

***Family Structure, Gender and Delinquent Behaviours among Junior Secondary School Students in Calabar, Nigeria***

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**Abstract**

*In school, some children are observed to be well adjusted and disciplined while some others seem highly delinquent. The researchers suspect that family structure and gender have roles in orienting some students towards delinquent behaviour. This study, which adopted ex-post facto design, investigated the influence of family types and gender on delinquent behaviour manifestation by students. The research area is Calabar, Nigeria. The population is made up of all teachers in 24 public secondary schools in the two local government areas making up Calabar. This amounts to 1,290 teachers (392 males and 998 females). Proportionate sampling was applied to select the sample for this study. Hence 328 respondents, out of 413 teachers sampled, were admitted into the study. Questionnaire was used for data collection; while descriptive and inferential statistical tools were used to analyze data collected. The findings show, among others, that family structure and gender has significant relationship with delinquent behaviour manifestation among junior secondary school students. Implications for education and counselling practice was suggested with the view to minimizing delinquency among students in the school system.*

**Keywords:** Family, structure, gender, delinquent, behaviours, students, Nigeria

**Introduction**

Children are treasures to the society hence society ensures that children learn appropriate behaviours through schools. In addition to acquisition of relevant social cognitive skills like communication, empathy and problem solving skills are needed for functional living. However, in the society, children as members of young generation, are

expected to be of good behaviour, obedient, respectful and manifest virtues that shows that they have been properly socialized by their families. Unfortunately, while in school some children are observed to be well adjusted and disciplined while some others are highly delinquent.

Delinquency is associated to those children who indulge in wrongful, harmful or destructive behaviours. They are called juvenile delinquents because they are still children and may not be charged in a law court for such contrary behaviours. Delinquency as a concept has been defined variously but to Alemika and Chukwuma (2000), it is a condition of maladjustment, exhibition of morally deprived and unruly behaviour. Also in explaining delinquency, Hirsh cited in Maheshwari (2016) categorized delinquency into six groups on the bases of the kinds of offences committed. These include (i) incorrigible (e.g keeping late hours, disobedience) (ii) truancy (e.g staying away from school) (iii) larceny (ranging from petty thief to armed robbery) (iv) destruction of property (including private and public properties) (v) violence (against community by using weapons) (vi) sex offences (ranging from homosexuality to rape). Based on the foregoing, delinquent behaviours among students are contrarily outcome of socialization.

Parents have been known as main facilitator in the socialization processes of their children and wards. This is not only true in Nigeria but the world over. However, common perceptions show that the type of family and environment that children grow up in, including the social and psychological atmosphere in which they are exposed to, over time may exert negative or positive effect on their development. Children's development in terms of social, cognitive, political and economic could be adversely strained as a result of poor family socialization experiences. Just as families differ in structure, they also may differ in their parenting styles. Darling (2007) notes that parenting style (whether intact or non-intact families) predicts child wellbeing with respect to social competence, academic performance, psychosocial development and problem behaviour.

This study is anchored on Albert Bandura's (1977) social learning theory. This theory posits that behaviours are mainly acquired through modelling and imitation of model in the environment of interaction. This study perceives that while some family type may support the desired behaviour orientation, others may not. The inability of some family types to support development of desirable behaviour by their children has become a worrisome issue to many education stakeholders. For example guidance counsellors, school psychologists and school administrators are seriously concerned about finding out ways that can help the school system curb the problem of delinquency among students. This has become necessary because the maladjustment that is associated with this undesirable behaviour has continued to deny the effect of good report in their academic and their interpersonal dealings with other members of the school community.

Consequently, if not curbed, delinquent students may be performing at low capacity hence frustrating the quality of education at this level in the school system. This underscores the observation of Ekpo and Ajake (2013) that delinquency has remained an age-long problem with dire consequences in the Nigerian school system.

This study was necessitated by the need to expose the conditions inherent in some family types and gender of students on their influence on delinquent behaviour development. The outcome may provide the way forward which includes appropriate counselling for parents on how to teach their children good character and associated virtues.

