

**Familism and Crime in Nigeria: Exploring Family Conduct and  
Implication on Expanding New Spaces of Crime in Akwa Ibom State**  
By

**Aniekan S. Brown**

**And**

**Uduot Akpan**

Department of Sociology & Anthropology,  
University of Uyo - Nigeria

E-mail: [brown.aniekan@yahoo.com](mailto:brown.aniekan@yahoo.com)

**Abstract**

The study investigates the influence of the family on crime in Nigeria, and emphasizes how conformance/non-conformance to family values have induced an expansion on the spaces of crime. Focusing on the Ibibio people of South-South Nigeria, this qualitative survey study adopts the socio-structural explanation of crime. Relying on simple percentage for data analysis, emerging data reveal the notion that familism emphasizes loyalty, trust, integrity, unity, progress and defence of family values. It notes that the changing societal attitudes to family values have led to the emergence of new spaces of crime. The paper concludes that police deployment, the resort to self-help and enforcement of conformity reactionary to the emerging crime problem have induced the emergence of new frontiers of anti-social activities which are not explicitly mainstreamed within extant crime management realities. It recommends the imperativeness of proper evolution of the criminal justice system for coping with the emerging trends.

**Introduction**

The idea of familism has evolved to capture the relative position of family values and responsibilities within the context of our rapidly changing society. Familism as a cultural value emphasizes the importance of family in moderating behaviors, expectations as well as cultivating and coordinating mutual emotional, psychological, social and related support among members (Roblyer and Zambrano 2017). In simple term, familism has to do with the behavioral aspect of inculcating loyalty and cooperative ties with close relatives and kinship network.

Studying college life among Latino communities in the United States, Desmond and Turley (2009) saw familism as a social pattern in which individual interests, decisions and actions are subordinated to a wider network of relatives, whose collective interest takes priority over the individual, resonates across family experiences in both developed and developing contexts. Though cultural contexts may introduce slight differences in experiences, the central manifestation of

## ***Familism and Crime in Nigeria by Brown and Akpan***

familism as a value can be understood from the dimensions documented in Steidel and Contreras (2003), and Valenzuela and Dombusch (1994). Basically, focus is on three core unitary perspectives as advanced by Desmond and Turley (2009 P. 314) to include :

- 1) the attitudinal, expressed in dispositions, values, and beliefs that prioritize the welfare of the family;
- 2) the behavioral, expressed in everyday actions, or major decisions, informed by one's attachment to family ties;
- and 3) the structural expressed in the spatial architecture of family networks.

In Nigeria, the influence of religion and family as social institutions occupy primary posts. The late 1980s witnessed the idea of familism clearly conceptualized on the basis of three important factors (Stein et al 2014) namely, familial obligations (obligation to provide material and emotional support), perceived support from the family (the extent to which family members are reliable sources of support), and family as referents (the use of relatives as behavioral and attitudinal referents). As comprehensive as this broad conceptualization seems, Steidel and Contreras (2003) however observed that past conceptualizations had failed to incorporate important aspects of familism including protecting the family name, family reciprocity and interconnectedness, and the subjugation of self for the family.

Familism as a value has contributed to shaping the course of social development and the sustenance of societal order and stability. Sommers et.al (1994) in a study of the influence of acculturation and familism on Puerto Rican delinquency observed that 'individuals' expressed concern with family values rather than individual opportunities has crucial effects on the avoidance of deviance through family attachment, school commitment, and belief.' Values associated with upholding family name and integrity as well as subjugating self-interest for the broader family interest have been central to experiences of family behaviours in sub-Saharan Africa. Studies have noted significant country differences in attitude to families, mostly attributed to socio-economic development, democratic stability and cultural tradition (Gundelach and Riis, 1994; Inglehart, 1998). Some societies have variously experienced profound changes in family values in areas as diverse as 'relationship between marriage and reproduction', 'a family's ideal sizes', 'preference for children's gender', 'women's work', 'extra-marital relationship'. These changes have had significant impacts on the society in terms of social, economic, moral and related processes. Although these processes are critical to social ordering and stability, researchers hardly turn their searchlight on them. Importantly, studies on the impact of familism on social order and stability mostly originate from the industrial western countries, and a survey of literature rarely produce any systematic research on this issue from the sub-Saharan African perspective. A study that focuses on the relationship between family values and social crime from the perspective of sub-Saharan Africa will significantly contribute to the growing body of literature from industrialized realm to strengthen some theoretical speculations on this issue. The paper aims to address

this knowledge gap by looking at the sociological importance of attitudes to the family in respect and their impact on crime in Akwa Ibom State.

