

Family Influence and Recidivism in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study strived to examine the relationship between family influence and recidivism in the Niger Delta. Underpinned by the social support theory, the study canvassed content analysis which established a causal link between the two variables. The study revealed that emotional and instrumental support which are necessary ingredient for successful reintegration of ex-offenders are sometimes substituted for discrimination and being faced with inability to provide for children, marital crisis as well other challenges peculiar to ex-convicts, dejection sets in and consequently propel ex-offender's disposition towards criminal activities. Hence, endogenous family elements are also contributors to the rate of recidivism in Nigeria. Therefore, it is recommended that the criminal justice system should put in place mechanism to establish favourable connections between inmates and their families in order to strengthen family bond as well as expedite family support.

Keywords: Family, Family influence, recidivism, Niger Delta

Introduction

The family is considered as the most important system of support for individuals in their personal as well as professional life. This is the reason why most persons breakdown abruptly when this system of support is polarized and depleted in terms of physical separation, death, or socio-environmental factors coming in between this experience of support especially emotionally and psychologically. A family is seen as a unit of persons composing of complex system of relationship with one another especially by blood, social affinity or by adoption (Abdul, 2010). Indeed the contribution of parents to the training of a child determines how far he/she will go in life, especially in the actions and decision that they take to make progress in their personal as well as professional life.

Recidivism (i.e. reoffending) and crime in general in society today can be attributed to a lot of factors but foundationally it could be termed a product of family upbringing which plays a vital role in shaping the cognitive prowess of a person. This establishes the place of family influence on the sanity of society, mostly when it has to do with adherence to law and promotion of order in society. In this regard, family social support construed either as the perceived or tangible emotional and instrumental assistance given by the family can deter its members from engaging in criminal activities. Pratt & Cullen, (2004) assert that providing emotional and instrumental resources to individuals by displaying a sense of care for others and providing tangible support, will decrease the likelihood of crime. Similarly, Mears & Travis (2004) established that consistent family social support specifically, increases the likelihood of successful reentry by acting as a protective factor against recidivism among reentering youth generally. It is evident that social support creates positive social bonds to the

family and can act as a buffer against traumatic and stressful events such as being incarcerated. With respect to emotional support, attachment theory is a guiding framework for understanding how such support may influence recidivism especially among youths.

Attachment theory states that the affective bond between a child and their parents is imperative for a child's successful social and emotional development (Levy, 2005 as cited in Anderson 2016). Lapsley & Roisman, (2010) posit that when emotional support is low, the onset of anti-social behaviors, depression, anxiety, aggression, and delinquency is more likely to arise (as cited in Anderson, 2016). Prior research suggests that delinquent youth possess weaker attachments to their parents than non-delinquent youth (Rankin and Wells, 1990; Stattin & Kerr, 2000 as cited in Anderson, 2016). The lack of emotional attachment and support can lead to individuals cycling in and out of the criminal justice system. Abrams (2006) put forward that strong emotional support is particularly important for youth who are reintegrating back into the community as their family is considered a primary source of comfort as they reintegrate back into society. Instrumental support consists of the material support the family provides (Martinez & Abrams, 2013). A family's instrumental support is tangible and includes assistance with housing, food, transportation, employment, enrolling in school and other financial obligations. Instrumental support can decrease the likelihood of recidivism because it provides individuals with the tools required for successful reentry.

Inmates who have been released are expected to take on difficult and stressful tasks, such as finding a place to live and securing employment. For successful reentry to take place, ex-offenders require preparation and resources for such

tasks, which can be provided by the family. If offenders do not have to worry about how their living arrangements after release from incarceration, and can be rest assured that they will receive assistance on other additional tangible needs, they can fully focus on setting positive goals thereby increasing successful reentry. Such support is the key to success for offenders because it provides reentering offenders with the stability required to increase successful reentry (Martinez & Abrams, 2013). It is argued that the lack of family instrumental support can negatively affect post release adjustment. Specifically, the provision of both emotional and instrumental support by the families of returning prisoners play a major role in influencing the success or failure of such individuals. This is because majority of prisoners do expect their family to provide emotional and instrumental support once they are released from prison.

The interest of this study is provisionally surrounding factors pertaining family influence and recidivism in society today looking at the Niger delta region as a point of departure. Recidivism as the term implies has a lot of consequences on the relational structure of a family, especially in our complex individualistic society.

