
Moral Disengagement and Gender as Predictors of Tendency to Commit Crime Among Adolescents in Anambra State

Sunday C. Achebe¹, and Chinwe, I. Onyemaechi²

^{1&2} Department of Psychology, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus.

Corresponding Author: Chinwe I. Onyemaechi

Email: ifeachoc@gmail.com

Abstract

The present study examined moral disengagement and gender as predictors of tendency to commit crime among adolescents in Anambra State. A total of 253 secondary schools students drawn from five different local government areas in Onitsha education zone, comprising 143 boys (57%) and 110 girls (43%) participated in the study. Their age ranges between 15 – 17 years with a mean age of 16.39 and standard deviation of 1.11. Two instruments were used for the study namely; Crime Behaviour Rating Scale (CBRS) and Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement Scale (MMDS). The study adopted correlational and cross-sectional research design. Linear regression was used to test the correlation. The first result showed that there is positive correlation between moral disengagement and tendency to commit crime among adolescents in Anambra State $r=0.946^{**}$. The second result showed that there was a statistically significant difference between male and female adolescents in Anambra State, on their tendency to commit crime, $t=6.688^{**}$. The third result showed that moral disengagement has a significant predicting influence on tendency to commit crime among adolescents in Anambra State, $B= 0.946$, $t= 46.331$. The study therefore recommended creating of leisure facilities for the youths, and creates free education, and also, the school management to create an office of student adviser to help the students.

Keywords: Moral Disengagement, Gender, Crime, Adolescents

Introduction

Globally, criminality is an act or any behaviour that is in violation of already constituted laws, norms, or criminal law made by the society. According to Davies, Hollin, and Bull (2018), crime is an act, or an action representing any behaviour that violates criminal law.

According to Nwafor (2012), these behaviours include fraud, rape, suicide, kidnapping, stealing, murder, drug trafficking, forgery, and advance fee fraud also known as 419. Under ages' involvement in delinquent behaviour and criminality seems to be increasing on daily basis, especially, crimes such as kidnapping murder, advance fees fraud known as 419, drug trafficking, and rape (Arema, 2011; Animasahum, 2011; Ajaebu, 2012). According to Tsang, Law and Hui (2012), these children are within adolescence stage, and they are expected to be in school where they should learn and acquire some skills required for both psycho-social and other careers that will help them in their future living.

Unfortunately, these youths abound one school and engaged in criminal activities, such as stealing, advance fee fraud, known as 419, murder, armed robbery, ritual killings and drug trafficking, which violate societal norms, customs, value and belief, and also make life difficult for people living around them.

In support of this, evidence from Nigeria prison demonstrates that there are 55% of inmates, both convicted and awaiting trial who are within the age that supposed to be in school learning and acquiring skill that will help him or her for a better living (Nigeria prison, 2017). It is clear that those whom are in the prison are unlucky individuals, because a good percentage of individuals within this age range that are not convicted or arrested are still in the streets, villages and towns exhibiting difference forms of criminal behaviours, such as internet scam, armed robbery, cultism, rape, drug trafficking, kidnapping, bribery and corruption, terrorism, murder, money laundering and burglary (Okeke, et al., 2012, Oguntunde, et al., 2018, National Bureau of Statistics,2017).

Again, Nwafor (2012) and David (2018) indicated that most Nigeria youths, including under age that are involved in exporting and importing drugs overseas increase on daily basis and those that are incarcerated overseas also increase on daily basis. According to Nwafor (2012) the rate of Nigerian youths incarcerated overseas from 2012 till date are higher than other Africans. David (2018) support what Nwafor (2012) stated, that numbers of incarcerated Nigeria youths overseas increase on daily basis.

