

Perceived Youth Gangs and Peers Imitation as Correlates of Adolescent Delinquent Behaviour in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT This study examined the relationship between youth gang, peer imitation, peer friendship network and adolescent delinquency among secondary school students in Ibadan metropolis. Data was collected using the Adolescent Delinquent Behaviour Questionnaire (ADBQ). Results indicate that adolescent delinquency increases as youth gangs increases, this means that as adolescents form an attachment with gangs the more they become delinquent. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.140$), peer imitation was also found to be significant, ($r(171) = 0.458, p < 0.05$). This shows that as peer imitation increases, so does delinquent behaviour increases. Finally the result shows that as age increases, adolescent delinquency also increases. This could be because as adolescents grow older, they tend to have more courage to try out new things (even bad ones) and their rebellious nature also increases ($r(179) = 0.602, p < 0.5$). Therefore, the study recommends that family, community and social workers should find ways of integrating adolescents back into the society so that they can also play their own meaningful social roles. This can be done by linking community service with school learning which has a capacity of providing adolescents with supportive and non-parental mentors.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is usually a problematic period for younger people because of its physical and emotional implications which often lead to deleterious outcome if conflicts are not properly resolved. Throughout most of human history, the physical changes of puberty and resulting adult physique marked the end of childhood and entry into the adult world of work. In many cultures there are important rituals to mark this entry into adulthood. Modern adolescents are roleless for the most part. They often seek their group identification and self-worth in teams, cliques, and gangs (Kerr et al. 2012). A notable feature of parent-adolescent relationships are that of the amount of changes that occurs over a relative short period of time. In recent times, findings of social research have revealed that significant numbers of parents are finding it difficult to understand these changes in their children. Adolescents who are trying to imitate their peers are

often as erratic and unpredictable as birds taking their first flights from the nest. They become uncomfortable with the ties that bind them to an older generation, they often see mothers and fathers as inhibiting more than helpful. Teenagers look up to their peers as companions in their struggle for independence, these interactions may mar the adolescent developmental outcomes if the adolescent falls among the wrong peers. Adolescent groups have been identified to exist at least at three different levels of peer interaction (Frick and Moffitt 2010). First is the dyadic level, dominated by individual friendships, which starts practically from childhood. The second level, which is apparent, also prior to adolescence, is comprised of small groups of peers who regularly interact with each other. Sometimes referred to as cliques, these groups involve an interweaving of relationships that vary in closeness, duration, and mutual regard or affection. Freed from the close supervision of adults, adolescent groups can congeal around antisocial as well as prosaically behaviour patterns (Collins and Laursen 2004).

Thus, in adolescence, one can see the emergence of delinquent gangs, along with friendship cliques or special interest groups that are not as oriented toward violating social norms. A third level of peer interaction is not readily ap-

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parent before adolescence. It involves what is frequently referred to as crowds and is contingent on adolescents gathering in such large numbers that it is no longer feasible for everyone to know each other personally. Peer groups at this level are more cognitive than behavioural, more symbolic than concrete and interactional (Collins and Laursen 2004). They involve identification of adolescents who share a similar image or reputation among peers or who have a common feature such as ethnicity or neighbourhood, even if they do not consider each other friends or spend much time interacting with each other.

An understanding of the relationship between peers and delinquency is at the heart of delinquency research. One of the most consistent and robust findings in the literature on adolescent delinquency involves the association between friends' delinquent behaviour and a respondent's own delinquency. Delinquency is defined in this study by Farrington (2004) as acts prohibited by the criminal law, such as theft, burglary, robbery, violence, vandalism, and drug use. However, there are many problems in using legal definitions of delinquency because the boundary between what is legal and what is illegal may be poorly defined, highly subjective and change over time across the different cultures. Legal definitions rely on the concept of intent, which is difficult to measure reliably and validly while social scientists rely on the behavioural criteria as it makes it possible to compare and summarize results from different researches (Farrington 2004). Delinquency is commonly measured either using official records of arrests or convictions or using self-reports of offending (Farrington 2004).

