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**INFLUENCE OF LOCUS OF CONTROL AND FAMILY  
BACKGROUND ON CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR**

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**ABSTRACT:** This research work focuses on finding out the influence of locus of control and family background on criminal behaviours. The study was conducted among 90 prison inmates in Keffi medium security prison by administering the Terry Pettijohn's (1992) locus of control scale, the psychopathic deviate scale of Mckenlyand Hathaway (1967) and the family background questionnaire. The following hypotheses were tested: There is a significant influence of locus of control on criminal behaviour among Keffi prison inmates. Family background has a significant influence on criminality among Keffi prison inmates. The study found a significant influence of locus of control on criminal behaviour at 0.05 based on chi-square  $X^2=24.31(4)$ . In addition, those who exhibited criminal behaviour, and scored high on the PD scale were externals. Family background was found to be another factor that impacted on criminal behaviour, as most of the inmates who scored high on the PD scale were from polygamous family background). In conclusion, the research findings show that both locus of control and family background are important factors that influence criminal behaviour having seen that family types, parenting style and other environmental factors in one way or the other exert a directional influence on behaviour and personality development.

**Keywords:** Locus of Control, Internal Locus of Control, External Locus of Control, Family Background Factors, Crime, Criminal Behaviour.

**INTRODUCTION**

Over time and cross contexts, locus of control and family background have been identified to be relatively stable factor that influence many behaviours, including crime. Crime has become a major problem in the modern society and a national concern leading to desperate efforts control. The effects of crime vary among the various segment of the population. Crime or criminal behaviours are usually law breaking behaviours which are usually unacceptable in the society. Crime in one country might be seen differently in another, same applies to culture and religion. Definitions of crime also vary over time and circumstances.

Juvenile delinquency and crime are on the increase worldwide. The participation in delinquent act and criminal activities continue to increase, unless we can identify the factors that have the potential to lower the rate (Barnes, Haffman & Walte, 2006). The population of juvenile is roughly 75 million in the United States as of 2013. According to the preliminary data released by the FBI, the overall nations violent crime rate tickled up by 1.2% in 2012 after years of steep declines.

The increase in crime worldwide affects the general population; we see crime on the news every day, in our communities, in our schools and in some cases even in our immediate families. South Africa has the highest rate of rape in the world with 65,000 rapes cases reported in 2012, 15,609 murders in 2011/12 to 16,259 murders in 2012/2013. Delinquency and crime seems to be social problems in most African countries. Nigeria as one of the African countries is not left out of the picture as it is severely affected by both violent and nonviolent crimes. A multidimensional report violence, security and criminality, 2012 survey of Nigerians on crime and victimization by CLEEN foundation found that on the average 5% of respondents had personally been victims of armed violence and in 2011, Human Rights Watch estimated that over 15, 700 people had been killed in intercommunity political and sectarian violence in Nigeria. The most common forms of crimes and victimization are burglary, robbery, physical assault and domestic violence.

The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) provided a survey report which states that among youths of between 15-35 years in Nigeria, about 54% of them were unemployed in 2012. The statistics also delved into crimes committed by these youths 46,836 against different types of crimes, such as marijuana smoking, theft and murder. Meanwhile adult crimes also seem to be on the increase as no fewer than 74,064 cases of murder, manslaughter, suicide, rape as well as other cases was recorded within 2008-2009 according to the Police Annual Report. Never the less, the document indicated the increase of crime in Nigeria with regard to increase in proportion and magnitude on crime.

There is an endemic of criminal activities in the society today, similarly armed robberies, kidnapping, murder, assassinations, terrorism are few other of cases of crime which are prevalent in many countries of the world reported in print and electronic media. The prevalence of crime in the society can be traced to several factors which include unemployment, lack of education, underemployment and drug use. These have assumed a frightening and alarming dimension in many countries. The influence of home factor cannot be over looked as parents and guardians are supposed to give adequate moral training to their children/wards. Poverty is another issue that is responsible for crime prevalence in the society, particularly in most African countries, many household and families are living below standard due to the high cost of living occasioned by poor economy. The process of delinquent behaviour begins with the lack of positive family interaction, leading to school failure and social rejection which eventually leads to membership of deviant peer groups (Debargshe & Ramsey, 1989). Not forgetting the increase in use of drugs, involvement in criminal activities is precipitated by the need to finance drug habits and a consequence of intoxication (Hussain & Cowie, 2005).

