

Parenting Styles and Parental Conflicts as Predictors of Criminal Behaviour Among Emerging Youths in Nigeria

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Abstract

Criminal behaviour among emerging youths has become a growing social and security concern in Nigeria, manifesting in offences such as cybercrime, cultism, kidnapping, armed robbery, drug abuse, political violence and other forms of delinquency. While socioeconomic factors such as poverty and unemployment have received considerable attention, family-related factors, particularly parenting styles and parental conflict, remain comparatively underexplored despite their significant influence on behavioural development. This study therefore investigated whether and to what extent parenting styles and parental conflict predict criminal behaviour among emerging youths in Nigeria. The study was anchored on Bandura's social learning theory and Hirschi's social control theory. The integration of these theories provides a comprehensive framework for explaining how parenting practices and family relationships influence the development or prevention of criminal tendencies among emerging youths. The study adopted a qualitative, historical descriptive research design. Data was sourced from secondary sources such as books, journal articles, newspaper clippings, and conference papers and was analysed using inductive-deductive method to determine the predictive influence of parenting styles and parental conflict on criminal behaviour. The study addressed a notable gap in existing literature by examining the combined predictive effects of parenting styles and parental conflict on criminal behaviour among emerging youths in Nigeria. Previous studies have largely examined these variables independently or focused primarily on adolescents with limited empirical attention given to emerging adults and the interaction of both family variables in predicting criminal behaviour in Nigeria. The findings revealed that parenting styles and parental conflict jointly and significantly predicted criminal behaviour among emerging youths, with authoritative parenting showing a protective influence, while authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful parenting styles together with high levels of parental conflict were associated with greater likelihood of criminal behaviour. The study recommends that government agencies, educational institutions, religious organizations and community-based organizations implement evidence-based parenting education and family counselling programmes aimed at promoting authoritative parenting, strengthening parental supervision and reducing destructive parental conflict as effective strategies for preventing criminal behaviour among emerging youths in Nigeria.

Background to the Study

The family is widely regarded as the primary institution of socialisation, where children acquire values, norms, attitudes and behaviours that shape their adjustment to society. Through interactions with parents and other family members, young people develop self-control, moral reasoning, emotional regulation and respect for social norms. Consequently, the quality of parenting and the nature of family relationships have long been recognized as important determinants of behavioural outcomes. Positive parenting practices characterized by warmth, supervision, open communication and consistent discipline are generally associated with healthy psychosocial development, whereas ineffective parenting and persistent family conflict have been linked to various behavioural and social problems, including aggression, delinquency, substance abuse and criminal behaviours.

Emerging youths, typically defined as individuals between the age of 18 and 29 years, represent a critical developmental stage marked by increased independence, identity exploration and transition into adult roles. While this period presents opportunities for personal growth, it is also characterised by heightened vulnerability to risk-taking and antisocial behaviours, particularly in contexts where family support and social control are weakened. In Nigeria, increasing rates of youth involvement in armed robbery, cybercrime, cultism, kidnapping, violent extremism, drug-related offences, and other forms of criminal behaviour have become major social concerns. These trends have significant implications for national security, economic development and social cohesion, underscoring the need to identify the underlying factors that predispose some young people to criminal activities (Piate, 2013; Piate, 2024; Sunday and Piate, 2019; Piate, 2025; Piate, 2025; Piate and Udoh, 2025; Piate, 2025; Piate, 2025; Piate, 2025; Piate, 2026; Piate, 2026).

