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CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES AND ADOLESCENT DELINQUENT BEHAVIOUR AMONG REMAND HOME INMATES IN LAGOS, NIGERIA

O. M. Omoegun , M. B. Ubangha & P.N Emeri

Department of Educational Foundations

University of Lagos, Akoka.

pemeri@unilag.edu.ng.

Abstract

This study investigated childhood experiences and adolescent delinquent behaviour among remand home inmates in Lagos, Nigeria. Two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The participants for the study consisted of 180 adolescents selected from the different remand homes or correctional centres in Lagos State using stratified random sampling technique. The instrument used in the data collection was a self-designed questionnaire consisting of; Personal Data Inventory (PDI), Childhood Experiences Structured Inventory (CESI) and Delinquency Structured Inventory (DSI). The data collected were analyzed with one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) at 0.05 level of significance. The result of the analysis showed that there is a significant difference between parental use of corporal punishment during childhood and adolescent delinquency. Parental use of invectives was also found to have a significant effect on adolescent delinquency. Based on the results, it was recommended among others that parents should provide pleasant childhood experiences to their children to avoid delinquency.

Key words: *Childhood experiences, delinquency and institutionalized adolescents*

the nature of such experiences and their mode of impartation.

Introduction.

Childhood experiences leave indelible marks in the hearts of those who have been through them. Every human being on the face of this earth has had one form of childhood experience or the other. The way and manner these are imparted is quite crucial. Some recall theirs with * nostalgia and others do so with so much bitterness and regrets. This usually stems from

Childhood experiences range from love, hatred, care, rejection, abandonment, acceptance, discomfort, deprivation to over-pamperedness. Tangible issues of maltreatment arising from such include:

Physical abuse; such as corporal punishment, pinching, kicking, spanking, slapping, shoving

and scarification, often manifesting as sprains, head injury, burns and scalds.

Verbal abuse; including scolding, yelling, name – calling and swearing.

The impact these have on the general adjustment of the child in later life is a cause for worry.

A child without behavioural problems is indeed an asset to the society given the ravaging menace of juvenile delinquency especially in recent times. How to achieve this leap has remained the greatest challenge of parenting. The home being a primary agent of socialization has a crucial role to play in providing the early childhood experiences and the child spends greater part of his early years in the home before reaching out to other socializing agents such as peer group. The role of such early experiences in shaping the life of the child was captured in Abraham's (1983) view that the child's response to school and other socializing settings is highly dependent on the attitudes and behaviour he developed in the home at the initial stage of the socialization process. Parents do subject their children to varying experiences probably with a view to achieving positive outcomes. Then, the expected responsibilities of parents to their children as enshrined in the African Union Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) include:

- (a) to ensure that the best interests of the child are their basic concern at all time; and
- (b) to secure within their abilities and financial capacities conditions of living necessary to the child's development; .

Accordingly, the rights of the child include;

- (a) The right to life.
- (b) **Survival and development rights:** They include rights to adequate food, shelter, clean water, formal education, primary health care, leisure and recreation and cultural activities; and
- (c) **Protection rights:** They include protection from all forms of child abuse, neglect, exploitation, cruelty, war and abuse in the criminal justice system.

The extent to which the parental responsibility and the rights of the child are being realized within the context of the Nigerian society is a cause for concern. Maltreatment of children results from failure of parents and other relevant stakeholders in creating an enabling environment for the realization of the rights. Millions of Nigerian children face special problems of disadvantage, abuse and exploitation, sometimes in appalling circumstances (UNICEF, 2001).

Maltreatment of children is a social problem that has captured the attention of many all over the world. McCurdy and Daro (1994) described child maltreatment as a whole spectrum of abuse ranging from child battery, child labour, deliberately ignoring a child, rejection, abandonment and sexual abuse to outright denial of a child's needs. Child maltreatment practices prevalent in Nigerian society include harsh discipline, especially, physical punishment, use of invectives and denial of basic privileges.

Observational evidence indicates that parents and their surrogates assault children frequently by imposing physical punishment.

Regoli and Hewitt (2003) reported the case of a father and mother who whipped their daughter to death with a 5-foot stretch of electric cable after she was tied down. They delivered 160 blows, stuffing a towel in her mouth to silence her screams. Adegbehingbe and Agite (2007) in a Nigerian study at Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospital, Ile-ife, found that corporal punishment is being used extensively to discipline children both in schools and at home and this has been responsible for severe forms of ocular injuries leading to significant visual impairment and blindness on several occasions. Teachers were found to use their hands, sticks, straps, shoes and kicks to inflict such punishment.

