

Role of family in crime



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Definitions of concepts pose a lot of problems to scholars. This problem is more enhanced with criminology as it cuts across various disciplines.

Despite the difficulties involved in coming up with a definition, attempts have been made by various scholars. HOWARD JONES defined it as the science that studies the social phenomenon of crime, its causes and the measures which society directs against it. FOX defines it as the study of law, broken law and the lawbreaker. PROF.

ADEYEMI in what can be described as an encompassing definition, defines it as the science involving the study of crime and its causation; the pattern, distribution, perpetrators and victims ; and the methods of dealing with crime together with the agencies for the administration of criminal justice including their structures, techniques and personnel sequel to the foregoing. MANNHEIM says it is the study of crime and punishment which takes three forms; the descriptive, casual and normative. The descriptive involves the observation and collection of facts about crime and criminals; the normative is aimed at the discovery of universally scientific laws and conformities; and the casual is the interpretation of the observed facts which can be used to search for the causes of crime, an aspect referred to as etiology. This part is what shall be discussed in this paper. TAFT AND ENGLAND stated that criminology is the study which includes all the subject matter necessary to the understanding and prevention of crimes and to the development of law, together with the punishment or treatment of delinquents and criminals. According to them, criminology attempts to answer the question “ how and why do individuals become criminals? ” AETIOLOGY OF CRIME.

The etiology of crime can be discerned under three major approaches; a) The individual approach which deals with physique, temperament, chromosomal studies, twin studies, heredity etc. b) the social approach which deals with economy, ecology and anomie. Economy deals with how economic factors affect crime. It revolves around theories of cupidity, depression, poverty, affluence, political economy etc. Ecology refers to human ecology.

It deals with how spacial influences impact on the individual. Theories of urbanism, ruralism, concentric circle theory etc. are discussed. Anomie deals with how society drives people to break its rules which eventually leads to social dislocation. Discussed are theories of conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion .

c) the socio-psychological approach which deals with hoe psychological factors emerge from the social approach to predispose to criminality. It studies stimulus (i. e. what within the social environment stimulates the psychological reaction), the transmission process of delinquency (which consists of imitation, differential association which is the process of choosing between positive and negative values; and delinquent subculture); and the result.

Stimulus has two major types; i)Family ii)Culture Family. The family is the foundation of human society. Families are the strongest socializing forces of life . According to IRWIN DEUTSCHER (1962), the concept of symbolic interaction assumes that misbehaviour is of the same nature as any other kind of behaviour and arises through the same general processes of socialisation.

Regardless of personal traits or characteristics, any individual given the proper configuration of circumstances and associations can become a delinquent. It is this same fact that MARSHALL CLINARD (1963) seeks to establish when he claims that any form of deviant behaviour, e. g. juvenile delinquency, is one kind of social behaviour as conforming behaviour is another kind.

According to OLORUNTIMEHIN , In an ideal family (e. g. a home where relationship between the parents on the one hand and the children on the other is cordial and where parental roles are fully activated) the attitudes that one would expect to enter into a child's self-conception and influence his behaviour are those of approval, acceptance, interest, etc. The type of behaviour that is likely to emerge would be conforming. The child is also likely to identify himself with his parents and their values. The child's behaviour is, therefore, likely to be conforming provided that the values held by his parents conform to the general values of the society.

The interactional structure which generates both delinquent and non-delinquent behaviour is the family, and the basic processes involved in the development of both forms of behaviour are role performance and socialisation processes. According to BROOM AND SELZNICK (1963), the moulding of the child is accomplished through person to person interaction and the family is the major agency through which this socialization takes place. Also, PERTROSINO is of the opinion that a negative family characteristic such as poor parental supervision of children is often studied as a risk factor for future delinquency or crime, and children who come from such homes are believed to be at greater risk or are more likely to commit

offenses than children who do not. Thus, the family can be a potent harbinger of delinquency and this can occur through the following paths;

- a) Broken home (also referred to as fractured families in some literature)
- b) Family size
- c) Sibling factor
- d) Discipline
- e) Family socioeconomic status
- f) Foster homes
- g) Parenting styles
- h) Unwanted Pregnancy etc

In an article titled *The Role of The Family In Preventing And Intervening With Substance Use And Misuse: A Comprehensive Review of Family Interventions, With A Focus On Young People* , it was shown that factors which influence the use of drugs and alcohol in adolescents include; family cohesion, family communication, family management and attitudes, parental supervision, parental behaviour and parental influences.

