Deviance and social control

Society

Reflective Summary In may own thinking, I found out that human beings are social individuals and therefore, more often than not, their behaviour raises certain critical concerns. These issues need to be handled with utmost care in order to achieve social harmony. Social harmony implies healthy relationships and to a great extent, it is essential for any productive society. However, issues of deviance are a common feature that the society has grappled with since time immemorial. In this regard, I deduced that there is a relationship between society and deviance.

Becker (1991), states that deviance is such activities or mannerisms that contravene the societal norms and customs. These norms include both formally established rules as well as informal rules that are socially respected. The formal rules are recognized on a wider scale and are usually referred to as law. They are also more elaborate and known to different communities. In addition, they are usually enforced by a governing body that has some level of authority over the rest. Hence, contravening those amounts to a crime (Anderson, 1997).

Informal norms on the other hand are recognized by specific parts of the society and are more localized. Basically, each community has its established customs that act as checks to the behaviour of its individuals. They are adhered to by the members of the specific community that has its own way of punishing the people breaking them. These norms, both formal and informal are very dynamic and contextual in nature. To this effect, they are defined by the society that an individual belongs. Hence, Eugene and Muncie (2003) explain that some actions can be perceived deviant in some communities and not deviant in others.

However, irrespective of the context, the societal customs are fundamental in enhancing social cohesion. This formed the basis of my thinking on the subject and developed an argument that deviance is socially constructed and correlates to the kind of adopted social control mechanism. In this regard, sociological theorizing has helped understand well the concept of how is deviance socially constructed and how to control it based on sociological perspective. Therefore, the identified literature and the foundation of my thoughts shall closely examine social construction of deviance and social control in line with criminological theorizing.

Social Construction of Deviance Anderson (1997) indicates that deviance is a relative component of societies that largely manifests itself through behaviour. According to him, it is a normal aspect of any social relationships and it comes about as a result of the different relationships that human beings enjoy. Behaviour is a vital element of relationships that largely contributes to the manifestation of deviance in the society. According to Eugene and Muncie (2003), it entirely influences thehealthof relationships because if unsound, it leads to incidences of conflict.

Conflicts, being a healthy aspect of social relationships help the manifestation of deviance to come to the fore, either as causative agents or as measures used to solve them (Downes and Rock 2003: 78). Notably, deviance creates disorder in a given society by affecting in many ways the functions of the same. It is known to have an impact on the existing societal principles. However, Anderson (1997) explains that not all deviant behaviour has negative implications on the existing norms. According to him, some

deviance can bring about positive change in the society and help the society adapt to modernization.

For instance, most traditional communities used to prescribe jobs depending on the sex of an individual. However, deviance to this has seen people take up any type of job and today, qualifications as opposed to sex determines which jobs different people take up. To thisrespect, it is notable that deviance helps individuals embrace change accordingly by adjusting the present rules to be in line with the societal expectations. Deviance forms a significant part of human behaviour and therefore seemingly, it can not be completely eliminated from the society.

The role it plays in the shaping human behaviour makes it one of the key determinants of the frequency of deviance in the society (Becker 1991: 48). It should be appreciated that behaviour is a basic element of social relationships and thus deviance, through its incorporation in behaviour, is largely a component of social relationships. Deviance is a process that takes time to develop as well as manifest basically through acts of opposition (Becker, 1991: 108). As a result, it also takes the authorities' time to address it accordingly and satisfactorily.

Time is an essential aspect of social events as it is through this that they are manifested. Arguably, deviance, being the sole event here, is a social event. Downes and Rock (2007) acknowledge that deviance is an aspect that undergoes a series of phases before it can have an impact on the given society. They explain that before it begins to develop in the mind of an individual, societies often tend to be in harmony. At this stage, individuals

therein have some common knowledge and perception of the norms that govern them.

In addition, the individuals in the society at this level hold ' their' norms in high regard (Downes and Rock, 2007: 89). The first trigger of this process is the introduction of an external aspect from elsewhere that initiates differences with regard to perception. However, manifestations of deviance take time and therefore at this level, societal order is still maintained. The second stage is when individuals try to justify whether the aspect should be accepted or not. Usually, this stage attracts a body of knowledge and the aspect is wholly defined, as well as related to the normal life (Becker 1991: 59).

In addition, an effort is made to make the society acknowledge that knowledge is a continuous process that should be mainstreamed in the normal way of life. The next step is the internalization of the aspect. Here, the aspect is learned by the society and entrenched into its system. It is accepted by all stakeholders and institutionalized as a normal aspect of the way of life in that particular society. According to Anderson (1997), both the authorities and the locals uphold the basic elements of the aspect. At this level, social order is still enjoyed because manifestations of deviance are yet to begin.

In addition, on a larger scale, this aspect is considered as a norm upheld by the society. It should be appreciated that despite this, there exists individual perceptions that are varied and that that counter this general view. These varied views are the key aspects of deviance and with time, they manifest. The final step is when the workability of the aspect is disputed by the

individuals whose initial perception was contrary to the rest. At this stage, individuals develop opposing opinions and behaviour (Downes and Rock 2007: 84).

