

Velma-ARC's Rehabilitation of Repentant Cybercriminals in Nigeria

Authors : Umukoro Omonigho Simon, Ashaolu David 'Diya, Aroyewun-Olaleye Temitope Folashade

Abstract : The VELMA Action to Reduce Cybercrime (ARC) is an initiative, the first of its kind in Nigeria, designed to identify, rehabilitate and empower repentant cybercrime offenders popularly known as 'yahoo boys' in Nigerian parlance. Velma ARC provides social inclusion boot camps with the goal of rehabilitating cybercriminals via psychotherapeutic interventions, improving their IT skills, and empowering them to make constructive contributions to society. This report highlights the psychological interventions provided for participants of the maiden edition of the Velma ARC boot camp and presents the outcomes of these interventions. The boot camp was set up in a hotel premises which was booked solely for the 1 month event. The participants were selected and invited via the Velma online recruitment portal based on an objective double-blind selection process from a pool of potential participants who signified interest via the registration portal. The participants were first taken through psychological profiling (personality, symptomology and psychopathology) before the individual and group sessions began. They were profiled using the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory -2- Restructured Form (MMPI-2-RF), the latest version of its series. Individual psychotherapy sessions were conducted for all participants based on what was interpreted on their profiles. Focus group discussion was held later to discuss a movie titled 'catch me if you can' directed by Steven Spielberg, featuring Leonardo De Caprio and Tom Hanks. The movie was based on the true life story of Frank Abagnale, who was a notorious scammer and con artist in his youthful years. Emergent themes from the movie were discussed as psycho-educative parameters for the participants. The overall evaluation of outcomes from the VELMA ARC rehabilitation boot camp stemmed from a disaggregated assessment of observed changes which are summarized in the final report of the clinical psychologist and was detailed enough to infer genuine repentance and positive change in attitude towards cybercrime among the participants. Follow up services were incorporated to validate initial observations. This gives credence to the potency of the psycho-educative intervention provided during the Velma ARC boot camp. It was recommended that support and collaborations from the government and other agencies/individuals would assist the VELMA foundation in expanding the scope and quality of the Velma ARC initiative as an additional requirement for cybercrime offenders following incarceration.

Keywords : Velma-ARC, cybercrime offenders, rehabilitation, Nigeria

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