

Family Dynamics and Delinquent Careers among Secondary School Students in Uyo Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between family dynamics variables and delinquent careers among secondary school students in Uyo Local Government Area. **This study employed a correlational research design to investigate the relationship between family dynamics and delinquent career among secondary school students.** The population of the study consisted of 15843 Students in all the public secondary schools in Uyo Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State as at 2023/2024 academic session. The study sample comprised 130 Students determined using simple random sampling technique. A Researcher-made instruments titled: Family Communication Pattern, Conflict Resolution Styles, Family Flexibility and Delinquent Career Questionnaire (FCPCRSFFDCQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was subjected to face validity by two lecturers. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was .78, determined using Cronbach alpha reliability statistics. The data obtained from the instrument was analysed using Pearson product moment correlation (PPMC) statistic. The result showed that there is a significant relationship between communication patterns in the family, conflict resolution styles in the family, parenting styles and delinquent careers among secondary school students. Recommendations were made among others that Parents should be encouraged to provide a stable and supportive family environment, characterized by warmth, love, and consistent discipline, to help prevent delinquent behavior among secondary school students.

Key Words: Family, Family Dynamics, Delinquent Career, Secondary School Students

Introduction

The family is a child's first point of socialization, playing a crucial role in shaping their behaviour patterns and potentials. Family dynamics, including parenting styles, communication patterns, conflict resolution styles, and family flexibility, can significantly influence a child's likelihood of engaging in delinquent behaviour. Research suggests that factors such as poverty, unemployment, and social inequality can exacerbate the problem,

highlighting the need for a comprehensive approach to address delinquent careers (Argnew, 2006; Farrington, 2003). Delinquent careers refer to long-term involvement in criminal activities as a way of life or a primary source of income. Individuals pursuing delinquent careers often engage in a variety of illegal activities such as drug trafficking, theft, fraud, or other forms of criminal behaviour. These individuals may develop specialized skills and networks within the criminal underworld to sustain their illicit livelihoods. (Argnew 2006)

Family communication patterns, such as consensual, pluralistic, protective, and laissez-faire, can impact a child's behaviour. Consensual families prioritize open conversation and high conformity, while pluralistic families encourage open discussion and low conformity. Protective families emphasize obedience, and laissez-faire families have low conversation and low conformity (Koerner et al., 2002). Extreme family communication patterns can contribute to delinquent behaviour, with too strict or too flexible families increasing the risk.

Conflict resolution styles, including avoiding, competing, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating, can also shape a child's behavior. Families that adopt a collaborative approach, prioritizing mutual understanding and cooperation, are more likely to raise children with positive behavior. Family flexibility, characterized by rigid, structured, flexible, and chaotic patterns, is another important factor. Families that balance structure and flexibility, with open communication and clear rules, are more likely to raise children who exhibit positive behavior and are less prone to delinquency (Herrity, 2023; Ricketts, 2020).

Understanding the complexities of family dynamics and delinquent careers is essential for developing effective strategies to prevent and reduce criminal behavior. Interventions should focus on promoting positive family relationships, providing support for families, and addressing the root causes of delinquency. By working together, it is possible to create a supportive environment that promotes positive behavior and reduces delinquency among teenagers. Family dynamics play a role in shaping a child's behaviour and can influence the likelihood of delinquent behaviour.

Statement of the Problem

The increasing prevalence of delinquent behaviour among teenagers in Nigeria, particularly in Akwa Ibom State, is a pressing concern that warrants attention. Recent occurrences of teenagers engaging in internet fraud, examination malpractices, substance abuse, and other forms of delinquency highlight the need to understand the underlying factors driving these behaviours. Despite the growing concern, there is a dearth of research on the impact of family dynamics on delinquent careers among adolescents in Nigeria.

This study seeks to fill the gap in literature by examining the relationship between family dynamics, specifically communication patterns, conflict resolution styles, and family flexibility, and delinquent behavior among teenagers in Akwa Ibom State. The study aims to understand how family dynamics contribute to the development of delinquent careers in adolescents and identify potential risk and protective factors.

