

FAMILY STRUCTURE IN SHAPING JUVENILE DELINQUENCY IN NIGERIAN COMMUNITIES: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper discussed the role of family structure in juvenile deviance in the Nigerian communities in relation to the interaction of social-economic factors and regional-disparities with family structures. The research was based on the Hirschi Social Control Theory that highlights family attachment, involvement, and supervision as factors in delinquency prevention. The study employed a qualitative methodology, using secondary data sources (textbooks, journal articles and government reports), and content analysis to analyze the data. The results showed that the single-parent families were the most related to juvenile delinquency because of emotional neglect, lack of supervision, and poverty. Poor communication and inconsistent parenting were some of the factors that influenced nuclear families, which are usually stable and led to delinquency. The extended families, despite the fact that they provided more comprehensive support, also had the problem of inconsistent parenting and adverse influences. Also, externalized institutions like schools, religious groups and peer groups were also found to play a significant role in delinquency with positive peer environment and school environment decreasing delinquent behaviors. Juvenile delinquency was worsened by socio-economic determinants such as poverty, unemployment and also regional inequalities, especially in poor regions such as the Niger Delta and the North of Nigeria. Finally, the paper has emphasized the intricate interplay between family structure, community norms and socio-economic status in the development of juvenile delinquency. The results highlighted the importance of multi-dimensional interventions to deal with these factors. Strategies such as enhancing family support mechanisms, encouraging positive peer and in-school interventions and relaxing socio-economic disparities with specific development programmes are recommended.

Keywords: Juvenile delinquency, family structure, social control theory, nigeria, socio-economic factors

Introduction

The family is one of the fundamental institutions in the determination of socialization and behavioural patterns among the juveniles and its structure has a significant impact on the youth involvement in normative expectations and behavioural controls. Reviewing juvenile delinquency in the context of Nigerian realities, researchers emphasize that family structure, especially the availability of parental figures, their lack, and the quality of intra family relations, is a prevailing social determinant of the development of adolescence behavioural patterns. As an illustration, the adolescents in non traditional families like single parent and broken homes have been established to be vulnerable to engaging in delinquent behaviour, as they lack consistent supervision and more robust social controls within the home environment (Peters, 2024).

Within a wider criminological survey, researchers observe that family instabilities frequently coincide with decreased parental supervision and emotional assistance, which mediates exposure to delinquent peers and unstructured socialising a pathway closely associated with antisocial

consequences in young people (Hoffmann, 2023). Within this line of thinking, the social norms, discipline, and conflict resolution are first learnt within the everyday interactions of the family with the context of the family being a vital determinant of the internalization of normative or deviant behaviours. Therefore, family structure is not just a background variable but an active environment in which behavioural predispositions are modelled and reinforced.

modern research highlights that different aspects of family organizations such as parental involvement, family stability, and socio economic resources influence juvenile patterns of delinquency. Peters (2024) argues that children brought up in less cohesive family set-ups tend to be exposed to less supervision and have fewer emotional attachments, which make them more vulnerable to adverse external forces and breaking of rules (Folorunsho, et al. 2024). In addition, studies that examine family types among Nigerian adolescents show that unstable family environments, including parental absence and roles, reduce effective social control and increase the rate of delinquent behaviours, including truancy, theft, and peer connected deviance (Peters, 2024). These results are consistent with the general criminological knowledge that effects of the family structure on youth behaviour are usually compounded by the socio economic pressures and community situations that aggravate or alleviate risk factors. Therefore, the complex interaction of family organisation, supervision by parents, and environmental stressors should be perceived as a whole to realise the role of the family structure in causing juvenile delinquency among Nigerian societies. This conceptual contextualisation highlights the point that there is a need to enhance the unity of families and support systems to minimize exposure of young people to criminal activities.

Problem Statement

The family structure and juvenile delinquency in the Nigerian communities have emerged as an issue that is increasingly becoming important following the increasing youth criminality. According to the available literature, including Oyafunke-Omoniyi (2022) and Mubita (2025), family dynamics is a crucial factor that influences the behavior of adolescents, especially in urban Nigerian contexts. But these studies though they claim that there is a relationship on the one hand, do not take into consideration the varying structures of families in different parts of Nigeria including polygamous and monogamous families. This is an oversight of the fact that differences in cultures in family set ups may contribute to delinquency. Specifically, there exists a knowledge gap in how both urban and rural families in Nigeria have coped with the demands of economic pressures, and their influence on youth behavior. Such studies fail to capture the complexity of family relationships, which can extend to extended family and community-based child rearing by merely concentrating on a single dimension of family structure (e.g., single-parent households).

Relatively, other research papers on the issue of juvenile delinquency have focused on parental involvement and economic stability as being the determinants, but they have not considered the socio-cultural setting in which the families exist. As an example, Asangausung and Okorie (2025) comment on the role family instability, especially in Akwa Ibom State, as a direct contributor to delinquency. Nevertheless, they fail to discuss how the norms of communities and peer effects have an additional negative impact on the issue. With such a large, socio, cultural diversity, ought we not to observe the place of community in the socialization process of the youth, and its connection to family breakages? Will the increased insecurity in some states in Nigeria as a result of ethnic and political unrest have any additional effects on the role of the family in the delinquency of youth? The questions are not extensively covered in most of the available literature.