### **Statement of the Problem**

It is evident that crime and juvenile delinquency in the world are on rapid increase. Every day bring cases of fresh evidence of prevalence of crime in our communities. It is either a case of robbery, destruction of property, terrorism, rape, murder, corruption and many other forms of crimes most of which caused or are attached to unemployment, poverty, mental disorders, family background, personality factors and so many other factors.

Most disturbing is the observation that underage children are engaged in such social vices as prostitution, drug abuse, shop lifting, and even violence. It is obvious that in Nigeria and many other African nations, criminal activities are on the increase. For many young people today, the traditional patterns guiding the relationship and transition between family, school and work are being challenged. Social relations that ensure smooth process of socialization are collapsing; lifestyle trajectories are becoming more varied and less predictable. The restructuring of the labour market, the extension of the maturity gap (the period of dependence of young adults on the family) and the influencing relationship with family and friends, educational institutions, leisure activities and lifestyle are great factors that make impact on criminality. Studies on socialization have shown that it has great effect on the individual's behaviour throughout life. Not just that, socialization affects the way we experience and attribute causes to events. Socialization is more than just what we learn at school; it is the effect of our families and those around us, including the media and our peers (While, 1977). A person learns from what he/she sees, reads or hears from media outlets (Douler, 2003).

The general proposition that deviant and criminal behaviours could be learnt shows that the individual's personality traits are not the only causal factors in the adoption of destructive behaviours, unless those traits affect their socialization with a specific influence. The developmental ideals and experiences which in turn are instilled in the individual leading to effected social judgments on morality and socially acceptable behaviour or a disposition towards criminal behaviour are thus influence of the individual's socialization process and attribution styles. This phenomenon has not been given adequate attention in psychological research in Nigeria, whereas much is not known about the influence of family background on criminality. There is also very little information on the association between locus of control and criminality. This study therefore intends to find out its impact on criminality, because more often offenders seek to exonerate themselves by attributing the blame for their actions to other factors or the victims.

## **EMPIRICAL REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Locus of Control and Criminality**

Locus of control refers to the extent to which individuals believe that they can control events that affect them. The concept was developed by Julian B. Rotter in 1954 and has since become an aspect of personality studies. A person's "Locus" (Latin for "Place" or Location") is conceptualized as either internal (the person believe that their decision and life are controlled by them) or external (the person believe that their decision and life are controlled by environmental factors which they cannot influence).

Herbert (1976) defined the perceived locus of control; a generalized expectancy for internal as opposed to external control of reinforcements. Control is a concept that plays an important role in several psychological theories. It is central to Seligman's (1975) probability analysis of control, theories of learned helplessness, Rotter's (1954) social

learning theory, Weiners (1986) attributional analysis of motivation and emotion, and it is the key concept in Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory.

Seligman (1975) had defined the concept of locus of control most explicitly. He defined an event as controllable when a person's voluntary responses have an impact on the consequences of that event. By contrast, an event is considered to be uncontrollable when a probability of its occurrence in the presence and in absence of the response under consideration are equal, however loss of control exist when there is lack of contingency between behaviours and outcomes. This can lead to motivational, emotional and cognitive deficits (Seligman 1975).

However, in certain situations, lack of control can lead to a quite different psychological state known as reactance. Wortman and Brehm (1975) argued that the initial response to uncontrollable outcomes is an increase in motivation and performance in order to attempt to regain control. Thus, the child that experiences the death of a loved one may be motivated to become a doctor so that he can treat patients with similar problem and prevent the same thing from happening to other loved ones. Wortman and Breghm theorized that when perceived uncontrollable experience continue to arise the state of helplessness is likely to emerge.

Research within the framework of Rotter's (1954) social learning theory is not primarily concerned with the conditions that lead to uncontrollability. Instead, the psychological consequences of the belief that one can or cannot control the causes of event are the focus of his work. Rotter defines "control" quite similarly to Seligman. He states that an individual has an internal locus of control if one perceives that the event is contingent upon action. This phenomenon is exemplified through the relatively stable personality dispositions of internal versus external locus of control. Internal locus of control leads to typical shifts in expectation of success following success or failure. Those who succeed have increased expectancies following success and decreased expectations following failure. Individuals with an external locus of control show more typical expectancy shifts. They exhibit decreased expectancies of success following success and increased expectations of success following failure.

In Weiner's (1986) attributional analysis of motivation and emotion, the concept of controllability plays a central role in evaluative interpersonal actions. He postulates that observer's reactions to actors who experience failure, sickness, or need for help, are largely determined by the perceived controllability of the causes of these events.

