Example of critical thinking on policing of marginal youth groups in public place...

Abstract.

A marginal youth group can be identified as a group of youth who have been identified by social workers as potential clients. Such groups exhibit some form of problem behavior or participate in some form of delinquent activities (Ngai et al, 2001). The police and private security guards are meant to provide security to the community and identify and protect the rights of these marginalized youth groups. However, the people who have the mandate to safeguard the rights of these groups are often seen as the violators of their rights. This is done by high handedness and implementation of laws that do not consider the rights of the youth.

Introduction:

This paper focuses on youth gangs and other youths who may be confused for youth gangs based on their mode of dressing or association. Activities of marginal youth groups are influenced by the society. They seem to go against the law and customs seen as the norm by the community (Downes & Rock, 1995).

Crime control strategies imposed on public places by law enforcement and their effects on relationships with marginalized youth groups.

Streets are public places that are used by people of all kinds. Though the streets are public, people tend to identify with streets close to their residences and places of work. They tend to consider these streets as their space and feel that they are responsible for the activities that take place in the streets. According to Jane Jacobs, the street holds a special meaning to

people who live in contested domains in cities. The street is what they identify with and they consider them as their own property. They are therefore cautious of activities that take place on those streets. Anything that they consider different from the normal is criminalized. Politicians play a major part in this perception to the masses. Streets are supposed to be places where people are free to express themselves, but due to the negative perception, such activities are criminalized. When people fear this " crime" they come up with measures and restrictions to limit the expression on the streets. Traditionally, youths have very little space to meet and interact with their kind. Adults have social places where they can meet and interact. Youths are often restricted by their age from accessing such places (Catalano, 2006)

This leaves public places as the only places where most youth can meet, interact and express themselves. Unfortunately, when such groups of youths are seen, they are associated with being vagabonds. This is not helped by cases of crimes by youth gangs on the streets and in other public places such as shopping malls. Youths often do not have private residences of their own and when they do some activities out in the open, they are treated as crimes. Adults can go to bars and pubs to have drinks. Youths who drink cannot do it at home and cannot go to the bars. They may source alcohol and consume it in public places like public parks and street corners where they congregate. Drug peddlers also use youths to sell their drugs and such youths are often identified in neighborhoods by their perceived mode of dressing and the people they associate with. Other youths have also been responsible for cases of vandalism on the streets and other activities like

graffiti (Catalano, 2006)

Youth gangs tend to identify with each other and some of the common identifier of such gangs is their approval of crime and reversing normal morals and standards. The approval of delinquency means that they contrast with the normal standards and are therefore branded as criminals (Elliott & Menard, 1996; Matsueda, 1989). The community's attempt to control the moral behavior of such youth leads to the criminalization of the things that they do. Cases of such youths have led to the blanket condemnation of youths and they are restricted and prevented from expressing themselves on the streets. As a result police and private security guards act in ways that harm their relationships with the youths. The blanket condemnation of youths who are seen together in public places, regardless of whether they are causing trouble or not even makes them easier targets for other criminal activities or make them actually engage in mischievous activities (Williams, & Singh, 1994). Such youths are often seen as a nuisance to adults and as a threat to younger children (Carver, Timperio & Crawford, 2008).

Studies have shown that youths who engage themselves in extra-curricular activities tend to perform better in school. There is also a lower drop-out rate among such students (McNeal 1995). Discouraging youths from meeting after school encourages them to engage in activities that are not physically involving. Such activities include watching television, playing video games and surfing the internet. A study by Larson (2001) shows that time spent by youths in unstructured activities such as watching television, playing video games and just hanging out with friends, impacts negatively on the development of the youth.

