

PARENTAL NEGLECT AND GANG VIOLENCE IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

GBENEMENE KPAE (Ph.D) and OGU, KING/SLEY

University of Port Harcourt

ABSTRACT: Parental guidance and discipline play significant role in shaping the behavior of young adolescents. Where such parental guidance is missing, such a child becomes vulnerable to influence from peer groups and recruitment into criminal gang. The objective of this study is to determine whether there exist a relationship between parental neglect and violent crime. The study is situated on three theoretical frameworks: strain, differential association and routine activity. The study (2018) relies on primary and secondary sources of data, while the Krejcie and Morgan formula was used to derive the sample size. Our study (2018) found a significant relationship between parental neglect and violent crime in Rivers State.

Key words: Parental Neglect, Violent Crime, Delinquency, Crime, Rivers State

1.0 Introduction

Parenting practices have been shown to be very important in determining whether a young person becomes involved in delinquent or criminal activity. The more interest a parent shows in a child, the more a parent gets involved with a child, the more a parent supervises a child and the more warmth and affection a parent shows a child, the less likely the child is to become involved in delinquency (Salmelinen, 1996). These findings suggest that it may be possible to reduce the number of juveniles who become involved in delinquency by developing strategies which address neglectful parenting.

In Rivers State, Nigeria there is prevalence of cult and gang related violence especially homicide and kidnapping. Many of the perpetrators of these cult related violence are youths from homes in which they have either been neglected or have little supervision by their parents. Apart from gang violence, many of the young men are also involved in petty street crimes and other illicit activities such as hand bag and telephone snatching, pick pocketing, burglary, and drug abuse, while others are involved in very violent crimes such as armed robbery, unlawful possession of firearms, kidnapping, rape, beheading of rival gang members.

Since there is very limited parental guidance and control, many youths in Rivers State have joined delinquent gangs where they learn the techniques of committing various crimes.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Rivers State in the past used to be one of the peaceful States in Nigeria, but recently there have been a steady rise in the level of violent crime and youth victimization. Majority of the crimes are committed when young people are operating in groups with limited parental supervision and control. Thus the prevalence of gang and cult related violence has made Rivers State a very unsafe place for many of its inhabitants. Obi and Ibabor (2018) also discovered that most youths in the Niger Delta of Nigeria living in rural areas are forced to relocate to cities for better employment opportunities, security, and safety, medical care and services and lifestyles. The high rate of youth and gang violence in Rivers State has been attributable to the problem of parental neglect and supervision. As economic hardship in Nigeria is taking a big toll on most families, many parents have simply abdicated their responsibilities and thereby living many children to street life and recruitment by criminal gangs. The high rate of poverty in the

country has forced many neglected children to see gang activities and criminality as the easiest way to survive and escape the current economic difficulties since gang life provides opportunity for them to obtain money and drugs illicitly. This situation has posed a serious threat to the security of lives in the State as many people are going out in the night and many businesses, men and women are forced to close shops early so that they do not become victims of criminal offenders.

Majority of the previous researches on the relationship between parental neglect and crime were conducted outside Nigeria particularly in the United States (Hoeve et al, 2009; Gormment, 2017). This study, therefore, is intended to determine whether explanatory variables such as lack of parental supervision, poor parental discipline, parental absence, warmth and affection, and parental criminality and aggression, as used in previous studies, can also explain the high rate of gang violence in Rivers State, Nigeria.

1.3 Objectives of the Research

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between parental neglect and violent crime in Rivers State. The specific objectives are:

- i. To determine whether lack of parental supervision cause youths to engage in gang violence.
- ii. To ascertain whether poor parental discipline cause youths to commit crime.
- iii. To assess whether parental absence causes youths to engage in gang violence.
- iv. To verify if lack of parental warmth and affection cause youths to commit violent crime.
- v. To examine whether parental criminality and aggression cause youths to commit crime.

1.4 Research Questions

- i. Does lack of parental supervision cause youths to engage in gang violence?
- ii. Does poor parental discipline cause youths to commit violent crime?
- iii. To what extent does parental absence cause youths to engage in gang violence?

- iv. Does absence of parental warmth and affection cause youths crime?

- v. Does parental criminality and aggression cause youths to commit crime?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study especially as it relates to understanding parenting factors that causes cult and gang violence in Rivers State will add to the existing body of knowledge on crime and delinquency. It is also intended to provoke further research into identifying those risk factors particularly at the individual and family level that cause youths to engage in violent act. Lastly, our recommendations is intended to assist policy makers and security agencies to formulate adequate policies and solutions to deal with the menace of cult violence and cultism in Rivers State.