Again, this shows the high level of influence the family has in the etiology of crime. As this paper focuses on the African cultural variable, only the factors which are prominent in the African society will be discussed. **BROKEN HOME.** Research into the impact of broken homes and delinquency goes back to the beginning of the 20th century. In 1923 SLAWSON reported that delinquents were twice as likely as non-delinquents to come from a broken home; in 1970 STRATTA claimed that 46% of a sample of 361 of black offenders came from broken homes, while, meta analysis conducted by WELLS AND RANKIN led to the conclusion that the prevalence of delinquency in broken homes is 10% to 15% higher than in intact homes. The term “ broken home” has been operationally defined to mean children residing in single-parent households or any type of household other than a household in which both biological parents are present .

The broken family is generally considered a family structure which deviates from the ideal family structure . The following have been identified as the types of family arrangement in Africa; two-parent arrangements, single parent arrangements, extended family member arrangements, adoptive/foster family arrangements, and other family arrangements. In the two-family parent family arrangement, two parents in the household are responsible for child nurturing. These arrangements include intact families, that is, those with both biological parents in the household. However, this can also include a stepparent residing in the household.

A second family arrangement or type is the single-parent family arrangement, which consists of a household in which a child resides with any relative-grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, or older siblings other than the biological parents. In most cases, this arrangement indicates that neither birth parent is present. A further family arrangement is the foster/adoptive family arrangement in which neither birth parent is present. In the adoptive family arrangement, the family does not have blood ties to the child, but the child is legally adopted. The foster family arrangement also excludes the birth parents and a child may stay with families or individuals for extended periods of time .

According to WRIGHT AND WRIGHT (1994), two parent families provide increase supervision and surveillance on property while single-parenthood increases the likelihood of delinquency and victimization. BARBARA WOOTTON found that 35% of her delinquent sample (using a control group) came from broken homes. OLORUNTIMEHIN and SZABO came up with 33%, REV. MORRISON with 51% and the highest EXNER with 62% from his sample

of 2000 delinquents. Also, OLORUNTIMEHIN in her paper stated that the general proposition is that there is a relationship between family structure and juvenile delinquency. This proposition can be broken down into the hypotheses that children will tend to become delinquent if they: 1.

come from homes where there is no cordial relationship between the parents and the children; 2. are brought up by step-parents; 3. are brought up in foster homes; 4. come from homes where there are no adults with whom they can identify themselves or regard as ideal models to be emulated.

5. come from homes where they are not allowed some leisure; 6. come from homes where parents are hostile to their children's friends. There are two types of broken home; structurally broken home and structurally intact but broken. **STRUCTURALLY BROKEN HOME** In the structurally broken home, the family is not "complete". Either the mother or the father is absent due to divorce, death or separation.

In Oloruntimehin's research, 91 delinquent children were studied divided according to the different residential areas to which they belonged as follows: 14 were from Mushin, 10 from Surulere, 13 from Yaba, 16 from Ebute Metta and 38 from Lagos Island. A control sample of 91 non-delinquent children was taken and interviewed; these children belonged to the above residential areas and attended primary schools situated within them. The control group was of the same age-group, ethnic group, residential area and sex as the experimental group. But the former group was not delinquent because their names did not appear in the records kept at the juvenile welfare centre and interviews with their teachers, parents and guardians

showed that they had not developed delinquent behaviour. Seventy-six fathers and 80 mothers in each of the two groups were interviewed informally. The interviews with parents of the delinquent group were difficult since (unlike parents of the non-delinquent group) many of them were either divorced or separated.