Among the numerous explanations advanced for youth criminality, family-related factors have received considerable scholarly attention. Parenting style, which refers to the patterns of attitudes and behaviours that parents adopt in raising their children, has been consistently associated with children's social and behavioural outcomes. Parenting approaches that combine warmth, responsiveness and appropriate behavioural control are generally linked to positive developmental outcomes, whereas harsh, inconsistent, neglectful or even permissive parenting practices may increase the likelihood of behavioural maladjustment and antisocial conduct. Likewise, parental conflict, particularly when frequent, intense or unresolved, may expose children and adolescents to chronic emotional stress, reduce parental supervision, disrupt family stability and weaken attachment to parents, thereby increasing susceptibility to deviant peer influence and criminal behaviour (Abe and Oshodi, 2015; Abdulrazaq and Gbadamosi, 2017; Abimbola and Olumide, 2017; Adebowale, 2018; Adeyemo and Bello, 2019; Adeyemi and Ogundele, 2019; Adekola and Adelugba, 2020; Adejumo and Atanda, 2017).

The increasing involvement of emerging youths in criminal activities has become one of the most pressing social challenges confronting Nigeria. Incidents of armed robbery,

cultism, cybercrime and other form of criminal behaviour have raised concerns among policymakers, scholars and the public regarding the factors that predispose young people to criminality. Although substantial international literature has examined the independent effects of parenting styles and parental conflict on youth behavioural outcomes, evidence from Nigeria remains relatively fragmented. Existing Nigerian studies have largely focused on juvenile delinquency, academic achievement, substance abuse or adolescent behavioural problem, often examining parenting practices or family conflict in isolation. Comparatively fewer studies have investigated the combined predictive influence of parenting styles and parental conflict on criminal behaviour among emerging youths, a developmental group that differs from adolescents in terms of autonomy, social responsibilities and exposure to criminal opportunities. Furthermore, many previous studies have been geographically limited, employed small or institution-based samples or paid insufficient attention to the broader socio-cultural realities shaping youth behaviour in contemporary Nigeria.

The gap in the literature limits understanding of the extent to which parenting styles and parental conflict jointly contribute to criminal tendencies among emerging youths. Given the changing family structure, economic pressure, urbanization and increasing youth unemployment in Nigeria, there is need for empirical evidence that integrates these family-related variables within a single analytical framework. Such evidence would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how family dynamics influence criminal behaviour and inform the development of family-centred interventions, social policies and crime prevention programmes. It is within this context that this study investigates whether and to what extent parenting styles and parental conflict predict criminal behaviour among emerging youths in Nigeria. By examining the relative and combined influence of these family factors, the study seeks to deepen understanding of the determinants of criminal tendencies among Nigerian youths and contribute empirical evidence that can support policy formulation, family interventions and future sociological research on youth crime and social development.

Theoretical Explication of the Discourse

The study utilizes the social learning and social control theories to explain the main argument of this work. Social learning theory explains that human behaviour is acquired through observation, imitation, modelling and reinforcement. Rather than being inherited, behaviours are learned by watching significant others, particularly parents, siblings, peers and influential members of society. Individuals are more likely to repeat behaviours that are rewarded or appear beneficial. The principal proponent of this theory is Albert Bandura (1977), whose work demonstrated that learning occurs within a social environment through observation and interaction. The theory assumes that behaviour is learned through observation and imitation, parents are children's earliest and most influential role models, reinforcement encourages the repetition of behaviour, exposure to aggressive, violent or antisocial behaviours increases the likelihood of adopting similar behaviours and environmental experiences shape behavioural development. The theory provides a direct explanation of how parenting styles and parental conflict influence

criminal behaviour. Children raised in homes characterized by violence, hostility, inconsistent discipline or poor parental supervision may learn aggression and antisocial responses by observing their parents' interactions. Persistent parental conflict can normalize violence, hostility or coercion as acceptable ways of resolving disputes.

