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**Family Dysfunction, Parental Role Abdication and High Rate of Kidnapping among Young People in Enugu State, Nigeria. (Psychological Implications)**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The family is one of the most fundamental social unit of the society. It consists of group of individuals united by blood, marriage, adoption and other intimate ties. Being regarded as the foundation of every human being, any form of negative treatment, abnormality and confusion emanating from it poses a great threat and catastrophe to the young people and society at large. Therefore, this study sought to investigate family dysfunction, role abdication and high rate of kidnapping in Enugu State, Nigeria. Two purpose of study and hypotheses guided the study accordingly. The study was delimited to Enugu South local government area of Enugu State. Correlational survey design was used as well as a sample study of 300 young people purposively selected using accidental sampling. The instrument was researcher structured questionnaire adapted from The Questionnaire of Family Functioning (2008) and Dyadic Parent-Adolescent-Role confusion scale (DPARCS, 2018) face validated by three experts from Educational Psychology, Sociology and Measurement and Evaluation from Enugu State University of Science and Technology. Reliability co-efficient of 0.76 was determined using Cronbach Alpha. Data was collected with the help of two research assistant and hypotheses analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. Based on the findings, it was recommended amongst others, that families should rise up to its foundational task of unconditional love as well as assumption of its responsibilities to family members in order to groom youths that are well equipped emotionally and psychologically.*

**KEYWORDS:** family dysfunction, parental role abdication, kidnapping, young people, psychology.

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## INTRODUCTION

Young people constitute a huge force in any society such that when their energies are properly harnessed and controlled can lead to greater national success, development and stability. However when such energies are not properly discipline and harnessed by the family especially parents during childhood, can result to different degrees of crises, restiveness, catastrophe and crimes such as terrorism, kidnapping, banditry, insurgency, armed robbery, cultism among others. Globally, “youth and crime” has been a global mantra on the lips of many nation. This has been prevalent too considering world technological innovations. This is because young people in any given society comprises social, political and economic force which are made up of larger portions of the productive population. They are carriers of the culture, custodians of national honour, trustees of national freedom, treasure of national and human resources with lots of talents in them; if tapped and harnessed in the right direction would be beneficial to the nation (Nwogwugwu & Irechukwu, 2015). One of the most critical problem confronting Enugu State and Nigeria in general is kidnapping. This is because it affects the realization of national and state objectives and goals. Moreover kidnapping has always been on the front burner of national and state discourse as young people channeled their energy, skill and aspiration into this crime in order to make it big, become wealthy and celebrated in the society. Thus is made so prevalent as a result of family dysfunction and role abdication by parents.

The family is the first foundation upon which an individual’s development and behaviour depends on. It determines to some extent, the kind of life a member will have. This is because every family also is unique in the way her members interact. While some families provide her members with love, affection and a safe environment, others main dynamics are unhelpful and negatively affect the personality of her members. There are variability on how interaction and behaviours occur within homes and these patterns of interaction form the core of the family dynamics (Harkonen, 2017). This is because each family have a unique set of dynamic that affect the way each member thinks and relates to themselves, others and the world around them. Several factors including nature of parent’s relationship, personality of family members, events like death, culture, belief about gender role and ethnicity amongst others influences these dynamics (Shaw, 2014). Moreover, for young people families constitute their entire reality because they see their parents and guardians as god-like without which they feel unloved, unprotected, unfed and unhoused. With these notions, they are forced to accommodate chaotic, unstable and unhealthy behaviours of their parents as normal way of life (Nelson, 2019). This is because at infancy through adolescence, young people lack sophistication to understand and verbalized their experiences. Some even accept responsibilities for violence in order to fit in into their reality as well as growing with such unchallenged beliefs into adulthood. These beliefs sometimes are funded by cultural and religious connotation that parents should be obeyed at all times. These family belief also become societal belief which goes on to become toxic behaviours in the society like kidnapping and other crimes.

These beliefs are also communicated in spoken and unspoken ways directly or disguised as words of advice hence contributing to dysfunctionality in the family.