Structurally broken home can result in delinquency along the following paths; maternal deprivation, paternal discipline and step parenthood.

MATERNAL DEPRIVATION A study by DEMUTH AND BROWN (2004), demonstrates that broken homes are associated with juvenile delinquency but also that family arrangements are not just a broken home issue. Specifically, the researchers found that levels of juvenile delinquency were much higher in teenagers residing with single fathers and lowest among teenagers who were part of a two-parent household. MCCORD in his research found that single-parent families are not more criminogenic than two-parent families-provided the mother is affectionate. Hence, it is clear that the mother plays a very important role in the life of a child.

As such, where there is maternal deprivation, criminogenic tendencies are likely to be higher. The father of this theory is JOHN BOWLBY. He states “ actual physical separation from the mother in early childhood, to the extent that it involves privation and deprivation of a relationship of dependence with a mother figure, will have an adverse effect on personality development, particularly with respect to the capacity for forming and maintaining satisfactory object relations . ” He sees this personality defect as “ foremost among the causes of delinquent character development and persistent misbehaviour .

” Maternal deprivation to him results in what he calls an “ affectionless character” (today’s psychopath as named by HENDERSON). Bowlby’s theory seems to imply that the most dangerous pathogenic factor in child development is the harm that may be done if a child has been deprived of his natural mother’s love through separation. This concept, while undoubtedly valid in specific cases, as demonstrated by Bowlby, causes dissatisfaction in several directions if one wishes to consider the vast and complex development of the personality as a whole. BARBARA WOOTTON is of the opinion that what Bowlby’s theory simply says is that children need to be dependably loved. SIRI NAESS also says that there is no serious criminogenic impact from maternal deprivation.

R. G. ANDRY asks the question if it is valid or expedient to isolate a single factor such as maternal deprivation to account for pathological behaviour. In the African society, there is surrogacy in the absence of the mother. Since most families are extended, there is usually somebody around to take up the responsibility of a child.

Such persons could include an aunt, grandmother, elder sister, female cousin etc. In East Africa, some herbs are given to unmarried women who have never had children to enable them lactate and care for infants who have lost their mothers. Thus, an African child who has lost his biological mother would not be far from another source of maternal love. Unlike in United States of America where AMATO AND SOBOLEWSKI (2001) found that family arrangements other than the ideal nuclear family arrangement have very significant influence on delinquency, extended family arrangements help to curb delinquency in Africa. PATERNAL DISCIPLINE It is often argued that

single parent families are more likely to foster children with a leaning towards delinquency. This can be attributed to often the absence of a 'suitable' role model of a father figure, in the case of single mother families.

The manner in which parents discipline their children has been shown to influence the risk of delinquency in children. Offenders are more likely to originate from households in which discipline is lax, erratic, inconsistent, harsh and overly punitive. In Africa, the father is usually seen as the symbol of authority in a home. It is his duty to administer discipline to all members of the family including the mother.

Consequences of bad behavior in a child could lead to a father disowning him which is one of the biggest disgraces that can befall an African. Thus, the role of the father is very essential. Single mothers in Africa usually send their sons to "uncles" for discipline. Where a father (or father figure) is absent, the tendency of delinquency is higher. STEP PARENTHOOD.

Bowlby (1950) casts light upon the meaning of relationships within a family. "The relationships within a home cannot be understood unless we concern ourselves with such seeming imponderables as love and hate, jealousy, nagging, fairness and favouritism, generosity and charity, loyalty, dishonesty and self-sacrifice. It is these 'springs of action of the human heart' which go to make or mar the family and to shape the characters of the children growing within it." OLORUNTIMEHIN confirmed the hypothesis that children who are brought up by step-parents will tend to become delinquent. She found that it is usual that when a couple have been separated one of them remarries or very often both do. If the couples have children then the

problem of relationship between the children and the step-parent is bound to arise.

