

## Perception of Cross-Section of Adult Citizens on Dysfunctional Families as Contributing Factor to Adolescents Engagement in Kidnapping in Anambra State-Nigeria

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### Abstract

*Using descriptive research design, this study sought to investigate the perception of selected adult citizens from various works of life on dysfunctional families as contributing factor to adolescents' engagement in kidnapping in Anambra state-Nigeria. Three research questions guided the study. A cross-section of adult citizens from different works of life ranging from artisans, market women, teachers, lecturers, politicians, doctors and nurses were randomly chosen for the study. A total of 200 subjects were used in the study. Data were collected through questionnaire of 30 items to elicit information on adult citizens' perception on dysfunctional homes as contributing factor to youths' engagement in kidnapping in Anambra state-Nigeria. The instrument was validated by specialists in education. Reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha and an alpha coefficient of 0.81 was obtained. Research questions were answered using frequencies, percentages and mean scores. Results of the study revealed 9 adult citizens perception of dysfunctional families, 11 adult citizens perception of dysfunctional families as contributing factor to adolescents' engagement in kidnapping and 10 measures were considered for adoption in transforming dysfunctional families to functional families. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that parents in dysfunctional homes should embrace anger control and emotion management strategies to reduce chaos, anarchy and conflict in their homes which are detrimental to their children healthy living and functioning in the society. Also corrections may be doomed if the family members are not interested in a family revival or transformation therefore every member of a dysfunctional family should desperately and sincerely cooperate and desire for a change for there is nothing glorious about a dysfunctional family rather than shame and reproach.*

**Keywords:** Adult Citizens, Dysfunctional Homes, Adolescents, Kidnapping

### 1. Introduction

The home was the first institution ordained by God at creation at the Garden of Eden and God's standard is that man should rear a healthy and functional home characterized by understanding, love, care, support and tolerance where every member of the family is well cared for and nurture. Educationist also observed that the home is the first agent of socialization and thus the foundation for child's rearing. This is where every child learns the values, traditions, aspirations and values of his society and carries same to adult life for communication, social relationships, relationship management, adaptation and adjustment in the society. A poet named Robert Frost noted "home is the place that when you have to go there, they have to take you in". Home is the

loving and supportive environment in which to grow up and discover one self. It is the primary connection between a person and the rest of the world.

Ideally, every individual who grows up in a family acknowledges the fact that each person has its own dynamics. The family provides emotional support to an individual and also plays a significant function in the formation of one's personality. The formative years of a child's life (infancy and early childhood stage) and the environment in which he/she grows up has a direct influence on how he/she functions as an individual. Put in another way, the quality and nature of the home, parental care and attention that the child receives will profoundly affect his/her future all round development. Psychologically children with various social and behavioural problems tend to come from families that are disadvantaged in some respect.

Recently, most families in Nigeria are facing a lot of challenges and difficulties in varied degree as a result of economic, health, social, cultural, educational, religious and political problems in the country. Regrettably, the economic problem and situation of the country is worsening on daily basis and thus exert tremendous influence on a person's emotions, actions and thoughts thus resulting in individuals' indulgence in all manner of social behaviours for survival. Specifically, some attendant social behaviours as a result of economic situation in Nigeria include robbery, embezzlement of public fund, prostitution, internet/cyber fraud (known as "yahoo yahoo"), ritual killings, assassination and kidnapping among others. Mathews (2020) writing on the health problems observed that the global pandemic of Covid-19 with its attendant effects of lockdown protocols disrupted the freedom, routine and responsibilities within families resulting to conflicts. On the other hand the political, social, religious and cultural problems in Nigeria resulted in emergence of various terrorist attack groups such as Fulani herdsmen, Niger-Delta militant groups, Boko Haran (Islamic militant group) and IPOB (Independent people of Biafra) among others. Some of these terrorist groups are causing serious havoc in the nation ranging from kidnapping, killing, destruction of farm products, raping, kidnapping and destruction of lives and properties. Their wicked activities has continue to increase the suffering of the citizens resulting in stress, poverty, aggression and untold hardship that are implicated in dysfunctional homes.