Cauffman et al. (2011) discovered that more than 80 percent of juveniles appearing before the court had peer accomplices, researchers have noted the strong tendency for offenders to commit delinquent acts in the company of others (Kolko and Pardini 2010; Viljoen et al. 2012). In fact, many studies find that the relationship of peer delinquency to self-report delinquency exceeds that of any other independent variable, regardless of whether the focus is on status offences, minor property crimes, violent crimes, or substance use (Piquero et al. 2005; Pardini and Loeber 2008; Lawing et al. 2010). Therefore, causal explanations of delinquency that emphasize delinquent peer associations (for

example, differential association, social learning, and developmental theories such as interactional theory appear justified. Although prior delinquency research establishes that adolescents are likely to behave in a manner consistent with their friends, it is yet to incorporate the nature and structure of friendship relations into empirical models (Kerr et al. 2012). Therefore, the objective of this study, therefore, was to examine the impact of youth gang and peer imitation on adolescent delinquent behaviour with the aim of determining their importance in controlling delinquency.

Literature Review

Ethnographic studies of adolescents in school settings provide most of the information on the importance of friendship networks during adolescence. These studies consistently report that being with friends is the most important aspect of school life for most students (Monahan et al. 2009) and that relational problem with peers are particularly distressing to adolescents (Muñoz et al. 2008). Part of the importance attributed to friendships derives from structural changes that occur in the school environment during the transitions from elementary to secondary school. After this transition, adolescents are confronted with a larger and more heterogeneous population of students, and status in this new setting often is based on "being known" by peers (Piquero et al. 2005). Subsequently, many students speak of the need to extend their personal networks to avoid becoming lost and isolated in the new school setting (Piquero et al. 2005). The importance of finding a position within larger friendship networks suggests that adolescents are particularly susceptible to peer influence during these transition years, including behavioural constraints that may pull them toward or away from delinquent behaviour. This concern over locating position within the school hierarchy and gaining a sense of belonging among their peers leads students to adapt a variety of strategies to enhance peer solidarity. One strategy involves the use of gossip to constrain friends' behaviours mostly among girls. For boys, a mechanism of ensuring conformity among peers involves "policing masculinity" (Puzzanchera 2008) with behaviours such as aggressiveness, dominance, and toughness encouraged among peers (Messerschmidt 1993). To ensure compliance with this masculine

ideology, boys often uses derogatory female and homosexual references to keep group members in line (Puzzanchera 2008). While ethnographic research is invaluable in highlighting the social mechanisms that peers use to constrain friends' behaviour, it cannot tell us whether structural characteristics of the friendship networks provide more or less opportunity for these mechanisms to operate. This requires detailed information on the structural characteristics of friendship networks for a large number of adolescents situated across many different contexts.

Recent studies have identified the role of sociometry status among peers as an important factor in adolescent delinquency. Peer nominations of the most liked and least liked classmates or grade mates or peer ratings of the likability of each pair are usually the basis for determining an adolescent's sociometric status. With such data, individuals can be classified as popular (well- liked by classmates and not often disliked), rejected (the opposite), neglected (rarely mentioned as liked or disliked), controversial (frequently mentioned as liked *and* disliked), or average. Moreover, those who are consistently rated as popular display better social and psychological adjustment over the long term than do other youth, especially those who consistently fall into the rejected category (Coie and Dodge 1997; Sylvestre et al. 2005). The second issue is that of gang or peer stability. Brown et al. (2012) observed that cliques of deviant youth tended to draw new members from other delinquent youth, so that whereas the specific people who belonged to a clique might rotate, the group retained its deviant orientation. Brown et al. (2012) observed a similar but more complicated pattern with reference to tobacco use in cliques. At both measurement points (one year apart), the majority of cliques was comprised exclusively of non-smokers or smokers. Non-smokers tended to depart from cliques in which most members smoked, but smokers did not abandon non-smoking cliques as readily. The implication of these studies is that even though youth change friendship groups frequently, they seem to remain in contact with peers who share their attitudes and behaviour patterns. This supports the contention of Rachel et al. (2011) that certain features of the crowd system should make it difficult for youth to achieve radical changes in their reputation among peers. It is more likely, they reasoned, that adolescents will