Step-parents may be male or female depending on which of the parents has decided to take custody of the children. The relationship that exists between children of a former marriage and step-parents is often not cordial. If the step-parent is a female (this should not be confused with a co-wife in a polygamous family), which has been discovered to be very common among families of delinquent children, the woman tends to see the children of her husband's former marriage as rivals for her husband's affection and attention. Her jealousy and bitterness become more formidable if she does not have children of her own. She tends to see her role-relationship to her step-children as serving "the other woman.

She maltreats the children and she is bossy and overbearing. If she has children of her own she indulges in giving them differential treatment to the other children. Step-mothers tend to be hostile whether the children's parents have been separated by divorce or death. The problem of the step-children is greater if the father nurses some bitterness against the mother which tends to result in an undesirable relationship between the father and the children.

Thus the children have nobody to protect them against the bitterness of their step-mother. We have discovered that many of the fathers of the delinquent children supported the step-mothers against the children and they also indulged in giving differential treatment to the children of the step-mothers as compared with the other children. If the step-parent is a man, he tends to

see the children as strangers and regards his role-relationship to the children as serving “ the other man. ” He indulges in giving differential treatment to his own children. He is often less tolerant of the other children’s faults and he remains indifferent to their welfare.

The children’s problem becomes greater if, as is commonly found among cases of delinquent children, the mother nurses some bitterness against her former husband, which tends to affect her relationship with her children. The presence of the children in her new home threatens her relationship with her new husband. Thus she either supports the stepfather against her children or in order to protect her own position she refrains from protecting her children. But step-fathers tend to be more sympathetic towards children whose parents have been separated by death rather than by divorce. Children who come from homes with step-parents tend to feel unwanted and in an attempt to be free from the undesirable conditions of their homes they remain in the streets for days since they find more meaningful relationships when they come across other children with similar experiences and by sharing one another’s company they are able to solve their identity crisis.

But while roaming about the streets these children very often engage in delinquent activities. Some of the children described as “ children in need of care or protection “ by the juvenile court also come from this type of home. As regards the step children, there is a psychological theory called the oedipal complex whereby a son has such a great love for his mother that it is almost sexual. He sees the step mother as someone who has come to replace his mother and this elicits angry emotions from him which may lead to violence.

The opposite of this is the Electra complex between the father and the daughter. In step fatherhood, the absence of biological connection, it transcends to actual sexual relations and this negatively impacts on the psyche of child and can result in criminality. STRUCTURALLY INTACT BUT BROKEN HOME. In this situation, the father and mother are both present but there is tension or physical absence of the parents. Under this, factors to be discussed include; family cohesion, family stability, FAMILY COHESION/TENSION. CASHWELL AND VACC (1996) investigated the role of family cohesion and found that a cohesive family environment reduces the chances of delinquent behaviours.

Similarly, SHIELDS AND CLARK (1995) found that low levels of adaptability in the family results in higher levels of delinquency. It is apparent that there appears to be a relationship between family arrangements and delinquency. Further researches have produced the following manifestations of juvenile delinquencies in secondary schools in Nigeria. These include: cruelty, bullying, fighting, vandalism, roughness during games, use of foul language, stealing, lying, cheating, examination malpractice, gambling, truancy, drug abuse, noise-making, disobedience, stubbornness, apathy, untidiness, failure to wear correct school uniform, reading of pornographic materials, sexual immorality, mob action, loitering, and carrying of weapon. Bringing into perspective the preponderance of juvenile delinquency, EDELMAN (1995) discovered that about 1, 234 youths run away from home and 2, 255 teenagers drop-out of school each day. SANNI ET AL carried out a research on secondary school students in Uyo, located in the eastern part of Nigeria. The data analysis showed that out of the 114 respondents that have

symptoms of delinquency, 47 or 41 per cent of the subject never spent valuable time with their parents, while 98 or 86 per cent never enjoyed parental supervision, and 80 or 70 per cent have never enjoyed close association with parents and other family members.

