

The Evolving family System and Violent Juvenile Delinquency in Ile-Oluji/Oke-Igbo Ondo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between the evolving family system and violent juvenile delinquency in Ile-Oluji/Oke-Igbo, Ondo State, Nigeria. It examines the challenges associated with changing family structures and the extent to which parental social control accounts for variations in delinquent behavior. Anchored on Hirschi's Social Control Theory, the study reviewed literature on family structures to explain adolescent delinquency through parent-child relationships across different family types. Adopting a qualitative design, the study conducted Focus Group Discussions and In-Depth Interviews on sixty-four participants - eight groups of 6-8 participants each. Participants included parents and children from both two-parent and single-parent households. Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. Findings reveal that economic instability, domestic violence, infidelity, and the increasing role of women as breadwinners have weakened family cohesion. Respondents acknowledged that family structure significantly influences juvenile socialization, with single-parent families often lacking consistent supervision, monitoring, and mentoring from both parents. Adolescents from intact two-parent families reported lower odds of engaging in violent delinquency, especially when under adequate parental social control. The study recommends that parents, regardless of family structure or employment demands, should prioritize time for monitoring and mentoring their wards to protect them from negative peer influence and other risk factors associated with violent juvenile delinquency.

Keywords: Family system, juvenile delinquency, social control, single parenthood, Ondo State, Nigeria

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Introduction

The evolving family system and its effect is the most debated global social issue today. Its causes could be traced to the global high rate of divorce/separation, single parent-hood and non-marital/cohabitating childbearing parent of which the United States have the highest rate (Rebecca, Amy, and Anna, 2014). The alteration of the cultural value in the family system - the natural environment for adequate socialization - led to the emergence of incomplete family (single-parenthood), thus, affecting the parent-children relationship, especially the adolescents that depend more on their parent for almost everything (Booth, Farrell and Varano, 2008; UNESCO, 1991). The manifestation of the evolving family system globally is as follows: inadequate child care and love, poor mentoring, aggressive behaviour, polygamy, child abuse/molestation and inappropriate supervision of the adolescents, thereby exposing them to other vulnerable anti-social behaviour (Matherne & Thomas 2001). Juvenile delinquency is an illegal act, whether criminal or status, committed by youth under the age of 18 which is commonly referred to as status offenses started in America in 1950, due to the alterations in the family system (Kierkus, Johnson, & Hewitt, 2010; Shoemaker, 2010). However, The US Public policy from early 1990's has helped to reduce and ameliorate juvenile delinquency as it promotes marriages, adequate father involvement, and reduce economic strain among single-parent families. Though these policies are mostly targeted towards the low-income family earners, who are believed to be more prone to such phenomenon (Khuda, 2019; Rebecca et.al, 2014).

Socialization and mentoring of all children are the basic responsibility and function of the family and other socio-institutions like religious and educational institutions for the better upbringing and proper monitoring of the children (Khuda, 2019; Wright & Wright (1994) as cited in Ilongo, 2009). Thus, juvenile delinquency resulted from inadequate parent/children relationship as juvenile conformity is encouraged through proper monitoring, consistent discipline, and persistence parent-child relationship. (Aaron & Dallaire 2010; Mack, Leiber, Featherstone & Monserud, 2006; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; see also Sampson, 1987). This is likened to the traditional Nigeria family system, a social insurance (traditional safety net or bulwark) for old age and the younger children. The progressive shift in the family system has reduced the juvenile care and mentoring in the recent times. Presently, single parenthood and remarried couple are facing the challenges, especially the children who depend on their parent for socio-economic security,

adequate mentoring and monitoring. Most single parenthood is connected to domestic violence, infidelity and lack of trust while other reasons for divorce can be socio-economic problems such as unemployment, low-income earnings, lack of industry, women emancipation and favourable economic competition, etc. The situation which has gradually affected the proper parent/children socialization and the society relationship in the early intervention and prevention of violent juvenile delinquency such as sexual abuse or rapes, pocket-picking/theft, physical aggression or assault or threats thereof; emotional abuse; controlling or domineering; intimidation; stalking; passive/covert abuse otherwise known as neglect; economic deprivation, endangerment, criminal coercion, kidnapping, unlawful imprisonment, trespassing, harassment incarceration, adult criminal behaviour etc (National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2011; Shoemaker, 2010). Therefore, children with inadequate or improper socialization from the weak contemporary family system are always at the greater risk of becoming delinquent.