Family dysfunction is a major concern of every society because the foundation of every home is a determinant factor in the development of an individual. Family dysfunction can be defined as any condition which interferes with healthy family functioning (Nelson, 2019). It is a type of family functioning impaired by stressful and chronic circumstances characterized by negative pattern of parental behaviour. This is the opposite of healthy family where emotional expression is allowed, rules made and accepted, attention freely asked for and given, rules explicitly made and consistent and flexible in adaptation to individual needs and situations. Meanwhile, a family is a place where individuals are consistently treated with respect, do not fear emotional, verbal, physical or sexual abuse. In the family, parents are counted to provide care for the children while children are given responsibilities appropriate to their age and not expected to take on parental responsibilities. Furthermore, the family is considered to be the major factor of a child's personality development as well as the main institutions of education and upbringing. Hence, a child follows the behaviour models set up by his/her family members, shares their view and interest which contribute to the formation of his/her moral-psychological qualities. According to Ryhor (2019), the family value system functions on the basis of the development and broadening of a child's outlook. Therefore there are practically no social or psychological aspect of a person's behaviour that are not based on one's family traditions and lifestyles either in the past or present Ryhor further posited. Thus, in a dysfunctional family, parents are either under-functioning leaving their children to fend for themselves or over-functioning never allowing their children to grow up and be on their own. Thus according to Minullina (2018), the characteristics of a dysfunctional family include but not limited to unharmonious parenting styles, indulging and ignoring a child's need, conflict, hostility, lack of empathy, addiction, lack of communication, mental issues, controlling behaviour, criticism and violence amongst others. He further posited the following types of dysfunction in families. They are:

- ◆ Deficient family: Here families hurt each other by omission than by commission. Children take on adult responsibilities from a young age with parental emotional needs taking precedence. Young people in this kind of family act as caretakers of their parents hence getting robbed of their childhood and adolescence.
- ◆ Controlling family: Unlike the deficient families, controlling families allow their young ones to assume responsibilities appropriate for their age. However, this kind of family always makes excuses for the behaviours of their family members by dominating them as well as making decisions for them. Parents in this family are driven by fear of becoming less important in their children's lives. Hence young people who grow up in this kind of family have difficulties making decisions independent of their parents and peers including committing crimes like kidnapping in order to help lift the financial burden of the family.

◆ **Alcoholic family:** This kind of family is chaotic and unpredictable with non-existing rules. Emotional expressions are forbidden here as well as discussion about the alcohol use or related family problems. This is because family members are expected to keep the problem a secret thus preventing family members from seeking help. Therefore everyone behaves the way they like.

◆ **Abusive family:** This family is characterized by frequent belittling, criticism, domestic violence, and sexual abuse thus making family members to grow with the feeling of self-loathing, shame and worthlessness. In order to develop self-worth, some of her young one's are easily deceived in committing crime in order to escape the frustration and psychological trauma arising from the family.

Furthermore, family dysfunction can be caused by family finance which occurs when a family is in huge financial crisis or extreme poverty which puts extra pressure on the mental health of the family adults thereby causing toxic stress which leads to dysfunctional behaviour within the family. Financial pressure also gets parents anxious thus leading to cracks in the family structure thereby leading to fights and disharmony (Nelson, 2019). Family dysfunction can also be caused by overly religious belief with no room for conversation, debate or explanation leading to parents enforcing same set of belief on their children. Another causes of family dysfunction can be as a result of a long chronic illness and mental instability where stress associated with taking care of sick loved ones puts undue pressure on loved ones hence sometimes takes up the parental roles of the family including putting food on the table. Therefore young people resort to legitimate and illegitimate and quick means of livelihood in order to make ends means including kidnapping.

Abdication is simple the act of giving up one's right to another person. Parental role abdication is a culture-immersed phenomenon with some of its antecedent, outlook, perception and measurement varying across culture (APA, 2014). Therefore, parental role abdication popularly known as parentification is a deviation in the parent-child relationship such that a parent looks up to a child or younger member of the family in order to meet the parent's physical, financial, psychological and emotional needs hence relinquishes parental role in exchange for these care, intimacy or support from the child. It also means that children and younger people are placed in the role of serving as primary caregiving in the family. Hence younger persons engage in various responsibilities and role towards some or all family members. Sometimes, the young man/woman is the one who initiates this process in order to gain closeness to the parent who is preoccupied by his or her own needs (Zvara and MacFie, 2018). Parental role abdication also refers to a variety of ways in which a young individual is pressured to assume functions in the relationship usually assumed by the parents (Lauriane, Coardy, Elisabeth, Jeremy, Nahum and Karlen, 2016). This shift in responsibility occurs as a result of parental difficulties in carrying out appropriate parental tasks may be as a result of physical and mental illness, emotional abuse, physical violence and sick societal value. Although there not much focus and literature on parental role abdication in Enugu State due to her cultural belief to the best of the researchers' knowledge, there are evidence that it affects child development into adulthood. This evidence is seen during the transition process between infancy through early adulthood when availability and support are more important for