Statement of the Problem

Desistance studies have found that rebuilding ties with family, friends and the wider community and developing new prosocial relationships through work or marriage are important aspects of desisting from crime. Furthermore, research suggests that offenders who feel a welcomed part of society are less likely to reoffend compared to those who feel stigmatized (Maruna & LeBel, 2003). Family members are often primarily responsible for providing housing, financial support and emotional support not only to the law-abiding members but also

their relatives who are ex-convicts. But when these expected mutual care and supports are substituted for discrimination and stigmatization, post-prison rehabilitation, integration and adaptation may be difficult. Consequently, the chances of such stigmatized released inmates to relapse into the act that initially took them to the correctional centre are indeed very high (Leschied, Chiodo, Nowicki and Rodger, 2008).

This is why the reintegration question has drawn a great deal of attention from criminology and criminal justice researchers. Each year more than 675,000 prisoners are released into a community ill-equipped and unprepared to consolidate the reformation process. When these released inmates are not well welcomed and helped to settle, their criminal gangs will be the next alternative for survival (West, Sabol, & Greenman, 2010).

It is in the light of the above that the study seek to unravel the impact family has on recidivism in order to fill in the gaps in our knowledge taking the Niger Delta region of Nigeria as a point of reference. Since every member of society or youths reside with their parents or extended family, their support, or lack thereof, can either encourage or discourage their successful reentry. Research on the influence of family on recidivism is quite limited, which is why it is imperative that we understand the impact of the nature and levels of family social support as well as other family variables on recidivism, specifically in the Niger delta region.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study was to examine the influence of family on recidivism in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. Specifically, the study will examine:

1. The role of family social support and recidivism
2. The impact of parenting role of ex-offenders on recidivism.
3. The effect of marital relationship and recidivism.
4. The influence of other family variables and recidivism
5. Provide recommendations to stem the endogenous drivers of recidivism in the family.

Definition of Terms

Recidivism: The word 'recidivism' is derived from the Latin word 'recidere', which means 'to go back'. In this study, it means relapsing into criminal activities after serving prison term culminating in re-conviction.

Family: Is a socially recognized group of people unified by blood, marriage or adoption that forms an emotional connection and serves as an economic unit of society.

Family Influence: this deals with how the family substantially affect the personality, behaviour, beliefs and values of its members directly or indirectly. In this study, it is viewed as how family dynamics determine the criminal history as well as career of members.

Literature Review

Reintegration into society is often a difficult period for most offenders which is often compounded by the challenges they face while trying to reenter society. This reintegration question have attracted some scholarly works which are reviewed in this section. These works establish the link between family variables and criminal activities.

Family Support and Recidivism in Nigeria

Recidivism which is a global phenomenon seems to be one of the serious challenges facing not only the Nigerian prison system but also the society at large. Abrifor, C. A., Atere, A. A. & Muoghalu, C. O. (2012) admitted that the rate at which released inmates return to the prison few months after release has attracted the attention and interest of criminologists, sociologists and scholars from other disciplines who doubt the ideal function of the prison institution the world over. For instance, statistics from Nigerian prisons shows that over 60% of inmates are recidivists, and this is an indication that the prison as a reformatory or rehabilitation home has failed in correcting antisocial behaviour of inmates (Chukwumerije, 2012). This cause for concern and many studies have been conducted to unravel the root of the spike, among which is family influence. Taiwo and Adeola (2015) study thirty (35) prison inmates in a Nigerian maximum-security prison. The inmates comprised 13 male and 22 female volunteers respectively within the ages of 18 and 42 years and above, who were exposed to rehabilitation counselling in preparation for life after prison experience. The study revealed that 80% of the inmates claimed they received supports from siblings while in prison, and 85.7% of them received sympathy support from relatives. Finally, it was revealed that 23 inmates representing 65.7% had low tendency of wanting to return to prison, as against 34.3% who displayed high tendency of wanting to return to prison as a result of the supports received from relations. Taiwo and Adeola concluded that family support if well applied with support of the government and significant others in the society will assist the prisoners to cope with life after prison and reduce the rate at will assist the prisoners to cope with life after prison and reduce the rate at which people commit crime in the society.