Similarly, Ajaegbu (2012), and Adegoke (2014) discovered that there is an increase of crime in Nigeria. In the same way, evidence from research conducted by Achuba, Igbomereho and Akpor-Robaro (2013), and Nigerian communication commission (2017) states that crimes increase every day in Nigeria, such as stealing, armed robbery, kidnapping, murder, drug trafficking and advance fee fraud, also known as 419. Again, Global Peace Index (2018) and Nigerian Commission (2017) states that International Statistics Manual of Insecurity and Crime globally ranked Nigeria 16th in the world insecurity and crime. Nigerians youths involvement in crimes have affected different sectors in Nigeria, because people are not free, and people live in fear. Again, many do not travel on the road because of killings on the high way. Youth's involvement in crimes, such as murder, stealing, kidnapping, drug trafficking, and armed robbery, is one of the major problems Nigeria is facing today (Ajibade, 2011).

Crime is defined as an act committed or omitted in violation of a public law, either forbidding or commanding it (Davies, et al., 2018). The word "crime" is derived from the Latin word 'krimos' which means to accuse. Crime covers and includes any acts which are against norms, and social order, and deserve strong disapproval and condemnation by the

society, and can be punished by fine or imprisonment by the law, such as kidnapping, murder, armed robbery, burglary, drug trafficking, rape and stealing. Similarly, Uwaoma and Chima (2015) states that when an individual's actions or inaction undermines the grand norms controlling, or governing the society, such action is viewed as crime. From what Aguilar et al (2018) discovered, and what Uwaoma and Chima (2015) stated, law or breached of a rule, the individual have committed a crime, and the individual will be treated or punished as criminal. Furthermore, Archer (2018) states that behavioural definition of crime always focuses on criminality, an irrefutable personality silhouette that causes the most disturbing types of crimes. Different factors have been identified as highly related to the increasing of crime globally, such as biological, parenting styles, peers influence, social media or technology advancement, personality disorders and brain impairment (Poldrack, 2017; Okorodudu, 2010; O'Driscoll & Leach 2016; Raine 2016).

However, this study focuses on moral disengagement and gender as predictors of tendency to commit crime among adolescences in Anambra State. The first variable of interest in this study is moral disengagement. Moral disengagement is a process where an individual convincing his or herself that an ethical standard do not apply to the individual in a particular context. This attitude is been performed by the individual separating moral reactions from inhumane conduct and disabling the mechanism of self-condemnation. Gini, Pozzoli and Hymel (2018) defined moral disengagement as a set of cognitive mechanisms that permit an individual, or group of people to view, or justify their damaging and reprehensible behaviours, or acts against social safety actions in order to maintain or preserve their self-image.

Crime has become the scourge of the Nigeria society in recent times. It constitutes one of the major problems the country is going through today (Abudul-Rasheed, 2016, Ajibade, 2011, Animasahun, 2011; Aremu, 2011; Ajaegbu, 2012, Okeke *et al*, 2012). A study conducted by Adudul-Rasheed (2016) showed that no one seems to be insulated against its unfavourable effects as crime is now a perceptible malaise which prevails almost in every part of the country. Animashaun and Oyebiyi (2014) noted that there's a high increase in the number of Nigeria underage (youths) who are engaged in different criminal activities, such as advance fee fraud, known as 419, armed robbery, rape, kidnapping, stealing and murder. The adverse effects of crime on Nigeria have reached almost endemic proportions that cannot be over emphasized.

Okeke *et al* (2012) indicates that it goes well beyond loss and the considerable pain suffered by crime victims, such as trauma, depression, high blood pressure, and thought of suicide. Again, Abudul-Rasheed *et al* (2016) discovered that the increase of crimes in Nigeria have discourages investment, growth and sustainable development because other countries are afraid of coming to Nigeria. These activities affect other countries not coming to invest in Nigeria and as much affecting the economy of the country, and these may lead to increase in poverty, and also increase in premature death.

Abudul-Rasheed (2016) noted that the fund that would have been invested in providing good and quality education, free medical treatment, and good roads are beings allocated in combating crimes. National Bureau of Statistics (2018) stated that Nigeria prisons are filled with under ages (youth) who are involved in crimes such as stealing, murder, kidnapping, rape, advance fee fraud and armed robbery, those that are supposed be in the classroom

receiving lecture and training that will enable them to be useful for both themselves and the society. Previous studies have engaged in the research of factors that contribute to criminal behaviour, such as media, peer influence, and personality disorder (Merton, 2008). Thus this present study examined whether moral disengagement and gender predict tendency to commit crime.