2.0 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Review and Relevant Theories

This study is anchored on three theoretical frameworks: Strain theory, Edwin Sutherland theory of Differential Association and Routine Activity Theory. The strain theory was propounded by Robert Merton. Merton (1957) argues that society's structure encourages conflict and violent behavior. Merton believes that socially accepted goals put pressure on people to conform. People are compelled to either work within the system or become members of a subculture to achieve the desired goal. Merton contends that strain occurs when there is a gap between individual goal and their current status. He believes people adapt to strain in various ways. He argues that by innovation people are using unconventional means to obtain culturally approved goals.

Nigerian society puts pressure on individuals' especially young people to succeed and less emphasis on hard work. Thus the emphasis on material prosperity is tremendous. This cultural demand of material success makes many young people to deviate from cultural goal of society. Since the opportunity for people to succeed in a legitimate way is limited for a lot of people, many individuals especially young persons who have been neglected by their parents resort to illegitimate means to achieve cultural goals. Violent behavior through gang association has become an acceptable unconventional means through which many young people try to obtain culturally approved goals. Since many youths are pressured by society to succeed and there is no culturally defined and acceptable means to succeed, many resort to

illegitimate means to acquire the culturally approved goals of material success. Worst still, economic hardship and less cultural emphasis on hard work have made many neglected and unsupervised youths, who have obtained financial success through illegal means, to be celebrated by their communities as many of them drive around town in expensive cars.

Sutherland (1947) assumes that criminal behavior is learned through group association and interaction. More significantly, Sutherland delineates nine principles of differential association which explains the process by which a particular person comes to engage in criminal behavior. The most important of those nine principles is that a person only becomes delinquent when there is an excess definition favourable to violation of the law over definitions unfavourable to violation of law Igbo, (1999); Iwarimie Jaja, (2012) had more- or - less similar findings among others. Poverty and lack of employment in Nigeria have compelled many parents to neglect their primary responsibility of caring for their families and children. Consequently, many of such abandoned and neglected children learn criminal conducts through association with delinquent peer groups and criminal gangs, where in the process of the association and interactions with the criminal groups learn criminal behavior. Since many young people are driven by the desire to make quick money, gang and cult life provides that easy means through which criminal violence and property crimes can be committed in hidden locations and to escape without arrest by law enforcement agencies.

Another theory that is suitable to situate the problem of crime and juvenile delinquency in Rivers State is Routine Activity Theory (RAT). The Routine Activity Theory by Cohen and Felson (1979) is one of the theories of environmental criminology. Theory assumes that crime is relatively unaffected by social causes such as poverty, inequality, unemployment.

The theory states that for a criminal event to occur there must be a convergence in time and space of three factors: these are the presence of a motivated offender, the absence of a capable guardian and the presence of a suitable target (person or object). Whether or not these elements converge or coincide is a product of the routine activities (day-to-day movement) of potential targets and offenders. Daily activities of people such as going to work, pursuing recreation and running errands brings offenders in contact with suitable victims and targets. In Rivers State, most crimes are committed by unsupervised youths in areas where there are absences of suitable targets such as police officers and other

security agents who can apprehend the criminals. As a result, many of them rob, kidnap people and escape without police detection or apprehension. The violent crime situation in Rivers State is made worst because of the weakness of the formal and informal means of social control that would have helped to reshape and redirect the behavior of neglected children in our society.

2.2 Empirical Review of Literature

McCord (1983) in Salmelainen (1996) reported findings from an American longitudinal study of boys reared in 232 families prior to World War 2 in eastern Massachusetts. Juvenile delinquency rates among boys who had been raised by parents classified as 'neglectful', 'rejecting', 'abusive', or 'loving' were compared. Parents in the 'rejecting' group displayed repeated displeasure with their sons, while 'loving' parents were described as being genuinely concerned for the welfare of their sons. 'Neglectful' parents tended to show little emotional attachment toward their sons. McCord reported that the highest rates of delinquency occurred in the 'rejecting' group, with about half of the rejected boys having juvenile criminal court convictions compared with a conviction rate of 11 per cent for the 'loved' boys. A relatively high proportion of boys in the neglected' group also had juvenile convictions (23%).

Abuh (2015) found that young men who left their homes and embrace Islamic education (almajirai), and were abandoned by their parents and exploited by their Mallams and members of the public were likely to end up facing a future lifestyle woven by poverty and hardship. This is because the Islamic education they receive only equips them with few skills that do not fit into the harsh and capitalist oriented modern economy that Nigeria operates which cannot offer them profitable employment. Similarly, in a field survey conducted in Sokoto State by Sule-Kano (2010), it was found that most parents would prefer not to contribute anything to the upkeep of their almajiri children. In some schools less than 10% of parents made no contribution at all for the upkeep of their children while undergoing Islamic education. This study shows that almajirai children are neglected by their parents which are capable of pushing them into social vices as they rely on different devices to keep body and souls in harmony.