Social Support (familial) and Recidivism

Social support comprises both familial emotional and instrumental support. According to Breese, Ra'el & Grant, (2000), social support upon release is significant as it contains a normative element. The family displays values, norms, and models behavior that is socially acceptable. Reintegrating into the society or community may be extremely difficult and such support can act as moderators to these stresses. Breese et al. (2000) avers that individuals reentering society can benefit from emotional support since it provides them the opportunity to discuss personal issues and feelings with someone who cares about their well-being. Emotional support and possessing strong family bond can also provide the individual with a sense of purpose in life. Also, seeking employment and accommodation upon release can be demanding, especially since ex-offenders are under the scrutiny of parole staff after release (Breese et al, 2000). Social support provided by the family can ease these emotional and tangible stresses, which makes successful reentry more likely (Anderson, 2016).

On the other hand, instrumental support involves providing ex-convicts with material or tangible resources including housing, money, substance abuse treatment, transportation and employment. With such support, individuals receive the requirements needed for everyday living until they are able to become self-sustaining (Breese, et al., 2000). Ex-offenders are better able to adapt to life in the community and focus on increasing prosocial outcomes. Research on instrumental support is deeply rooted in the adult literature. Much of the literature on instrumental family support comes from the Urban Institute's Returning Home studies. In the Chicago Returning Home study, 400 male respondents were interviewed while incarcerated and four to eight months after release. The reentry challenges that ex-offenders face include, finding a

job, difficulty continuing their education, lack of financial assistance, lack of housing arrangements, and lack of transportation (La Vigne et al., 2004 cited in Anderson, 2016). All these elements are considered instrumental support and paramount to successful reentry.

Parental Stress and Recidivism

Stress in parenthood also has the proclivity to exacerbate the challenges ex-convict face while trying to reintegrate into society. The chances of an ex-offender to recidivate is usually high if their reintegration process is fraught with strain in parenthood. This is predicate on the fact that reentry process is usually different for parents, given their additional concerns vis-à-vis reunification with children (Michalson, 2011; Smith, Krisman, Strozier, & Marley, 2004), but there are also some indication that the process may be more problematic. For example, some studies indicate that some parents use substances to cope when relationships with children are strained (Davis, Bahr, & Ward, 2012), encounters difficulties in securing employment in order to provide for their children (Arditti, Smock & Parkman, 2005; Clarke, O'Brien, Godwin, Hemmings, Day, Connolly & Van, 2005), and a link has also been established between perceived relationships with children and symptoms of depression after release (Lanier, 1993 cited in Anderson, 2016). However, offenders often report their children are motivators to desist from substance use and criminal activity (Davis, Bahr, & Ward, 2012). Thus, having children may improve or exacerbate offenders' reentry experiences, and offenders' reentry experiences differ based on whether they have children or not.

Marital Relationship and Recidivism

Marital relationship also has the propensity to generate inverse outcomes. While a healthy marital relationship tend towards positive reintegration for ex-offenders, marital disorder might lead to recidivism. Although it has been contended that career criminals may discontinue criminal activity when they get married or have offspring of their own, some cross-sectional studies have found that marriage and family do not influence the likelihood of crime among adults (Ouimet & LeBlanc, 1996; Wright & Wright, 1992 cited in Christian, 2012). This implies that individual differences in the possibility of committing crimes continue over time and that transitional points do not significantly prevent one's inclination toward criminal behavior. Nevertheless, few longitudinal studies have examined transitions during adulthood that might divert the course towards a career in crime. Several longitudinal studies have studied childhood familial experiences in relation to adult criminal lifestyles, but few have examined life events such as marriage and parenthood and their impact on criminal behaviour (Christian, 2012). Some research submit that male criminals in comparison to non-criminals are more likely to marry younger, often marry already pregnant women, and are more likely to marry criminal women. In contrast, others have found that criminals, while no less likely to be married or in a significant relationship than non-criminals, were more likely to divorce or separate, to not *get along* well with their spouse, and to be involved in violent marital relationships (Wright & Wright, 1992 cited in Paolucci, Violato & Schofield, 2000). These results revealed that marriage and family life may simply be another indicator of social irresponsibility, along with erratic employment, criminal associates, and substance abuse.

Studies conducted in this area, revealed that strong inmate family connections are advantageous for criminals. Research which has examined the quality of the marital relationship decipher a link with criminality. Specifically, attachment to spouse was found to be associated with a reduction in the prospect of adult criminality. Among convicted criminals, maintaining an active family interest while incarcerated and establishing a mutually satisfying relationship after release were two factors associated with decrease in subsequent recidivism (Paolucci, Violato & Schofield, 2000).