❖ **Social Control Theory and Juvenile Delinquency**

Social control theory by (Hirschi, 1969) is employed to explain the traditional family system complex activities directed towards parent/children relationship to reducing juvenile delinquency. Hirschi, believes that increased parent/children social bonds may likely decrease the adolescent chances of wanting to engage in crime and delinquency. He further explains the four necessary elements for orderliness and social bond in the family system to be - attachment (close affectionate ties with others); commitment (the fear of lawbreaking); involvement, (conventional participation) and belief, (social reinforcement). In order to prevent juvenile delinquency, the family system must perform these four roles. Children will deviate from delinquency when they have strong affective attachments to parents, stakes in conformity, involves in conventional activities, and belief in social norms. This means that mostly those children who have weak attachments, low stakes in conformity, little involvement in conventional activities, and poor attitudes regarding societal norms that are more likely to indulge or participate in delinquency. A Hirschi argument was that parent/children attachment is paramount and the strength of this relationship is the most important factor in determining delinquency. The argument from the theorist point of view was that, it is the level of parent/children closeness that determine the quality of relationship, mentoring, supervision, and socio-bonds that prevent delinquency, irrespective of family structure, economic factors, and race and ethnicity (Leiber et al., 2009; Grove & Crutchfield, 1982).

❖ Methodology

The study being an explorative study adopts a qualitative research design and it was conducted in two selected areas (Ile-Oluji and Oke-Igbo) in Ondo States, Nigeria. The choice of these areas was due to the fact that the study is first of its kind in Nigeria and Ondo State in particular. The areas also have sizeable number of delinquent juvenile and considerable number of various family types. The researcher employs Focus group discussions (FGD) and In-depth interviews (IDI) as instruments for data collection. The instruments were divided into sections which sought to establish the parent/children relationship occasioned by changes in family system; challenges associated with single parenthood and measures to prevent violent juvenile delinquency in Ile-oluji and oke-igbo area of Ondo State Nigeria. A sample of 64 participants was drawn, thirty participants were randomly selected among the parents: 15 from each area; while twenty-six respondents among children: 13 from each area. In addition to this, four traditional leaders each from the two areas were selected. The FGD and IDIs were drafted in the English Language. This was later translated to "Yoruba" and back translation to English was done for the "Yoruba" so as to ensure accuracy and validation of data collected. This was done by the researcher and Professor Olakunle Micheal Folami in the Department of Criminology and security studies - Adekunle Ajasin University Akungba Akoko Ondo State - who speaks and understands "Yoruba" language eloquently. The focus group discussions lasted between 40 and 52 minutes each while the in-depth interviews lasted between 15–21 minutes each. The qualitative data collected from IDI and FGD were audio-taped, sorted, transcribed and later analyzed using content analysis and reported. The Consent of respondents was sought prior to interviews conducted and their identity kept anonymous. Ethical approval was sought from the relevant community authorities. Basic bio-social data were also quantified to describe the sample respondents' bio-social variables in the reports.