Bandura (1986) examined aspects of the self that influence self-regulation. His research examined the effects of self-efficacy belief, or the expectations that people hold about their abilities to accomplish certain tasks, whether or not they will undertake a particular activity, attempt to do a particular task, or strive to meet a particular goal depends on whether or not they believe we will be efficacious in performing those actions (Taylor, 1998). In other words, if individuals believe they have control over future events, then they will attempt to exert that control in order to achieve a positive outcome. It one will try to attain it.

Therefore, locus of control has a significant impact on how individual's expectation shape the goals they set for themselves.

Locus of control is a concept that has significant effect in our daily lives and general behaviour including the crime related behaviours. Those with an external locus of control believe that their own actions do not influence future outcomes; this in turn makes them less likely to work to reach their full potential due to the motivational, emotional, and cognitive deficits it creates. While those with internal locus of control see that world through a more adaptive perspective, believing that personal abilities leads to outcomes of life events.

According to Rotter (1954), behaviours are largely guided by "reinforcement" (rewards and punishments) and that through contingencies such rewards and punishments, individuals come to hold beliefs about what causes their actions. These beliefs, in turn guide the kind of attitudes and behaviours people adopt.

Research indicates that criminals tend to be externally controlled (Hollin, 1989). According to Maruna and Copes (2005), many offenders see themselves as victims of circumstances or as a product of their environment. Many perspectives on crime as well as lay peoples understanding of why people turn to crime is rooted on the environment they were brought up. This may also be interpreted as an external locus of control which facilitates fatalistic thinking, where one's fate is felt to be outside one control (Ross & Fabiano, 1985). More often offender seek to exonerate themselves by attributing the blame for their actions to the victims, the most obvious example is that of rape. Individuals must have control of their behaviours and actions to reduce the possibility of aggressive and criminal behaviours. According to Winstock and Perki (2009), self-control refers to the degree in which a person is capable of regulating thoughts and emotions, especially in conflicting behaviours. Low self-control capability or high impulsivity tendency, result to more frequent and severe the violent behaviour.

### **Family Background and Criminality**

Several family background factors have been identified as correlates and predictors of criminal behaviours among children. Evidence shows that children raised in different family contexts display different patterns of outcomes across a wide range of development domains.

In contemporary Western societies, a nuclear family structure has been idealized. Conversely, deviations from this structure have been blamed for a variety of social problems including crime. Classical theories endorsed the view that good child development requires the presence of two parents. In line with the Freudian tradition, many believe that paternal absence resulted in over-identification with the mother. According to this view, delinquency is one symptom of compensatory masculine "acting out" the theory also explains why delinquency is prevalent among blacks and poor, groups with high rates of single-parent families. The family is a primary socializing agent, parents are expected to teach, provide

warmth and protection as well as guide their children, conversely absence of affection and inadequate discipline have been seen as sources of crime.

Family factors such as parental supervision or monitoring, harsh parental discipline, parental disharmony, parental rejection of the child and low parental involvement in the child as well as anti-social parent, and large family size or type of family. Gorman-Smith and Tolan (1998) found that parental conflict and aggressiveness predict violent offending whereas, lack of maternal affection and paternal criminality predicted involvement in property crimes. Social learning theory argues that behaviours are learned. Aggressive behaviour is learned; as parents display aggressive behaviour, children learn to imitate it as an acceptable means of achieving goals (Wright & Wright, 1994).

Juby and Farrington (2001) claim that there are three major classes that explains the relationship between disrupted families and delinquency; trauma theories suggesting that the loss of a parent has a damaging effect on children, most commonly because of the effect on attachment to the parent, life course theory focuses on separation as a long drawn out process rather than a discrete event, and on the effects of multiple stressors typically associated with separation. Selection theories argue that disrupted families are associated with delinquency because of pre-existing difference in family income or child rearing methods. Nevertheless, findings from family studies have shown that just like other behaviours, criminal behaviours are transmitted from one generation to the next which determined that delinquents were more likely than non-delinquents to have delinquent fathers and mothers. Disruptive parenting practices and behaviour account for most of the apparent effects of single parent families on crime (Capaldi & Patterson, 1996; Gorman Smith, Focan, & McCord 1991, Spetz & Greenberg, 1995). Positive parenting practices during the early years and later in adolescence appear to act as buffers in preventing delinquent behaviour and assisting adolescents involved in such behaviour to desist from delinquency (Wright & Wright 1994).

Also divorce is most likely to affect a large proportion of the child's behaviour, experiencing emotional pain at the marital dissolution of his parent. Family conflict is particularly criminogenic (McCord 1977; Rutter 1983, West & Farrington 1990).