Research Questions

The study provided answers to the following:

- i. What is the relationship between moral disengagement and tendency to commit crime among adolescents in Anambra State?
- ii. How does a male and female adolescent in Anambra State differ in their tendency to commit crime?
- iii. How do moral disengagement and gender jointly and independently predict tendency to commit crime among adolescents in Anambra State?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine whether moral disengagement and gender could predict tendency to commit crime among adolescents in Anambra State. The study specifically sought to:

- i. Investigate whether there is relationship between moral disengagement and tendency to commit crime among adolescents in Anambra State.
- ii. Examine if there will be a significant difference between male and female on their tendency to commit crime among adolescents in Anambra State.

- iii. Explore if there will be a joint and independent predicting influence of moral disengagement and gender in tendency to commit crime among adolescents in Anambra State.

Hypotheses

- i. Moral disengagement will not significantly correlate with tendency to commit crime among adolescents in Anambra state.
- ii. There will not be a significant difference between male and female on tendency to commit crime among adolescents in Anambra state.
- iii. There will not be a significant joint and independent predicting influence of moral disengagement and gender on tendency to commit crime among adolescents in Anambra state.

METHOD

Participants

A total of two hundred and fifty three (253) secondary school students from Onitsha Education zone of Anambra state participated in the study. The participants were drawn from six selected schools, including Community Secondary School Umueri, New Era Secondary School Nteje, St. Christopher Junior Seminary School Onitsha, Community Secondary School Nando, and Anglican Girl's Secondary School Onitsha. The entire participant is within 15 - 17 years. Comparing 143 boys, (57%) and 110 girls' (43%). The means age of the participants were 16.39, with standard deviation of 1.11. Both purposive and simple random sample were used to select the participants at different stages.

Purposive sampling was used at the first stage to select Anambra State and secondary schools in Anambra State, while simple random sampling technique was used in selecting the class. The researchers purposely enrolled SS11 students as the respondents, considering the facts that students at that level have been academically exposed and will be able to handle the item questions involved. The choice of Onitsha Education zone was made because Onitsha recorded very high in crime related case (The Nation, Sept. 16, 2018) and the researcher is familiar with the activities in the Education zone. Finally, students in SS1 class are still new in senior secondary level, while those in SS111 are preparing for their terminal examinations (WAEC & NECO).

Instruments

Two instruments were used in the study. The instrument includes: Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement scale (MMDS) and Crime Behaviour Rating Scale (CBRS)

Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement scale (MMDS)

This thirty-two (32) items scale was used to Measure Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement. This mechanisms of moral disengagement scale (MMDS) measures the eight mechanisms of moral disengagement by Bandura (1986). These mechanisms include moral justification, euphemistic labelling, and displacement of responsibility, dehumanization, distorting consequences, and attribution of blame. The eight mechanisms summation will be equal to moral disengagement. MMDS was scored on three (3) points scale ranging from 1="agree", 2="undecided", 3="disagree", demonstrating the extent to which the items apply to the participants. This indicates that lower score shows higher moral disengagement. Items 1,9,17 and 25 measure moral justification, items, 2, 10, 18, and 26 measure displacement of

responsibility, items 6,14, 22, and 30 measure distorting consequences, items 3,11,19 and 27 measure advantageous comparison, items 4,12,20, and 28 measure diffusion of responsibility, items 8, 16 24, and 32 measure attribution of blame, and items 7,15,23 and 31 measures dehumanization.