With the problem of child maltreatment on one hand lays yet the issue of juvenile delinquency on the other hand. Juvenile delinquency is an action committed by a minor that violates a state's penal code (Regoli & Hewitts, 2003) and common types of delinquency prevalent in our society include: moral laxity, larceny, truancy, gang fighting, disobedience, promiscuity, stealing, arson, assault and insult, drug offences, willful destruction of properties and wickedness (Ezewu, 1983).

Various reasons have been advanced for delinquency among adolescents although familial factors which include childhood parental rearing patterns and divorce are particularly being implicated in delinquency (Osarenren, 1996; Olusakin, 1996 & Adejumo, 2008). So far, efforts by parents to combat delinquency in their children have failed to yield the desired results including those made by parents who present themselves as strict

disciplinarians, relying heavily on punitive measures as correctional devices.

The age long maxim "spare the rod and spoil the child" has erroneously been anchored exclusively on corporal punishment and thus has been a leading cause of violence against children. Based on this, some parents have violently assaulted their children. Infanticide, foot-binding and cranial deformation have been practiced as ways of handling problematic children. In fact, in colonial America, in 1641, the General Court of Massachusetts colony passed the stubborn child law which stated that children who disobeyed their parents could be put to death! (Regoli & Hewitts, 2003).

Against the backdrop of the ravaging menace of juvenile delinquency in a seemingly abusive society, this study was conducted to investigate the effect of childhood experiences on delinquent behaviour among adolescents.

Statement of problem

The utter helplessness displayed by some parents towards handling extremely problematic children is a public concern. Lives and businesses of some parents are in serious jeopardy due to the activities of such errant teenagers who defy virtually every parental effort to keep them on the right track of life. In most cases, child discipline has been left in the hands of teachers which support the perceived parental helplessness especially for those who wish to exonerate themselves from the pains and agony of handling problematic children. Such seemingly beyond parental control cases make up a sizeable number in the correctional institutions or welfare centres such as the Remand Homes and the Approved Schools found across the various states of the federation.

The challenge of coping with delinquent children in the discharge of their duties does impinge greatly on teachers' effectiveness. Distracting behaviours such as truancy, stealing, examination malpractice and diverse lawlessness which characterize the delinquent child are quite worrisome and combine forces to make the teaching profession highly tasking and unattractive.

Poor academic performance and other deleterious effect that delinquent behaviour have on the lives of young people and the society at large is so overwhelming to attract serious investigation. Given that the proffered solutions even as available in the social welfare unit do not seem to have provided an enduring solution to the problem, a root cause analysis that bothers on the child and his or her early childhood experiences thus attracts an urgent attention in attempting to tackle the ravaging problem..

Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical considerations relevant to the study are:

- (i) Social Learning Theory
- (ii) Social Disorganization Theory

(i) Social learning theory

The social learning approach in explaining crime and delinquency is hinged on the assumption that human behaviour is learned (Akers, 2000). By this, through social interactions, peer group and other agents of socialization, some juveniles are taught delinquent behaviours. Children who grow up in homes where violence for instance is a way of life may learn to believe that such behaviour is acceptable and rewarding. Hence, parents who model socially unacceptable

behaviours will encourage delinquency in their children.

(ii) Social disorganization theory

This posits that social order, stability and integration are conducive to conformity while disorder and malintegration are conducive to crime and delinquency. Thus, raising a child in a family ridden with conflict predisposes him or her to delinquent acts, having learnt that non-conformity is a norm. An orderly home and society where peace abounds would serve as healthy platform for conformity for the growing child hence discouraging all forms of delinquency.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the role of childhood experiences such as excessive use of corporal punishment and parental use of invectives in the development of delinquent behaviour in adolescents among remand home inmates in Lagos metropolis. To achieve these objectives, two research questions and two corresponding hypotheses were raised.

Research questions

1. Does corporal punishment in childhood contribute to delinquency?
2. Does the use of invectives in by parents lead to delinquency?

Hypotheses

1. Corporal punishment in childhood will not significantly affect adolescent delinquent behaviour.
2. Parental use of invectives during childhood will not significantly affect adolescent delinquent behaviour.

Methodology.

The research design used for this study was descriptive survey research design. The sample for this study comprised one hundred and eighty (180) institutionalized adolescents (both male and female) drawn from the four remand homes and approved schools in Lagos, using stratified random sampling technique. A self-designed questionnaire comprising Demographic Data Inventory (DDI), Childhood Experiences Structured Inventory (CESI) and Delinquency Structured Inventory (DSI) was used for collection of data. Split-half reliability estimate was done to establish the internal consistency of the questionnaire and correlation

coefficient ranging between 0.67 to 0.74 were obtained,

Results

Hypothesis one:

Corporal punishment in childhood will not significantly affect adolescent delinquency.