Findings and Discussion

❖ Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The study had a sample size of 64 participants which include 22 males and 16 females' parent and 14 boys and 12 girls. The ages of the participants ranged between 12 and 48 years. Twenty-six (26) of the participants were age range between 12- 18years; twenty-two (22) are aged younger than 35 years, eleven (11) are aged between 35 and 55 years and five (5) were aged 55 years and above. The gender profile of the participants suggests the following: that male is more privileged to discuss family

issues while women are somehow restricted by customs and norms. The boys are also freer to discuss social issues than girls in the study areas. Fifteen (15) of the adult participants are married, ten (10) are single-parent, eight (8) have remarried while six (5) are a widowed. Sixteen (16) of the juvenile live with their both biological parent while ten (10) live in single parent home. The religious affiliation of the participants shows that thirty-five (42) are Christian, forty-six (18) Muslim and seven (4) Traditional Religion.

❖ **Parent/Children Relationship Associated With Traditional Family System**

The Participants in the focus group discussions on in-depth interviews conducted were asked to comment on the parent/children relationship association with traditional family system. Although, there was a consensus among the participants that traditional family system activities have in one way or the other contributed to adequate parent/children relationship in ile-oluji and oke-igbo area of Ondo State Nigeria while parent/children relations varies. A good number of the participants identified the traditional family system as a natural environment which allows cordial and proper parent/relation. It knitted the family and allows the children to be well supervised. Once there is love and unity among the parent such is extended towards the children in term of care, mentoring, and monitoring. A summary of participants' submission is shown below:

“We as parent want the best for our children and would give our best. We love ourselves and have always pooled our resources together to meet our children’s’ demand. We love and would always advice, comfort, monitor and pray with our children. Our children repose so much love and confidence in us; they hardly hide anything from us. We are always around them, except when they are in school. Our job involves teaching in public school, church and at home. The unity and love in us are what has translated into our children believing and respecting us. We are more confidence that our children would never involve in any delinquency without our prior knowledge” [couple-participant, ages 45 and 36]

Another couple participant was of the opinion that:

“The traditional family system has really afforded us the opportunity to guide and guard our children properly. We hardly think of anything apart from their welfare and better upbringing. We are proud of the unity and love among us and we appreciate our children for being calm, gentle and obedient to our instructions. They always seek our

opinion before taking any personal or group decision. The most senior among them has also show good followership and leadership to us and his siblings. The bond in the family is very strong and we appreciate ourselves for holding up to our marital vow” [couple-participant, aged 50 and 42].

One of the couple -participants made this submission:

“I had a terrible experience caring for my children when I had a partial separation from my wife, little did I know the important role of both parent to the children when she first left me with three kids. I had thought the children would be in school while I would be at my place of work and we would all be home in the evening as usual after daily work and school. But it done on me a week later when they began to fall sick one after the other with nobody to turn to for assistance. I almost got stressed up and couldn’t concentrate both at home and work. Thank God she came back after much persuasion and pleading. Ever since, I can never imagine being a single parent. We have both form a formidable bond and our children have always love and enjoy our company. Indeed two better heads are better than one”. [Couple-participant aged 50 and 41].

An overwhelming number of children participants also indicate intimate parent/children bond as a major element occasion by traditional family system. According to them proper family settings enable adequate parent/children relation. An excerpt from adolescent participants' submission is shown below:

“We as children learn from our parent first and fast. We easily sense any occurrence in the family no matter how secretive they seem to be. We are much happier when there is unity in the family and we love our parent to be in unity. This gives us much confidence in them as we look up to them for a role model. Most times it is not what they provided for us that matters but the love and togetherness that reign in the family that maintain orderliness. Their unity has always extended more hands of love and care towards us. Thus, we have no reason to be violent”. [Adolescents-participant aged 13, 15, 14 and 18].

In the views above some inferences can be deduced. The tradition family system is major element for better parent/children relation in ileoluji and okeigbo area, Ondo State, Nigeria. Adequate parent/children relation enable proper care, adequate mentoring, and good confidence between them both. This guarantee obedience and respect from children toward the parent and positive bond that prevent delinquency.