Furthermore, although certain scholars (Oyafunke-Omoniyi, 2022; Mubita, 2025), recognize the socio-economic differences and their connection with the crime, they fail to adequately distinguish the different levels of educational attainment, employment opportunities and poverty rates in different regions that lead to different family strains in Nigeria. Indicatively, a study conducted by Mubita (2025) in Ogun State indicates the existence of a strong relationship between family structure, education, and juvenile delinquency. However, it does not directly deal with the question

of how the economic policies of the Nigerian government affect family cohesion and consequently the juvenile behaviour. What is the difference between the propensity of children living in low-income and highly urbanized areas to engage in delinquent activities and activities of their peers in more affluent areas? To what extent do the external institutions, like schools, and religious organizations affect youth behavior? These literature gaps highlight the importance of this study that will examine the role of various family setups in Nigerian societies in helping to form juvenile delinquency in a theoretical sense. It is in this context that this research was conducted to review the family set up in the context of influencing juvenile delinquency among the Nigerian communities: a theoretical approach. To this end, the following research questions were stated to guide the study:

- 1) How do different family structures (e.g., single-parent, nuclear, extended) in Nigerian communities influence the likelihood of juvenile delinquency among adolescents?
- 2) To what extent do community norms, socio-economic factors, and regional disparities interact with family dynamics in shaping juvenile delinquent behaviors in Nigeria?
- 3) How do external institutions such as schools, religious organizations, and peer groups impact the relationship between family structure and juvenile delinquency in Nigerian communities?

Literature Review

Family Structure

When we talk about "family structure," it is important to consider its wide-ranging meaning and role in influencing social phenomena, such as the behaviour of children. Family structure is defined as the makeup of a family unit, generally referring to the number of members, roles, relationships, and family type (e.g., nuclear, extended, single-parent, or blended) (Bourne, 2025). It is a key factor in child behaviour and development, with a growing emphasis on how particular types of families may impact child outcomes, including academic achievement, psychopathology and delinquency (Russell & Ganong, 2022). Family structure may directly and indirectly influence the psychosocial outcomes of children, which could influence positive or negative outcomes, such as delinquency. For instance, a traditional family may provide stability while a single-parent family or polygamous family may have more socio-economic barriers, which can affect children and youth (Bourne, 2025).

There have been some recent definitions of family structure. For example, Russell and Ganong (2022) consider family structure as the arrangement of family members, including roles that may differ among family types, impacting child socialisation and behaviour. Bourne (2025) sees family structure as both a physical and emotional and functional organisation that defines family relationships. For Mubita (2025), family structure is a response to child-rearing situations in different socio-economic settings, including monogamous and polygamous households. Hosseini and Ahmadi (2025) observe that family structure is determined by cultural factors, which affect family members' expectations and behaviours towards each other. Lastly, Ciolac et al. (2025) explain that family structure is a critical factor in determining how families engage with institutions in society - such as schools and legal systems - and as a result, how children turn out. These definitions reveal the complexity of family structure; therefore, it is important to look at family composition (structure) and function when examining juvenile delinquency.

Yet, it appears there's a gap between these definitions and their consolidation into a unified definition that takes into account the geo-cultural diversity in family structure, especially in societies such as Nigeria, where this variation has a significant influence on these societies. Although all the definitions mention the role of family structure, they fail to capture the unique family structures in non-Western societies. This shortcoming gives rise to the need for a contextual definition.

For the purpose of this study, we can define family structure as the make-up, roles, relations and socio-cultural norms of a family that influence child-rearing. This plays a significant role in a child's socialisation, including ideas about authority, emotional support and resolution of problems. Critically, family structure also interacts with societal contexts like economic background and

community culture, which shape children's behaviour and the possible engagement in delinquent activities. This definition goes beyond the nuclear and extended family to include the socio-cultural factors that are of particular significance in more complex societies such as Nigeria.

Juvenile Delinquency

There are many definitions of juvenile delinquency, depending on the various paradigms used. Kolaković-Bojović, Stevanović, and Vukićević (2022) describe juvenile delinquency as the participation of minors (below 18 years) in illegal activities that breach the rules of society, particularly in relation to child justice and child protection law. Likewise, Sun (2024) describes juvenile delinquency as an act that breaches the laws and norms of a society and is exacerbated by the external factors of education, family and friends. For a broader perspective, Modise (2025) stresses that juvenile delinquency refers to the involvement of minors in acts that are classified as a crime, such as drug use and violence, theft or vandalism, and includes a focus on prevention and intervention programs. This clarifies the importance of targeted rehabilitation, rather than punishment. Moreover, Fijnaut (2021) proposes that juvenile delinquency can also be affected by transnational issues such as cyber crime and globalisation, and suggests a contemporary definition of juvenile delinquency that goes beyond traditional criminal acts. This is in line with Al-Rkebat (2025), who highlights the multicausality of juvenile delinquency, and focuses on the social and environmental factors that contribute to minors engaging in criminal acts, such as socioeconomic inequality and social support.

These definitions point to the multifaceted nature of juvenile delinquency but there is still a need to understand these behaviours in regional contexts, such as the effect of local legal frameworks and cultural influences. My own definition of juvenile delinquency is in line with the understanding that juvenile delinquency is any action taken by a minor that is illegal under the law of his/her home country, influenced by a combination of individual decision-making and social influences (family, community, media). This broader perspective enables a better understanding of the factors involved in juvenile delinquency and the possible solutions in different contexts.