Many authors and researchers have attempted various definitions of dysfunctional homes. Nadra (2021) explained a dysfunctional home as one in which interest to solve parents' problems take priority over the children needs and any child that tries to put up any complain is punished thus leading the children to deny their own perception of reality and suffer from low self-worth. Nadra further acknowledged the imperfection of man but stressed that in a dysfunctional home, there is total neglect of the needs in the home and therefore such homes breeds neglect, abuse, secrecy and denial. Al- Ubaidi (2017), Brandwein (2022), Elyassaki (2022) and Snee (2020) noted that dysfunctional family is one rooted in conflict, chaos, anarchy, lack of organization or indifference resulting in neglect of children's emotional, educational and physical needs. Brandwein further observed that dysfunctional families pose a serious concern because children who are victims of such homes often manifest serious abusive tendencies ranging from alcohol

abuse, drug abuse, domestic violence, sexual abuse and emotional abuse. Mahak (2018) opined that a family is dysfunctional when conflict, neglect and social behaviours are the order of the day. Mahak noted that dysfunctional homes are characterized by anxious systems, high level of emotional problems, child's neglect and abuse.

In the context of this research work, the researchers explain dysfunctional family as one synonymous with violence, misunderstanding, conflict, quarrel, nagging, child abuse and neglect. Life in a dysfunctional family is emotionally tensed up, relationships are highly not cordial and every member of the family is "Lord/Master of his/her own". Nobody likes to be reprimanded or corrected. The scenario is "Tiger and Lion relationship". The only means of communication in this type of family is beating, shouting, fighting and quarrelling. Supporting the above, Mahak (2018) enumerated the characteristics of dysfunctional families as apathy, child abuse and neglect, tension, mistrust, resentment, constant fear and hurt, lack of communication and criticisms.

Psychologically, child abuse and neglect breeds all manner of social behaviours thus justifying the Biblical injunction "If the foundation is destroyed, what can the righteous do". Absence of parental care, love, support and training is detrimental to a child's healthy growth and development resulting in all manner of social vices like stealing, lying, bullying, prostitution, addiction, internet fraud, internet addiction, alcohol and drug addiction, rituals and kidnapping. Of all these social vices, the researchers wish to remark that the high wave and incidence of kidnapping is recently posing a serious concern to the government and citizens of Nigeria including Anambra state. Kidnapping affects the psychological, mental and health being of the victim, family members and dependants. Akwash (2016) supporting the above statement noted that of all the social vices, kidnapping is one of the most psychologically damaging crimes and leaves serious emotional and mental wounds on the victim.

Kidnapping is not a new development in Nigeria. Abamara and Dike (2018) observed that in recent times in Anambra state-Nigeria, kidnapping has become the most dangerous and traumatic threats to the residents of the state. They noted that this social vice leaves untold hardship on the victims, family members and dependants because of the huge financial demands by the perpetrators. Ekechukwu and Osaat (2021) observed that kidnapping seems to be the most technical and most lucrative among other criminal acts in Nigeria as many people engage in it silently. They enumerated political, marital, ritual and monetary reasons as the motives for kidnapping with politicians, community leaders and religious leaders as perpetrators thereby leaving lack of trust on anybody. Kidnapping has been in existence in Nigeria as far back as the early 80's and the victims then were mostly the rich/wealthy but today anybody can be the victim and the perpetrators of this wicked act are constantly devising new technique of operations. For example, in the early 80's, kidnappers rely on information to illegally arrest a victim at strategic place but today new dimensions/technique have emerged which include:

- i. Giving people free transportation to unknown destination and finally kidnapping them.

- ii. Disguised commercial vehicles heading to an unknown destination. In this case the passengers on board are the victims.
- iii. The perpetrators use school (shuttle) bags to abduct and carry children to their hide out.
- iv. The kidnappers go to schools and take away school children in disguise that they are their guardian.
- v. The criminals put sign posts/posters on the street for job vacancies with inscription such as “Factory workers needed. 30,000 naira per month”. The job seekers become the victims.
- vi. Display of sign posts/posters on the street for property rental (land and house). Often you have such inscription like “Room/Flat for rent”, “Plots for rent”. Contact line/mobile phone number will be clearly written out. The customers/buyers become the victims.

Kidnapping is indeed a very wicked act. It is a high level of physical and spiritual wickedness that confirms man’s inhumanity to man. Some researchers have attempted definitions of kidnapping according to their different perspectives. Earl (2021) asserts that kidnapping is a crime that involves taking or confining an individual without any legal authority or without the person’s approval. Earl explained that kidnapping can be done by physical means, force or fraud. Akwash (2016) noted that kidnapping implies unlawful imprisonment or confinement of an individual mostly for the purpose of making financial gain, for rituals or relation to child custody dispute.