❖ Challenges Associated with Single Parenthood

It was noticed in the consensus responses of the participants that single parenthood mostly leads to juvenile delinquency. The probe revealed deeply the challenges of single parenting ranging from: inadequate parent/children relation; lack of love and care; poor mentoring and monitoring; insecurity; negative external influences; peer pressure leading to juvenile delinquency. The following lines from the FGDs illuminates further:

“I divorced my husband after two kids about 15years ago because of persistence infidelity that become a threat to the family foundational love. His friends were bad influence but he would rather forsake his family for his pleasure. My kid’s (two boys) were exposed to series of abuse and deprivation from their father and their step mother. They were withdrawn from school and fixed up as a tailor and welder apprentices while their siblings from the step mother are currently in private school. They lost trust and confidence in the family and have engaged in series of delinquency that one can hardly envisage covering up for their inadequacies. Recently, when visited them they look tattered and on kept. I regretted leaving them behind but I have no choice as the man I later got married to would rather not see them either. It’s more or less a big challenge to my life and only God can change their situation” [Female participant, aged 39years].

In another view extracted from the FGDs, a participant maintained that:

“It was not easy taken care of children in a single family. I had this terrible experience after the death of my lovely wife thirteen year ago leaving me with our four kids between the ages of 11 and 3years. It became difficult for me to cope with their daily requirements e.g. preparing their meals, washing their clothes and uniforms, taking them to school and back as I had to get to work early and most time come back late. Marring another wife worsens the situation, they became a tool in her hand and the more they complain the more they are maltreated, starved, beaten and punished. The children lost hope, trust and confidence in us and took too violent after much trauma. I was force to send them all to boarding school but these farther reduced the family bond as I only see them around during holiday’s period. My only hope now is that the eldest just complete his NYSC program, two were already in the university and the last born would join them soonest” [Male-participant, aged 47years].

Challenges associated with single parenthood was further explained by a participant when she emotionally said:

"I find it difficult sending my three kids to school after my husband retrenchment. He elopes with another woman under the guise of scouting for a better job. I withdrew them to public school because of finance, since none of my husband family shows up for any assistance. My continuous struggle and late home coming bridged the family bond and also deprived them of proper care and monitoring. Most times they are at the mercy of my neighbour and friends. The eldest girl was influenced, abused and impregnated by my next door neighbour. The immediate younger brother took to drug and substance abuse and wayward lifestyle. I was force to take the youngest to my brother in Lagos who is a pastor for proper supervision while I send money and other materials for his upkeep". [Female-participant, aged 49 years].

Another participant explained further on the challenges associated with single parenting by saying that:

"I and my two other siblings were bread by our mother alone, we went through enormous challenges. It was not easy for us growing after the death of our father. We faced family rejection, drop out of school, engaged in maniac child labour at tender age and later took to tailoring, hairdressing and vulcanizing apprentice. Life was rough and tough that in most time I got frustrated and transfer violent aggression to my sibling and people around. Many times have indulge in delinquency all in a bit to keep life going". [Male-participant, aged 26 years].

The position above was buttressed when a female farmer said:

"I have no choice but to be violent in most time because of my situation! The death of my father confined me to my paternal grand-mother as my mother had disappeared into the thin air. Life becomes so difficult as the aged woman could hardly cater for my schooling. I dropped out of secondary school in JSS 3 and couldn't further my education nor learn any apprentice ever since because of finance. I resorted to assisting her on the farm. I can't even recognize my mother for she has left me over ten years ago while I was about six years. Life has been so miserable that at time I feel like committing suicide. I have been a victim of countless abuse and also involved in several violent act in other to survive. Life has not been favourable to me as an orphan and destitute who had been subjected to peoples' exploit" [female farmer-participant, aged 18 years].