The one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistical tool was used to analyze the data. The result of the obtained are presented in Tables 1 and 2

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Effect of Corporal Punishment on Delinquency

Groups	N	X —	SD	Std. Error
Not maltreated	4	33.50	9.68	4.84
Slightly maltreated	41	41.71	11.08	1.73
Moderately maltreated	100	48.53	10.22	1.02
Severely maltreated	35	56.09	9.46	1.60
Total	180	48.11	11.45	.85

Evidence from Table 1 indicates that adolescents who reported to have been severely maltreated at childhood obtained the highest mean delinquency scores ($x = 56.09$; $SD = 9.46$), followed by those who experienced moderate maltreatment with a mean delinquency score of 48.53 ($SD = 10.22$). The least scores on delinquency were obtained by adolescents who reported not to have been maltreated at

childhood ($x = 33.50$; $SD = 9.68$) while their counterparts who were slightly maltreated obtained a mean delinquency score of 41.71 ($SD = 11.08$).

To determine whether the mean differences were significant, the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistical tool was used. The obtained result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on the Effect of Corporal Punishment on Delinquency

Source	Sum of Square	DF	Mean Squares	F
Between groups	4778.66	3	1592.88	15.10
Within groups	18565.15	176	105.48	
Total	23343.78	179		

$$P < 0.05; F_{\text{tab}} 3/176 = 2.67$$

Table 2 shows that F_{cal} of 15.10 is greater than F_{tab} of 2.67 at 0.05 level of significance and 3/176 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis was thus rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted. It was concluded that corporal punishment at childhood had a significant effect

on adolescent delinquency. This implies that children who are punished are more likely to engage in delinquency.

To determine where the significant difference lay post hoc pair-wise comparison was done.

The result of the analysis is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Post Hoc Multiple Pair-Wise Comparison Tests

(i) Corporal Punishment	(j) Corporal Punishment	Mean Difference (i - j)	Std. Error	Sig.
Not maltreated	Slightly maltreated	-8.21	5.38	.129
	Moderately maltreated	-15.03*	5.24	.005
	Severely maltreated	-22.59*	5.42	.000
Slightly maltreated	Moderately maltreated	-6.82*	1.90	.000
	Severely maltreated	-14.38*	2.36	.000
Moderately maltreated	Severely maltreated	-7.56*	2.02	.000

* Significant at $P < 0.05$.

Table 3 shows that of the six multiple comparisons performed, all but one were statistically significant at the 0.05 level of significance. The only pair-wise comparison that was not statistically significant was that between those who were not maltreated and those who were slightly maltreated with a mean difference of -8.21. This implies that the higher

the degree of maltreatment, the higher the involvement of the adolescents in delinquency.

Hypothesis two:

The parental use of invectives will not significantly affect adolescent delinquency.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Effect of Parental use of Invectives on Delinquency

Groups	N	\bar{X}	SD	Std. Error
Not verbally attacked	5	30.20	8.26	3.69
Slightly verbally attacked	53	43.86	10.39	1.42
Moderately verbally attacked	108	50.37	10.58	1.02
Severely verbally attacked	14	53.14	12.45	3.33
Total	180	48.11	11.42	.85

The descriptive data presented in Table 4 shows that adolescents who reported to have experienced severe verbal attack at childhood obtained the highest mean delinquency score of 53.14 (SD = 12.45) while those who experienced moderate verbal attack had a closer but lower mean score of 50.37 (SD = 10.58). Adolescents who reported not to have experienced verbal

attack and those who experienced slight verbal attack obtained lower mean delinquency scores of 30.20 (SD = 8.26) and 43.86 (SD = 10.39) respectively.

Further evidence from Table 4 reveals that above the grand mean (48.11) lies the mean scores of both the severely and moderately verbally attacked adolescents while those of the slightly verbally attacked and absence of verbal attack at childhood fell below the grand mean.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test was carried out to determine whether the observed mean differences were statistically significant. The results obtained are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Analysis of Variance of the Effect of Parental use of Invectives on Delinquency

Source	Sum of Square	DF	Mean Squares	F
Between groups	3464.00	3	1154.67	10.22
Within groups	17879.78	176	112.95	
Total	23343.78	179		

$$P < 0.05; F_{tab} (3/179) = 2.67$$

Table 5 shows that the obtained F-ratio of the analysis of variance was 10.22 significant at 0.05 alpha level given 3 and 176 degrees of freedom which is greater than the critical F-value of 2.67.