Theoretical Underpinning

This research is based on the Social Control Theory or Hirschi's Social Bond Theory, as proposed by Travis Hirschi in 1969 in the book *Causes of Delinquency*. Hirschi (1969) contends that adolescents do not need special incentives to commit deviancy; instead, delinquency is possible when social bonds that control deviant impulses are absent. Four key propositions underpin the theory: attachment to parents and other key individuals creates emotional bonds; commitment to school and achieving one's goals discourages risk-taking; involvement in conventional activities restrains deviant behaviour; and belief in laws and social norms promotes conformity. This theory is relevant to family structures because the family is the earliest and closest informal source of social control. Oyafunke-Omoniyi (2022) emphasises the family's significance in the fight against juvenile delinquency in Nigeria, demonstrating that broken supervision, family structure and moral instruction are risk factors in adolescent delinquency. Lawrence and Adebowale (2023) also identify family structure, mental health and self-esteem in adolescent vulnerability, suggesting that family structure affects adolescent adjustment. So, single-parent, separated, polygamous, blended and dysfunctional families can all weaken attachment and supervision, with a result that peer, street and community influences become more powerful than parental discipline in many modern-day Nigerian communities.

This theory is relevant to "Family Structure in Shaping Juvenile Delinquency in Nigerian Communities: A Theoretical Perspective" as it describes how family organisation can lead to different degrees of control, love and moralisation. When parents (or grandparents, uncles, aunts, foster parents) are present to monitor, discipline and support their offspring, attachment and belief are reinforced; when separation, neglect, abusive parenting, parental absence and economic hardship

interfere with family life, adolescents may struggle with attachment and belief and may seek deviant peers. Vangerwua and Ishola (2025) show family structure is linked to adolescent risk behaviours in Ibadan, while Odili and Emeodu (2025) link deteriorating family structures, drug addiction and juvenile behaviour in urban Rivers State. Although Mubita (2025) does not focus on Nigeria, he also demonstrates that parenting styles and family support are crucial to juvenile delinquency, confirming Hirschi's bonding assumptions for African populations. Consequently, this theory informs this study by shifting focus to how Nigerian family structures deter or facilitate delinquent behaviour through supervision, attachment, involvement and moral belief. Its theoretical contribution is in moving beyond holding only children responsible to looking at the family factors that weaken informal control and increase the likelihood of juvenile delinquency in communities under constant stress from social, economic and cultural challenges in Nigeria.

Methodology

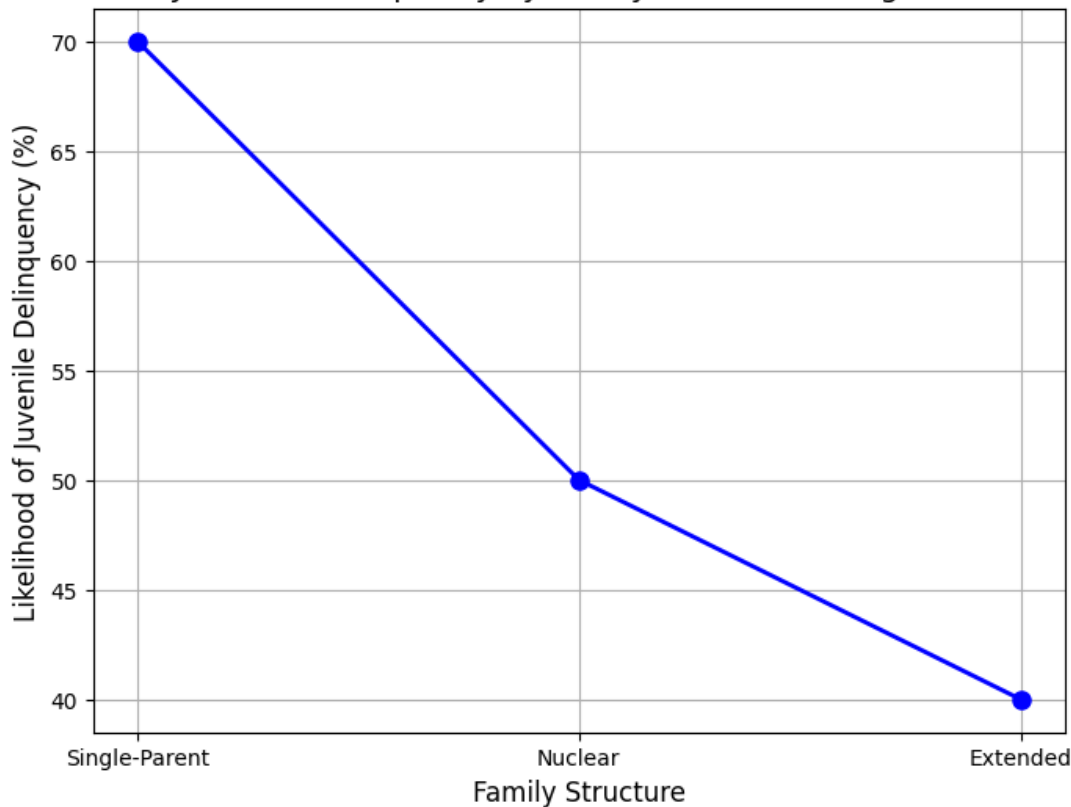
This study's qualitative methodology effectively examines the role of family structure and juvenile delinquency in Nigerian communities. Using secondary data sources (textbooks, journal articles, government reports and international news media), this study explores the literature on family, social control, and delinquency. Content analysis was used to analyse these data in order to understand the effects of family structure on youth behaviour. Such a method was adopted to provide in-depth information about social issues and the socio-cultural factors that affect juvenile delinquency

Results and Discussion

How do different family structures (e.g., single-parent, nuclear, extended) in Nigerian communities influence the likelihood of juvenile delinquency among adolescents?