move between crowds with fairly similar reputations for example, from brains to nerds or from druggies to punks rather than from brains to druggies. According to one ethnographic study, some youth may find it difficult to change crowds. Merten (2005) traced the efforts of a small set of nonaggressive, socially rejected boys to cope with their reputation as "Mels" (short for "Melvins"). The boys were widely derided by classmates from a variety of other crowds and, understandably, sought to escape this derision. Only with great effort, however, was one boy successful in this venture.

Burt and Klump (2013) have identified that joining youth gangs consisting of both pulls and pushes. Pulls pertain to the attractiveness of the gang. Gang membership can enhance prestige or status among friends (Pickett 2005) especially girls (for boys) (Laura 2009) and provide opportunities to be with them (Mytton et al. 2009). Gangs provide other attractive opportunities such as the chance for excitement (Dahl 2008) by selling drugs and making money (Burt and Klump 2013). It should be noted that violent behaviour is not the only behaviour in which gang members partake. For the, most part, gang members "hang out" and are involved in other normal adolescent social activities, but drinking, drug trafficking is also common (Burt and Klump 2013). Youth commits many more serious and violent acts while they are gang members than they do after they leave the gang (De Looze et al. 2011; Chapman et al. 2011). However, the influence of a gang is long lasting.

Theoretical Framework

Edwin Sutherland's (1947) differential association theory is based on the premise that delinquency is learned through intimate social relations with friends where attitudes or "definitions" favourable to law violation are acquired. Thus, not only are adolescents' attachments to peers important for delinquency involvement, but more important, the context or norms of the friendship group determine whether attachment to friends results in conventional or delinquent behaviour. The social transmission of delinquency occurs within the friendship network through the dissemination of attitudes about the appropriateness of delinquent behaviour (Sutherland 1947). While Sutherland's theory emphasizes the attitudes of peers in the transmission of delin-

quency, Aker's (1985) extension to the differential reinforcement theory suggests that the adoption of delinquent behaviour occurs through the imitation of the peers' behaviour or through the observation of its consequences (either positive or negative). Consistent with Aker's reformulation of differential association theory, research finds that the behaviour of peers is more important than the attitudes of peers in influencing an individual's own delinquency (Warr and Stafford 1991). Differential association theory and Aker's extension to it are particularly suited to an examination of friendship networks because definitions favourable to violation of law are learned in the intimate social networks of individuals (Cressey and Sutherland 1974). Moreover, several researchers drawing on differential association theory have argued that the effect of delinquent peers is conditioned by specific features of social relations (Agnew 1991; Orcutt 1983; Voss 1969). Because Sutherland's theory stipulates that the frequency, duration, priority, and intensity of associations are the most relevant to differential association, researchers have explored whether these features of social relations condition delinquent peer influences.

Unfortunately, the imprecise definitions offered by Sutherland for the features of differential association leave room for subjective interpretation of the defining characteristic of social relations, and subsequent researchers have offered various definitions. Instead of focusing on subjective properties of social relations, such as affection, a network perspective suggests that useful conceptualization of social relations should also incorporate the underlying structural properties of interpersonal relationships in which definitions, favourable or unfavourable, to delinquency are transmitted. This may particularly be the case for Sutherland's property of intensity. For example, a more cohesive peer network in which everyone is friends with everyone (that is, high density) will provide greater intensity in differential associations for adolescents than willing location in a friendship network in which only certain members identify each other as friends. Additionally, an adolescent's structural location within the network may affect the intensity of different associations. For example, adolescents located in more central positions within the network should experience greater differential association than adolescents

located in more peripheral positions in their peer network.