❖ Measures to Prevent Violent Juvenile Delinquency

The violent delinquencies promoted by changes in family system have become a thing of worry to the communities. Adequate juvenile socialization which remains the responsibility of the family is threatened by the activities of the incomplete family system; hence, there is a need for urgent measures. The participants, therefore, suggested that for juvenile delinquency to be reduced/curbed there must be proper parent/children relationship. The society must enforce a norm of a complete family system whereby polygyny, divorce and separation would be discouraged as marital law that prevents such be promulgated. Before divorce and separation should only be permitted when the last child has attained the minimum age of 18 years. The family should always encourage adequate parent/children relation, thereby promoting proper care and mentoring of the children. The summation of the participants was shown below:

“I believe violent juvenile delinquency can be reduced if the society promotes children care and love amidst the family setting. Parent should understand that their children are the responsibility and endeavour to have adequate relation with their kids irrespective of their work demand. Parent and children need one another, therefore, I suggest parent should always be around to rub mind and counsel the children. Their adequate mentoring would enable them to properly guide and guard their children on the right path”. [Male-participant, aged 46 years].

This was also established by the response of one of the participants:

Children are always happy, influence and will always conform to parent decision when they are around. I am therefore suggested that single-parent family be discouraged. In the situation of natural separation i.e death of a spouse, other extended family members and other social institutions should assist in mentoring and monitoring the left behind children to avoid abuse and other inhuman maltreatment that may lead to juvenile delinquency [Female-participant, aged 39 years].

Another participant said that:

“Most children are easily subjected to external factors influence such as bad company, peer pressure, bad advice etc most especially when the parent are not around to guard and guide them. This has resulted into many forms of violent delinquencies and if not properly and timely addressed may resulted to criminal act in future. Therefore, parent

should be enlightened on the danger of poor parent/children relation, inadequate mentoring and improper monitoring. Also, couple should consider their child/children wellbeing first before taken to separation/divorce decision". [Male-participant, aged 41 years].

An aged participant further said that:

"Children socialization is both the duty of the parent and also the responsibility of the society, the elder people around should help to monitor and mentor the children in the absent of their parent. If we ignore, abuse, exploit, deprived, maltreated and frustrated other peoples' children to become delinquent. They would grow up to become future criminal that will hunt and torment us till death. Children can only be the future glory and leader of the society when they are properly catered for monitored, and mentored". [Female-participant, aged 69 years].

Conclusion

This study has identified the problems peculiar to improper family system in ile-oluji and oke-igbo area of Ondo State Nigeria. Some of these are: drug/substance abuse and dependency, truancy/school drop- out, rapes, pocket-picking/theft, incarceration and adult criminal behaviour. The probe into the challenges associated with single parenting activities revealed the following: inadequate child care and love; poor mentoring; child abuse/molestation; inappropriate supervision of the adolescents; exposure to vulnerable anti-social behaviour; lack of trust among the family; stereotyping; and suspicion. On the need to prevent violent delinquency, the following were therefore suggested: the society should promote children care and love while Parent should be enlightening on the need to relate and spend quality time with their kids irrespective of their work demand as this would enable Parent rub mind with the children and also guide and guard them on the right path. Given the above findings, this study suggests there is a need to discourage divorce and single-parent family, while extended family members and other social institutions should assist in the proper socialization of the children. The government through print and electronic media should sensitize the public on the danger of improper/incomplete family system on the society at large.

Recommendation

The study recommends that the society and the government should promulgate a public policy that will strengthen parent-child relationships, promote community and extended family involvement in child socialization. There is the need to also sensitized the public on the risks of family breakdown, and integrating family life and proper parenting education into school curriculum while religious institutions should also help to prepare the congregation mind towards better family foundation. The family policy should support single-parent households economically rather than stigmatize them, in line with the Child Rights Act 2003.

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- **Conceptualization, and intellectual revisions. Data collection, interpretation, and drafting of manuscript**
- The author agrees to take responsibility for every facet of the work, making sure that any concerns about its integrity or veracity are thoroughly examined and addressed
- This study contributes to the limited empirical literature on family system changes in Ondo State, Nigeria. It provides evidence that incomplete family structures can pose risks to juvenile socialization, and that strong parent-child relations are critical to preventing violent juvenile delinquency

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