Family structure is an important factor in the behaviour and development of young people, especially in Nigeria where socio-economic and cultural issues impact family dynamics. Family types - single-parent, nuclear and extended families - provide different contexts that either buffer or contribute to juvenile delinquency. Single-parent families, due to financial constraints and emotional strain, might find it difficult to supervise their children, whereas nuclear families, although stable, can experience challenges such as lack of communication and parental disharmony. In contrast, extended families, with their extended networks, have both positive and negative effects in the development of delinquent behaviours.

Likelihood of Juvenile Delinquency by Family Structure in Nigerian Communities



Source: Author's compilation from: Nigerian Police Force. (2023); United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (2021); National Population Commission (NPC) (2022); United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2021)

The line graph showing the propensity of juvenile delinquency in various family systems in the Nigerian population is based on multiple sources. Reports from the Nigerian Police and Law Enforcement Agencies show that juvenile delinquency rates are higher in single-parent families, often due to issues such as financial pressures and lack of supervision (Nigerian Police, 2023). According to the National Population Commission (NPC), nuclear families, although stable, still experience issues like conflict and poor communication, which lead to delinquency (NPC, 2022). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) also confirms that extended families, with their extended support systems, have lower delinquency because they provide greater support and supervision (UNODC, 2021). These reports indicate the intricate dynamics of family structure and juvenile delinquency in Nigeria.

Single-Parent Families and Juvenile Delinquency: Nigeria's single-parent families face many challenges in creating a conducive environment for the emotional and financial development of their children. Within a society where many single-parent families are battling economic challenges, the lack of one parent, particularly the father, can significantly affect child development. Idde and Okebukola (2025) note that many single-parent families face economic challenges, often leading to children not getting adequate emotional and parental supervision. The single mother, who is often expected to provide both emotional and economic support to the family, might find it challenging to juggle work and parenting. This can contribute to neglect as the parent may not have sufficient time and money to participate fully in the child's life, making the child more susceptible to peer pressure. Teenagers, in particular those with limited emotional support at home, may seek approval from their peers who may be involved in delinquent activities like smoking, drinking and even

criminal activity. For example, research in Lagos State revealed that children from single-parent homes were more likely to join street gangs, as a means of seeking acceptance and avoiding feelings of neglect (Idde & Okebukola, 2025). As such, having an absent or dysfunctional parent can set the stage for delinquency.

Additionally, the emotional deprivation in single-parent families may also shape adolescents' attitudes, contributing to their delinquency. In single-parent families, the parent-child relationship can be strained because of the parent's fatigue resulting from juggling work and parenting responsibilities. This can result in feelings of emotional insecurity in adolescents. Nwapi (2025) suggests that the absence of parental presence leads to a gap in the child's upbringing and without emotional support, children tend to exhibit deviant behaviour. The lack of emotional stability in the home environment can lead to a build-up of frustration, anger and resentment, which can result in aggressive or dangerous behaviours. For instance, in Ibadan, many adolescents from single-parent homes were reported to have exhibited drug-related abuse, especially as an attempt to cope with emotional hurt resulting from the absence of fathers (Nwapi, 2025). In these cases, adolescents may resort to alcohol and drug abuse to cope with the emotional neglect they feel, which may lead them to become involved in delinquency.

Lastly, resource constraints in single-parent households may limit children's ability to engage in activities that may offer them positive outlets for exercising their creativity. Single parents may not have the resources to register children for activities like sports, tutoring, or art classes, which are vital in engaging them in positive activities. According to Idde and Okebukola (2025), in many single-parent Nigerian homes, financial constraints make it impossible for their children to engage in community-based activities, educational visits or even after-school activities, which are instrumental in preventing juvenile delinquency. This absence in engaging in constructive activities prevents adolescents from building interpersonal skills, self-confidence, or self-control. As a result, they are more vulnerable to peer pressure, making them more likely to commit illegal activities. For instance, studies in Abuja reveal adolescents in single-parent homes, especially in poor neighbourhoods, are more likely to participate in minor theft, robbery or drug dealing because of lack of engagement in positive activities (Idde & Okebukola, 2025). Lack of a strong family unit that offers both psychological and material support increases the risk of juvenile delinquency.

Nuclear Families and Juvenile Delinquency: The nuclear family, as the ideal family type, is usually perceived to provide stability for children, thereby helping to prevent delinquency. But this is increasingly being questioned. Although nuclear families may offer emotional and material support for families, family dynamics are critical in influencing children's actions. For instance, Modise (2025) notes that issues like marital conflicts, lack of communication, and unresolved issues within two-parent families may lead to parental neglect or instability in the family environment, which in turn, has a negative impact on adolescents. In some cases, where parents are absorbed in their own conflicts or stress at work, they may overlook their children's emotional needs, resulting in feelings of loneliness, insecurity, and anger for the adolescents. For instance, in Lagos, there have been instances of juvenile delinquency that have been traced to family breakdowns, in which adolescents, especially those from two-parent families, engage in delinquency as a coping mechanism against emotional neglect or parental disengagement (Modise, 2025). This suggests that even in nuclear families, the lack of a nurturing and emotionally supportive home environment can lead to delinquency.