Such treatment of youths has been documented in many cities across the world. They are seen as intruders, people who are up to mischief, therefore, some laws have been put in place to control their activities in the streets. There are curfew laws that have been introduced in some places. This implies that there is a time beyond which youths are not supposed to be seen in the street un-accompanied. This curtails their freedoms and reduces the way in which they can interact and express themselves. in other cities, move on laws have been introduced. These laws basically mean that a time limit is set which is the maximum time a group of youths can spend at the same location (Malone, 2002). In countries with high incomes, policing of the streets is seen as having national security importance. However, policing has moved from physical presence of security personnel and is now being done by use of CCTV cameras. The removal of youths from the streets under the guise of protecting them has led to negative interactions with law enforcement.

There is a case in Australia where a young man, 18 year old Terry, a high school student was pulled aside by police on four separate occasions over a period of one month. He was asked to turn his pockets when hanging outside a local supermarket. While playing pool in the local youth center, he was taken by police and taken to a break in identification line-up. Later, while walking through the train station, heading home, he was stopped, searched by police and asked about drug dealing. The surprising thing is that all these encounters happened when he was still in his school uniform. These stereotypes may lead to the youths actually engaging in illegal activities. Influenced by media reports, police responding to a supposed surge in crime

committed by the youth have been known to use excessive powers and are known even to detain youths without good reason (Malone, 2002). In another incidence also in Australia, police picked up youths by the roadside and detained them in police stations. Most of the youths detained had been waiting for lifts home from their parents. When police at the station tried to call home to arrange for the picking of the youths, phones went un-answered as parents were out on the streets looking for supposedly lost children. Most of the controls that youths are subject to are laid out by adults who tend to criticize some of the behavior of youth as self-destructing. Another cause of the problems that faces youth use of public spaces is the ambiguity of the rules and regulations concerning public space use (Malone, 2002).

Strategy to facilitate better relationships between youth and law enforcement in public places:

According to Adams (1997), intolerance is the major cause for the disputes about public space use for the youth. Tolerance would enable understanding of the youths activities by the adult residents who would stop viewing the activities of youths on the streets as a nuisance. It follows that to create an environment with tolerance would be the first step to create better relationships with the youths and law enforcement officers. Allowing structured or supervised interactions of the youths would ensure that they enjoy freedom and are allowed to express themselves. However, the supervision would ensure that they participate in activities that are helpful to their growth.

A research by Tim Edensor (1998), on the culture in Indian streets, showed

that the activities on the streets contribute a great part to the vibrancy of the streets. Supervised activities of the youths can contribute to this vibrancy and identity of streets.

Another way to improve relations between law enforcement and youths is to set up areas where youth can meet up and interact. Such centers would have all the facilities necessary to youths. They could include youth centers with playing fields, recreation areas, adequate sanitary facilities and adequate security. Security personnel, who may include police officers and private security guards, would be deployed in such facilities to protect the youth. This would ensure that the youths in such centers are not at threat from adults who might want to introduce them to illegal activities. The officers would also protect vulnerable youths from other youths in the center.

Law enforcement officers would be required to act in a manner that is helpful to the youths. For example, instead of detaining youth in police stations when they find them on the streets, the officers would instead escort the youths home. Separation of youths from adult detainees would also go a long way in helping relationships with law enforcement officers. Treating the youths as criminals after minor offences may make them turn to greater offences in the future. However, helping the youths to identify their mistakes and turn away from them instead of punishing them would prevent them from turning into crime in the future.

Conclusion

Older persons as mischievous and a nuisance have misunderstood the activities of youths in the streets. However, majority of the youth do not engage in wrong activities. They are just expressing themselves and interacting with each other. However, due to lack of alternative locations, they find themselves doing it on the streets. On the streets, they are seen as a nuisance and intruders. This leads to conflicts with adults and eventually with law enforcement officers. To avoid these conflicts, the treatment of youths on the streets and other public spaces should stop being viewed negatively and spaces should be provided where the youth can freely express themselves without fear of condemnation from people (Catalano, 2006). When such activities are structured and supervised, the relationships between youths and law enforcement officers will be improved.

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