### **The Ibibio People and the Family system**

The Ibibio people presently occupy the geographical area of Nigeria's Akwa Ibom State (south-south region) and comprises of three major ethnic groups namely: Ibibio, Annang and Oron. Udo (1983, p. 84) suggests the Annangs constitute the sub-tribe of Ibibio. On an ethnic note as contended by Noah (1980), there is consensus among earlier scholars that the Annangs, and other seaborne people of

Oron, Eket, and Ibeno are branches of the Ibibio people. Though urbanization is on the increase, about 80% of the population is estimated to live in rural areas, practicing subsistent and small-scale farming and gathering, trading, artisanal activities, fishing, domestication of animals, sewing, electronic repairs and other and other small-scale production and services to sustain livelihoods and cater for the wellbeing of families. The Ibibios are deeply religious with over 90% Christian faithfuls, with some inclinations to syncretic behaviors given the tendency to draw on diverse forms of spiritual and religious sources for medical reasons (Akpabio 2006, 2012). The Ibibio social and cultural institutions are still linked with patriarchal hegemony characterized by high incident of gender inequality, where men are relatively privileged and largely in control of socio-economic, political and governance affairs in the family and the society at large (Izugbara 2004).

The Ibibio people subscribe to an extended family structure made up of a man, his wife or wives and children living under a common roof and several other network of relations including the grandparents, in-laws and chains of siblings. As a social institution, Ekong (2003, p.168) observes that the family

“...involves a) a set of common procedures-courtship, betrothal or engagement, wedding, honeymoon; b) a common set of values and norms, e.g., incest taboo which prohibits sexual intercourse with blood relations thereby necessitating marriage outside the immediate family (exogamy), love between husband and wife in a manner different from that which is expected between brother and sister and rules on descent, residence and authority; c) a network of statuses and roles or social relationships, e.g., husband who provides for and protects the family and also satisfies wife's sexual needs; wife, who bears children, provides love, socializes the children and gratifies husband's sexual needs; children, who uphold family identity and perpetuate family name; relatives, who provide affection and mutual support.”

Marriage is the basis upon which a family is built (Ekong, 2001). In Ibibio land, family ties are very strong, to the extent that an unmarried mother and her child

## ***Familism and Crime in Nigeria by Brown and Akpan***

cannot be rightly classified as a family. The Ibibio people generally subscribe to a patriarchal family structure, in which the substantial aspects of the family authority are vested in the man (father). According to Ekong (2003), such a situation may take the form of the husband in the immediate nuclear family exercising authority or the authority being vested in the eldest male in the extended family. The family in Ibibio land remains a socially acceptable unit within which sexual activities and parental drives are legitimized. This shows the normative mien of the people regarding the family.

Traditionally, the Ibibio people's perspectives on family emphasize loyalty, interpersonal trust and cooperative attitudes within the family group. Family values are very strong among the Ibibio people that certain behaviors of members are considered taboos, while others are less tolerated and less acceptable to the family and society including extra-marital relationship, homosexuality, prostitution, abortion, divorce, single parenthood, among several others. These and related behaviors, though oppressive, have contributed to the expansion of the bounds of crime.

### **Theory and Method**

The theoretical drift here is the social structural explanation of crime. It borders on the statuses, roles, and institutions, as well as the pattern of social organization and the interrelationship between and amongst persons and institutions (Schmallegger, 1999; Siegel, 2001; Hagan, 2002; Brown and Okorie, 2015). Put differently, Tepperman (2006) identifies career, community, and culture as key to understanding of the social structure. Emphasis here is placed on the family as a social institution which Ekong (2001 & 2003) view as a kinship group linked by blood and marriage, and occupying a common household. In other words, it is a social group with members interacting and influencing the behaviors of each other in an intimate manner.

In terms of functions, the family grants life, imparts social identity or reference, provides support and sustenance as well as socialization for members. It also imparts values and norms, grants socio-economic inheritance, and serves as the basic group in the society. The symbolism, values and relative social standing of the family, to a large extent, reflect on the individual members, and are crucial to reinforcing class positions and status boundaries. Families generally credited with positive social standing invest in efforts and resources to sustain and reproduce such favorable status over generations. Within this context, we contend that the boundaries of what constitute crime in a society is shaped by prevailing social and moral attitudes and behaviors reflective of the general notion of what appropriate or inappropriate family norms should be.