The intact family appears to offer a myriad of benefits for adults and children. Children who grow up in an intact household with biological parents present seem to do better, on the average, on a wide range of social indicators than do children who grow up in a single-parent or unstable households (McLanghan & Sandfur, 1994).

### **Hypotheses**

1. There is a significance influence of locus of control on criminal behavior among Keffi prison inmates.
2. Family background significantly influences criminality among Keffi prison inmate



## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

A total of 90 inmates were selected to participate in the study. Participants of the study were chosen among convicted prison inmates Keffi Prison in Nasarawa State Nigeria through a purposive sampling method. The low sample size was due to the large difference in the numbers of male and female inmates of the prison. The research samples consisted of both male and female inmates of 18 years. Out of the 90 respondents, there were 75 males, and 15 females who participated in the study.

### **Instruments**

Three instruments were employed for this study and they are: the Terry Pettijohn's Locus of Control Scale (1992), the Family Background Questionnaire, and the Psychopathic Deviate Scale by McKenly and Hathaway (1967).

The Pettijohn's Locus of Control Scale (1992) is a measure of internal versus external perception of personal control. It is a 20 item questionnaire with true or false response options. The locus of control classification were done along the five point degree of control personality which are, 0-15 very strong external locus of control, 20-35 external locus of control, 40-60 both external and internal locus of control (undifferentiated) , 65-80 internal locus of control and 85-100 very strong internal locus of control.

The Family Background Questionnaire contains demographic variables and items that described family background characteristics.

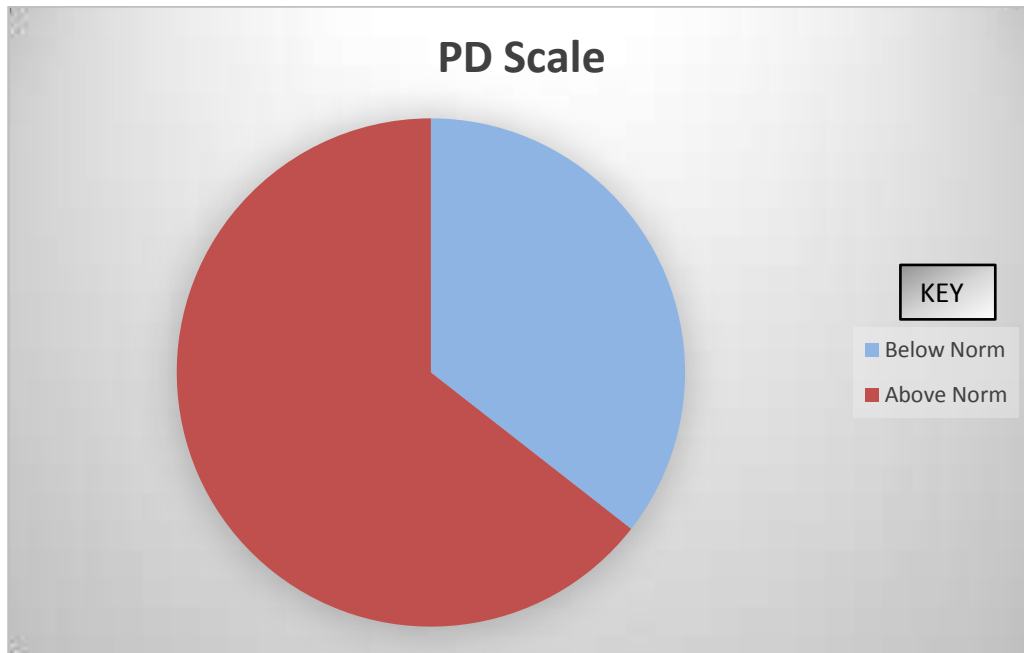
Thirdly the Psychopathic Deviate Scale (PD scale) contains 72 items adopted to measure criminal behaviour. In scoring the PD scale, a point is awarded to each shaded response to obtain the PD scale raw score. The psychometric properties for this scale is one week interval test-retest coefficient of reliability reported by Hathaway and Machkinley (1967) with a sample of 100 male and female clients are: Pd scale =.80, k scale =.76 and Ivor (1984) correlated Pd Scale with Arrow Dot Test which is the subtest of IES Test (Dombrose & Slobin, 1958) which measures ego strength and obtained a concurrent validity coefficient of .57. Nigerian sample provided by Ivor (1984) and Kukoyi (1997) without k =22.24 for male and female (n=100), then with k for male and female (n=120)=28.30. Therefore the Nigerian norms or mean scores are the basis for interpreting the scores of the participants.