Crime Behaviour Rating Scale (CBRS)

The thirty -three (33) items scale was used to measure tendency to commit crime. The Crime Behaviour Rating Scale (CBRS) was developed and validated by Animasahun (2011). It is designed to measure behaviours and characteristics that can easily predispose an individual to commit crime. All the 33 items loaded saliently: they have positive significant contributions and correlate significantly with the domain in each item as established in the results of Animasahun (2011). The 33 items were directly scored. The scoring was done on five (5) point scale ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree” showing the extent to which the items apply to the participants. Sample items of the (CBRS) include statement such as “my behaviours often go contrary to acceptable norm”, “I can find any means to make money to survive”. Animabahun (2011) reported internal consistency reliability estimates (Cronbach Alpha) for CBRS (0.94) and the validity as obtained by inter items correlation ranged from 0.56 to 0.88; convergent validity of 0.86 and discriminate validity of 0.02.

Procedure

A letter of introduction was given to the researchers by the Head of Department of Psychology for identification. The participants were secondary school students recruited from five (5) public secondary different schools, in five (5) different local governments in

Onitsha Education Zone. The researchers met the principals of the schools, and introduced themselves seeking for permission to do the research work. The researchers were given approval and permission from each of the principal to carry out the research with the research assistances recruited for the study. The participants were duly informed about the study and the aim of the research. However, the researchers purposely enrolled SSII students as the participants, considering the facts that students at that level have been academically exposed and would be able to handle the questionnaire involved. Furthermore, Onitsha Education Zone was used because Onitsha scored very high in crime related cases.

Design and Statistics

It is a survey study, correlational design. Hierarchical multiple liner regression was employed as the statistical tool for data analysis.

Table 1. Pearson R correlation summary table showing relationship of moral disengagement with tendency to commit crime among adolescents in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation (SD)	Df	R	P
Moral Disengagement	65.81	19.64	251	.946**	<.01
Tendency to Commit Crime	112.00	23.33			

Note: ** = $P < .01$.

The result on table 1 showed that moral disengagement (Mean = 65.81; SD = 19.64) has a significant relationship with tendency to commit crime (Mean = 112.00; SD = 23.33) among adolescents in Anambra State, Nigeria, $r = .946^{**}$; $df (N-2) = 251$; $P < .01$. The implication is that, as moral disengagement is increasing, tendency to commit crime is also increasing among adolescents in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Table 2. T-test independent sample summary table showing the mean difference between male and female on their tendency to commit crime among adolescents in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation (SD)	Standard error (SE)	Df	t	P
Male	119.94	21.63	1.81	251	6.688**	<.01
Female	101.67	21.41	2.04			

Note: ** = $P < .01$.

The result on table 2 showed that there was a statistically significant difference between male (Mean = 119.94; SD = 21.63; SE = 1.81) and female (Mean = 101.67; SD = 21.41; SE = 2.04) adolescents in Anambra State, on their tendency to commit crime, $t = 6.688^{**}$; $df = 251$; $P < .01$. Therefore, the hypothesis two which stated that there will be no significant statistical difference between male and female on their tendency to commit crime among adolescents in Anambra State, Nigeria, was rejected.

Table 3 Hierarchical multiple linear regression table showing the joint and independent predicting influence of moral disengagement and gender on tendency to commit crime among adolescents in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Variables	B	SE B	T	β
Step 1				
Constant	38.032	1.666	22.832**	
Moral Disengagement	1.124	.084	46.331**	.946**
<i>R</i>	.946 ^a			
<i>R</i> ² Adjusted	.895			
ΔR^2	.895			
<i>F</i>	2146.59**			
<i>Df</i>	1,251			
Step 2				
Constant	42.752	2.664	16.049**	
Moral Disengagement	1.103	.026	42.640**	.928**
Gender	-2.309	1.022	-2.259*	-.049*
<i>R</i>	.947 ^b			
<i>R</i> ² Adjusted	.897			
<i>F</i>	1093.39**			
ΔR^2	.002			
<i>Df</i>	1,250			
<i>Durbin Watson</i>	1.610			

Note: ** = $P < .01$; * = $P < .05$.