Methodologically, this study was mostly qualitative-based, and drew on over three years (from February, 2015 to April, 2018) of formal and informal interactions and interviews, narratives, discourses, informant sources, and the review of empirical and secondary literature, to understand practical issues associated with individual

and collective behaviors and interests to live out family norms and values among the Ibibio people. Before the field work, the Center for Research and Development, University of Uyo provisionally approved the venture after input was received from three experts in social science research. In addition, the instrumentation of graduate students in the University who are also staff of the correctional institutions in the state facilitated the granting of consent by the authorities of the correctional institutions for the tracing of released inmates to the locality. This was upon the researchers' training of the facilitators and commitment to strict confidentiality.

A multi-stage sampling technique, including: cluster, purposive, and stratified methods; was used in raising the respondents that provided the raw data for this work. There were altogether seventeen visits to the facilities and recording materials were utilized. In addition, discharge data from the correctional institutions were relied upon to reach a few discharged inmates and their families. Also, faith-based organizations that invest on the evangelization of the correctional institutions were utilized in the bids to locate ex-convicts. The study also built on personal experiences and identities as Ibibios. Parents and siblings were purposively targeted.

We were particularly interested in what constitutes core family values to be protected and sustained as well as the consequences associated with a breach. The respondents were asked to name some and discuss possible consequences linked to a breach of any. Issues that were mentioned were not significantly different from the ones documented in the literature (Garzon, 2000) including prostitution, abortion, divorce, homosexuality, single parenthood, extra-marital affair, suicide, stealing, and incest, filial piety, respect, family support and obedience, among several others.

In over three years, we were able to interview 98 respondents (62 males and 36 females) mainly through a multi-stage process. While blaming the gender disparity on the patriarchal nature of the study area and the gender relations to crime, it should be noted that the interviewees came from different ethnic backgrounds in Ibibio land including Annang, Eket, Ibeno, Obolo, and the core Ibibio. Aside from seeking individual knowledge of what constitute family values, the study encouraged individual ranking of breaches that were considered highly offensive to the family image and integrity. This approach was useful for determining what behaviors were considered equivalent to committing crime against a family as well as the likely punishment expected. On the whole, confidentiality was assured.

On the average, an interview could last between 40 and 60 minutes. A substantial part of the interview was conducted in the last year of the project through trained field assistants. Two volunteer student field assistants, with substantial knowledge of the study communities, were trained on the modalities for such interview and other data collection processes. The student field assistants were used for recording field notes, and manual coding for purposes of identifying and

## ***Familism and Crime in Nigeria by Brown and Akpan***

highlighting themes, which were later cross-checked collectively. We reviewed one another's field notes from individual interviews and discussed our interpretations collaboratively. Additionally, our fieldwork activities at the Nigerian Prisons, Uyo, afforded us the opportunity of interacting with inmates whose crimes bordered on the breach of family values. Such interaction was highly supervised by the Prisons authorities who, at some points, raised questions on the quality of information obtained. To overcome this, we depended on informal sources through the services of the Prisons staff, who were vital and complementary sources of vital information to resolve and clarify some unanswered questions/issues. These informants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, the basis for which we were able to reconcile seemingly contradictory information as well as extract fairly reliable and sensitive information. Officials of the Nigeria Police and the Prisons were equally interviewed to understand appropriate basis and legal foundations for handling crimes associated with familism. Secondary sources of information came from academic articles and newspaper reports.

This kind of research depends on trust, and to succeed we had to build relatively long-term relationships with the interviewees, through the community structures (community leadership, youth, women, and the faith-based institutions) to the point we were able to secure the confidence of many. Ethically, the respondents were guaranteed high levels of anonymity, confidentiality, transparency and ability to withdraw from participation at any time. It is worth acknowledging that the perspectives of 98 respondents may not adequately reflect micro-scale details and contexts that characterize a relatively larger ethnic group as Ibibio. However, despite this and other limitations, this study offers important basis for further research in this field.