In summary, a network perspective offers a structural approach to defining characteristics of social relationships. A network perspective suggests that (1) some group members are more susceptible to control by their friendship network due to their position within the friendship network, and (2) some friendship networks are more effective in controlling the behaviour of their members due to structural characteristics of the network. By reconnecting adolescents to the structures of relationships in which they are embedded, network methods and theory provide important tools to deepen understanding of the delinquency-peer association.

STUDY AREA AND METHODOLOGY

Ex-post-facto research design was used for this study. The independent variables are youth gangs, and peer imitation while the dependent variable is adolescent delinquent behaviour. One hundred and eighty-one (181) delinquent adolescents from five local government areas of Ibadan metropolis were sampled for this study. These include Ibadan North, Ibadan North East, Ibadan North West, Ibadan South East and Ibadan South West local government areas of Oyo state. Ibadan is an ancient city in Nigeria. The city is divided into 11 local government areas for administrative reasons and the city is noted for its commercial viability as people from different nationalities are found in the city.

The purposive clustering sampling technique was employed to select the adolescents from schools and among street urchins residing in unapproved and uncompleted building, under bridges and at motor garages. From these identified groups (clusters) the researchers used the random sampling technique to select 181 delinquent adolescents. For the location of the targeted sample, 36 were selected from remand homes, 60 were selected from secondary schools, 58 were selected from motor garages, 13 were selected from under bridges while 14 were selected from uncompleted buildings. These respondents were of different sex, educational background, socioeconomic and, religious affiliation. All the participants were Nigerians.

A 30 item structured questionnaire tagged "Adolescent Delinquent Behaviour Questionnaire (ADBQ)" constituted the main instrument

for this study. The questionnaire had section A, B, and C. Section A measures the social-demographics of the participants with items such as sex, age, educational background, record of previous arrest for any criminal act, family factors like, number of siblings in the family, home background, etc. Section B contained questions on whether they belong to any gang, the number of close friends and the extent of their relationship. Section C contained 24 items adapted from the 65 item adolescent delinquent behaviour questionnaire developed by Ma et al. (2000) tagged ABQ. The adolescent response was scored on a four point rating scale format of strongly agree (SA), agree (A), Disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD). Of the 24 items, 6 items each measured adolescent behaviours relating to sexual activities, 6 items measured delinquent behaviours in the family and 6 items measured delinquent behaviours in the community. The reliability and validity of the state of the Adolescent Behaviour Questionnaire score were demonstrated to be good in studies by Ma et al. (2000) with the reliability, ranging from 0.80 to 0.90. The present researchers revalidate the scale and discovered that the whole scale had an internal consistency (alpha that the whole scale had an internal consistency (alpha coefficient) of 0.87 and a Guttman split half of 0.40. The subscale that measured delinquent behaviours relating to sexual activities had an alpha coefficient of 0.82 and a Guttman split 0.71. The subscale that measured delinquent behaviours relating to the family had an alpha coefficient of 0.89 and Guttman split half of 0.78.

Permission was sought to carry out the research with these adolescents from the heads of the schools and the organizations. Questionnaires were administered to the adolescents through the help of the guidance counsellors in the selected secondary schools. For adolescent street children, the researchers sought the permission of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) chairman of the selected motor garages to use the adolescents in their garages for the research. The researchers were able to administer questionnaires to the adolescent street children through the assistance of two research assistants. Those who could not read very well were assisted by the researchers and their assistants to fill the questionnaire. The questionnaire administration exercises lasted for a duration of six weeks. After this period the

questionnaires were sorted, coded and taken for analysis on the SPSS. Frequencies and percentages were used to analyse the demographic section of the questionnaire. The stated hypotheses were tested using the person-product moment correlation statistics at the 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are presented in six tables. Tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 show the findings on the objectives of the paper on the impact of perceived youth gang and peer imitation on adolescent delinquent behaviour. Table 1 shows that 41 (22.7%) respondents indicated that their peers did not smoke while 140 (92.3%) respondents stated that their peer's smoke. One hundred and sixty-five (91.5%) respondents reported that their siblings smoke while 16 (8.8%) respondents indicated that their siblings did not smoke. The implication of this is that majority of the respondent learnt delinquent acts from their peers and siblings who were already delinquent.