McCord, (1983) examined the effect of child abuse and neglect on rate of delinquency among some group of young males. She examined records written between 1939 and 1945 consisting of

232 males that were differentiated in four categories, according to how they had been treated as children 'neglected' 'abused', 'rejected' or 'loved'. The groups were similar in terms of poverty and proportions from broken homes. The abused and the rejected children were more likely to have been reared by aggressive parents. The rejected children were most likely to have experienced parental conflict and parental alcoholism or criminality; and the loved were most likely to have been raised by self-confident mothers. Between 1975 and 1979, 98% of the men were retraced. The records showed that juvenile delinquency showed higher rates among the abused and rejected boys than among those raised by loving parents. Approximately half of the abused or neglected boys had been convicted for serious crimes, become alcoholics, mentally ill, or had died when unusually young. Although paternal alcoholism and criminality were not related to the occurrence of child abuse, they were related to damage from such abuse.

In another study, Wldom (1989) examined the relationship between child abuse, neglect and violent criminal behavior. Using a prospective cohorts, official criminal histories for large sample of substantiated and validated cases of physical and sexual abuse and neglect from 1967 through 1971 (n-908) were compared with those of a matched control group (n-667) of individuals with no official record of abuse or neglect. The result shows that abused and neglected subjects had higher rates of arrests as adults. Based on a logit analysis, using four explanatory variables (age, sex, race, and abuse/neglect status) provided a good fit. In comparison with controls, abused and neglected subjects had a higher frequency of arrests for violent offenses as adults. There were higher arrest rates for violent offences for adult males.

Ryan, Williams, and Mark (2013) in their study sought to determine whether neglect is associated with recidivism for moderate and high risk juvenile offenders in Washington State. They found that victims of child abuse and neglect are at an increased risk of involvement with the juvenile justice and adult correctional systems. Neglect likely plays a critical role in continued offending as parental monitoring, parental rejection and family relationships are instrumental in explaining juvenile conduct problems. The study also found that adolescents with an ongoing case neglect were significantly more likely to continue offending as compared with youth with no official history of neglect. These findings remain even after controlling for a wide range of family, peer, academic, mental health, and substance abuse covariates.

3.0 Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. The survey was conducted in Rivers State, which was chosen due to the prevalence of gang and cult related violence, and its peculiarity as being the hub of major oil activities, which leads to influx of people from different parts of Nigeria into the State in search of employment and better The population of this study was drawn from a total population of figure of Rivers State, living condition. Nigeria which is 7, 303,924 (National Population Commission, (2016). The Krejcie & Morgan (1970) formula was used to derive the sample size. Primary data was obtained through the administration of surveys. This was supplemented with secondary data obtained from academic journals and other internet source.

Using the above formula 385 persons were drawn from the population.

4.0 Discussion of Findings

Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents
(Age, sex, education, religion).

Details	Classifications	Frequency	Percent
Sex	Males	222	57.66
	Females	163	42.34
Aggregate		385	100
Age	15-20	110	28.57
	21-30	123	31.95
	31-40	62	16.10
	41 and above	90	23.38
Aggregate		385	100
Marital Status	Married	178	46.23
	Single	207	53.77
Aggregate		385	100
Education	B.Sc/HND	27	56.36
	M.sc/PhD	51	13.25
	Other Degrees	117	30.39

Table 4.2: Parental Neglect and Gang Violence

S/N	Aim	Questions	AD	%	DA	%	Total
1	The relationship between parental neglect and violent crime in Rivers State	Does lack of parental supervision causes youths to engage in gang violence	265	68.83	120	31.17	385
		Does poor parental discipline causes youths to commit violent crime	304	78.96	81	21.04	385
		To what extent does parental absence causes engage in gang violence	282	73.25	103	26.75	385
		Does absence of parental warmth and affection cause youths to commit violent crime	261	67.79	124	32.21	385
		Does parental criminality and aggression cause youths to commit violent crime	319	82.86	66	17.14	385

Source: Field Work, February- April, 2017

Our analysis in table 4.2 indicate that 69% of respondents agreed that lack of parental supervision causes youths to engage in gang

violence while 31.17% disagreed with the statement. Overwhelming majority of respondents (79%) agreed that poor

Aggregate		385	100
Religion	Christian	298	77.40
	Islam	34	8.83
	Others	53	13.77
Aggregate		385	100

Source: Field work: February-April, 2017

The data in table 4.1 shows that majority of the respondents (68%) are males, while 42% are females. Also, the table indicates that majority of the respondents (32%) belong to 21-30 years age bracket while 23.38% are above 41 years. Furthermore, the analysis states that those within 31-40 years are the least among the respondents (16.10%) while those within 15-20 years are 28.57%. Our analysis also reveal that majority of the respondents (54%) are single while 46.23% are married. The table shows that 56.36% of respondents have B.Sc/HND , 13.29% M.sc/Ph.D, while 30.39% have other degrees. Lastly, majority of respondents (77.40%) are Christians, 14% belong to other religion, while only 9% are Muslims. The implication of this analysis is that young person that fall within 13-30 years age bracket (60.52%) constitute the bulk of the respondents, who may likely have experienced one form or the other of parental neglect in their homes.