Thus, it is clear that family cohesiveness has a significant influence on juvenile delinquency among secondary school students. This finding is in line with that of TERLOUW AND JUNGER-TAS (1992), who found that juveniles who had positive relations with their parents were considerably less likely to engage in delinquent behaviour than those who had negative relationships. MARTENS (1992), HARADA (1995), BROOK et al. (1999) have also reported findings that close bonds with parents and general close emotional ties within the family among its members reduce the likelihood that juveniles will become delinquent further substantiates this work. Furthermore the research by WRIGHT AND WRIGHT (1994) has also lend credence to the importance of family cohesiveness in helping to stem down the incidence of juvenile delinquency, in their research it was revealed that single parent produce more delinquents than the two- parent families.

MUEHLENBERG (2002) also supported the findings in the study on the basis of research findings that asserts that the absence of intact families makes gang membership more appealing, because the delinquents succor in the presence of their group members which help to reinforce the delinquent tendency in them. Parental harmony is another aspect of family cohesion. It explores the nature of relationships between parents in two parent families. The basic argument is that constant discord, fighting, uncertainty and

discontent between parents is likely to impact negatively on children growing up within that family.

In some instances, the effects might be as drastic as those of broken homes. SHAW AND MCKAY are of the opinion that children from such homes tend to be bullies in school. Family tension leads to domestic violence and they arrived at the conclusion that many young bullies come from homes where there is either child or spousal abuse. RECOMMENDATIONS.

Government should utilize every opportunity to sensitize parents on the importance of creating a cohesive home environment, one in which parents and children share affection, where children are sufficiently supervised, and where there is discipline and not punishment. Parents should be encouraged to effectively socialize their wards, teaching them to eschew unacceptable behaviour, to delay gratification and to respect the right of others. Parents should be intimated that their children learn best from what they see them do. In other words, parents should provide good example in conduct and speech for their children to emulate.

Parents, guardians and caregivers should appreciate the need to create a peaceful home, one with relative harmony conducive enough for the development of pro social behaviour on the part of the children. ABSENTEE PARENTS. There is a certain quality of love exchanged between a child and its mother absence of which leads to resentment and hostility. Prolonged absence of parents from the home could lead to criminogenic behaviour.

As observed earlier, the absence of the mother has a more significant effect. For example, the working mother syndrome leads to resentment and

negative behaviour. Another issue under absentee parents is HOME DISCIPLINE. This involves the correction and control of a child within the family environment. CYRIL BURT AND MCCORD analyzed home discipline and divided it into 3 classes; i) Too lax j) Too harsh; this is punitive.

k) Defective discipline; this is where there is uniform method of discipline. Punitive discipline in the opinion of PROF. IBIDAPO-OBE is just an expression of frustration on the part parents in the lower class with financial difficulties. Lax discipline is used by members of the upper class by withdrawing love or luxuries from the child. KATE FRIED LADAN introduces an element, agreeing with BURT AND MCCORD that there is a further layer that whether one adopts lax, punitive or defective discipline depends on the class of the family.

This covers items (d) and (e) on page 3. Whatever method that is to be used, the important thing is consistency. In the African context, GRACE OKORODUDU , researching on secondary school students in Delta central found that there was no significant relationship between authoritarian parenting style and adolescent delinquency. This is an indication that authoritarian parenting style could not significantly predict adolescent delinquency. This finding confirms previous research outcomes; ANG ; GOH (2006) summarized results of some studies on parenting styles to the effect that authoritarian parenting had positive impacts among Asian and Indian adolescents.

Similarly, LOROMEKE (2007) in her research stated that African tradition emphasized the use of high control, authority and punishment in bringing the

best out of a child. UTTI (2006) in her research found that authoritarian parenting style influences adolescents' academic performance positively. On the contrary, parental demanding without responsiveness (authoritarian parenting style) may make adolescents rebellious and delinquent. For instance a home without love, warmth, care, affection but have the parents harsh and aggressive may make the adolescent run away from home, rebellious and have negative associations and other delinquent behaviours follow. RECOMMENDATIONS.