child-parent attachment than proximity. Thus when children transits to adolescence and early adulthood, they navigate new relationship through flexible emotional regulation in order to form healthy relationship with peer and teachers since most are in formal schools already. However, failure to negotiate these series of inter-dependent tasks leads to psychopathology and unsuccessful adaptation (Bridget, Burt, Edwards and Deater-Deckard, 2015). These are evident in the number of street corporate beggars made up of young people who ordinarily should be engaged in one skill or the other. Furthermore, the fact that parental role abdication is embedded in culture, it has both positive and negative connotations on development and well-being of young people. While some school of taught argue that it aids risky behaviours associated with crime with the popular phrase “the idle mind is the devils workshop”, others feel constructive abdication may help young people learn efficient task managing both at school and home (Burton, Hooper, Tomek, Cauley, Washington and Possel, 2018). In cases of abdication by parents, parents may also look up to and depend on their offspring to meet caregiving, social; or romantic needs in a manner that deviates from typical parent-child role. Consequently, the young individual may try to meet the needs of the parent by attempting to fill the adult role. Parental role abdication is often differentiated by the type of care-giving activities being performed as well as to whom the role is directed. The different types of parental role abdication are:

◆ Instrumental Abdication-where younger members of the family perform parent-like household duties like raising their siblings, earning money for the family legitimately like in hawking, begging as well as illegally like in kidnapping as well as acting as informants for kidnappers in order to fulfil financial burden of the family (Schier, 2014). These roles they see as part of family loyalty while the parents appear dependent on their physical presence and attention in order to maintain their well-being as well as provide comfort and reassurance. In this type of parental-role abdication, parents cajole younger members of the family into taking care of the family through any means as they believe the young owe them that duty.

◆ Emotional Abdication-where younger members of the family fulfil the emotional and social needs of their parents and guardians. Under this type of role, young people act as confidants, comforters and mediators. According to Schier, (2014), emotional abdication may be more destructive and severe than instrumental abdication. This is because it is less explicit, overt and harder to detect because the individual is highly attuned to the parent’s psychological and physical well-being hence acts as a secure base as well as the decision-maker of the domestic unit for developmentally inappropriate concerns like discipline and parenting of siblings and financial duties amongst others. Thus young members of the family resort to different illegal behaviour and crime since the parents have abdicated their powers to them therefore they are answerable to nobody.

Kidnapping is an act of seizing, taking away and keeping a person in custody either by force or fraud in order to collect a ransom in return. According to Inyang and Abraham (2013), kidnapping is an organized robbery which is becoming more deadly, more profitable than armed robbery. This profitability has resulted in recent times its prevalence even with death penalty as its punishment.



Out of frustration from the fact that most families are dysfunctional as well as abdicating their roles to the younger ones as well as mounting of responsibilities to tackle many issues in the family, many young persons have deviated into criminal activities of which kidnapping is not an exemption. This issue is further compounded by the fact that unemployment in the state is at its peak with a lot of young people seeking for legitimate means of livelihood. Moral decadence as a result of dysfunction in the family, parental role abdication, drug abuse as well as the quest to get rich quick syndrome are some of the causes of kidnapping in the state. Criminal data on Enugu state from 2018-2021 showed clearly that young citizens of the state constitute 70% masterminds of kidnapping in the state. This is because the family has over time in disfunctionality advocated the quick wealth syndrome in her members hence abdicated her roles of discipline as well as unconditional love for “*a spoon of porridge*”. Parents pressure the young ones into living a life they wanted but couldn’t have hence the level of criminality in the state.