On family structure and delinquent behaviour, studies show that the behavioural problems of most deviants are rooted in their families (intact or non-intact), (Wallman, 2010; Isangedghi, 2007; Ang & Goh, 2006; Okpako, 2004; Onyewadume, 2004). To Wallman (2010) the families that children grow up in and the social environment in which they live can have major effects on their wellbeing. Isangedghi (2007) avers that what a child becomes, the quality of mind he possesses, his behaviour and life orientations have the imprint of the family he routes his life through. Ang and Goh (2006) opined that adolescents' development may be hindered due to parents' lack of involvement in their socialization as a result of their serious involvement in their job and means of livelihood. Hence, parents spend little or no time at home to assist in the proper socialization of their children (Onyewadume, 2004). This supports the general view that unsupervised children are more vulnerable to delinquency. Hockenbury and Hockenbury (2006) averred that good and adequate parenting provided by families produces children who are psychologically well adjusted, competent and well behaved. Parks (2013) in a study carried out on the effects of family structure on juvenile delinquency, found no significant differences in violent delinquency between cohabiting families and other family types, but indicated that adolescents from cohabiting families have a greater odds of engaging in non-violent delinquency compared to those from two-biological parent families, although reaching only marginal significance. The study by Parks (2013) also discovered that children raised in intact families experience a lower risk of delinquency than those from non-intact families.

Sobolewski and Amato (2007) in a study found that 20 percent of students in grades 7 to 12 who live with their married, biological parents have never been suspended or expelled from school. The study's findings corroborate Manning and Lamb's (2003) observation that children from intact families have fewer behavioural problems in school.

The National Longitudinal study of Adolescent Health, Waves I and II (2011) reports that more than 50 percent of adolescents live with a single never married parent, 34.3 percent lives with two biological cohabiting parents, 35.9 percent lives with a step

parent, 37 percent are those whose parents are divorced while 40.8 percent are those who live with one biological cohabiting parents. Smith and McVie (2003) in a study of youth in Edinburg, Scotland, found that adolescents living with a mother and step father or in single parent homes were more delinquent than those living with both biological parents.

Gender, that is being male or female, is one of the demographic variables which can influence an individual's adjustment and behaviour. Sex difference in personality and behaviour are real, and they have a profound effect on many aspects of a person's wellbeing. Welch-Brewer, Stoddard-Dare and Mallet (2011) noted that among delinquent youths, males and females tend to have similar rates of problematic behaviours (e.g substance use). Onyechi and Okere (2007) believe that gender is not a significant factor in adolescent's deviant behaviour and academic achievement.

Similarly, Okorodudu (2010) found that there was no significant difference in delinquency between males and females. However, Sekuk, Rimfat and Ogbonna (2003) noted that until recently, male adolescents were by far more involved in delinquent acts than female. Similarly, as observed by Cauffman, Farmiggia and Goldweber (2008), the gap between gender differences in youth delinquency is small. That being the case, one of the explanations for the higher level of delinquency in males than in females is that the etiology of delinquency make males more vulnerable to risk factors for delinquency such as inadequate parenting than females (Moffit, Caspi, Rutter & Silva, 2001).

Ncube, Muranda, Tshablala and Mapolisa (2010) conducted a study on the nature and prevalence of bullying in primary schools of Nkayi south circuit in Zimbabwe to determine the negative effects of this antisocial phenomenon so as to help schools come up with strategies for ending the problem. The main findings of the study revealed that the most common forms of bullying were physical (that is fighting, punching, hitting), verbal (that is, threatening, swearing, teasing), social (that is, deliberately leaving out of a game or group, ignoring). The study also revealed that boys were the main contributors of bullying. The findings further revealed that the bullying behaviours were influenced by home based factors, peers, and hence they advised that schools should encourage teachers to engage all children in productive work all the time and also liaise with parents on best ways of guiding the behaviour of pupils who exhibit characteristics of bullies. With regards to school risk behaviours such as absenteeism, fighting and discipline for misconduct, Almakadma and Ramisetty-Mikler (2015) observed that a significantly higher proportion of males have been found to exhibit these behaviours than females. According to the authors, students who exhibited these behaviours reported significantly lower levels of school connectedness and parental monitoring. Regression analyses of data in the same study suggested that school-student connectedness reduced the odds for all three risk behaviours examined in the study

while parental monitoring reduced the odds for absenteeism, and school policies reduced students' involvement in school fights. Schools and parents were also encouraged to work as a team and to recognize the importance of school connectedness in improving positive students' behaviour and outcomes.