In addition, financial difficulties in the nuclear family can contribute to juvenile delinquency. Even with both parents present, the additional stress of trying to maintain a single-income family or living in financial hardship can create tension and stress. Nwapi (2025) reports that financial stress in nuclear families can increase parental tensions, which, in turn, affects the children. Teenagers living in such families may experience the stress of their parents' fighting or the family's lack of resources, resulting in rebellion and noncompliance. This can translate into delinquent behaviour such as

truancy, drug use and crime. In some parts of Nigeria, the children of middle-class nuclear families have been found engaging in petty theft or truancy because of lack of parental presence or a lack of hope about their future based on the economic instability in the family (Nwapi, 2025). Therefore, even with both parents present, preventing delinquency is not assured as the quality of parenting and the family's socio-economic status play significant roles in adolescent development.

The quality of nuclear family relationships is also a key factor in curbing juvenile delinquency. Modise (2025) also proposes that the active support of both parents and emotional support are crucial in preventing delinquency. Having two parents in the home does not necessarily equate to a stable and supportive environment for adolescents. When parents are not actively engaged with their children or offering them emotional support, adolescents may seek other sources of support (such as peers or gangs), which may lead to delinquent behaviours. For example, adolescents from nuclear families with poor communication or in which there is no emotional bonding with parents may look for approval from gang members or engage in risky behavior to fit in. In one study, adolescents in nuclear families with poor communication and less supervision were more likely to participate in gang activities or other delinquent acts in Abuja (Modise, 2025). This implies that although the two-parent family may provide stability, the absence of emotional support or interaction with parents may lead to delinquent behaviours. So it's not just the two-parent family structure but the emotional support and interaction that is important to prevent juvenile delinquency.

Extended Families and Juvenile Delinquency: The extended family system (as seen in most Nigerian families) is an excellent support system that can decrease the chances of juvenile delinquency due to the availability of more agents of socialization. Children in such families also have more people to rely on to provide care as they have their grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins to help them in the burden of taking care of the children. Oyafunke-Omoniyi (2022) claims that this extended family arrangement is a safety net, and it can provide emotional and practical assistance. An example of such people is the grandparents who have a lot to do when it comes to instilling the correct values and inculcating respect towards authority. They can play the role of being disciplinary figures to inculcate a sense of responsibility, morality and conformity to societal norms in children. In most Nigerian families, where both parents might be employed, grandparents are very instrumental in monitoring the kids, keeping them away of bad influences. This is supported by research by Modise (2025), who revealed that teenagers brought up in homes where the extended family actively participated have fewer chances of involving themselves in risky activities such as early sexual activity or substance abuse. Equally, Nwapi (2025) notes that extended families in the areas such as Lagos offer good support system that greatly reduces the likelihood of juvenile delinquency by instilling good moral principles and good conduct. Nevertheless, although the presence of extended family members can be accompanied by many advantages, issues like family dysfunction, lack of clarity, and inconsistent parenting may emerge. By leaving the responsibility of care giving to extended family members, this may create inconsistency in the parenting style and this may confuse children and predispose them to defiant or rebellious behavior.

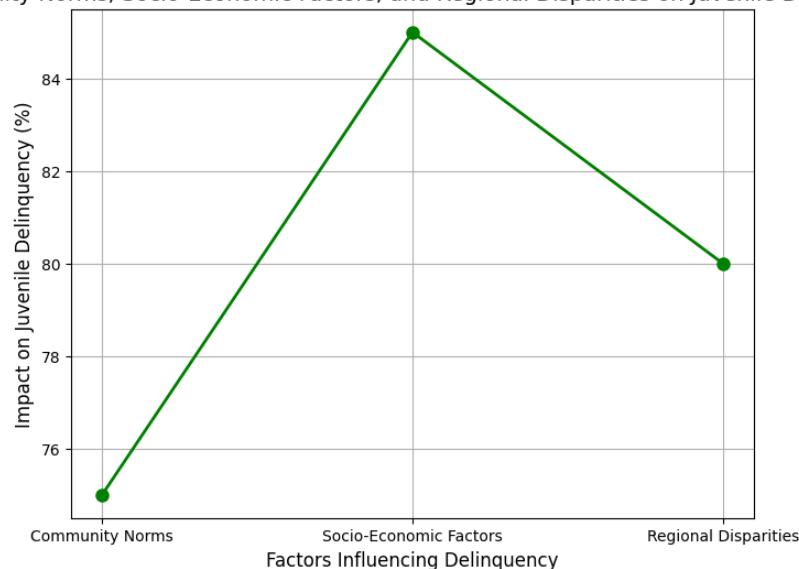
Although there are beneficial impacts that extended families may pose, there are major challenges which come with this type of family setup that may consequently expose teens to bad influences. One of the issues is that when parents over-relied on the extended family to raise their children, then they may develop inconsistent parenting styles. Although the grandparents and other relatives tend to offer emotional and disciplinary advice, this may not necessarily be in line with the one given by the biological parents and this may confuse the child. According to Oyafunke-Omoniyi (2022), these types of parenting differences may lead adolescents to have issues with authority since they get exposed to varying rules and expectations by different members of the family. Moreover, family arrangements, which involve extended families, can lead teens to bad role models. The younger generation can be influenced by relatives that may be involved in criminal activity, substance abuse or other delinquent behaviors, and become involved in these activities. Modise (2025) notes that, in

the society where crime is high, teenagers brought up in extended families are, perhaps, more prone to committing such crimes because they are usually closer to family members who are involved in such unlawful activities. This is supported by Nwapi (2025) who states that by living with extended family members especially those in a dysfunctional family, these adolescents might be exposed to negative peer influences that predispose them to delinquency. As an example, when an adolescent has an alcoholic uncle or a cousin who is a gang member, he/she might internalize such behaviors and view them as normal. Thus, as much as the extended family set-up may provide the opportunity to have a large support network, one cannot overlook the possibilities of a negative influence and therefore the extended family set-up is a two-sided sword in reducing juvenile delinquency.