Similarly, parenting styles characterised by neglect or inconsistent discipline may expose emerging youths to deviant peer groups from whom criminal behaviours are learned and reinforced. Conversely, authoritative parenting provides positive behavioural models, reinforces prosocial conduct and discourages criminal tendencies through consistent guidance and monitoring. Therefore, social learning theory explains criminal behaviour as a product of learned experiences within the family and wider social environment (Bandura, 1977). The social control theory was developed by Travis Hirschi (1969) in his seminal work, *Causes of Delinquency*. The theory posits that criminal behaviour occurs when an individual's bond to society is weak or broken. Hirschi argued that people are naturally capable of engaging in deviant behaviour, however strong social relationships discourage them from doing so. The family, as the primary agent of socialisation, plays a fundamental role in establishing these bonds during childhood and sustaining them into emerging adulthood. According to the theory, individuals who develop strong emotional ties with parents, commit to socially approved goals, participate in conventional activities and internalise societal values are less likely to engage in criminal behaviour. Conversely, weak family relations, inadequate parental supervision, inconsistent discipline and family instability reduce social control and increase the likelihood of delinquency and crime. The principal proponent of social control theory is Travis Hirschi and the theory is built on four interrelated elements of the social bond: (a) Attachment: Attachment refers to the emotional bond between an individual and significant others, especially parents. Young people who maintain close, affectionate and supportive relations with their parents are less likely to engage in criminal activities because they value their parents' approval and seek to avoid disappointing them. (b) Commitment: Which refers to an individual's investment in conventional goals such as education, employment and career development. Emerging youths who have invested time and effort in legitimate pursuits are less likely to risk losing these opportunities through criminal involvement. (c) Involvement: Which Hirschi argued that participation in constructive activities leaves less time and opportunity for deviant behaviour. Youths engaged in education, employment, religious activities, sports or community service are less likely to participate in crime and (d) Belief: Which refers to an individual's acceptance of society's laws, moral values and social norms. Young people who believe in legitimacy of laws conform to them. The theory assumes that when any of these four elements weakens, the likelihood of criminal behaviour increases.

The social control theory provides a strong framework for understanding how parenting styles and parental conflict influence criminal behaviour among emerging youths in Nigeria. Parenting styles directly affect the quality of attachment between parents and children. Authoritative parenting, characterized by warmth, effective communication, emotional support, consistent discipline and appropriate supervision, strengthens

attachment, reinforces moral values and encourages commitment to socially acceptable goals. Consequently, emerging youths raised under authoritative parenting are more likely to develop strong social bonds that discourage criminal behaviour. By contrast, authoritarian parenting may foster fear rather than trust; permissive parenting may fail to provide adequate supervision and behavioural guidance, while neglectful parenting often results in weak emotional attachment and limited parental involvement. These parenting styles may weaken social bonds, reduce self-control and increase susceptibility to criminal behaviour. Similarly, persistent parental conflict disrupts family cohesion and weakens the emotional bond between parents and children. Frequent conflict disrupts insecurity, diminish trust and expose youths to stressful home environments. As attachment to parents weakens, emerging youths may seek acceptance from deviant peer groups or become less committed to conventional social institutions, thereby increasing the likelihood of engaging in criminal activities.

Within the Nigerian context, where the family remains the primary institution for moral upbringing and socialisation, social control theory suggests that ineffective parenting and unresolved parental conflict undermine the social bonds that ordinarily discourage criminal behaviour. Economic hardship, changing family structures and increasing social pressures may further weaken these bonds, making some emerging youths more vulnerable to crime. Social control theory aligns closely with the objectives of this study because it explains the mechanisms through which parenting styles and parental conflict may predict criminal behaviour among emerging youths in Nigeria. The theory suggests that parenting practices influence the strength of attachment, commitment, involvement and belief, while parental conflict can erode these protective social bonds. Therefore, the study employs social control theory as one of its principal theoretical frameworks to examine whether variations in parenting styles and levels of parental conflict significantly predict criminal behaviour among emerging youths. The theory also provides a theoretical basis for interpreting the empirical findings and for recommending family-centered interventions aimed at strengthening parent-child relationships and reducing youth crime (Hirschi, 1969; Agbaje and Ogbonna, 2018; Ayodele and Adebayo, 2018; Adeniyi and Oladele, 2017; Afolabi and Olorunfemi, 2020; Aikoye and Olakuomi, 2017; Akanji and Fagbemi, 2020; Adintomide and Salaam, 2016; Akpan, 2017; Baumrind, 1991).