### **Findings**

The respondents were classified according to crucial socio-economic characteristics including age range, gender, marital status, education, occupation, ethnic background and income bracket. About 63% of the respondents were males while about 37% were females. This is not unconnected with the gender realities of crime in the area. By ethnic composition, most respondents were of Ibibio background (53.1 %), followed by the Annangs (30.6%) while respondents from Oron formed 16.3%. This is in line with the demographical realities of the area. Educational level was another important variable of significance to understanding the dynamics of familial views of the respondents. Most respondents had basic, no formal education, and school certificate level of education (amounting to 68.4 %). Only 19.4% had post-secondary education, while a relatively small number (6.1%) had studied up to postgraduate level (Table 1).

**Table 1. Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents**

Variables	Classification	No. of Respondents			Percentage
		Male	Female	Total	
	18-30	11	5	16	16.3%

	31-39	17	8	25	25.5%
	40-49	6	12	18	18.4%
	50-59	13	7	20	20.4%
	60 and above	15	4	19	19.4%
Ethnicity		No. of Respondent			Percentage
		Male	Female	Total	
	Ibibio	36	16	52	53.1%
	Annang	19	11	30	30.6%
	Oron	7	9	16	16.3%
Education		No. of Respondents			percentage
		Male	female	Total	
	No formal	3	15	18	18.4%
	FSLC	25	7	32	32.7%
	SSC	16	8	24	24.5%
	Post-secondary	9	3	12	12.2%
	undergraduate	5	1	6	6.1%
	Postgraduate	4	2	6	6.1%
Marital status		No. of respondents			percentage
		Male	Female	Total	
	Married	51	23	74	75.5%
	Single	6	7	13	13.3%
	Divorced	2	1	3	3.1%
	Widowed	3	4	7	7.1%
	Separated	0	1	1	1.0%
Occupation		No of respondents			percentage
		Male	Female	Total	
	Private business	8	17	25	25.5%
	Civil service	26	11	37	37.8%
	Unemployed	10	2	12	12.2%
	Student	13	6	19	19.4%
	Company worker	5	0	5	5.1%
Income bracket	(In Naira)	No. of Respondent			percentage
		Male	Female	Total	
	< 10,000	1	3	4	4.1%
	10,000-30,000	15	16	31	31.6%
	31,000-50,000	19	5	24	24.5%
	51,000-70,000	16	2	18	18.4%
	71,000-90,000	12	6	18	18.4%
	>91,000	2	1	3	3.1%

*N/B: FSLC- First School Leaving Certificate; SSC- Senior Secondary School Certificate*

## ***Familism and Crime in Nigeria by Brown and Akpan***

A sizeable number of the respondents (75.5%) were married while divorcees and separated recorded 3.1% and 1% respectively. The low number of divorcees and 'separated' indicate the majority of the respondents are still much attached to traditional family values. As argued by one female respondent, 'marriage is one of the core basis of a family...it is sacred and divorce is religiously out of the point...it is for better for worse...and one who divorces still carries the stigma of irresponsibility...'. Most of the respondents were of relatively low-income category (the highest of 31.6% were on a monthly income of between 10,000 Naira and 30,000 Naira; and 24.5% fell between the income range of 31,000 Naira and 50,000 Naira). Only 3% of the respondents earned above 91,000 Naira (Table 1). All the respondents were of the Christian faith and draw their beliefs and teachings from the Holy Bible. The Christianity background of the respondents was noted as contributing to reinforcing respondents' notions and views on family. Most narratives and responses to interview questions were supported by copious biblical quotations including the '*sacredness of marriage*', the '*needlessness of divorce*', '*child upbringing*' and many others. Traditions and customary beliefs were also mobilized in the discourse of familism especially on matters of adultery, protecting family name and integrity as well as child deviance, among others.

Popular notions of familism revolved around a value which emphasizes a commitment to the family as a unit in terms of loyalty, trust and cooperative attitudes within family group. Several views were gathered from the respondents and eventually classified into five themes including family name and integrity, family unity and cohesiveness, family growth and progress, carving unique family image, upholding and defending family values and building family in line with godly principles (Table 1).