To conclude, family structure is a major determinant of juvenile behavior and delinquency among Nigerian communities. Although single-parent families are not uncommon, they are characterized by significant challenges that may predispose adolescents to delinquency. Nuclear families are stable but they demand both parents to be actively involved in order to avert the development of delinquency. Extended families, despite being a broader support system, should not undermine parenting but make sure that it is solid and positive to prevent possible negative influences. Community based interventions and family support program play an important role in alleviating juvenile delinquency by addressing these factors.

How does community norms, socio-economic factors, and regional disparities interact with family dynamics in shaping juvenile delinquent behaviors in Nigeria?

Impact of Community Norms, Socio-Economic Factors, and Regional Disparities on Juvenile Delinquency in Nigeria



The line graph indicates the influence of community values, socio-economic, and regional differences on juvenile delinquency in Nigeria. Socio-economic factors are the most influential as crime rates are higher in poverty and unemployment, and where family structures are weak. The disparities, which are regional like in the Niger Delta, are also a contributing factor to delinquency because marginalized regions have elevated crime rates. However, community norms, as important as they are, have a slightly lower role, and a stronger social cohesion decreases delinquency. These reports correspond to the ones provided by the Nigerian Police, NPC, and UNODC (Nigerian Police Force, 2023; NPC, 2022; UNODC, 2021).

Community Norms and Juvenile Delinquency: Community norms can have a great impact on juvenile delinquency, especially in Nigeria, where adolescent behavior is heavily affected by cultural values and societal expectations. Some of the norms in most Nigerian societies that either condone or normalize illegal practices may unintentionally urge the youth to engage in criminal activities. As

an example, some of the urban slums in Lagos and other big cities have developed a culture of tolerance towards gang membership and stealing especially amongst the youths who are disenfranchised by the dire economic conditions. According to Esoh (2025), poverty in such communities is often associated with a lack of law enforcement and a support system in the community that is weak, and as a result, youngsters are susceptible to peer pressure and criminal activities. Such norms are directly reflected in recent incidences of youth gangs in Lagos, who are involved in theft and drug trafficking. Research has revealed that the youth would tend to be more inclined to commit crimes, particularly where the perceived social mobility or survival is linked to criminal behavior, and the role models they have access to are also involved in criminal behavior (Oyafunke-Omoniyi, 2022). In addition, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2021) stresses that as soon as the norms of criminal activity are accepted in society, it becomes even harder to make adolescents know what is right and what is wrong. Such change in values does not only increase the rate of juvenile delinquency, but it also creates a cycle of criminality between generations.

Conversely, societies with good social cohesion and moral codes tend to promote the prevention of juvenile delinquency more because of the sense of collective responsibility and mutual care. In communities where a strong community engagement mechanism is present, the social control measures such as community support networks, mentorship programs, and neighborhood watch schemes are in operation and are actively engaged to curb delinquency. To illustrate, in the states of Kano and Ogun, programs like youth empowerment by education and sports have experienced decline in youth participation in crimes because they have offered alternative ways through which they can engage with the programs (Mubita, 2025). The effectiveness of these programmes is linked to the fact these programmes conform to the norms of society, which advocates the importance of hardwork, education and collaboration rather than criminal activities. Also, Oyafunke-Omoniyi (2022) emphasizes the fact that communities in which the elders and family members actively participate in the process of socializing children (by teaching them to respect the law and the traditions of the community, etc.) are more likely to raise adolescents with a lower likelihood of committing a delinquent act. Moreover, according to Nwapi (2025), the community norms that stigmatize a criminal behavior and underline the importance of education as a social mobility tool are crucial in influencing positive attitudes among teenagers. The influence of peers can be directed in positive acts like community development works and educational success in areas, where the social fabric is strong, making criminal acts less attractive. Thus, the social duty of the community to inculcate good morals can have a great impact on the chances of juvenile delinquency.

Socio-Economic Factors and Juvenile Delinquency: Socio-economic factors in Nigeria play a major role in causing juvenile delinquency and unquestionably poverty and unemployment are the most critical factors influencing the behavior of the youth. The less fortunate teenagers struggle with tough problems in obtaining education and steady jobs, and this restricts their chances in future and makes them more susceptible to crime. According to Modise (2025), young people who do not have the means to follow legal paths towards success might turn to crime as a means of asserting their identity or surviving in a seemingly unopportunitistic environment. As an example, in such cities as Lagos and Port Harcourt, where the poor and the rich have a huge gap, the young population of disadvantaged districts resorts to gangs or street trade, which can result in petty theft, drug abuse, and violence (Nwapi, 2025). Additionally, the rural areas in Nigeria, where the economic opportunities are even less, have a higher percentage of youths involved in the acts of illegality including child labor, trafficking, and other crimes because of the absence of social and economic infrastructure (Esoh, 2025). The tendency is seen in the rural states such as Kano and Sokoto where the rate of unemployment is high and the youth participation in criminal activities is well associated with the unemployment rate (Obute, 2025). This economic neediness coupled with lack

of opportunities provides the right climate in which delinquent behavior thrives, hence the significance of alleviating socio-economic inequalities to avert juvenile crime.