The research questions guiding this study are: How do family dynamics influence delinquent behaviour among teenagers? What are the specific communication patterns, conflict resolution styles, and family flexibility that contribute to delinquent careers? Why do some adolescents relinquish delinquent behaviour while others continue into adulthood? By

addressing these questions, this study hopes to provide insights into the complex interplay between family dynamics and delinquency, and inform interventions aimed at preventing and reducing delinquent behavior among teenagers in Nigeria.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the development of effective prevention and intervention strategies aimed at reducing delinquent behaviour among teenagers. By understanding the role of family dynamics in shaping delinquent careers, policymakers, educators, and mental health professionals can design targeted interventions that address the specific needs of adolescents and their families, ultimately promoting positive youth development and community well-being.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate family dynamics variables and delinquent careers among secondary school students in Uyo Local Government Area. Specifically, the study sought to determine the:

1. relationship between communication patterns in the family and delinquent careers among secondary school students.
2. relationship between conflict resolution style in the family and delinquent careers among secondary school students.
3. relationship between family flexibility and delinquent careers among secondary school students.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

1. What is the relationship between communication patterns in the family and delinquent careers among secondary school students?
2. What is the relationship between conflict resolution styles in the family and delinquent careers among secondary school students?
3. What is the relationship between family flexibility and delinquent careers among secondary school students?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated for the study

1. There is no significant relationship between communication patterns and delinquent careers among secondary school students
2. There is no significant relationship between conflict resolution styles in the family and delinquent careers among secondary students
3. There is no significant relationship between family flexibility and delinquent careers among secondary school students

Methodology

The study adopted a correlational research design. Correlational research design is a design that measures the magnitude and direction of relationship between variables (Udoh and Joseph, 2005). Correlational research design is used to discover or clarify relationships by using

correlation coefficients. One reason for using this design is that, it will help the researcher to describe, analyse, and investigate the situations that occur at the time of the research and connect with same problem situation that is felt by a larger population.

Participants

The study adopted simple random sampling technique to select each of the public secondary schools and students used in the study. At each sampled school, a cap and draw method was used to select an average of 130 senior secondary school students from SSS 1-3. These students were selected from 3 public schools from the study area

Instrumentation

Four instruments were used for this study to measure Family Communication Pattern, Conflict Resolution Styles, Family Flexibility and Delinquent Career.

The study adopted Family Communication Pattern Questionnaire (FCP) by Gupta and Geekita (2019), Conflict resolution styles were measured by using Kurdek's Conflict Resolution Style Inventory (CRSI; Kurdek, 1994). This questionnaire, originally designed for couples, but modified to suit parents and adolescents. Each conflict resolution style was measured by 5 items and the items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from never to always. To measure flexibility in the family, the study used the Family Conformity and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES-III) which was created by Olson et al. (1985) consisted of 40 items and 2 subscales of cohesion (20 questions) and adaptation (20 questions). It is used to measure family harmony and cohesion. The assessment scale of family harmony and cohesion has a relative internal consistency. Delinquent career was measured by a 16-item questionnaire, adapted from Baerveldt, Van Rossem and Vermande (2003), designed to measure minor offences. Adolescents were asked to indicate on a 4-point score ranging from never to four times or more how often they had shown certain forms of delinquent behaviours during the last 12 Months. Sample items were 'stolen a bike', 'deliberately broken something at the street', 'started a fire', and 'used drugs'.

Result

Research Question One

What is the relationship between communication patterns in the family and delinquent careers among secondary school students?

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between communication patterns in the family and delinquent careers among secondary school students

Variables	n	r	Remark
Communication patterns	130	.572	Moderate Positive
Delinquent careers	130		Relationship

Source: Computed by the Researcher using data from the respondents.

From the result in Table 1, it is revealed that r-value is .572. This implied that there is a moderate positive relationship between communication patterns in the family and delinquent careers among secondary school students. This means that as communication patterns in the family increases, delinquent careers among secondary school students also increases moderately. Therefore, communication patterns in the family enhance delinquent careers among secondary school students.

Research Question Two

What is the relationship between conflict resolution styles in the family and delinquent careers among secondary school students?

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between conflict resolution styles in the family and delinquent careers among secondary school students

Variables	n	r	Remark
Conflict resolution styles	130	.325	Weak Positive
Delinquent careers	130		Relationship

Source: Computed by the Researcher using data from the respondents.

From the result in Table 2, it is revealed that r-value is .325. This implied that there is a moderate positive relationship between conflict resolution styles in the family and delinquent careers among secondary school students. This means that as conflict resolution styles in the family increases, delinquent careers among secondary school students also increases moderately. Therefore, conflict resolution styles in the family enhance delinquent careers among secondary school students.

Research Question Three

What is the relationship between family flexibility and delinquent careers among secondary school students?

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between family flexibility and delinquent careers among secondary school students

Variables	n	r	Remark
Family flexibility	130	.916	Very Strong Positive
Delinquent careers	130		Relationship

Source: Computed by the Researcher using data from the respondents.