**Table 2: Notion of Familism**

<b>Notion of Familism</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
Projecting family name and integrity	Over 95% of the respondents mentioned this but in different forms	-some said of conducts that make people speak well of the family; -behaviors that encourage a sense of identification with the family, etc.
Family unity and cohesiveness	100% of respondents opined that children were a factor in this regard.	Most discussions tended to the idea of having parents stay together for the sake of the children
Supporting family growth and progress	Over 54% mentioned this idea	Family growth and progress was mostly linked to economic growth and material progress

Upholding and defending core family values	All the respondents emphasize positive values of the family that must be defended	Core values mentioned include respect, hard work, godliness, discipline, honesty, and peace.
Carving a unique family image	Over 36% of the respondents mentioned this.	Some respondents mentioned outstanding positive behaviors or performances at public places.
Building family in line with godly principles	100% of respondents seemed to emphasize this directly or indirectly	Biblical teachings and portions were mobilized to support this view.

Every respondent raised diverse forms of concerns relating to the desired image expected of their respective family. The basis of such expectation and concerns was generational. Most discussants repeatedly used the phrase, *‘our family has been known for this...’*, *‘everyone draws inspiration from our family’*, *‘most people want to be like our family’*, etc. One respondent in her early 60s argued: *‘Udo Utuk [not real name] is known from generations as a model family...we have a family reputation and respect all over this place...anyone that would want to taint our family reputation will be treated as our enemy...’*. It follows that families who believe in good reputation and name strive to project, sustain and defend at any level. The values of hard work, achievement consciousness and always being at the top or forefront are reinforced in the younger generations. Children in such families are exposed to strict lines of moral and religious discipline, the best opportunities and the best life can offer (including putting them for higher civilizations and exposure to elitism) to continuously reproduce what is often believed as the family standard.

Given that children are often at the center of family value propagation, communication and transmission, every family is deeply interested in conducts and behaviors that are likely to tarnish its image and reputation. Several of such conducts were discussed. Over 80% of disreputable conducts and behaviors were linked to children including child deviance, teenage pregnancy and abortion, prostitution, laziness, among others. Conducts such as disrespectful behaviors against parents and elders (including talking back at parents, beating parents, heaping insults at them, and outright stubbornness), thievery and pilfering, early exposure to sexual feelings and behaviors, use of vulgar languages were all considered disrespectful to the family name and integrity, and local names were used to qualify such children including *‘idiok ntohoeyen’* (bad children), *‘ndito ifot’* (child witches who portend ill-luck), *‘ndat nduk eyen’* (children of illegitimate blood). *‘Children are the main channel for understanding the nature and integrity of a family’*, argued one male respondent of about 50 years of age. *‘Where the children manifest some unhealthy traits, parents are concerned, elders are*

## ***Familism and Crime in Nigeria by Brown and Akpan***

*concerned and the eyes of the villagers will always focus on such a family'*, noted another male respondent who is about 50 years.

Extra-marital affair was also listed as serious misconduct capable of tarnishing the family reputation. Every respondent seemed to believe extra-marital sex (mainly among the female folk) is the worst crime in a family. As a female respondent aged 34 observed: *'this is serious...it is believed such misconduct can inflict the family with some misfortunes...it is a traditional matter...'* A male respondent who is about 40 years noted as follows: *'a married woman believed to have committed extra-marital sex brings shame to her matrimonial home and the entire family...the family cannot accept this...everyone in the village would be waiting to gossip about such family...it is a shameful conduct...'* Most respondents said extra-marital sex is a crime no family would be prepared to compromise. Other conducts that were mentioned as damaging to the family name and reputation were suicide and incest (Table 3).

**Table 3. Conducts/Behaviors Mentioned as Offensive and Damaging to Family Image**

<b>Behaviors Damaging to Family Name</b>	<b>No. of respondents</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
<p>Child deviance (children who exhibit anti-social behaviors): conducts/behaviors qualified for this description include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Disrespectful behaviors against parents and elders</li> <li>- Thievery</li> <li>- Early exposure to sexual feelings and behaviors</li> <li>- Child who frequently uses vulgar languages</li> <li>- Parent beaters</li> <li>- Child who does not go to church and school, etc.</li> </ul>	<p>Every respondent used diverse words/names/phrases to describe such conduct including <i>'ndat nduk eyen'</i> (illegitimate blood); <i>'idiok ntohoeyen'</i> (bad children); <i>ndito ifot</i> (child witches), etc.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Such children are often linked to extra-marital relationship;</li> <li>2. Popularly seen as nonconformists to family values;</li> <li>3. Parents are collectively concerned and ashamed to be associated with such children;</li> <li>4. The mother receives the highest blame and shame;</li> <li>5. Such children are likely to be disowned by the father</li> </ol>
<p>Prostitution: persons who frequently solicit for sex, known for keeping many sexual partners; engages in</p>	<p>Most respondents see this behaviors as characteristics of wayward persons in the family, and describe such</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. This behavior is popularly traced to the family genealogy, which reinforces the</li> </ol>