The result on table 4.3 showed that moral disengagement has a significant independent predicting influence on tendency to commit crime among adolescents in Anambra State, Nigeria, $F = 2146.59^{**}$; $R = .946^a$; R^2 Adjusted = .895; $\beta = .946^{**}$; $t = 46.331^{**}$. In another block when gender (with independent predicting influence of, $\beta = -.049^*$; $t = -2.259^*$) was added to the regression, moral disengagement ($\beta = .928^{**}$; $t = 42.640^{**}$) showed a slight decrease in its independent prediction of tendency to commit crime among the adolescents in Anambra State, Nigeria. This means that gender influences moral disengagement among this population. Moral disengagement accounts for 89.5% of the variations on tendency to

commit crime among adolescents in Anambra State, Nigeria. However, the joint prediction of moral disengagement and gender on tendency to commit crime, $R = .947^b$; R^2 Adjusted = .897; $\Delta R^2 = .002$; $F = 1093.39^{**}$. This result showed that the joint predicting influence of moral disengagement and gender accounted for 89.7% of the variation on tendency to commit crime among adolescents in Anambra State, Nigeria. Though the change in the variation as a result of the addition of gender is 0.2%. Therefore, the hypothesis which stated that there will be no joint and independent predicting influence of moral disengagement and gender on tendency to commit crime among adolescents in Anambra State, Nigeria, was not confirmed.

Discussion

This present study examined moral disengagement as gender as predictors of tendency to commit crime among adolescents in Anambra State. Comprehensive effects in predictors on tendency to commit crime among adolescents were found in both moral disengagement and gender. In this research, it was discovered that moral disengagement and gender are predicting factors of tendency to crime among the adolescents.

This result demonstrates a positive correlation between moral disengagement and gender as predictors of tendency to commit crime. In this study, the participant indicates that stealing some money is not too serious compared to those who steal a lot of money. Similarly, the participant's showed that individuals who people steal from are careless, and it is their fault. Again, participants indicates that they can always tell lies to save themselves from embarrassment, that they don't care about what people said about them, and that their

conscience doesn't trouble them for anything they do, and every Nigeria is a potential criminal.

Furthermore, the second hypothesis was rejected. This present study is in line with previous studies conducted on gender and crime, and gap between both female and male in committing crime. The result indicates that men have higher tendency to commit crime than women. This present result supports previous findings on the gap between male and female in committing crime (Abudul-Rasheed *et al* 2016). The discrepancy in the male and female on tendency to commit crime was discovered.

Equally, these present results are consistent with the findings of Davies, et al., (2018), that crime is a complex issue that comprises any act or omission that violate societies norms, value, beliefs system, customs and traditions which constructed individuals well-being and their sustainability. For example, the participants shows that their behaviour often go contrary to acceptable norms, that taking Indian hemp/marijuana makes the body more active, and that they must satisfy themselves before thinking about another person.

Conclusion

Crime is an act, action or omission that violates the society's norms and law. Crime is a social problem globally, which needed an urgent solution. No community will boast of none criminal activities in their community. These present study examined moral disengagement and gender as predictors of tendency to commit crime among adolescents in Anambra State. Problems of crime are rooted in social inequalities; therefore, it is recommended that the government should try to reduce social inequalities. Also, creating job opportunity and reducing unemployment among the youths will also help to reduce crime.