Literature reviewed in this study shows that irrespective of the type of family structure, that parents have the responsibility to build their children's character and to shape their behaviour. The review also revealed that children learn certain character through modelling and imitation. Therefore, whatever is the prevailing attitude or behaviour or norm existing among family members and immediate surroundings, the behaviour of children in such families or surrounding may tend to orientate towards that direction, be it prosocial or antisocial. On gender and delinquency, the review shows that certain types of offences are more or less among either of the sexes. This implies that gender is not such an important factor in deviant behaviour or delinquency. Delinquency in children may probably be due to some other risk factors impacting on the individual's development.

### **Research questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the prevalent types of family structure as perceived by teachers in Calabar, Nigeria?
2. Which family structure is perceived to orientate junior secondary school students to delinquency?
3. Which gender (male or female) had more cases of discipline in school?

### **Hypotheses**

**Ho1:** There is no significant relationship between family structure and delinquency among junior secondary school students in Calabar, Nigeria.

**Ho2:** There is no significant relationship between gender and delinquency among junior secondary school students in Calabar, Nigeria.

### **Methodology**

The research design adopted is ex-post facto. The research area is Calabar, Nigeria. This area is made up of two local government areas (LGA) namely, Calabar Municipality and Calabar South. The area was selected because the researchers believe that since the area has many schools, there will also be a widespread of different family structures. The population of teachers in 24 public secondary schools in Calabar as at the time of study is 1,290 where 392 are males and 998 are females.

The researchers utilized simple random sampling technique to select 50 per cent of the schools in the study area which amounted to 12 schools in all (8 from Calabar Municipality and 4 from Calabar South LGAs). This amounted to 827 teachers (216

males and 611 females); 50 percent was applied to each school to select the sample for the study. This amounted to 413 teachers. A questionnaire titled 'family structure and gender in delinquent behaviour questionnaire' (FSGDBQ) was used in data gathering. It was a 14 item peer reviewed questionnaire with three sections. Section 1 elicited information on respondents' school location and sex. Section 2A is a checklist which sought information on the prevalent type of family structure in which students live. Section 2B required the respondents to check in the row the type of family structure that is more likely to orientate students towards delinquency. In section 3, respondents were asked to indicate by a check in the appropriate box which of the gender (male or female) has had more cases of discipline in their schools in the last six months. Permission to carry out the study was obtained from the principals of the schools visited and consent was received from the teachers who volunteered to be part of the study by collecting the questionnaire to complete. The copies of the questionnaire were left with some teachers who were not able to complete their copies at the time of administration. The researchers visited the schools to retrieve the remaining copies of the questionnaire on an agreed date. The return rate was 79 percent therefore 328 teachers (86 males and 242 females) constitutes the sample for the study. Data obtained were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical tools.

### Presentation of Results

**Research question 1:** What are the prevalent types of family structure as perceived by teachers in Calabar, Nigeria?

The result on prevalence of types of family structure in which students live in Calabar, Nigeria as perceived by teachers is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Prevalence of types of family structure which students' lives

s/n	Family structure	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1.	Both parents	209	63.7
2.	Father only	12	3.7
3.	Mother only	26	8.0
4.	Elder brother/sister	10	3.0
5.	Relatives (aunty, uncles, others)	71	21.6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>100</b>

The result in Table 1 shows that the most prevalent family structure in which students live is both parents family type (63.7%). This implies that majority of the junior secondary school students live with both parents (intact family). Both parents family structure is followed with relatives family structure (21.6%); this implies that some of the junior secondary school students live with their relatives (Aunts, uncles, others). The other family types followed in decreasing order, mother only (8.0%), father only (3.7%) and elder brother or sister (3.0%). Putting the non-intact family structures, together they consist of only 36.3%. This further shows that the prevalent family type in Calabar, Nigeria as at the time of the study is both parents family structure in which the junior secondary school students live with their father and mother.