behaviors of collecting money for sex.	individuals by various names including the popular 'akpara' etc.	disgrace on family members; 2. Such persons are likely to be disowned; 3. Notably, sex workers do not want to be so identified in the area.
Teenage pregnancy and abortion	Every respondent spoke against this	1. Seen as damaging to the family name and image; 2. Such children could be disowned; 3. In most cases, those responsible could be subjected to some indignities.
Extra-marital sex	Every respondent mentioned this as one of the worst crimes against matrimonial home	1. A wife who perpetrate this behavior could be killed by the husband; 2. The extra-marital partner could equally be killed; 3. The husband is confronted with perpetual stigma and can commit suicide or unilaterally divorce the wife; 4. The wife is an object of disgrace. 5. A husband who tolerates extra-marital sex from the wife is expected to suffer from mysterious and inexplicable ailments and death. 6. Male marital infidelity is not socially countenanced in the area.
Others, e.g., suicide, incest, homosexuality, etc.		Perceived as taboos

While the study assessed the attitudes and opinions of the respondents on this, the main interest focused on the criminological implications of over devotion to family

## ***Familism and Crime in Nigeria by Brown and Akpan***

values and ideals in the study area. Certain aspects of child deviance have been treated within the State criminal legal codes. The Social Welfare unit in the Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Welfare handles all cases of teenage crime and deviance. However, certain elements of child misbehavior are handled by the Nigeria Police at the instance of the affected parents. A story was told of a parent who was tired of the unruly behaviors of one child, to the level of engaging the Police, and which later led to the eventual killing of the disobedient child. The attitude of the father was that the child was not his own blood (illegitimate child). Usually taken very seriously, fathers of such children easily disown them.

Labelling children with criminal tags including '*ndito ifot*' (child witches), "*ndat nduk*" (illegitimate child), '*idiok ntohoeyen*' (bad children) often provide justification for criminal treatments including neglect, abandonment, trafficking, killing, imprisonment, among others. This occurs when the family runs out of patience in their bid to manage such children and their excesses. The rise in the number of street children in Uyo has been of great concern to the appropriate public authorities. '*All the orphanage homes in the State are populated by children who have been neglected and abandoned by their parents...*' noted one female respondent who works as a staff in the Social Welfare division of the Ministry of Women Affairs. The woman who is about 40 years further stated: '*every day we receive them and the story is the same namely: picked from the street...*' while the reasons for some cases of child abandonment could be related to inability to cater for a child or to solve the problem of doubtful paternity, it was clear from field interaction that most parents abandon their children for the purpose of ridding their family of disgrace and shame from children whose conducts and behaviors they considered as disreputable to the family name and integrity.

Incidence of absconding, abortion and criminal killing of infants were discussed as practices that are often considered for solving familism related problems. As most respondents considered teenage pregnancy as a source of shame to the family reputation, pressure is often mounted directly or indirectly on the culprit teenager who, at most times, resolve to abscond from the family setting, abort the pregnancy, or kill the infants. As one female respondent who is about 30 years: '*the family will be against you...they would disown you...and, in extreme case, they are not interested in what happens to you...the only option is to take the problem in your hands: go and live with one who impregnates you, run away from the family, abort the baby or give birth and either kill or sell the infant...*'

Extra-marital affair especially from the wife was perceived as much serious as follows: '*this one, tradition does not favor you in some areas if you try...most likely, you could die or your husband...and if your pregnancy is from another man, it would be difficult for you to give birth alive unless you confess openly...*' argued one female respondent (who is about 40 years). She went on '*the emotional reaction on the side of the husband could be disastrous: if the wife is not lucky, the husband can murder her or the person responsible*'. Generally, the Nigerian

Prisons welcome all categories of inmates' population including inmates contending with criminal outcome of adulterous behaviors of a partner or of pregnant teenager. The core driving force for such contentions were anchored on the damages such behaviors and conducts have inflicted on the family name and reputation.

In all, the realities of the family structure and system arguably influence the criminal justice system and regulation therein in the areas of policy attention, policing, and institutional reactions. Strict adherence to family virtues would most likely moderate the disposition to criminality in the immediate, short, and long terms. A laxity in familial coherence would certainly portend otherwise.