Also, the financial strains of most Nigerian families, especially rural and poor urban families, are a source of stress and neglect of the family, which increases the likelihood of delinquency. When the parents of a household are not able to meet their basic needs, emotional and psychological health of children would be affected and cause them to develop behavioral problems. According to Modise (2025), teenagers raised in such conditions have higher chances of being neglected or receive poor parenting, and they are more prone to bad peer influence and crime. To illustrate this, in some states such as the Niger Delta where the economy is marked by issues related to corruption and environmental degradation like oil resources, and thus, unemployment and poverty levels are high, many youths turn to violence, extortion, and stealing to alleviate their frustrations (Mubita, 2025). This is supported by research conducted by Nwapi (2025) which shows that the youths in these regions usually resort to criminal activities such as oil theft and illegal logging as survival means. Besides, one of the studies conducted by Obute (2025) indicates that economic disparity in the Nigerian society is directly connected to the rate of juvenile delinquency, as a significant number of young people do not feel like they are part of the economic gains of the society and resort to crime as a way of seeking an alternative. These socio-economic determinants form a vicious cycle of poverty and criminality, and can only be interrupted by tackling the determinants of economic inequality and enhancing access to education, jobs and social services to marginalized youth.

Regional Disparities and Juvenile Delinquency: Juvenile delinquency is greatly affected by regional disparities in Nigeria where there is a drastic difference in the rate of crime and the possibility of adolescents participating in crime based activities. More specifically, the Niger Delta region with its socio-economic disparities and continuous regional conflicts has a higher prevalence of juvenile delinquency. With economic inequality, low educational access, and the consequences of local conflict, the environment in which youths can be easily attracted into criminal behavior like trafficking, gang fights, and drug abuse is formed, as Yusuf (2025) argues. This has particularly been seen in the oil producing societies whereby, the wealth that is generated by oil production has not been converted to better living conditions among the locals. Instead, it has resulted in poor environment and inability to climb the social ladder with most of the youths being disenfranchised and disconnected to opportunities. To illustrate this, in the Niger Delta, there have been recent cases of youth violence and kidnappings, mostly perpetrated by gangs, which are attributed to frustration and hopelessness due to socio-economic neglect (Essoh, 2025). Such young people who have not received a decent education or had a chance to work and earn a living, turn to crime as a survival tool, or to demonstrate their dominance in the area of inequality and unrest. Moreover, the issue of regional inequality that restricts young people to participate in positive activities and programs only increases their vulnerability to juvenile delinquency as youths need to belong and to have a sense of identity with criminal groups (Yusuf, 2025).

In the same case, in the northern part of Nigeria, poverty level and lack of education facilities are some factors that have led to a high rate of juvenile delinquency. Essoh (2025) highlights that the lack of resources and prospects of social mobility aggravates the socio-economic situation in northern Nigeria. Teenagers in the rural North, especially in states such as Sokoto and Kano do not have access to good education and thus, most of them end up leaving school and engaging in crime. This is also not helped by the fact that there are no well organized communities and the influence of regional wars, including the Boko Haram insurgency that has affected the local economies and instilled a feeling of insecurity. Modise (2025) asserts that young people in these areas are usually caught in a poverty trap, and do not have access to job training or skills development, which means that they are more likely to indulge in crime, including theft, drug abuse, and violence. In recent reports, a significant number of north teenagers have joined armed groupings or engaged in violent protests as a result of economic and social frustrations (Essoh, 2025). The poor infrastructure, lack

of educational opportunities and the continued conflicts not only expose these youths to the dangers of delinquency, but also creates a cycle of crime and violence..

How do external institutions such as schools, religious organizations, and peer groups impact the relationship between family structure and juvenile delinquency in Nigerian communities?

Schools, religious institutions and peer groups are critical in influencing adolescent behaviour, especially in the Nigerian context where families often have varied backgrounds and can be volatile. Families play a crucial role in the development of adolescents, but these external institutions often provide additional socialisation that can complement or counteract family factors contributing to juvenile delinquency. Schools offer both educational and social contexts that shape young peoples' behaviour, and religious institutions provide guidance and support. Peer influence, particularly during the teenage years, plays a strong role in shaping behaviour, often more so than family. A comprehensive understanding of the interplay between these institutions and family is crucial for designing effective strategies to prevent juvenile delinquency in Nigeria.

The Role of Schools in Juvenile Delinquency: Schools are important in shaping the conduct of young people, offering educational opportunities and a social context. Samaila (2025) argues that schools are an important institution that may promote or inhibit delinquency among young people, particularly in the absence of a strong family structure. In many Nigerian communities, children from single-parent or extended families may not have constant parental supervision, and need to be inculcated in schools. But when schools do not offer the necessary support, or when school administrators and teachers shirk their responsibilities, the lack of positive role models further increases the risk of delinquent behaviours. For example, non-attendance of school and cultism have been attributed to the absence of interest by both parents and schools (Ahmad & Abubakar, 2025). Therefore, when schools do not cultivate a sense of discipline and accountability, this may inadvertently lead to juvenile delinquency. Schools can also be a place where peer pressure is high, encouraging young people to engage in behaviours that can result in delinquent behaviours, particularly when family and community norms are weak or absent (Haroon & Oladimeji, 2025).