Since the F_{cal} is greater than F_{tab} at $P < 0.05$ with 3/176 degrees of freedom the null hypothesis which states that parental use of invectives will not significantly affect adolescent delinquency was rejected while upholding the alternate hypothesis. It was thus concluded that

parental use of invectives at childhood significantly influenced adolescent delinquency. The more a child faces verbal reprimand from the parents, the more likely that he will engage in delinquency in later life.

To determine where significance between groups differences lay from the ANOVA test, post hoc multiple pair-wise comparisons were performed and Table 6 shows a summary of the results.

Table 6: Post Hoc Multiple Pair-Wise Comparison Tests

(i) Use of Invectives	(j) Use of Invectives	Mean Difference (i - j)	Std. Error	Sig.	Remarks
Not verbally attacked	Slightly verbally attacked	-13.67	4.97	.007	*
	Moderately verbally attacked	-20.17	4.86	.000	*
	Severely verbally attacked	-22.94	5.54	.000	*
Slightly verbally attacked	Moderately verbally attacked	-6.50	1.78	.000	*
	Severely verbally attacked	-9.27	3.19	.004	*
Moderately verbally attacked	Severely verbally attacked	-2.77	3.02	.360	Ns

* = significant at $P < 0.05$ ns = not significant

Table 6 shows that five out of the six pair-wise comparisons are significant at 0.05 alpha level significance with the severely verbally attacked and not verbally attacked having the highest mean difference. The only Pair-wise comparison that was not significant was that between severely verbally attacked and moderately verbally attacked with a mean difference of 2.77.

Discussion

The result of hypothesis one revealed that there was a significant difference between corporal punishment in childhood and adolescent delinquent behaviour.

Further evidence yielded by the study based on post-hoc multiple comparison tests revealed that the greatest group difference existed between the severely maltreated and the not maltreated groups while the least difference was observed between the not maltreated and the slightly maltreated.

This result corroborates also, Eron, Walder and Lefkowitz (1971) who found that school children who were rated to be the most aggressive in classroom tended to have parents who used the most corporal punishment.

Similarly Anbarasan (1999) submitted that corporal punishment provokes anger in its victims, leading to resentment, encouraging violence and revenge. These findings and assertions are not surprising given that constant administration of corporal punishment on a child makes him to indulge in the unexpected. This finding however contradicts Gershoff (2002) who found among other things that parental corporal punishment was associated with higher levels of immediate compliance.

The result of hypothesis two showed that there was a significant difference between parental use of invectives and adolescent delinquency. This finding corroborates Moses (1999) who found that child victims of verbal abuse exhibited higher rates of physical aggression, delinquency and social problems than do other children. Similarly, the finding lends credence to Teicher (2004) who found victims of verbal abuse to be at great risk for depression, anger and dissociated disorders.

This finding is expected given the sort of emotional trauma that children who experience constant verbal suppression undergo. The bottled up emotions associated with the feeling of worthlessness lead to emotional outburst that manifests as maladaptive behaviours.

Furthermore, that a 19-year old boy could take his own on account of verbal abuse meted out on him by his parents (Next, 2010) shows the magnitude of the devastating effect that verbal abuse can have on the lives of adolescents.

Conclusion

Juvenile delinquency has been a long standing problem that has challenged deeply, the home, the school and the larger society. These agencies do experience untold set-backs and huge loss in human and material resources as a result of the ravaging problem. The simplest response of people to the problem has been the use of force. However, findings from this study revealed that unpleasant or harmful childhood experiences such as physical punishment and use of invectives significantly influence adolescent delinquency. Nevertheless, embracing positive childhood experiences, inculcated or achievable in a non-abusive home environment, by warm and supportive parents, and other relevant stakeholders, would effect a significant reduction in delinquency among adolescents.

Recommendations

- (1) Parents should see childhood experiences as an effective tool for combating diverse anomalies in the child's later life and hence strive to provide pleasant experiences.
- (2) New parents, at-risk parents and pre-parents should be well educated about the effective alternatives to physical punishment and the potential negative outcomes of physical punishment and verbal abuse. Potential settings for such interventions include; childbirth classes, school PTA fora, foster and adoptive parent preparation programmes, pre-

marital counseling, and babysitting training courses.

- (3) Every parent should be educated on the parental responsibilities to their children while appropriate machinery should be put in place to check defaulters.

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