## **RESULTS**

The data collected for this research work were analyzed using chi-square, the choice for this statistics was to test the relationship between locus of control on criminal behaviour among prison inmates; and t-test was also used to find the difference between family types on the dependent variable.

With regards to locus of control orientation, 17(18.8%) of respondents were within 0-15 very strong external LOC, 32(35.5%) were within 20-35 external LOC, 14(15%) of the population were within 40-60 described as both external and internal LOC, while 18(20%) were between 65-80 internal LOC, and 9(10%) were between 85-100 very strong internal LOC. Cumulatively therefore, there were 54.3% externals, 30% internals and 15% were undifferentiated .

**Figure 1: Pie chart on PD scores of participants.**



The Figure 1 above shows the distribution of participants result on PD scale:

58 (64.4%) respondents scored above the mean score 28.30 while 32(35.5%) of the respondents had below mean score.

Table 1: Chi-square table showing the influence of locus of control and criminality

| $X^2$ | Critical Value | $\alpha$ | df | P           |
|-------|----------------|----------|----|-------------|
| 24.31 | 9.488          | 0.05     | 4  | Significant |

On locus of control and its influence on criminality, Chi-square result which is ( $X^2$ ) 24.31 at alpha levels ( $\alpha$ ) 0.05 and the degree of freedom (df) 4. The table value 9.48<24.31 calculated value was much less than the calculated implying a significant result. This therefore leads us to accept the stated hypothesis that locus of control orientation influences criminal behaviour having seen that those with external Locus of control tend to become more criminal than internals.

Table 2: t-test table showing summary of family types and criminality

| Source of Variance | Above Norm Score | Below Norm Score | F N | df | Mean | Variance S2 | t <sub>critical</sub> | t <sub>calculated</sub> |
|--------------------|------------------|------------------|-----|----|------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Monogamous         | 16               | 15               | 31  |    | 16   | 42.25       |                       |                         |
| Polygamous         | 42               | 17               | 59  |    | 29   | 42.25       |                       |                         |
| Total              | 58               | 32               | 90  |    | 45   | 84.5        |                       |                         |
|                    |                  |                  |     | 2  |      |             | 2.92                  | 6.25                    |

The above table 2 shows result of t-test between family types differences on criminal behaviour. The calculated t is greater than the tabulated t ( $6.25 > 2.92$ ). The finding indicated that participants from polygamous family ( $X=26$ ) scored significantly higher on criminality than those from the monogamous family ( $X=16$ ). Furthermore, external locus of control significantly influences criminal behaviour having seen that 54.3% of the respondents who scored high on the PD scale were externals.

## DISCUSSION

Loci of control and family background have been identified to be factors that influence criminal behaviours. The study found out that external locus of control significantly influence criminal behaviour, having seen that out of the 64.4% of the respondents who scored above norm score, 54.3% were externals, 10% were internals and 7.8% were undifferentiated. Rotter (1954) social learning theory states that behaviours are product of psychological consequences of the belief that one can or cannot control the causes of events. Thus, the influence of locus of control on criminal behaviour could be seen in most criminals as most of them deny culpability and often attribute it to an external factor or even, their victim.

However findings from this study indicate that 47% out of the 64.4% of the respondents who scored higher on the PD scale were from polygamous families, which indicated criminality. While 17% of the respondents who scored above norm scores were from monogamous family. Results showed that respondents from monogamous homes scored less on the PD scale, this in turn could be viewed from the classical theory which endorsed the view that good child development requires the presence of two parents.

Robins, West and Herjanic (1975) conducted a study investigating delinquency in two generations of 145 black urban families of low socio economic status, from St Louis, Missouri and found that family size was significantly associated with delinquency even when parental criminality was controlled; both boys and girls with fewer siblings engaged in less delinquent behaviours.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the research findings show that both locus of control and family background are important factors that influence criminal behaviour having seen that family types, parenting style and other environmental factors in one way or the other exert a directional influence on behaviour and personality development. It has also been noted in the study that large family size could have great influence on the child's general behaviour as the child becomes more susceptible to peer pressure and deviant relationship.

## Recommendations

The study recommends that:

1. Programs should be designed to improve the individual's locus of control orientation towards internality to reduce tendencies towards criminality.
2. Family support services should be provided to polygamous families to enable them reduce the risk of crime among their members.
3. Environmental and social factors that influence criminal behaviour should be noted and modified in order to reduce tendencies towards crime among youths.

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