### **Discussion of Findings and Concluding Remarks**

Two perspectives have emerged from the fieldwork results. The first has to do with the role of traditional and cultural factors on familism, and the second perspective relates to the increasing concerns on emerging threats to existing cultural and traditional values. Given that over 80% of conducts and behaviors that challenge traditional family values are attributed to the rising incidence of child deviance, it is easy to understand why parents and the elderly were concerned during our various discussions with them.

A female respondent of about 50 years of age captured this as follows: *'we are living in an era where children are a major source of our worries...being exposed to modern ways of life through the television and other social media implies the likelihood of bringing in new ways of life completely different from what we used to know...'* This, as Brown (2012) notes, is obvious as the copycat threats of the media in a lopsided world information order are largely left unaddressed. There were huge spatial variations in societal attitudes to these issues. While respondents from the rural areas were much more culturally conservative especially by being very rigid in views about some conducts considered against family values including extra-marital sex, suicide, and some aspects of child behaviors; most urban respondents were less anxious about such child behaviors as early signs of sexual feelings, less frequent attendance at Church services, among others. A mother of 4 children who should be in her late 50s argued: *'we know these are not how we were brought up but we pretend or overlook some of them to avoid much problem for ourselves...'*

Changing times equally condition changing societal attitudes on familism. Demographic changes, increasing urbanization, economic challenges, and technological factors as well as the increasing democratization of information and communication systems have significantly impacted on the family system and its values. Though not mandatory for all societies to go through the same path and procedure, Whitehead (1991) advanced a simple framework for discussing familism over the evolution of human history. The first period (1940s to the mid-1960s) witnessed a more conservative form of traditional familism, characterized

## ***Familism and Crime in Nigeria by Brown and Akpan***

by the overwhelming influence and dominance of married couples with children, high birth rates, low divorce rates as well as stable marital relationship. The economic and cultural environments were equally supportive of this period in aspects of high standard of living and strict conformity to social norms respectively. Family life during this period witnessed increasing idealization and communality. The second period was highly individualistic (extending from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s) and witnessed the breakdown (or reversal) of most of the demographic factors that sustained the first period including a decline in birth rates, accelerating divorce rates and the adoption of singles 'lifestyles', among others. Additionally, this period witnessed the idealization of career and work life, which equally opened more freedom for women. Individuals were more interested in searching for meanings in life through self-expression. Within this context, family values were less idealized. The third period, appropriately tagged by Whitehead (1991) as the new familism featured the levelling off of the divorce rate, a levelling off of workforce participation among women and the highest number of births since 1964. Culturally, the new familism marked the movement away from expressive individualism and a fascination with self and toward greater attachment to family and commitment to others.

More recently, the emergence of the social media and technology as a means of communication, interaction and cultural exchanges have had enormous impact in accelerating the decline of individual and group commitment to social norms and family values (Surrett, 2008). Within the broad globalized context outlined in Whitehead's framework, opportunities exist for understanding the Nigerian perspective on familism. Changes in commitment to family values have been less significant over historical period than in spatial contexts (in terms of the rural and urban differences). Whitehead's sequence of transition, however, manifest in subtle forms in urban areas due to a growing tendency of individualistic lifestyles, less emphasis in bigger and extended family structure, the involvement of women in work and public lives as well as the growing influence of the social media and other channels and means of cultural communication. Relatively high incidence of freedom and individualism in urban areas has weakened traditional family norms and commitment to it, raising concerns on new ways of managing the situation and its consequences.

Regarding the smallness of the sample size, this paper argues that the need to manage changing societal attitudes and commitment to family values has led to the emergence and expansion of new spaces of crime in our society. This, however, should be seen in part as other factors exist that add to the amalgam of reasons for criminality. The use of the police and the application of self-help efforts as reaction to emerging problem or to enforce conformity to specific norms have forged a certain line of crime that are not explicitly mainstreamed within the State penal and crime management system. When someone is harmed due to extra-marital affairs, the law seems relaxed in preference for social sanction. Same applies to related crimes. More research is needed to understand the scale and depth of the problem, and perhaps possible implication on the existing crime management approach.