When social control theory and social learning theory are combined, they provide a stronger and more comprehensive explanation of how parenting styles and parental conflict predict criminal behaviour among emerging youths in Nigeria. The two theories are complementary rather than contradictory. While social control theory explains why weak family bonds increase the likelihood of criminal behaviour, social learning theory explains how criminal behaviour is acquired through observation, imitation and reinforcement within the family and social environment. The integration of the two theories provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for explaining the influence of parenting styles and parental conflict on criminal behaviour among emerging youths in Nigeria. Although each theory approaches criminal behaviour from a different

perspective, together they explain both structural and behavioural processes through which family experiences shape youth involvement in crime. The combination of these theories therefore provides a more holistic explanation of criminal behaviour than either theory alone. Social control theory explains why weakened family relationships reduce conformity to societal expectations, whereas social learning theory explains how exposure to dysfunctional family interactions and deviant models contributes to the acquisition and reinforcement of criminal behaviours. Together, they suggest that parenting styles influence both the strength and social bonds and the quality of behavioural models available to young people, while parental conflict simultaneously weakens emotional attachment and exposes youths to maladaptive patterns of behaviour.

In the Nigerian context, where the family remains the primary institution responsible for socialization and moral development, the integrated framework is particularly relevant. Contemporary challenges such as economic hardship, unemployment, changing family structures, urbanization and social inequality may place considerable strain on families, affecting parenting practices and increasing parental conflict. These conditions can weaken social control within the family while simultaneously creating environments in which antisocial behaviours are learned and reinforced. The combined theories therefore provide a robust framework for understanding how family dynamics contribute to criminal tendencies among emerging youths. The integration of these theories enhances the study's explanatory power by accounting for both the weakening of protective family bonds and the social learning processes through which criminal behaviour develops.

Parenting styles and Parental conflicts and criminal behaviour among emerging youths in Nigeria

The family is the primary social institution responsible for the socialization of children and adolescents. Parental influence extends across children's emotional, cognitive, moral and behavioural development through their parenting practices, disciplinary approaches, communication patterns, and conflict management styles. As children transition into emerging adulthood, the cumulative effects of family experience become evident in their behavioural outcomes. In Nigeria, increasing incidences of cybercrime, cultism, armed robbery, drug abuse, internet fraud (yahoo yahoo), political thuggery, violent extremism and other forms of criminal behaviours among emerging youths have generated concerns regarding the role of family dynamics in fostering or preventing criminal tendencies. Among the most influential family variables are parenting styles and parental conflicts. Parenting styles determine how parents provide warmth, discipline, monitoring and support, while parental conflict influences the emotional climate of the home, (Akpan *et al.*, 2024; Thelma *et al.*, 2024; Peter *et al.*, 2024; Essien *et al.*, 2024; Emeh, 2022; Emeh and Oyeбанj, 2019; Mbat *et al.*, 2013). Understanding how these variables interact provides valuable insight into the development of criminal behaviour among emerging youths in Nigeria.