From the result in Table 3, it is revealed that r-value is .916. This implied that there is a very strong positive relationship between family flexibility and delinquent careers among secondary school students. This means that as family flexibility increases, delinquent careers

among secondary school students also increases very strongly. Therefore, family flexibility enhance delinquent careers among secondary school students.

Testing of Null Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis One (H01)

There is no significant relationship between communication patterns in the family and delinquent careers among secondary school students.

Table 4. Result of Pearson Product Moment Correlation for communication patterns in the family and delinquent careers among secondary school students

Variables	n	p-cal	p-crit	Remark
Communication patterns	130			
Delinquent careers		.000	.05	Significant. Ho1 Rejected

df=128

Source: Computed by the Researcher using data from the respondents.

From the result in Table 4, it is revealed that the p-cal of .000 is less than the .05 alpha level of significance with 128 degrees of freedom. This showed that the formulated null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between communication patterns in the family and delinquent careers among secondary school students.

Null Hypothesis Two (H02)

There is no significant relationship between conflict resolution styles in the family and delinquent careers among secondary school students.

Table 5: Result of Pearson Product Moment Correlation for conflict resolution styles in the family and delinquent careers among secondary school students

Variables	n	p-cal	p-crit	Remark
Conflict resolution styles	130			
Delinquent careers		.000	.05	Significant. Ho2 Rejected

df=128

Source: Computed by the Researcher using data from the respondents.

From the result in Table 4.6, it is revealed that the p-cal of .000 is less than the .05 alpha level of significance with 128 degrees of freedom. This showed that the formulated null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between family flexibility and delinquent careers among secondary school students.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study are summarized as follows:

- i. There is a significant relationship between communication patterns in the family and delinquent careers among secondary school students.
- ii. There is a significant relationship between conflict resolution styles in the family and delinquent careers among secondary school students.
- iii. There is a significant relationship between family flexibility and delinquent careers among secondary school students.

Discussion of Findings

Communication Patterns in the Family and Delinquent Careers

The findings based on Hypothesis one revealed that there is a significant relationship between communication patterns in the family and delinquent careers among secondary school students. The result also shows that there is a moderate positive relationship between communication patterns in the family and delinquent careers among secondary school students. This finding indicates that delinquent careers among secondary school students depends on communication patterns in the family. The result could be attributed to the fact that families that maintain open, supportive, and consistent communication tend to foster positive social and emotional development in their children, which can help reduce the likelihood of delinquency. On the other hand, poor communication within the family, characterized by conflict, neglect, or inconsistent messaging, can contribute to behavioural issues and delinquent careers among secondary school students. In families where communication is clear and supportive, children are more likely to develop strong self-esteem, emotional regulation, and respect for rules and authority. These students typically experience a greater sense of belonging and security, which helps them navigate the challenges of adolescence. They are more likely to internalize positive values and avoid engaging in risky behaviours that could lead to delinquency.

Additionally, families with dysfunctional communication patterns such as frequent arguments, lack of emotional support, or inconsistent discipline can create an environment of frustration, insecurity, and rebellion. In such cases, students may seek acceptance and validation outside the family, sometimes turning to peers involved in delinquent activities. Without proper guidance and emotional support, these students may develop antisocial behaviours, such as truancy, substance abuse, or involvement in criminal activities. Lastly, families that fail to communicate effectively about expectations, responsibilities, and consequences can inadvertently contribute to the development of delinquent tendencies. Inconsistent discipline, unclear boundaries, or a lack of involvement in a child's education and social life can create a disconnect between the student and family values, increasing the risk of

delinquency. The findings of this study agreed with the findings of Alzaben, et al., (2023) who reported that there is a significant relationship between family communication patterns and criminal behaviour and elucidate their relationship in Jordan.

Conflict Resolution Styles in the Family and Delinquent Careers

The findings based on Hypothesis two revealed that there is a significant relationship between conflict resolution styles in the family and delinquent careers among secondary school students. The result also shows that there is a moderate positive relationship between conflict resolution styles in the family and delinquent careers among secondary school students. This finding indicates that delinquent careers among secondary school students depends on conflict resolution styles in the family. The result could be attributed to the fact that families that use constructive and healthy conflict resolution methods tend to foster emotional stability, problem-solving skills, and respect for others in their children. Conversely, families that resort to destructive conflict resolution styles, such as aggression, avoidance, or domination, may inadvertently contribute to the development of delinquent tendencies in their children. Furthermore, in families where conflicts are resolved through open communication, compromise, and mutual respect, students learn important social skills, such as empathy, negotiation, and self-control. These skills are critical in helping them navigate conflicts in their personal lives, whether with peers, teachers, or authority figures. Students who grow up in environments where disagreements are handled calmly and respectfully are less likely to resort to violence or other forms of delinquency as a way of managing their frustrations. On the other hand, families that rely on negative conflict resolution styles such as verbal or physical aggression, stonewalling, or avoidance often model dysfunctional behaviours for their children. In such environments, students may learn to deal with conflicts through similar harmful means, such as fighting, bullying, or defying authority.