Family Variables and Recidivism

Researches have also shown that certain factors endogenous to the family experience have the proclivity to predict a criminal career in adulthood. Such factors indicted include, discipline, large family sizes, parental age at child birth, child's birth order, family discord, parental unemployment, familial criminality or mental illness, and separation from parents. Moore, Pauker, and Moore (1984 cited in Paolucci et al, 2000) examined the relationship between liability factors and assert that the presence of certain factors in the family would determine or increase the likelihood that the child will become delinquent and continue in this delinquency throughout adulthood. Some of the implicated factors include parental inability to provide consistent affection by testing the hypothesis that first offenders who repeat delinquencies display more high-risk factors than those who do not repeat delinquencies. Four factors were identified which distinguished recidivists from nonrecidivists. All factors of family size, parental age at child's birth, birth order, and socioeconomic status were more prevalent in the recidivist group and significantly so for the factors of inconsistent discipline, school failure, previous agency contact, impulsive behaviour, parental

unemployment, and parental criminality (Moore, Pauker, & Moore, 1984 as cited in Paolucci et al, 2000).

Theoretical Framework: Social Support Theory

Social support is defined as the emotional and instrumental resources that are provided by the family. Cullen (1994 cited in Anderson, 2016) is largely credited for developing the concept of social support. His model consisted of three propositions when discussing its significance. First, he asserted on the basis of early works of literature that higher rates of crime and delinquency are due to low levels of social support. Second, he hypothesized that a relationship existed between decreased levels of social support and higher crime rates in a community, and that increased levels of social support decreases the likelihood of criminal involvement. Lastly, he expressed that social support encourages people to comprehend what is right and what constitutes a “good society”.

Within the purview of this theory, recidivism can be understood as a product of non-existent emotional and instrumental support from family (spouse, children and close or extended family members). Reintegration is often difficult time in the offender’s life as they experience sundry challenges ranging from lack of job to housing problems. Family support in this period is critical to palliate for these challenges and facilitate successful reentry experience. However, where the family support is absent, it might pose strain and consequently hamper the successful reentry process. In American criminology specifically, there has been interest in the criminogenic effects of family life since this structure is deemed as significant and the pathway to adult criminality starts in childhood and adolescence. The notion of social support is predominantly rooted in ideas advanced by the Chicago school (Cullen, 1999 cited in Anderson, 2016). High

levels of social support can encourage coping mechanisms in response to straining life events such as incarceration and assist with successful reentry long-term (Sampson & Laub, 1993 cited in Anderson, 2016). When organized networks of human relations assist individuals by tending to their emotional and instrumental needs, the likelihood of crime and recidivism is decreased. Specifically, emotional and instrumental support can be provided by informal social networks such as family and friends, or formal networks such as schools and governmental agencies (Colvin, Cullen, & Vander, 2002).

Family Influence and Recidivism in the Niger Delta

Today the Niger Delta region has been bedeviled with so many vices ranging from kidnapping, armed robbery, sea pirate to cultism which result in arrest and re-arrest among indigenes in the area. These crimes have continued unabated over the years, becoming careers among some individuals in the area despite different mechanism put to preclude them. From the various materials canvassed for this study, a causal link between family support and recidivism in the Niger Delta was identified in line with the study of Taiwo and Adeola (2015) which revealed that the proportion of inmates who had high tendency to return to prison were those that did not receive supports from relations. Released inmates face permutation of challenges ranging from homelessness to lack of job (La Vigne et al., 2004 cited in Anderson, 2016) which are capable of predicting future recidivism. In this situation, the positive psychology and resilience literature indicates that relationships with family serve as protective factors, which buffer the effects of stress and adversity such as incarceration and reentry (Hamby, Banyard, & Grych, 2014). Family members are primarily responsible for providing housing, financial support and emotional support not only to the law-abiding members but also their relatives who are ex-convicts.

But when these expected mutual care and supports are substituted for discrimination and stigmatization, post-prison rehabilitation, integration and adaptation may be difficult. Consequently, the chances of such stigmatized released inmates to relapse into the act that initially took them to the correctional centre are indeed very high (Leschied, Chiodo, Nowicki and Rodger, 2008).