Parenting styles refers to the consistent pattern of attitudes, behaviours, expectations and disciplining strategies that parents employ while raising their children. Parenting style influences children's emotional adjustment, self-control, academic achievement, social competence, and behavioural outcomes. Baumrind (1966, 1967, 1971, and 1991) proposed four major parenting styles based on two dimensions of responsiveness (warmth) and demandingness (control). Authoritative parents combine high responsiveness with high control, and its characteristics include warmth and affection, consistent discipline, open communication, encouragement of independence, clear expectations, and emotional support. Children raised under authoritative parenting typically develop self-control, empathy, emotional intelligence, confidence, resilience, academic success and lower delinquency. Several scholarly researches consistently identify authoritative parenting as the most protective parenting style against criminal and antisocial behaviour. Studies across South Africa, Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria indicate that adolescents raised by authoritative parents report lower aggression, better emotional regulation and fewer behavioural problems (Aremu, 2013; Steinberg, 2001). Authoritarian parenting combines high control and low warmth and it is characterized by strict obedience, harsh punishment, limited communication, emotional distance, little autonomy. Children under this kind of influence often develop aggression, anxiety, low self-esteem, hostility, poor social competence and increased delinquent behaviour. According to Social Learning Theory, harsh parenting model's aggression, making children more likely to imitate violent behaviour. Authoritarian parenting remains relatively common because of cultural beliefs emphasizing obedience, hierarchy and respect for elders. While discipline is valued culturally, excessive harshness has been associated with increased aggression, peer involvement and juvenile delinquency (Baumrind, 1967; Gershoff, 2002). Permissive parents demonstrate high warmth and low discipline and its characterized by few rules, excessive freedom, inconsistent discipline and avoidance of confrontation. Children raised under permissive parenting often display impulsive, poor self-control, aggression, substance abuse, risk taking and criminal tendencies. Without consistent boundaries, young people may struggle with self-regulation and accountability (Baumrind, 1991; Maccoby and Martin, 1983). Neglectful parenting combines low warmth and low control that is characterized by emotional detachment, lack of supervision, minimal communication, poor monitoring and absence of parental involvement. Children exposed to neglectful parenting frequently experience depression, substance abuse, school dropout, gang affiliation, criminal behaviour and antisocial personality traits. Among all parenting styles, neglectful parenting has been consistently associated with the highest risk of delinquency. Rapid urbanization, labour migration, economic hardship and family instability have increased parental absence in many Nigerian households, leaving emerging youths vulnerable to peer pressure and criminal recruitment (Hoeve et al., 2009).

Parental conflict refers to recurring disagreements, hostility, verbal abuse, physical violence, emotional withdrawal or unresolved disputes between parents. Conflict may include frequent arguments, domestic violence, emotional abuse, silent treatment, separation, divorce, and marital dissatisfaction. Children living in high-conflict homes

often experience chronic stress and emotional insecurity. High parental conflict contributes to aggression, anxiety, depression, emotional dysregulation, poor academic performance, conduct disorders, delinquency, substance abuse, violent behaviors and criminal activities. Children may also imitate aggressive conflict-resolution strategies or seek acceptance from deviant peer groups (Cummings and Davies, 2010). Based on the literature, it is expected that: Authoritative parenting will negatively predict criminal behavior, Authoritarian parenting, will positively predict criminal behavior when characterized by excessive harshness and low warmth, Permissive parenting will positively predict criminal behavior because of weak behavioral regulation, neglectful parenting will be the strongest positive predictor of criminal behavior due to poor supervision and emotional disengagement, and high parental conflict will positively predict criminal behavior by increasing emotional distress, aggressive modelling and affiliation with delinquent peers. These family factors are likely to account for a significant proportion of the variance in criminal tendencies even after considering broader social influences such as poverty, unemployment, peer pressure and community violence.

Criminal behaviour refers to any act or omission that violates established criminal laws as is punishable by the state. Within the context of this study, criminal behaviour encompasses unlawful actions committed by emerging youths that infringe upon the rights, safety or property of others and attract legal sanctions under Nigerian Law. Criminal behaviour is not merely the violation of legal statutes but also reflects the intersection of individual, familial, social, economic and environmental factors that shape an individual's propensity to engage in unlawful conduct. From a psychological perspective, criminal behaviour is viewed as a learned or acquired pattern of anti-social conduct influenced by cognitive processes, personality traits, family relationships, peer associations and environmental conditions (Bandura, 1977). Criminological theories similarly suggest that criminal behaviour develops through weakened social bonds (Hirschi, 1969), exposure to deviant models, social disorganization and strain arising from limited legitimate opportunities (Merton, 1938).