### **Family dysfunction, Parental role abdication and theory of Structural Family Theory**

Structural family therapy (SFT) is a method of psychotherapy developed by Salvador Munchin in 1974 which addresses problems in functioning within a family. According to this theory, family structure refers to how members of the family relate to one another and the outside world, what activities each member engage in and how the role each member plays in the context of family are related to the impact of outside system. Here power within a family is defined as the level of influence that each family member has on family function and decision-making. Ideally, family power is organized within a generational hierarchy in which parents and other adult with primary responsibility for taking care of the home share the most power both in family decision and establishment of rules matched according to respective ages. This is done in order to afford maximum opportunities for success and development of positive self-esteem. In carrying out task, parents coordinate and share their authority as well as time, energy and influence in order to provide effective leadership are well clear and defined within and outside the family.

From a structural perspective, a dysfunctional family exist when parents fail in their leadership responsibility in a family thereby exposing their younger members to various societal ills and crimes like kidnapping. This disfunctionality also fosters parental role abdication where younger members of the family assumes responsibilities meant for adults of the family. Thus with no proper discipline and guidance on proper navigation of life, the younger members of the family venture into different ways of salvaging family issues including crimes and criminal behaviours like kidnapping. Since such parental roles has been abdicated to younger members of the society, such parents do not have the moral obligation to question certain wealth brought into their families rather chooses to turn a blind eye to the issue while enjoying the riches.

### **Psychological Implications**

The idea of perfect parenting and family is a misconception. This is because parents and family members are human with flaws. Therefore it is normal to deal with occasional outburst, crisis and breakdown of rules. What is important is that there is unconditional love and understanding in

order to solve issues as they arise. This helps family members navigate physical, emotional and social difficulties from childhood to adulthood (Shaw, 2014). However, a dysfunctional family whose parental roles are abdicated brings about the opposite thereby creating chaos, indiscipline, irresponsibility as well as undue pressure to fit in into adult shoes. These issues can also trigger psychological stress on the young individual into seeking pleasure in societal ills like drug and other criminal behaviour. In order to prove their loyalty to family members, can as well resort to quick wealth by joining various kidnapping syndicate in order to gain through ransom paid from kidnapping. Having relinquished their responsibilities to immature younger members of the family who lack insight and discipline to control their adrenaline surge or give a second thought to consequences of their behaviour venture into criminality like kidnapping solely for the momentary gain of quick cash. This is partly because an individual who grew up in a dysfunctional family dynamic to form healthy boundaries. Furthermore, the burden of family dysfunction and parental role abdication on a young person is that the parent ceases to act a regulator of the family system (Hooper, 2017). Thus younger members of the family are forced to manage, regulate and stabilize the family system thereby robbing them of the ability to focus on and use their resources for their development. Younger members of the society who grew up in a dysfunctional family as well as one whose parent abdicated its role are more likely to become withdrawn, isolated, abuse alcohol and sex, develop negative and criminal behaviours, develop disorders, depressed and anxiety amongst others. Parental role abdication can also bring about trauma, negative self-esteem and anger. These negative energies are hence channeled to negative behaviours and criminality like drug abuse, prostitution, armed robbery and kidnapping amongst others. Therefore, parents who are around but not around as well as toxic families triggers heightened prevalence of kidnapping in the Enugu State.

### **Purpose of the study**

The specific objectives of the study were:

- a. To determine the relationship between family dysfunction and high rate of kidnapping among young people in Enugu State
- b. To determine the relationship between parental role abdication and high rate of kidnapping in Enugu State

### **Research Hypothesis**

The following hypothesis guided the study at  $P < 0.05$

$H_{01}$ : There is no significant relationship between family dysfunction and high rate of kidnapping among young people in Enugu State at alpha level of 0.05.

$H_{02}$ : There is no significant relationship between parental role abdication and high rate of kidnapping among young people in Enugu State at alpha level of 0.05.