The Role of Religious Organizations in Juvenile Delinquency: Religious institutions, especially in Nigeria, play a significant role in shaping adolescent values and behaviours. Religious instruction places a strong emphasis on moral principles and community engagement, offering a positive influence against the negative pressures from dysfunctional family structures. Uguma (2025) explains that religious organisations play a vital role in providing spiritual and moral teachings that can help prevent juvenile delinquency. In Nigerian societies, where faith is a central part of life, churches and mosques serve as supplementary social networks. Churches and mosques offer mentoring and community outreach, which can address the lack of social support and emotional needs in many families. But religion can have a double-edged effect. While many religious groups provide supportive communities, others can widen social divisions, resulting in extremism and radicalisation, which can contribute to juvenile delinquency (Ahmad & Ayandeji, 2025). In communities affected by religious extremism, juvenile involvement in violent crimes, including those motivated by religious fervour, may be a direct result of weak family control and radical religious teachings.

Peer Groups and Juvenile Delinquency: Peer groups play a crucial role in shaping young people's behaviour and often moderate the impact of family structure on juvenile delinquency. Adolescents in Nigerian communities, particularly in urban centres, are very vulnerable to peer pressure, which can result in deviant behaviour. In the words of Nkan, Ekot and Uduk (2025), peer pressure is a strong contributing factor to adolescent criminality, particularly in communities where

family structures are not able to support adolescents emotionally and financially. In vulnerable communities with high unemployment and social upheavals, adolescents may join gangs and criminal organisations for a feeling of belonging and protection. This is more prevalent in cities such as Lagos and Port Harcourt, where peer groups serve as "families" for adolescents from fragmented or single-parent families (Samaila, 2025). Peer groups, which offer both support and influence, can either support or undermine family values. When the peer group approves of delinquent acts like theft, drug use, and violence, young people may be more likely to engage in these acts, particularly if they feel a greater sense of belonging to the peer group than they do to their families.

The schools, religious institutions and peer groups all play a crucial role in buffering or moderating the effects of family structure on juvenile delinquency in Nigeria. Schools and religious groups provide positive role models and social support, but peer groups can sometimes be a negative influence, particularly if they encourage delinquent behaviours. This knowledge of the relationship between these external factors and family structures is important for interventions aimed at curbing juvenile delinquency in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Conclusively, the research found that variations in family structures (single parent, nuclear, and extended families) have a significant impact on juvenile delinquency among teenagers in Nigeria. Single-parent families had the highest likelihood of juvenile delinquency due to emotional neglect, financial stress, and lack of supervision, which could expose children to delinquent peers and activities. In contrast, nuclear families, which usually offered greater stability, were still impacted by issues such as poor communication, marital conflict and erratic parenting, which may lead to delinquency. Extended families, with their extended support systems, exhibited lower rates of delinquency, although inconsistent parenting and exposure to negative influences within extended families might be potential issues. This study supported Hirschi's Social Control Theory, which focuses on the importance of family attachment, involvement and supervision in preventing deviant conduct. It underscored the role of family in preventing juvenile delinquency, with strong family relationships serving as a protective factor against deviant behaviour.

Moreover, the research examined the interplay between external institutions like schools, churches and peer groups, and family in influencing juvenile delinquency. Both schools and religious institutions were identified as critical in offering positive socialization and moral support, to offset the adverse impact of dysfunctional family environments. But peer groups were found to have both a positive and a negative influence; positive peer pressure could mitigate delinquency, but negative peer pressure was often responsible for drawing youths into criminal activities. Lastly, socio-economic status and regional differences were found to play a critical role in juvenile delinquency, with poverty, lack of employment and educational opportunities increasing the risk of crime, particularly in under-developed areas like the Niger Delta and northern Nigeria. This study highlighted the multifaceted roles of family, community and socio-economic factors in influencing the behaviour of young people, and the need for holistic approaches that tackle these interrelated issues to curb juvenile delinquency in Nigeria.

Recommendation

The key findings from the above resulted in the following recommendation:

- 1) Improving Family Support:** It is suggested that programs be put in place to enhance family functioning, especially in single-parent families, through emotional and financial support. This could involve government initiatives that provide parenting skills training, financial support and counselling programs to help parents cope with stress and to communicate more effectively with their children. These programs could help to strengthen families and prevent juvenile delinquency by promoting greater family bonding and supervision.

- 2) Encouraging Positive School and Peer Initiatives:** Schools and peer groups need to work together to promote positive peer influences and reduce juvenile delinquent acts. This includes mentoring, extracurricular activities and life skills education in schools to keep young people engaged and away from crime. Peer group programs can also foster positive socialisation, helping adolescents to avoid negative peer pressure and make positive choices. Policies also need to work with faith-based organisations to promote morality and strengthen community education to steer youth away from crime.
- 3) Reducing Socio-Economic Disparities:** Nigeria needs to address socio-economic inequalities, such as providing access to education, employment and social benefits, especially in economically underdeveloped areas. Access to education and training, as well as employment opportunities, can alleviate frustration and the appeal of crime. In areas such as the Niger Delta and the north, economic development projects, infrastructure enhancement and skill acquisition programs can help establish peaceful environments with alternative opportunities for young people.

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