This is the final stage of deviance and it is what leads to the disruption of the societal operations. This comes about as a result of the individuals with varied perceptions to the aspect, also referred to as moral entrepreneurs, openly manifesting their views. This then initiates change in the society after a series of consultative and informative sessions by all stakeholders. Social Control Social control as formed by the rich literature refers to the tools that are used to make human behaviour in a given society be consistent to the norms and regulations of the given society (Keel, 2008: 201).

These tools are basically acknowledged and employed by the specific society to enhance social relationships. However, according to Keel (2008), some tools are cross societal and are internationally recognized and appreciated by all cultures and societies. According to Keel (2008), I have identified two dimensions of social control mechanisms: informal and formal. Informal social controls refer to certain principles that are defined by a society and those that check the behaviour of individuals at a personal level (Anderson, 1997: 296).

According to Anderson (1997), they are usually part of a person'spersonalityand have proven to be more effective in controlling behaviour than the formal ones. These include aspects like religion. Religion usually prescribes some kind of behaviour that is usually socially and morally acceptable. It aims at upholding the values and virtues that are morally upright. By adhering to the propositions of religion, individuals are able to

relate well and therefore achieve social cohesion. Those that do not uphold the teachings of religion are looked down upon by the entire society.

This act encourages people to act in accordance to the teachings of religion and thereby enhance socially acceptable relationships. Another most common mechanism that is widely employed across cultures to shun unacceptable behaviour is ridicule. Keel (2008) considers it a shameful act that most individuals can not bear. It is usually unlikely that a person who is ridiculed will at any time repeat the act as this has a negative impact on the guilt of a person. Customs are also often used in regulating deviant behaviour (Anderson 1997).

It is because they prescribe a standard code of conduct that should be followed by the society. Persons who break these rules face various punishments administered by the societal leaders on behalf of the entire society. For instance, in some societies, individuals whose behaviour contravenes the provisions of the customs are usually sent away, given physical punishments or asked to pay fines. Discriminationis also widely employed in regulating conduct. To this effect, most people find it difficult to associate with individuals who have socially unacceptable behaviour (Eugene and Muncie 2003: 45).

This is due to the fear of picking up the same or the fear of being caught on the wrong side of the law. Increasingly, social misfits are being isolated and more often, they do not freely interact with the rest of the society. Discrimination makes such individuals feel victimized and as such, they are able to correct their behaviour accordingly (Becker 1991: 69). The society also highly criticizes unacceptable behaviour. Criticism can have a very

negative impact on the personality of a person because it highly damages the confidence of a person and not so many people are usually ready to experience this (Keel, 2008).

Therefore, it is a measure that is widely employed by different societies to control the behaviour of their people. In addition, the society can directly disapprove any socially unacceptable behaviour. Persons contravening social norms can be directly forewarned by for instance parents and other relatives. This move makes the people to change accordingly and adapt behaviour that is in line with societal expectations. There are formal measures that are also adopted to check the behaviour of individuals and groups in the society. In states that value social equity, Eugene and Muncie (2003, p.

52) argue that all the individuals of the respective society are given equal chances to contribute to the establishment of the laws. These laws either directly or indirectly reward individuals whose behaviour corresponds with the societal rules and expectations. They also rebuke the kind of behaviour that is not in line with the expectations of the society. These measures are usually created by the law enforcement agencies in consultation with other major stakeholders. They are always in form of laws that are official and legal.

However, Keel (2008) points out that these laws may require a certain kind of force while enforcing them especially in instances where consultation was not done. Individuals who violate these are called criminals and are often punished according to the provisions of the laws (Eugene and Muncie: 2003: 54). Specifically, they are taken to prisons from where they face their

punishment. Erich and Angus (2008) explain that the level of punishment depends on the gravity of the crime that the individuals committed. On the contrary, their counterparts are always rewarded by the body that established the rules.

Hence individuals in most instances work towards maintaining socially acceptable relationships and adhere to the rules and laws provided by the governing body. It should be appreciated that not all individuals who break the law are taken to prisons. According to Keel (2008), some are usually punished by making them pay fines to compensate for the damage caused. Further, not all individuals who commit crimes are arrested. At this juncture, it is worth noting that in many ways every individual is deviant. It is just that the level and type of deviance differs and it is this that differentiates crime from other forms of deviance.

Social deviance and social controls have different implications on deviant behaviour. By explicitly exploring the patterns of deviance in the society, Keel (2008) explains that one can be able to understand why some individuals are more deviant than others. The social controls are very important because through them one is able to indentify deviance and its root in a given society (Anderson 1997). This can certainly be achieved because the social controls aim at screening different types of behaviour. Consequently, deviant behaviour can easily be identified and regulated accordingly.

Becker (1991) state that studying the realms of deviance helps one to understand that the behaviour is recurrent. As such, we are able to come up with people friendly measures that can help regulate this conduct as well as

ensure that we benefit from it. Conclusion In conclusion, as opposed to my views before the study of perceiving deviance negatively, I realise that social deviance is an aspect that should be appreciated by the society and especially those in authority because of the role it plays in the growth of the society.

In deed, without this, we could still be dwelling in the ancient eras. It is basic in highlighting aspects of change in the society and if well controlled, it should not pose any threats to the wellbeing of the same. Contrary to my knowledge that individuals who constantly experience deviance exhibit anomaly in their behaviour, is not really correct. In fact, I have discovered that social deviance is a very vital aspect of behavioural growth and it should be appreciated.