Table 1: Whether adolescents have peer smokers

<i>Peers smoking</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
No	41	22.7
Yes	140	77.3
Total	181	100.0

Table 2 indicates that the majority of the adolescents (91.25%) have a sibling who smokes while only 8.8% do not have a sibling who smokes. This suggests that a delinquent act of smoking is usually imbibed among adolescents through delinquent siblings.

Table 2: Whether adolescents' siblings smoke

<i>Siblings smoking</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
No	16	8.8
Yes	165	91.2
Total	181	100.0

Table 3 reveals that the majority of the adolescents, 87.35 percent associated with peers who were themselves drug users. Only 12.7 percent did not associate with peers who were drug users. The resultant effect of this is that many adolescents are introduced to drugs by their peers who are drug users.

Table 3: Whether adolescents with peers are drug users

<i>Peers drug use</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
No	23	12.7
Yes	158	87.3
Total	181	100.0

Table 4 also shows that the majority of the adolescents, that is 96.1 percent had siblings who were drug users while only 3.9 percent of the adolescents had no sibling who was engaged in drug abuse. The implication of this is that adolescents with delinquent siblings can learn delinquent acts from their delinquent siblings.

Table 4: Whether adolescents' siblings are engaged in drug use

<i>Siblings smoking</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
No	7	3.9
Yes	174	96.1
Total	181	100.0

Table 5 reveals that the majority of the adolescents (69.1%) in the study were gang members while 30.9 percent were not gang members. This also buttresses the point that gang membership is an avenue where delinquent acts could be learnt by adolescents. This finding is upheld by Brown (2012) who stated that membership of a gang leads to increased exposure to anti-social behaviour, a weakening social bonds and drug abuse behaviour while quitting membership leads to the reduction of this behaviour. These findings are supported by Lawing et al (2010) that asserted that several other factors that are related to adolescent delinquent behaviour include parental and family factors, peer influences, gender differences, socioeconomic factors and youth gang.

Table 5: Whether adolescents are gang members

<i>Gang membership</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	125	69.1
No	56	30.9
Total	181	100.0

These findings are further supported by Westenberg (2009) who maintained that youth see themselves as making a rational choice in deciding to join a gang and they see personal advantages to gang membership. Puzzanchera (2008) further stated that for some youths, gangs provide a way of solving social adjustment problems, particularly the trials and tribulations of adolescence. In some communities; youth is intensively recruited or coerced into gangs. They seemingly have no choice. A few are virtually born into gangs as a result of neighbourhood traditions and their parents earlier and perhaps continuing gang participation or involvement in criminal activity (Dahl 2008).

Table 6 shows the result of the independent variable of the youth gangs correlation coefficient ($r(181) = 0.18, p < 0.01$) which shows that adolescent delinquency increases as youth gangs increases. This means that as adolescents form an attachment with gangs the more they become delinquent. Peer imitation was also found to be significant, ($r(181) = 0.34, p < 0.05$). This shows that as peer imitation increases, so too does delinquent behaviour increases. This means that the more adolescents imitate their friends' behaviour the more they are delinquent in behaviour. Peers form part of the institute of socialization with children and this can be established as the basis for delinquent behaviour of adolescent. However, this depends on the type of behaviour they are imitating from their peers and also the type of gangs they found themselves in. Furthermore, the results reveal that leadership in the gangs ($r(181) = 0.26$,

Table 6: Descriptive statistics and summary of Pearson correlation analysis showing the relationship between juvenile delinquency, peer imitation and youth gang membership

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>
Delinquency	10.18	3.35	181	1	.18**	.34**	.26**	.49**	.17**
Peer imitation	9.16	.390	181		1	.49**	.27**	.26**	.13**
Youth gang membership	3.49	.43	181			1	.42**	.21**	.19**
Leadership role in the gang	1.16	.36	181				1	.28**	.34**
Peer rating of popularity	1.64	.48	181					1	.26**
Change of gang affiliations	1.23	.47	181						1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01level(2-tailed).