## References

- Akpabio, E. M. (2006) Notions of environment and environmental management in Akwa Ibom state, southeastern Nigeria. *Environmentalist*, 26 (4), 227-236.
- Akpabio, E. M. (2012). Water meanings, sanitation practices and hygiene behaviours in the cultural mirror: a perspective from Nigeria. *Journal of water, sanitation and hygiene for development*, 02 (3), 168-181.
- Almond G A & Verba S. (1963). *The civic Culture*. Londres: Sage.
- Almond, G. A. & Verba S. (1980). *The civic culture revisited*. Londres: Sage
- Banfield E. C. (1958). *The moral basis of a backward society*. Chicago: Free Press.
- Brown, A. S. & E. J. Okorie (2015) Crime and seasonal reality in Nigeria: a spatio-temporal discussion of the situation in Uyo Urban. *South south journal of culture and development*, 17(1), 1-29.
- Brown, A. S. (2008) Media, crime and Africa's development crisis: the need for social reconstruction. M. Mboho and H. Batta (eds.) *The companion to communication and development issues*. Uyo: Department of Communication Arts, University of Uyo, Nigeria. (pp. 537-547).
- Brown, A. S. (2016) The criminology of relevance and the relevance of criminology: an invitation to crime science. In U. O. Uduma & F. Etim (eds.) *Humanism, globalization and the relevance of philosophy*. Eket: Inbonet.
- Conradt D. P. (1980). Changing German political culture. In G. A. Almond & S. Verba (Eds). *The civic culture*. Londres: Sage.
- Desmond M. and R. N. L. Turley (2009). The role of familism in explaining the Hispanic-white college application gap. *Social problems*, 56 (2), 311-334.
- Ekong, E. E. (2003). *Rural sociology: an introduction and analysis of rural Nigeria*. Uyo: Dove Educational Publishers.
- Ekong, E. E. (2001) *The sociology of the Ibibio*. Calabar: Scholars Press.
- Garzón, A. (2000). Cultural change and familism. *Psicothema*, 12(Su1), 45-54.
- Gundelach, P. and Riis, O. (1994). Cited in: Garzon, A. (2000). Cultural change and familism. *Psicothema*, 12(Su1), 45-54.
- Hagan, F. E. (2002) *Introduction to criminology: theories, methods, and criminal behavior*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Inglehart R. (1998). *Values and beliefs. Political, religious, sexual and economic norms in 43 societies: findings from the 1990-1993 world values*. Michigan: University Press.
- Izugbara, C. O. (2004). Patriarchal ideology and discourses of sexuality in Nigeria. Understanding human sexuality seminar series 2. African Regional Sexuality Resource Centre. Lagos, Nigeria.
- Noah, M. E. (1980). *Ibibio pioneers in modern Nigerian history*. Uyo: Scholars Press.
- Roblyer M. I. Z. and S.B. Zambrano (2017). Crime victimization and suicidal ideation among Colombian college students: the role of depressive

## ***Familism and Crime in Nigeria by Brown and Akpan***

- symptoms, familism, and social support. *Journal of interpersonal violence*: 1-22. DOI: 10.1177/0886260517696856
- Schmallegger, F. (1999) *Criminology today: an integrative introduction*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Siegel, L. J. (2001) *Criminology: theories, patterns, and typologies*. Belmont, C.A.: Wadsworth
- Sommers I., J. Fagan and D. Baskin (1994). The influence of acculturation and familism on Puerto Rican delinquency. *Justice quarterly* 11 (2): 207-228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418829400092231>
- Steidel, A. and J. Contreras (2003). A new familism scale for use with Latino populations. *Hispanic journal of behavioural Sciences*, 25, 312-330.
- Stein, G. L., Cupito, A. M., Mendez, J. L., Prandoni, J., Huq, N., & Westerberg, D. (2014). Familism through a developmental lens. *Journal of Latina/o Psychology*, 2(4), 224-250.
- Surrett, R. (2008). *Media, crime and criminal justice: images and realities*. Belmont: Wadsworth.
- Tepperman, L. (2006). *Deviance, crime, and control: beyond the straight and narrow*. Oxford: University Press.
- Udo, E.U. (1983). *Who are the Ibibio?* Onitsha. African FEP Publishers.
- Valenzuela, A and S. Dombusch (1994). Familism and social capital in the academic achievement of Mexico origin and Anglo adolescents. *Social science quarterly*, 75, 18-36.
- Whitehead, B. D. (1991). The new familism: crossing the cultural divide. an institute for American values working paper: WP8.