**Research question 2:** Which family structure is perceived to orientate junior secondary school students to delinquency?

The result on which family structure is perceived to orientate junior secondary school students towards delinquency is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Types of family structure perceived to orientate junior secondary school students towards delinquency in Calabar, Nigeria.

s/n	Family structure	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1.	Both parents	86	26
2.	Father only	60	18
3.	Mother only	80	24
4.	Elder brother/sister	31	10
5.	Relatives (aunty, uncles, others)	71	22
<b>Total</b>		<b>328</b>	<b>100</b>

The result in table 2 shows that the respondents perceived both parents family structure to orientate junior secondary school students more (26%) to delinquency than the other family structures. In decreasing order, they include, mother only (24%), relatives (22%), father only (18%) and elder brother or sister (10%). The result also shows that the gap seen in the differences in percentage between the different family structures is small. This further implies that all the types of family structure can orientate junior secondary school students to delinquency. This further implies that the students in the study manifest delinquency irrespective of the family structure they belong to.

**Research question 3:** Which gender (male or female) has more cases of discipline in school?

The result on which of the gender (male or female) has had more cases of discipline in the schools in the last 6 months is presented in Table 3 according to school location in Calabar, Nigeria.

**Table 3:** Perception of teachers on gender of students who has had more cases of discipline in the last 6 months by school location

S/n	School location	Male	Female	Total
1	Calabar Municipality	166 (75%)	56 (25%)	222 (100%)
2	Calabar South	76 (66%)	30 (33%)	106 (100%)
	Overall	242 (72%)	86 (28%)	328 (100%)

The result in Table 3 shows teachers' perception on which gender has had more disciplinary cases than the other in the last 6 months. The result shows that on overall, more males than females have had disciplinary cases in the different locations in the study area. Disciplinary cases means that the students have been involved in delinquency behaviours (stealing, bullying, truancy or other undesirable behaviours like disobedience, dishonesty, among others) against the school rules and regulations.

**Ho1:** There is no significant relationship between family structure and delinquent behaviour among junior secondary school students in Calabar, Nigeria.

The result of chi-square test of hypothesis one is presented in table 4

**Table 4:** Chi-square test of hypothesis one

s/n	Family structure	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	Residual (O-E)	(O-E) <sup>2</sup>	e <sub>χ</sub> <sup>2</sup>
1.	Both parents	86	65.6	20.4	416.16	0.344
2.	Father only	60	65.6	-5.6	31.36	0.478
3.	Mother only	80	65.6	14.4	207.36	3.161
4.	Elder brother/sister	31	65.6	-34.6	1,197.16	18.250
5.	Relatives (aunty, uncles, others)	71	65.6	5.4	29.16	0.445
	<b>Total</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>328</b>			<b>28.678</b>

The calculated chi-square is 28.678 while the table chi-square is 26.30 at 0.05 level of significance and 16 degree of freedom. Since the calculated chi-square is greater than the table chi-square, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that type of family structure has a significant relationship with students' delinquent behaviour in Calabar, Nigeria.

**Ho2:** There is no significant relationship between gender and delinquent behaviour among junior secondary school students in Calabar, Nigeria.

The chi-square test of hypothesis two is presented in Table 5

**Table 5:** Chi-square test of hypothesis two

s/n	Gender	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	Residual (O-E)	(O – E) <sup>2</sup>	$e\chi^2$ chi-square
1.	Male	86	164	-78	6084	37.10
2.	Female	242	164	78	6084	37.10
<b>Total</b>		<b>328</b>	<b>328</b>			<b>74.195</b>

The calculated chi-square is 74.195 while the table chi-square is 11.07 at 0.05 level of significance and 5 degree of freedom. Since the calculated chi-square is greater than the table chi-square, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that gender has a significant relationship with delinquent behaviour in Calabar, Nigeria.