To enable children to get the possible best (financially and motherly attention), the provisions of CEDAW guaranteeing the right of mothers to work by provision of maternity leave and making flexible provisions for the office hours as is the situation in the United Kingdom. Working mothers in contemporary economy must be accepted, allowing a woman to take her children to work. SIBLING FACTOR Sibling factor is broadly divided into three; sibling influence, position of sibling and sibling preference. Sibling influence occurs when the older child impacts on the younger one. Imitation flows from older brother to younger brother. Children tend to influence each other as they interact, communicate and spend more time together.

They are in their own universe which even parents cannot sometimes intrude. SHAW AND MCKAY in their research found out that where a younger brother is delinquent, the older brother usually is also. In their book, an estimated 72% of delinquents had elder brothers who had been involved in crime. Sibling position talks about birth position. CHARLES GORING is of the opinion that first born siblings tend to be more delinquent because there are so much expectations, ambitions and values imposed on him trying to make

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him a perfect example to the other siblings and his inability to measure up to the standards made could lead into delinquency. CARL PEARSON says that they go into drugs, alcohol, stealing, perversion, etc.

Still in the opinion of the above scholars, a second child's inability to measure up to an outstanding first born makes him lean towards rebellion and drugs. Middle born siblings have criminogenic tendencies to the effect that they feel anonymous in the family. In African societies especially all members of the extended family "hail" the first son calling him all sorts of names such as "Okpara, "Olowo ori mi", Alabi etc. The last child is also always shown favor for being the "baby" of the family. The middle child thus feels a sense of emotional dissipation.

He feels abandoned and deserted. The family finances have been stretched on the first child. These children tend to commit offences of conspiracy, gang crimes, so that they can feel a sense of belonging. Sibling preference is a situation whereby, parents show more love and attention to a particular child to the detriment of another.

The other child grows resentful and this leads to delinquency. FOSTER HOMES. Foster parents tend to fail to satisfy children's emotional and material needs and treat a foster child in a markedly different way compared with their own children. Yoruba people tend to board their children with relatives e. g. grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins or with friends of the family.

One of the important obligations which the Yoruba people fulfill to one another is to bring up children of relations and friends. The concept of foster

parent in African society is thus different from that of Western societies. What seems to have some significance for the development of delinquent behaviour is how the children get into foster homes since this very often affects the attitudes and behaviour of foster parents towards the children. This in turn has some effects on the self-conception of these children and eventually on their behaviour. Among the cases of delinquent children in her study, OLORUNTIMEHIN discovered that most of the children in foster homes were boarded with foster parents either because their own parents had been separated or they had been labeled pre-delinquent by them.

The parents, thus, perceived the foster homes as a means of evading their responsibilities towards their children while the foster parents regarded their charges as problem children who did not deserve any form of humane treatment. These foster parents often maltreated, e. g. overworked, them.

They applied strict forms of disciplinary measures for minor offences and indulged in giving differential treatment to their own children. The parents of these children shifted their parental responsibilities completely on to the foster parents. They did not show any concern about their children's welfare. The children, therefore, regarded themselves both as strangers in their foster homes and outcasts in their own homes. Such children steal in addition to wandering about the streets.

It was however, discovered that most of the non-delinquent children from foster homes were boarded with their foster parents either because the children wished to live with them or because the former liked these children and wanted them in their homes. These foster parents gave the children

almost the same treatment as they gave to their own children. The parents of these children were very much concerned about their children's welfare.

CONCLUSION. All in all, it is quite evident that the family plays a significantly large role in leading to or preventing criminality.

BAMAIYI commended the Family Support Programme as a social welfare related means of strengthening the material, cultural, and overall well being of the family fabric as the essential basic unit of the nation. Unfortunately, this has become defunct in Nigeria. African Governments should take steps to ensure that this program or another of its kind takes a prominent role in the society as it would to no small extent reduce crime rates in Africa.