## METHODS OF RESEARCH

The study design was correlational. Nworgu (2015) noted that this type of design seeks to establish what relationship exist between two or more variables. The study was delimited geographically to Enugu South local government area with a sample study of 300 young individuals with the age range of 17-20 years purposively drawn by accidental sampling from the church and market place in the area of study. The instrument was researcher structured questionnaire titled “family dysfunction, parental role abdication and high rate of kidnapping in Enugu State (FDPRAK)) adopted from The Questionnaire of Family Functioning (2008) and Dyadic Parent-Adolescent-Role confusion scale (DPARCS, 2018) face validated by three experts from Educational Psychology, Sociology and Measurement and Evaluation from Enugu State University of Science and Technology. Reliability co-efficient of 0.76 was determined using Cronbach Alpha. Data was collected with the help of two research assistants and hypotheses analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

## RESULTS

**H01:** There is no significant relationship between family dysfunction and high rate of kidnapping among young people in Enugu State at the alpha level of 0.05.

**Table 1:** Pearson Product Moment Correlation on relationship between family dysfunction and high rate of kidnapping in Enugu State.

Variables	X	SD	$\sum x$ $\sum y$	$\sum x^2$ $\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	r-cal	r-crit
Family dysfunction	2.33	1.53	23.30	58.77	70.42	0.1975	0.1045
High rate of kidnapping	3.01	1.73	30.07	91.15			

Data on table 1 shows the relationship between family dysfunction and high rate of kidnapping. The r-cal (.0.19) is greater than r-crit (.10) at 0.05 level of significance indicating a significant linear correlation the two variable. This reveals that there is a significant relationship between family dysfunction and high rate of kidnapping among young people in Enugu State.

**H02:** There is no significant relationship between parental role abdication and high rate of kidnapping among young people in Enugu State at alpha level of 0.05.



**Table 2:** Pearson product moment correlation on relationship between parental role abdication and high rate of kidnapping in Enugu State.

Variables	X	SD	$\sum x$ $\sum Y$	$\sum x^2$ $\sum Y^2$	$\sum xy$	r-cal	r-crit
Parental role abdication	2.09	1.48	20.99	47.47	63.80	0.4336	0.1045
High rate of kidnapping	3.01	1.73	30.07	91.15			

Data on Table 2 shows the relationship between parental role abdication and high rate of kidnapping. With the r-cal (.43) greater than the r-crit (.10) indicating a significant linear correlation between the two variables among young people in Enugu State.

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result from table 1 shows that there is a significant relationship between family dysfunction and high rate of kidnapping hence the acceptance of the alternate hypothesis. This view is supported by Ryhor (2019) who opined that young people are sometimes exposed to criminality and other vices as a result of family dysfunction hence physically and emotionally addled with the responsibilities of taking care of the family themselves. Result from table 2 reflected a significant relationship between parental role abdication and high rate of kidnapping in Enugu State. The result is consistent with Schier (2014) who maintained that in the absence of any meaningful direction and guidance from parents, the young are under pressure to take over the family responsibility including financial aspect hence engages in a lot of illegal and criminal behaviour in order to make to sustain the family.

### CONCLUSION

The level of criminality amongst young people in the state especially kidnapping has led to a lot of questions and analysis. This is because no society develop when its young are involved in different criminal behaviour likewise Enugu State. Kidnapping is becoming more prevalent in the state with a lot of citizen living in fear of becoming the next victim. Meanwhile the young people are already facing teeming pressure from unemployment, underemployment, bad leadership and corruptions of different kind pushing them to different level of criminality. Therefore, family dysfunction and parental role abdication also makes the already bad situation worrisome and frightening hence the increase in crime like kidnapping in the state. Furthermore, for this situation to be salvaged, families especially parents and guardians must sit up and take back their foundational role of taking care of family members in order to minimize the level of frustration pushing young people into criminal behaviours like kidnapping. Government should also create enabling environment for citizens to live and thrive as well as good leadership in order to salvage

economic situations of the state. Government should also enact laws for the protection of the young and vulnerable as well as punishing offenders. Orientations should be given to young people in the church and organizations on the consequences of allowing themselves as guinea pigs by their families and parents.

### Recommendations

Following the findings of the study, these recommendations are made:

1. Family laws in the state must be strictly adhered with welfare branch of the ministry of women and youth in charge
2. Social welfare scheme should be initiated by the government to mentor the young people of the society on rules and policies governing human behaviour
3. Parents and families should be given orientation at intervals on the right parenting method and family functioning
4. Psychological therapy should be advocated especially for families that are not doing so well in taking care of her members.
5. Parental abdication and other forms of abuse must be punished strictly according to the law in order to serve as deterrent to others.

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