parental discipline causes youths to commit violent crime, while only 21.04% disagreed with the statement. Additionally, 73.25% of respondents state that parental absence cause youths to commit violent crime while 27% disagreed. Also, 68% of respondents agreed that absence of parental warmth affection cause youths to commit violent crime while 32.21% disagreed with the statement. Finally, 83% of the respondents agreed that parental criminality and aggression cause youths to commit violent crime and, while only 17.14% disagreed with the statement.

Conclusion

The major objective of this study was to determine whether parental neglect cause youths to engage in gang violence in Rivers State. Although, previous researches have tended to support the assumption that there exist a positive relationship between parental neglect and juvenile delinquency, but majority of these studies were carried out either outside Nigeria or outside of Rivers State. We also tried to test empirically whether parental supervision, parental discipline, parental absence, parental warmth and affection, and parental criminality and aggression could explain the high rates of cult and gang related violence and criminality in Rivers State, particularly those in which young adolescent are involved. We found that there is a correlation between parental neglect and the desire to youths to join gangs and to engage in violent crime. This means that the prevalence of youth crime especially gang violence as experienced in many parts of Rivers State are due to the fact that majority of the young people that involved in these crimes are those that grow up in homes in which they have experienced low parental supervision, indiscipline, parental absence, poor parental warmth and affection, and parental criminality and aggression. Thus it means that violent crime can be explained not through individual factors or characteristics such as age and gender, but due to family factors. This is similar to the findings by Nnodim and Ochogba (2018) that found that parental care was one of the factors that predisposes youths into cultism in the Orashi Region of Rivers State.

It is noteworthy that due to inadequate official data on criminal offenders, this study relied solely on primary sources of data which were supplemented with academic journals and books. We believe that our inability to use official data is a limitation on this study because official records would have definitely improved on our research findings.

References

- Cohen, K. A. (1984). *Delinquent Boys*. New York.
- Cohen, L and Felson Marcus (1979) *Social Change and Crime Rate Trends: A Routine Activity Approach*, *American Sociological Review*, Vol 44, No 4, August, 588–608
- Gomment, T.I. (2017) *Parenting Neglect and Juvenile Delinquency of Almajrai in Kano State, Nigeria*. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*. Vol 3, Issue 1, 1237-1238
- Hoeve, M.; Judith, Dubas, J. S.; Eichelsheim, V.I.; Van der laan, P. H.; Smeenk, W. (2009) *The Relationship Between Parenting and Delinquency: A Meta-analysis*. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, Vol 37, Issue 2, August, 749-775
- Igbo, E.U.M. (1999) *Introduction to Criminology*. Nsukka: Afro-orbis Publishers
- Iwarimi Jaja, (2012) *Criminology the Study of Crime* (4th Edition). Owerri: Springfield .Publishers
- Krejcie, R.V. and Morgan, D.W (1970) *Determining Sample Size for Research Activities*. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, Vol. 30, 607-610
- McCord, J. (1983) *A forty year perspective on effects of Child abuse and neglect*. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, Vol 7 Issue3, 265-270
- National Population Commission (2016) *Nigeria's Current Estimated Population*. www.Population.gov.ng. Retrieved 20-5-2017
- Nnodim, A. U. and Ochogba, C. O. (2018) *Impact of Cult activities on the Socio-economic Well-being of Rural Dwellers in Orashi Region of Rivers State, Nigeria*. *International Journal of Innovative Research*, Vol 6 Issue 1, January- March, 56-63
- Obi, R. U. and Ibabor, S.O. (2008) *The Role of Social Workers in Meeting the Millennium Development Goals In the Niger Delta of Nigeria*. *Journal of Development Alternative and Area Studies*, Vol 27, No 1 and 2, March- June, 195-207

Salmelainen, P. (1996) Child Neglect: Its Causes and Its Role in Delinquency. Contemporary Issues in Crime and Justice, Number 33, December, 2-14

Sutherland, E. (1947) Principles of Criminology. (4th Edition). Philadelphia: Lippincott

Ryan, A. J , Williams, A. B., Mark, E. Courtney (2013) Adolescent Neglect, Juvenile Delinquency and the Risk of Recidivism. Journal of Youth Adolescence, Vol 42, Issue 3, January, 454-465

Wldom, C. S. (1989) Child Abuse, Neglect, and Violent Criminal Behaviour. CRIMINOLOGY, Vol 27, Issue 2, May, 251-271.