

Socio-Demographic Profile of Minors in Prison in the Republic of Guinea

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Abstract

Introduction: A minor is defined as any person under the age of 18 years according to article 67 of the Guinean Penal Code. The minor age is a vulnerable period of sensitive transition where the emerging life choices will have a lasting influence on the future adult. Our objective was to describe the socio-demographic profile of minors in Guinea's prisons.

Methods: We conducted a descriptive cross-sectional study on children aged 12 to 17 detained in prisons in the Republic of Guinea from 15 January to 14 June 2016.

Results: The number of minors was 132 and they are almost exclusively male. The average age was 15.8 years \pm 1.45 with extremities from 12 to 17 years. The majority of minors, 93.93%, were defendants followed by convicts with 6.07%. The reasons for detention were theft in 64.39% followed by rape in 14.39% and assault and battery in 10.6%.

Conclusion: The juvenile prison population is a reality in Guinea. Particular attention must be paid to juvenile justice and the living conditions of juvenile detainees, if it is true that one of the prison's responsibilities is to educate and reintegrate.

Keywords: Minors; Republic of Guinea; Remand Prison

Introduction

A minor is defined as any person under the age of 18 years, according to article 67 of the Guinean Penal Code [1]. The minor age is a vulnerable period of sensitive transition where the emerging life choices will have a lasting influence on adult health. While much work has been done on children at risk, in accordance with international instruments on the rights of the child, there have been few studies on the situation of children in conflict with the law [2]. In 2009, Cooper, *et al.* estimate that minors represent about 5% of all persons detained in correctional institutions in developed countries [3]. In developing countries, where almost half of the general population is poor, early school leaving is high, especially in rural areas. Parents can no longer support their children, so almost all these young children who are never in school are tempted by the exodus to the big cities. In cities, difficult living conditions and idleness often prevent them from taking charge of their own health and lives. They are exposed to delinquency, and some of them may be taken to prison. In Angola, the prison population is very young, with about 50% of the inmates being under 15 years of age, 60% under 18 years of age [4]. In Guinea, a study in 2011 shows that the average age of persons in pre-trial detention was 40 years. Although children were not included in this research, the sample included a number of people aged 14 and 17. [5]. The scarcity of data in the Republic of Guinea on this subject to justify the choice

of this study, the objectives of which were to describe the socio-demographic profile of minors in Guinea's prisons.

Methodology

This is a cross-sectional descriptive study conducted in correctional and detention centres in Guinea's eight (8) administrative regions between 15 January and 14 July 2016. The investigation began with an interview with administrative staff. This provided information on the number of minors and their age, sex, occupation, place of detention, reason for detention, level of education, type of detention and length of detention. All prisoners between the ages of 12 and 18 inclusive, according to the Guinean Penal Code who agreed to participate in the study were included [1]. They were then received in turn in the infirmary and could express themselves freely, without supervision of the prison guards to confirm the data collected by the administrative staff. Some other information was sought in the interview with the minors, namely: the origin, the type of family, the number of children in the family, the main activity in the family, the average monthly income of the family, why the cessation of studies if the minor was a pupil, future ambition.

Data collection and analysis techniques:

- The forms were completed manually as an inmate met our selection criteria.
- The data collected were entered using Microsoft Excel 2010 software
- The data obtained were analyzed using IBM SPSS (version 20) and Epi-Info (version 7.2) software
- Our results are presented in the form of a graph, figure and table.

Ethical issues

The authorizations of the Chair of Forensic Medicine and the National Directorate of Penitentiary Administration (N.D. P.A.) No. 003 M]/DNAP/16 were obtained before this work was carried out [6].

The consent of the detainees has been obtained. The data were collected anonymously and used only for scientific purposes.

Difficulties encountered: The non-cooperation of three (3) juvenile detainees was the main difficulty encountered in our study.

Results

Text 1: Number of minors in the prison population of Guinea

During the survey period, 132 of the 3066 prisoners, or 4%, were minors and agreed to participate in our study. Average age 15.8 years ± 1.45 extreme 12 and 17 years and with a predominance of the male sex 126 out of 132 respondents either a Sex- ratio M/F = 21 (See table 1).

Educational level	Age												Total	
	12		13		14		15		16		17			
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Primary school	3	-	6		7		3	-	4		13	-	36	
Secondary	0	-	3		1		3	-	15		21	-	43	
Superior	0	-	0		0		0	-	1		5	-	6	
Others	0	-	0		2		1	-	3		7	-	13	
Not in school	1	-	1		2	2	5	1	6	1	13	2	28	6
Total	4	-	10		12	2	12	1	29	1	59	2	126	6

Table 1: Distribution of minors by age, sex and education level.
Average age: 15.8 years ± 1.45 years; extremes: 12 and 17 years and sex- ratio M/F= 21.

Text 2: The professional occupation (apprentices or qualified) followed by students was the main professional activity in our workforce in 43.18% and 34.8% of cases respectively. However, it should be noted that cases of no profession have also been recorded.

Text 3: All remand and correctional facilities held minors during our study. However, about half of the staff were registered at the Conakry 74 detention and correction centre, i.e. 51.6% of cases, followed by Kankan, 18.9% and Labé 7.6% of cases.