In the context of this research work, the researchers explained kidnapping as act of keeping an individual on hold, restraining a person’s movement and freedom through confinement in a hideout mostly for financial purposes. Usually the release of the victim is dependent on payment of a particular amount agreed. Most often the individual, family member’s, loved ones and friends are exposed to short/long time suffering and pains as a result of borrowing to settle the financial demand. As pointed out earlier, the economic situation in Nigeria has compelled some people to sell out their conscience and look for any means of survival. No particular gender or status is connected to this crime. All groups of people are involved in this deadly act including men, women, politicians, community leaders, pastors and adolescents but most often the adolescents are hired/mobilize for the act.

Adolescence stage is what the researchers’ term “troublesome” stage because of the accompanied challenges and problems. Most adolescents in Nigeria including Anambra state express desire for quick acquisition of wealth not minding the source, implication and grave consequence. This is not hidden as it is evidenced in their discussions and activities. No wonder they indulge in cyber fraud, killings, rituals, sacrifices, robbery and kidnapping among others. The reasons may be attributed to unemployment, moral bankruptcy, poor parental training and peer associations/influence. Okeke and Joe-Akunne (2020) noted that adolescents are full of life and energy, they are yet to develop proper self identity and many draw their identity from peer group perceived “tough guys” criterion as they seem to be doing presently and often more exert their physical energy in violence related acts including assassination, rape and kidnapping. Supporting this statement, Dogra (2016) observed that

adolescence is a time of transition where the individual is full of uncertainty than certitude, as well as period between childhood reliance and being functionally free adult. Great psychologists including Freud (1930) defined adolescence as the period or recapitulation of the childhood oedipal complex. Erickson (1968) claimed that the struggle between identity and role confusion typified the adolescent stage of development.

Some authors and researchers including Earl (2021), Abamara and Dike (2018), Ekechukwu and Osaat (2021) and Okwuagbala (2020) have enumerated reasons for adolescents engagement in kidnapping to include rituals, sacrifices, monetary reasons. Okwuagbala (2020) further noted that unemployment, poverty, religion and political issues are some of the reasons for adolescents' engagement in kidnapping. Dysfunctional family (a family that is consistently in chaos, anarchy, misunderstanding, division and conflict among others) is another psychological construct that could be used to explain adolescents' indulgence in kidnapping. This study therefore sought to investigate the perception of cross section of adult citizens on dysfunctional homes as contributing factor to adolescents' engagement in kidnapping in Anambra state-Nigeria. The study is guided by three research questions which include:

1. What are the perceptions of adult citizens about dysfunctional families?
2. What are the views of adult citizens on dysfunctional homes as contributing factor to adolescents' engagement in kidnapping in Anambra state of Nigeria?
3. What are the opinions of adult citizens on possible measures that could be adopted in transforming dysfunctional homes to functional homes to foster adolescents' healthy growth, development and adaptation in the society?

## **2. Method**

The study was conducted using a descriptive survey design. This type of research is aimed at collecting data on and describing in a systematic approach the features about a given population (Nworgu, 2015). The study was carried out in Anambra state of Nigeria. Using purposive random sampling technique, adult citizens from different works of life were selected for the study. The sample consist of 41 artisans, 28 market women, 15 politicians, 29 teachers, 29 lecturers, 29 doctors and 29 nurses all randomly selected from the various works of life. Three research questions guided the study.

Two instruments were used for data collection namely:

1. Interview schedule with selected literate adult citizens specifically teachers, lecturers, nurses and doctors. The unstructured interview questions and information from related literatures served as a guide to the construction of the questionnaire.
2. A researcher-developed instrument titled "Dysfunctional Families and Adolescents' Engagement in Kidnapping" (DFAEK). The instrument was structured on a modified 4-point

likert scale ranging from agree, strongly agree, disagree to strongly disagree. The instrument has 3 sections with 30 items.

The instrument was validated for face and content validity by three experts in education. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha and an overall reliability coefficient of 0.81 was obtained. The researchers administered the questionnaire to the chosen sample for the study. In doing this concept of dysfunctional homes and kidnapping as well as items in the questionnaire were explained to the non-literate sample in vernacular language or mother tongue. This is to help their understanding of the questions thus ensuring their correct response. The research questions were answered using frequencies, percentages and mean scores. Acceptance point for the items was 2.50 and any mean score below 2.50 was rejected.