Furthermore Parents who are ex-convict may be posed with difficulties as a result of their additional roles of parenthood. Their role of providing for and difficulty in uniting with their children compounded by the problems they face during reintegration process may cause depression leading to recidivism (Michalson, 2011; Smith, Krisman, Strozier, & Marley, 2004). Some studies indicate that parents using substances to cope when relationships with children are strained (Davis, Bahr, & Ward, 2012) and have additional concerns regarding employment in order to provide for their children are likely to recidivate (Arditti, Smock & Parkman, 2005; Clarke et al., 2005; Magaletta & Herbst, 2001). On the other hand, offenders often report their children are motivators to desist from substance use and criminal activity (Davis, Bahr, & Ward, 2012). Thus, having children may improve or exacerbate offenders' reentry experiences, and offenders' reentry experiences differ based on whether they have children or not.

The many disorganized families in the Niger Delta region are also capable of aggravating the recidivism rate. Healthy marital life facilitate successful reintegration process whereas unhealthy one envisage the reverse. A marriage that provide mechanism such a break with the past, provide supervision and monitoring, change and structure routine activities and provide opportunities

for identity transformation is ideal for redirecting ex-convict towards positive ventures (Sampson & Laub, 2005). At the same time, the stronger social bonds of marriage provide possibilities for personal growth and support. Together, these possibilities make crime less rewarding, both because the cost of being apprehended increases with increased involvement in society, and because crime is a less relevant option as personal fulfilment and growth are secured within stable and safe environments. However, when these desistance mechanism are absent in a marriage or an ex-convict unites with a criminal spouse, it can lead to future recidivism. The increasing rate of recidivism in the Niger Delta is a pointer that most marriages lack the mechanism.

The rate of recidivism in the Niger Delta create an unbreakable circle of interaction between released inmates, recidivists and other family members which exacerbate the circle of recidivism in the area. Family variables such as inappropriate discipline, poor parental supervision, attachment to parents, and runaway behaviour are predictive of adult criminal conduct (Derzon and Lipsey, 2000; Wasserman and Seracini, 2001). A recent meta-analysis also confirmed that family rearing practices (i.e. lack of supervision and affection, conflict, and abuse) were predictive of recidivism (McCord, Widom, and Crowell, 2001). This indicates that what transpires in the family during a child's life may influence that child's later behaviour, however, adult family life may also play an important role in changing the life course (Paolucci, Violato & Schofield, 2000).

Conclusion

The roots of recidivism do not rest solely in the prison experience itself, nor do they stem solely from poor prison. The family experiences a child has, plays a significant role in predicting criminal behavior and ultimately on an individual's

decision to pursue a life of crime in adulthood. Similarly, family relationships have a role model effect and can teach members, especially children, by example, how to succeed in a life free of crime (Sampson and Laub 1993 as cited in Hope and Paat 2015). Although, the maladaptive childhood experiences can predict career in crime, these experiences can be mitigated against if there exist positive experiences in marriage, parenthood and family social support which are found to be puissant elements to divert ex-convict towards more positive ventures. When ex-convicts experience advantageous family relationships, it act to buffer their challenges and facilitate successful reentry process. The influence of family on recidivism emphasizes the integral value of social relationships and the need to incorporate it into post-imprisonment initiatives. If prisons and correctional facilities incorporate post-release programs aimed at building relations and social bonds, it will help to reduce increasing returns to prison.

Recommendations

The problems of recidivism is ubiquitous and have pose serious problems not only in Nigeria but in the world over. Thus, it is recommended that:

1. Mechanism should be put in place to establish ties between inmates and their relatives within the correctional system to strengthen family bond and facilitate healthy relationship during offender's reentry process. Policies that facilitate relationships with families through visits, phone calls, or letters should be encouraged. In jail or prisons, contact in any form is often regulated and costly for families. Policies and costs may be barriers to communication with family members during incarceration, but if contact is a mechanism for increased family support, and supports subsequent potential benefits, it is worthwhile.

They should also engage offenders' family members in post-release programmes. This is in recognition of the fact that prison inmates who had more contact with their families and who reported positive relationships overall are less likely to be re-incarcerated.

2. Government, non-governmental, media, religious organization as well as family counsellors alike should advance public enlightenment campaigns to educate the populace on the role of families on the sanity of society as it pertains to recidivism and crime in general. They should offer relationship education to families through extension services, community seminars/ workshops, radio and Television programs in order to improve on relationships and cohesiveness in families.
3. Families should support formerly incarcerated relatives emotional and instrumentally to resettle in society as well motivate them to seek or continue drug treatment or mental health care to preclude relapsing back to crime.
4. Curriculum planners, Educationist and Home Economists need to review the school curriculum especially at the secondary level with a view to making family life and parenting education a core subject. This will equip the future generation with required skills for parenting and relationships within the extended family structures.

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