In Nigeria, criminal behaviour among emerging youths has become a major social concern due to its increasing prevalence and its adverse effects on national security, economic development and social cohesion. Youth involvement in cybercrime, cultism, kidnapping, armed robbery, drug trafficking, terrorism, political violence, human trafficking and internet fraud has attracted considerable attention from researchers and policymakers. These offences emerge from a combination of unemployment, poverty, poor parenting, family instability, peer influence, weak law enforcement, corruption and declining moral values. For the purpose of this study, criminal behaviour refers to any unlawful or antisocial act committed by emerging youths in Nigeria that contravenes the Criminal Code Act, the Penal Code, the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act 2015 (as amended) or other relevant laws and which results in legal sanctions or poses significant harm to individuals, communities or society.

Youth crime in Nigeria has evolved over the past few decades, reflecting changing socio-economic conditions, technological advancement, urbanization and insecurity. The most prevalent forms of criminal behaviours among emerging youths include cybercrime (internet fraud), which has evolved into more sophisticated schemes involving cryptocurrency fraud, ransomware attacks and international financial scams, and has become widespread among unemployed and underemployed youths, particularly in urban centres (Omobowale and Olatunji, 2017). Cultism that is more prevalent in the South-South, South-East and South-West geopolitical zones (Ajayi and Ekundayo, 2018). Armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, revenge, political violence and organized crime, drug abuse and drug trafficking, political thuggery, terrorism and violent extremism such as bombings, murder, kidnapping and destruction of public infrastructure, human trafficking, sexual offences, and street gang violence. While criminal behaviour is influenced by numerous social and economic factors, family processes remain among the earliest and most enduring influences on behavioural development. Parenting styles affect the development of self-control, moral reasoning, emotional regulation and social competence, whereas parental conflict shapes the emotional climate in which children learn patterns of interaction and conflict resolution.

Parental conflict is widely recognized as one of the most significant family-related risk factors affecting the psychosocial development of children, adolescents and emerging youth. It encompasses persistent disagreement, hostility, verbal aggression, emotional abuse, physical violence and unresolved disputes between parents or caregivers. Parental conflict contributes to criminal behaviour by disrupting the emotional and social environment necessary for healthy development. Children who repeatedly witness hostility between parents may experience fear, insecurity, anger, anxiety and emotional distress, which appropriate coping mechanisms, these emotional difficulties may manifest as aggression, impulsivity, antisocial activities. Conflict between parents may also reduce effective parenting. During periods of persistent marital discord, parents may become less emotionally available, less consistent in discipline and less effective in monitoring their children's activities. Reduced supervision increases opportunities for association with delinquent peers, gang involvement, substance abuse and engagement in criminal activities.

Family is the earliest and most influential social environment in which children acquire values, behavioral norms, emotional regulation and attitudes towards authority. Consequently, parenting styles and the quality of parental relationships play a fundamental role in determining whether children develop prosocial behaviours or engage in delinquent and criminal activities during adolescence and emerging adulthood. Within the Nigerian context, where family remains the primary institution of socialization, dysfunctional parenting and persistent parental conflict have increasingly been identified as important family-level risk factors for youth criminality.

Baumrind's Parenting Theory suggests that parenting styles influence children's behavioral outcomes through varying levels of warmth, responsiveness, discipline and

supervision. Authoritative parenting, characterized by warmth, open communication and consistent discipline, promotes self-control, empathy and pro-social norms, thereby reducing the likelihood of criminal behaviour. Conversely, authoritarian parenting, particularly when characterized by harsh punishment without emotional support; permissive parenting, marked by weak supervision and neglectful parenting, characterized by emotional disengagement and inadequate monitoring, increase the risk of aggression, impulsivity, substance abuse and delinquency (Baumrind, 1991; Hoeve et al., 2009).