### 3. Results

**Table 1: Adult Citizens' Perception on Dysfunctional Families**

S/N	ITEMS	N =200					
		SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	Decision
1	Dysfunctional families are unstable or critical	56	98	20	26	2.92	Agree
2	Not ideal for proper child rearing	79	82	10	29	3.06	Agree
3	Characters, emotions, thoughts and attitudes of children are affected because of lack of parental care and guidance	72	92	21	15	3.11	Agree
4	Affects morality or moral development of the child	35	97	40	28	2.67	Agree
5	Dysfunctional families are breeding grounds for juvenile delinquents	115	55	15	15	3.35	Agree
6	Social behaviours/criminal acts are consequences of dysfunctional families	83	83	14	20	3.15	Agree
7	Dysfunctional families constitute nuisance to the society	101	45	15	39	3.04	Agree
8	Children from dysfunctional families are prone to addiction, alcohol, drugs and smoking	59	87	40	14	2.96	Agree
9	Dysfunctional families are fertile grounds for raising irresponsible and destructive children	70	57	33	40	2.79	Agree

Result from table 1 above revealed through the mean score of 2.50 and above the following to be among the perceptions of adult citizens on dysfunctional families: Dysfunctional families are unstable or critical, not ideal for proper rearing of children, characters, emotions, thoughts and attitudes of children are affected because of lack of parental care and guidance, affects moral development of the child, dysfunctional families encourages juvenile delinquents, social behaviours or criminal acts are consequences of dysfunctional families, dysfunctional families constitute nuisance to the society, children from dysfunctional families are prone to addiction, alcohol, drugs and smoking and finally, dysfunctional families are fertile grounds for raising irresponsible and destructive children.

**Table 2: Perception of Adult Citizens on Dysfunctional Families as Contributing Factor to Adolescents Engagement in Kidnapping.**

S/N	ITEMS	N =200					$\bar{x}$	Decision
		SA	A	D	SD			
10	Lack of adequate parenting often leads to an impairing development which results in social behaviours	57	68	30	45	2.69	Agree	
11	Adolescents that have a less secure attachment for their emotional disturbances by engaging in antisocial or deviant behaviours	76	50	37	37	2.83	Agree	
12	Lack of good parental training results in personality disorders which are implicated in social behaviours such as kidnapping	68	58	24	50	2.72	Agree	
13	Children from dysfunctional families are often frustrated leading to indulgence in social behaviours	38	90	30	42	2.62	Agree	
14	Children from dysfunctional families are left at the mercy of peer influence where they learn both right and wrong information that affects their social development	37	87	63	13	2.74	Agree	
15	Children from dysfunctional families seek for companionship from social media thereby getting addicted	88	38	31	43	2.86	Agree	
16	Children's behaviours are not regulated by their parents and the outcome is all manner of unruly acts	93	22	58	27	2.91	Agree	
17	Dysfunctional families teach children aggressiveness, antisocial and violent behaviours	42	86	24	48	2.61	Agree	
18	Unfavourable attachment and relationships children experience with their parents breed deviant behaviours	75	27	56	42	2.68	Agree	
19	Inadequate parental training, direction and supervision leads to hostility	103	16	48	33	2.95	Agree	
20	Unresolved conflicts among parents encourages mischief and rebellion in their children	81	52	36	31	2.92	Agree	

Table 2 shows adult citizens perception on dysfunctional families as contributing factor to adolescents' indulgence in kidnapping in Anambra state of Nigeria. 11 items has a mean score of 2.50 and above. They include among others: Lack of adequate parenting often leads to an impairing development that results in deviant behaviours, adolescents that have less secure attachment with their parents are more likely to compensate for their emotional disturbances by engaging in antisocial behaviours, dysfunctional families results in personality disorders which are implicated in social behaviours such as kidnapping and dysfunctional families teach children aggressiveness, antisocial and violent behaviours.