**Discussion of findings**

The result on prevalence of type of family structure shows that the majority of the junior secondary school students in Calabar, as perceived by their teachers, live with both parents. This finding is interesting and peculiar to the study area because contradictory findings reported that national longitudinal study of adolescent health wave I and II in the United States found that more than 50 percent of adolescent live with a single married parent. The difference could be attributed to the differences in demographic factors between the two countries. This findings finds support in the observation of Isangedighi (2007) that what a child become are traceable to the type of family he or she belongs. This observation above aligns with that of Park (2013), who found that children raised in intact families experience a lower risk of delinquency than children raised from other family structures. Similar to Park (2013), Manning and Lamb (2003) discovered that children from intact families have fewer behavioural problems in school. However, generally people believe that two parent family structure have the capacity to support effective parenting. This agrees with the finding of Hockenbury and Hockenbury (2006)

that good and adequate parenting provided by families produces children who are psychologically well adjusted, competent and well behaved. Similarly, Parks (2013) found that children raised in traditional two parent families (intact) experienced a lower risk of delinquency than children from other family structures (non-intact).

Another finding of the study shows that teachers perceive that all the family structures identified in this study could orientate students to delinquency. This finding agrees with Isangedighi (2007:231) that what a child becomes, the quality of mind he possesses, his behaviour and life orientations have the imprint of the family he routes his life through. This finding also agrees with that of Darling (2007) that parenting style whether in two parent families (intact) or other family structures (non-intact) could predict wellbeing with respect to social competence, academic performance, psychosocial development and problem behaviour. This is supported by the study of Smith and McVie (2005) who found different level of delinquency among adolescent in Edinbing. The researchers found that those living with a mother and a step father, or in single parent homes were more delinquent than those living with two biological parents.

On gender, the result shows that on overall males, more than females, have had cases of discipline in both locations. The finding agrees with Ncube, Muranda, Tshablala and Mapolisa's (2010) study on nature and prevalence of bullying in primary schools in Zimbabwe and found that boys were the main contributor of bullying. The finding also agrees with Almakadma and Ramisetty-Mikler (2015) who found that males more than females show significant higher proportion of misconduct. This agrees with Sekuk, Rimfat and Ogbonna (2003) that male adolescents were by far more involved in delinquency than females. This result is so because the male nature predisposes it to taking risk. Besides, inadequate parenting is also identified as risk factor predisposing males to delinquency more than females (Moffit, Caspi, Rutter & Silva, 2001).

The results on hypothesis one shows that family structure significantly relate with delinquent behaviours among junior secondary school students in Calabar, Nigeria. Result on hypothesis two shows that gender of students relates significantly with their delinquent behaviour. This finding contradicts Okorodudu (2010) finding that there is no significant difference in delinquency between males and females. Similarly, Welch-Brewer, Stoddard-Dare and Mallet (2011) found that among delinquent youths, males and females were not different in manifest problem behaviours. The finding of this study also contradicts with that of Onyechi and Okere's (2007) finding that gender is not a significant factor in adolescent's deviance. The result that gender of student relates significantly with their delinquent behaviour further implies that whether the students are males or females, they can be vulnerable to delinquency.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that family structure and gender have significant relationships with delinquent behaviour manifestation among junior secondary school students.

### **Implications for education and counselling practice**

Based on the findings of this study and the negative implication that delinquency could have on the development of the students, there is need to harness all efforts that can bring an end to the growing undesirable behaviour among junior secondary school students in Calabar, Nigeria. School guidance counsellor and administrators would find the following suggestions helpful:

1. Through parent teachers association, parents have to be re-sensitized on their parental role in engendering the development of desirable behaviours among their children and wards.
2. Parents should be encouraged to model desirable societal behaviours for their children to emulate and to live well-adjusted life.
3. Parents should be re-sensitized on the need to maintain stable and caring family environment irrespective of the family type. The reason is that junior secondary school students as adolescents, whether male or female, go through similar developmental challenges. Consequently, providing effective parenting could enhance their successful transition through the period with much benefit to themselves and to society. These benefits are in terms of less vulnerability to delinquency, adjusted life and success in academic and the high probability of completing basic education at the first instance.
4. School administrators should ensure that areas of the curriculum that instill desired discipline, values and virtues are upheld and implemented.
5. Teaching should be expanded to help students acquire life skills and capacity to refrain from indiscipline behaviours.

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