Moreover, when family conflicts are left unresolved or managed through aggressive tactics, students may experience heightened stress, anger, or a sense of alienation, all of which can push them toward delinquent behaviors. For instance, if family conflicts frequently escalate into violence or emotional abuse, students may become desensitized to aggression and replicate these behaviours in their social interactions. Similarly, families that avoid addressing issues or fail to provide emotional support can leave students feeling neglected or misunderstood, increasing the risk of seeking validation through peer groups involved in delinquency. Lastly, inconsistent or punitive conflict resolution can create confusion about boundaries and consequences, leading students to rebel or act out. Without clear, fair, and consistent methods for managing conflicts, students may struggle to develop respect for rules and authority, which can result in engagement in delinquent careers. The findings of this study agreed with the findings of Okorodudu (2010) who reported that there is a significant relationship between conflict resolution styles in the family and delinquent careers of students.

Family Flexibility and Delinquent Careers

The findings based on Hypothesis three revealed that there is a significant relationship between family flexibility and delinquent careers among secondary school students. The result also shows that there is a very strong positive relationship between family flexibility and

delinquent careers among secondary school students. This finding indicates that delinquent careers among secondary school students depends on family flexibility. The result could be attributed to the fact that a flexible family can accommodate the evolving needs and responsibilities of its members, fostering a sense of security, emotional well-being, and personal growth. In contrast, a rigid family structure may contribute to frustrations and rebellion, potentially leading to delinquent behaviours. When families exhibit flexibility, they create an environment where open communication and mutual understanding are prioritized. This flexibility allows parents to adjust their expectations and discipline strategies according to their child's developmental stage. Adolescents, in particular, face increasing social, academic, and emotional pressures. In a flexible family, changes in school performance, behaviour, or personal challenges are met with support, guidance, and constructive dialogue. This encourages students to communicate openly about their struggles and seek help, reducing the likelihood of engaging in risky or delinquent activities.

On the other hand, a lack of family flexibility can contribute to the development of delinquent careers among secondary school students. Families that adhere strictly to traditional roles, rigid rules, or unyielding discipline may struggle to meet the changing needs of their adolescent children. In such environments, students may feel trapped, misunderstood, or unable to express themselves, leading to feelings of frustration, rebellion, and defiance. When adolescents perceive their family as inflexible or overly controlling, they are more likely to seek autonomy or validation through delinquent behaviours, such as truancy, substance abuse, or associating with negative peer groups. Lastly, inflexible families may be less equipped to handle crises or transitions, such as parental divorce, financial difficulties, or changes in living arrangements. These disruptions can increase stress within the family, and without the flexibility to adjust and provide emotional support, students may feel neglected or overwhelmed. In such cases, delinquent behaviour can emerge as a coping mechanism or a form of rebellion against the perceived lack of understanding or care from the family. The findings of this study agreed with the findings of Okorodudu (2010) who reported that there is a significant relationship between family flexibility and delinquency in Delta central Senatorial district.

Conclusion

From the result of the findings of the study, it was concluded that there is a significant relationship between communication patterns in the family, conflict resolution styles in the family, parenting styles and delinquent careers among secondary school students. **Hence**, this underscores the notion that delinquent careers among secondary school students are, to a considerable extent, dependent on the quality of family dynamics, highlighting the need for interventions that prioritize promoting positive family relationships and environments to mitigate the risk of delinquency.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Parents should be encouraged to provide a stable and supportive family environment, characterized by warmth, love, and consistent discipline, to help prevent delinquent behavior among secondary school students.
2. The government and stakeholders should develop and implement policies and programs that address the root causes of delinquent behaviour, such as poverty, unemployment, and social inequality, and provide opportunities for students to engage in positive activities and develop life skills.
3. Schools should establish mentorship programs that pair students with positive role models, such as teachers, counsellors, or community leaders, to provide guidance and support and help students develop positive values and behaviors

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