$p < 0.05$), peer rating on popularity ($r(181) = 0.49$, $p < 0.05$), and change in gang affiliations ($r(181) = 0.17$, $p < 0.05$) were all significant correlates of adolescent delinquency. These findings give credence to the network perspective and the contemporary socio-cultural models of delinquency. Through reconnecting adolescents to the structures of relationships in which they are embedded deepens understanding of the delinquency-peer association. This finding is supported by Collins and Laursen's (2004) findings that the influence of delinquent peers on late-onset antisocial behaviour appears to be quite strong. Association with antisocial peers has been shown to be related to the later emergence of new antisocial behaviour during adolescence among youths who had not exhibited behaviour problems as children. Therefore, less adult supervision allows youths to spend more time with delinquent peers. Furthermore, Burt and Klump (2013) are in agreement with the findings of this study when they asserted that many youths see themselves as making a rational choice in deciding to join a gang. They see personal advantages to gang membership.

Social, economic and cultural forces push many adolescents in the direction of gangs and perceived general well-being is a key factor. Also, Lawing et al. (2010) are in agreement with the findings of this study. They stated that the status of minority youth serves to push them into gangs, for example, feeling of being marginalized make adolescents join gangs for social relationships that give them a sense of identity. For some youth, gangs provide a way of solving social adjustment problems, particularly the trials and tribulations of adolescence. Effective monitoring of adolescents with a parent is very crucial in preventing delinquent behaviours. Adolescents who are not closely monitored are likely to join gangs through which they can become delinquents. More importantly, adolescents emanating from social, economic and cultural forces within the society have the potential of forcing juveniles into delinquent acts. Many adolescents from low socioeconomic background, disrupted homes and those from violent community are more vulnerable to anti-social behaviours. This is because they are likely to turn to peers for love, affection and support they have been denied by their family and community. To determine the relationship between youth gang, peer imitation and delinquent be-

haviour, Table 6 shows the different relationships between peer imitation, youth gang membership, leadership role in the gang, peer rating of popularity and adolescent delinquent behaviour.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis of the data, it can be seen that the various independent variables tested (youth gangs and peer imitation) were found to be significantly correlated to delinquency among adolescents. Also, the study has demonstrated that the nature and pattern of adolescent peer network play a significant role in their delinquency behaviour. The study also revealed that adolescent delinquency increases in relation to youth gangs increase. The peer networks appear to reinforce the delinquency through psychology reward (according respect) and negative reinforcement (names calling and rejection). This is because the attached form by the adolescents with their gangs is an important factor that influences delinquent behaviour of adolescents. The analysis further shows that the greater the amount of imitation of certain behaviour from their peers, the more delinquent the adolescent is. This is because peer as an institution of socialization is capable of exposing the adolescent (who want to associate him/herself with peers) to delinquent imitations. This result has implication for the parents to be wary of associates and peers that their children associate with. Asserting the conceptualization of Sutherland frequency of exposure to delinquent peers may reinforce the delinquent behaviour among adolescents. Parents have the responsibility of monitoring their children to ensure that their children belong to the right group that can influence them positively and to teach their children the danger of keeping away from bad company.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The core recommendation that emerges from the findings of this investigation is the need to embark on re-integration of affected adolescents into the community/society anew. It was only in the past century and in the post-industrial societies that post pubertal young people have not been assigned meaningful, contributory social roles. In agrarian societies, their strength and energy was a valued asset. For those youth, their contribution was a source of self-worth and

identity as a valued member of a valued group. Community service can play a major role in giving modern youth a valued role. When community service is linked to schools as service learning, it can also serve a range of academic goals. Supervised community service provides adolescents with supportive and non-parental mentors. Furthermore, research should be carried out to ascertain the causal effect and possible mediational role of peer friendship networks in adolescent delinquent behaviour.

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