References

- Abdul-Rasheed, S., Muhammed, A. Yinusa, H. Raji-Abduulateef, P. Olatunji, A., & Abbulbaqi, S. (2016). Gender differentials in criminal behaviour in Nigeria. *Journal of African Women Studies*. Vol. 1 No 2, 241 – 340.
- Achuba, I. C., Ighomereho, O., S. & Akpor-Robaro, M., O. (2013). Security challenges in Nigeria and the implication for activities and sustainable development. *Journal of Economic and Sustainable Development* 4 (2).
- Adegoke, N. (2014). The Nigeria Police and the challenges of security in Nigeria. Review of Public administration and management. 3(6). Retrieved August 21, 2019 from www.arabianjbm.com/RPAM Index plp.
- Aguilar, B. L., Sroufe, A., Egeland, B., & Carlson, E. (2018). Distinguishing the early-onset/persistent and adolescence-onset antisocial behaviour types: from birth to 16 years. *Development and Psychopathology*, 12, 109 – 132.
- Ajaegbu, O. O. (2012). Rising youth unemployment and violent crime in Nigeria. *American Journal of Social Issues and Humanities*. 2(5), 315 – 321.
- Ajibade, O. (2011). *Revalidation and Reliability estimates of crime behaviour factor battery (CBFB)*. Unpublished M. Ed Dissertation, University of Ibadan. Ibadan.
- Animasahun, R., A (2011). Development and validation of crime behaviour factor battery. *International Journal of Psychology and Counselling*. 3(8). 137 – 153.
- Animasahun, R. A., & Oyebiyi, P.O (2014). Understanding self image and entrepreneurial intentions of prison inmates in south west, Nigeria. *International Review of social sciences Humanities*.
- Archer, J. (2018). The influence of testosterone on human aggression. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 82 , 1 – 28.
- Aremu, S., O. (2011). *Psychosocial predictors of criminal behaviour among adolescents and youths in South West, Nigeria*. A paper presented for hearing, Department of Guidance and Counseling, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social Foundation of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- David, T. (2018). The Nigerian/China prisoners Swap Deal. Retrieved August 20th, 2019 from www.sunnewsonline.com
- Davies, G., Hollin, C., & Bull, R. (2018). Who becomes a criminal? *British Forensic Journal*, Vol. 4, 122 – 132.

- Gini, G., Pozzoli, T., & Hauser, M. (2018). Bullies have enhanced moral competence to judge relative to victims, but lack moral compassion. *Persindiv differ*, 50:603 – 608.
- Global Peace Index (2018). Nigeria Ranked 16th Least Peaceful Country in the world. Retrieved August 17, 2019 from <https://vanguardngr.com>.
- Merton, R. (2008). Social structure and Anomie. *American Sociological Review*3:672 – 682.
- National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria (2017). Retrieved August 17, 2019 from <http://www.sunnews.com>
- National Bureau of Statistics, (2018).Reported offences by type and state. National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria.
- Nigeria Communication Commission (2017). Nigeria ranks 3rd in Global internet crime behind UK, US. Retrieved August 17, 2019 from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com>
- Nigeria Prison Services (2017). *Summary of inmate population by convict and awaiting trial person* as at 18th December, 2017. Retrieved 23/8/2019 from www.prisons.gov.ng.
- Nwafor, P. (2012). Retrieved August 17, 2019 from www.vanguardnews.com
- O' Driscoll, K., & Leach, J., P. (2016). No longer gage: An iron bar through the head. Early observations of personality change after injuru to the prefrontal cortex. *British Medical Journal*. 317, 1673 – 1674.
- Oguntunde, P. E., Ojo, O. O., Okagbue, H. I. & Oguntunde, O., A. (2018). Analysis of selected crime data in Nigeria. Retrieved 21/8/2019 from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dib>.
- Okeke, L. N., Nweke, M. E., Ngene, S. C., Anyaduba, C. N., Mgbechi, C. T. C., & Nwagbbo, S., N. (2012). *Basic principles of security duties*, (Unizik experience). Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
- Okorodudu, G. (2010). Influence of parenting styles on adult delinquency in Delta Central Senatorial District. *Edo Journal of Counselling*, 3(1) 58-86.
- Poldrack, R., A. (2017). The role of FMRI in cognitive neuroscience: Where do we stand? *Current opinion in neurobiology*. 18, 223 – 229.
- Raine, A. (2016). Functions of the medical frontal cortex in the processing of conflict and errors. *The journal of neuroscience*, 21, 23, 9430 – 9437.
- Uwaoma, N. C., & Chima, I. (2015). Behaviour modification: Modern Principles and Practices. *Gabtony Prints Ltd*