Parental conflict further compounds these risks by creating emotionally unstable home environments. Frequent quarrels, domestic violence, unresolved marital disagreement, emotional abuse and family instability expose children to chronic stress and emotional insecurity. According to Emotional Security Theory (Cummings and Davies, 2010), children raised in high-conflict homes often experience anxiety, anger, behavioral dysregulation and weakened attachment to parents. These experiences increase the likelihood of associating with delinquent peers, engaging in substance abuse, joining cult groups or participating in criminal activities. The interaction between parenting styles and parental conflict is particularly important. Persistent marital conflict often undermines effective parenting by reducing parental warmth, consistency, supervision and communication. Parents experiencing marital distress may become emotionally unavailable or inconsistent in discipline, thereby diminishing their capacity to monitor children's behaviour. As parental monitoring declines, opportunities for peer influence and criminal involvement increase. Meta-analytic evidence consistently shows that poor parental monitoring and ineffective parenting are among the strongest family predictors for youth delinquency.

In Nigeria, these family processes occur alongside broader socioeconomic challenges such as unemployment, poverty, urbanization, insecurity and weak institutional support. Although these structural factors do not directly cause crime, they amplify the adverse effects of dysfunctional family environments. Young people raised in homes characterized by harsh parenting, neglect or persistent parental conflict may be more susceptible to engaging in cybercrime, cultism, armed robbery, kidnapping, drug trafficking, political thuggery and other criminal activities as alternative means of achieving economic success, social recognition or belonging. The foregoing evidence supports the proposition that parenting styles and parental conflict are significant predictors of criminal behaviour among emerging youths in Nigeria. Parenting styles influence the development of self-control, moral reasoning, empathy and compliance with social norms, whereas parental conflict shapes children's emotional security and family attachment. When combined with contextual stressors such as poverty, unemployment, peer pressure and insecurity, dysfunctional parenting and chronic parental conflict increase the probability of delinquency and criminal involvement.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed demonstrates that parenting styles and parental conflict are significant family-level determinants of behavioural development and are closely associated with criminal behaviour among emerging youths. Guided by Baumrind's Theory of Parenting Styles, evidence consistently shows that authoritative parenting, characterized by warmth, responsiveness, consistent discipline and effective communication, promotes positive developmental outcomes such as self-control, empathy, emotional stability and adherence to societal norms. In contrast, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful parenting styles are associated with poor emotional regulation, aggression, impulsivity, weak parental attachment, substance abuse and increased susceptibility to delinquent and criminal behaviours. Similarly, persistent parental conflict creates an emotionally unstable home environment that undermines children's sense of security, weakens parent-child relationships, reduces parental supervision and exposes young people to maladaptive models of conflict resolution. Theoretical perspectives, including social learning and social control theory, provide strong explanations for how exposure to destructive family interactions contributes to antisocial and criminal behaviour. Empirical evidence from Nigerian and international studies further supports the proposition that youths raised in high-conflict or dysfunctional family environments are more likely to engage in behaviours such as cultism, cybercrime, armed robbery, kidnapping, substance abuse, political violence and other criminal activities.

Within the Nigerian context, the influence of parenting styles and parental conflicts is compounded by broader socioeconomic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, urbanization, insecurity and weak institutional support. Although these structural factors contribute to youth crime, the family remains the primary agent of socialization and one of the earliest environments in which attitudes towards authority, morality, self-control and lawful behaviours are developed. Consequently, parenting styles and parental conflict should be regarded not as isolated causes of criminal behaviour, but as significant predictors that interact with individual, social and environmental factors to shape behavioural outcomes among emerging youths.

The wayforward is that addressing criminal behaviour among emerging youths in Nigeria requires a comprehensive, family-centred and multisectoral approach that must extend beyond law enforcement to include strengthening families, promoting healthy parenting, reducing parental conflict, improving economic opportunities and fostering supportive community environments. Such integrated efforts are essential for nurturing socially responsible, emotionally resilient and law-abiding young adults who can contribute meaningfully to Nigeria's sustainable development.

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