Grounds for detention	Stay						Total	
	From 1 to 6 Months		From 7 to 12 Months		More than one year			
	P*	C**	P	C	P	C	P	C
Theft	60	3	13	3	5	0	78	6
Violent	10	0	9	0	0	0	19	0
Coup and injury	8	1	5	1			13	2
Murder or death threat	3				1	0	4	0
Abuse of trust	2						2	
Sale and or consumption of Indian rooms	2		2		0	0	4	0
Crime and destruction of property	2						2	0
Kidnapping	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	0
Total	87	4	30	4	7	0	124	8

Table 2: Distribution of minors by reason for detention, prison status and length of detention.

P: Prevented; C: Condemned.

Discussions

While studies have focused on prison living conditions in Guinea, few of them describe the socio-demographic aspect of minors. During our study, we identified 135 minors, 132 (4%) of whom were among the 3066 inmates in Guinea's remand centres who agreed to participate in our study. The objective of describing the social-demographic profile of this study was not fully achieved due to a lack of response from the respondents. Only data collected by the prison administration were analyzed.

The average age was 15.8 years with extremes of 12 and 17 years. The 16-17 age group (68.9%) was the most represented. This predominance of 16 - 17 year olds is explained by the known nature of this age group. It represents the age of puberty, marked by physical, physiological and behavioural changes. If from a physical point of view secondary sexual characteristics give the child the appearance of an adult, psychology still remains that of a child. Within this very being, physical maturity and psychological immaturity conflict, leading this being to adopt deviant behaviours. Which sometimes explains this delinquency. The same observation is observed in France, where 54.8% of convicted minors were over 16 years of age [7]. In 2012 in Burkina Faso 27.52% of minors in prison were between 17 and 18 years of age [8]. It should be noted, however, that the age of criminal responsibility in the Republic of Guinea is 13 years [1]. As a result, the presence in the central house in Conakry, Kindia, Kankan and N'Zérékoré of four (4) minors under 12 years of age is difficult to justify.

The male sex was well represented in our series (95.45%) with a sex ratio of 21 in favour of boys. This male predominance is also reported by Walmsley R, who noted that the female gender contributes 2 to 9% of the world's prison population [9]. Boys are more likely to engage in income-generating activities either for themselves or for those around them. Because of their ambition, they are exposed to conflicting or even violent situations that lead them to the judicial authority. In contexts of extreme poverty they are thrown out onto the

street in search of the everyday. Girls, on the other hand, are protected by families and are less exposed in our African societies, for whom they are synonymous with homes. They are then protected in the home by marriage, which protects them from need.

Minors in 74.2% of cases were or were enrolled in school with respectively (27.27% in primary and 32.57% in secondary). While 25.8% were out of school, including six (6) girls.

Our results could be explained on the one hand by the socio-political context of failure to expose young people in school to deviant behaviour. On the other hand, it could be an economic context that does not allow parents to cope with their children's schooling, leading them to enroll in street schools. As for girls, while they are protected in the home, they remain increasingly out of school compared to boys, especially in poor families. This often exposes them to socioeconomic risks that can lead them to prison. The majority of minors was in the process of learning a trade or were students in 64.15% and 34.85% of cases respectively. These results could be explained on the one hand by the lack of responsibility of parents for their children and on the other hand by the socioeconomic precariousness of parents, which leads them to take care of themselves. The Central House in Conakry alone houses more than half of the juvenile prison population in Guinea.

In all these prisons there was no juvenile area outside Conakry, although there are adult cells in them on a circumstantial basis. Also, by the rural exodus to the capital city from which young people think they are a source of happiness, Capital is a first intention destination for these young people where the realities of life often lead them to prisons.

The same observation was made by the non-governmental organization "Terre des hommes-Lausanne", which reported that 50 adult detainees were incarcerated with minors in the same neighbourhood in 2011 [10].

The main reasons used against these minors were theft (64.39%) followed by rape (14.39%) and assault (10.6%). The same motifs were found in Zoma's work in Burkina Faso in 2012 in similar proportions [7]. Indeed, the predominance of theft in our study could be explained in part by the socioeconomic precariousness of the families of minors.

According to prison status, accused persons were the most represented (93.93%). Zinsou in Benin in 2010 [11], reported that more than the majority of prisoners were held under a preventive regime (75.80% of cases). These results reflect the slowness of our judicial systems and the need for legal aid for minors. The reasons can be human, organisational and finally material. The average length of stay for minors was 5.63 months. It was dominated by stays of less than 5 months (47.7%). It is difficult to explain this long period of stay even for more ordinary reasons. It may be due to the slowness of the judicial system. A thorough study of this phenomenon and its consequences on the future lives of these minors is therefore necessary.

Kamano FB in 2014 during his work on malnutrition at the Central House in Nzérékoré (Guinea). He reported that 31.03% of the detainees had a length of stay of less than 5 months [12].

Limitations of the Study

The main limitation of this study is that we were unable to specify the origin of the minors and the socioeconomic and cultural status of the parents.

Conclusion

This study shows that the juvenile prison population is a reality in Guinea. These minor children are boys of an average age of 15, with a secondary school education and a majority of them incarcerated in the Conakry prison and correctional facility. The main reasons for incarceration were theft, for which they have most often been awaiting trial for about five months. In view of these results, it seems necessary that studies be carried out to determine the impact of the prison environment on the psycho-social state of these minors for their future socioeconomic reintegration.

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