**Table 3: Perception of Adult Citizens on Possible Measures that could be Adopted in Transforming Dysfunctional families to Functional Families**

S/N	ITEMS	N =200					Decision
		SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	
21	Respect other people's boundaries	33	75	51	41	2.50	Agree
22	Avoid discussions or subjects that cause disagreement	63	46	66	25	2,74	Agree
23	Limit contact with family members that cause disagreement	50	65	27	58	2.54	Agree
24	Be consistent	40	99	45	16	2.82	Agree
25	Spiritual counselling	36	109	40	15	2.83	Agree
26	Avoid reading other people's mind	70	63	07	60	2.72	Agree
27	Avoid criticisms and blaming people	31	101	10	58	2.58	Agree
28	Take responsibility of your life and feeling and let others take responsibility for their lives and their feelings	60	40	63	37	2.62	Agree
29	Learn to control your anger and emotions	58	101	10	31	2.93	Agree
30	Learn to tolerance, accommodate and be patient with people	109	42	36	13	3.24	Agree

From the result in table 3, the adult citizens agreed with a mean score of 2.50 and above that the following measures could be adopted in transforming dysfunctional families to functional families. They are: respect other people's boundaries, avoid discussions that cause disagreement, limit contact with family members that cause disagreement, be consistent, spiritual counseling, avoid reading other people's mind, avoid criticism and blaming people and learn to control your anger and emotions among others.

#### 4. Discussion

The findings of the study identified the following to be among the adult citizens perception of dysfunctional families: Dysfunctional families are unstable or critical, not ideal for proper child rearing, characters, emotions, thoughts and attitudes of children are affected because of lack of parental care and guidance, affects morality or moral development of the child, dysfunctional families are breeding grounds for juvenile delinquents, social behaviours/criminal acts are consequences of dysfunctional families, dysfunctional families constitute nuisance to the society, children from dysfunctional families are prone to addiction, alcohol, drugs and smoking, dysfunctional families are fertile grounds for raising irresponsible and destructive children.

The findings agree with Elyassaki (2022) that dysfunctional families are unstable and experiences regular fights. Child abuse and neglect are common practice thus making life difficult for the children. Elyassaki summarized a dysfunctioning family as absence of healthy growth and functioning, presence of negative behaviours such as apathy and lack of emotional support. Snee (2020) described a dysfunctional family as one characterized by abuse ranging from sexual, physical, emotional to verbal abuses as well as conditional love, no boundaries, no relationship, triangulation and addiction.

The findings of the study revealed the following to be among the adult citizens perception of dysfunctional families as contributing factors to adolescents' engagement in kidnapping in Anambra state of Nigeria. They include: Lack of adequate parenting often leads to an impairing development which results in social behaviours, adolescents that have a less secure attachment with their parents are more likely to compensate for their emotional disturbances by engaging in antisocial or deviant behaviours, lack of good parental training results in personality disorders which are implicated in social behaviours such as kidnapping, children from dysfunctional families are often frustrated leading to indulgence in social behaviours, children from dysfunctional families are left at the mercy of peer influence where they learn both right and wrong information that affects their social development, children from dysfunctional families seek for companionship from social media thereby getting addicted, children's behaviours are not regulated by their parents and the outcome is all manner of unruly acts, dysfunctional families teach children aggressiveness, antisocial and violent behaviours, unfavorable attachment and relationship children experience with their parents breed deviant behaviours, inadequate parental training, direction and supervision leads to hostility and unresolved conflicts among parents encourages mischief and rebellion in their children.

This aligns with the findings of Elyassaki (2022) that children reared in dysfunctional families experience emotional and mental fear. These children often grew up to become violent, irresponsible and lack discipline which prompts their involvement in criminal acts such as rape, kidnapping and murder. Al-Ubaidi (2017) observed that at adult stage, victims of dysfunctional families tend to avoid their childhood trauma by engaging in more destructive behaviours such as alcohol abuse, drug abuse, sexual abuse and stealing which are implicated in kidnapping. Mathews (2020) also assert that dysfunctional families affect the emotional development of the children and influence them throughout their lives. Mathews further stressed such children at adult stage have difficulty in social relationship and management. To express their feelings, they indulge in risky behaviours.

Finally, findings of the study revealed the following to be among the measures that could be adopted in transforming dysfunctional homes to functional homes: Respect other people's boundaries, avoid discussions or subjects that cause disagreement, limit contact with family members that cause disagreement, be consistent, spiritual counseling, avoid reading other people's mind, avoid criticisms and blaming people, take responsibility of your life and feelings and let others take responsibility for their lives and their feelings, learn to control your anger and emotions and learn to tolerate, accommodate and be patient with people. Supporting the above findings, Elyassaki (2022) enumerated being responsible and desiring for change as measures of transforming a dysfunctional family into a functional family. Elyassaki advised that people should embrace the character of responsibility for their family dynamics and also parents should desire corrective measures and seek the necessary help for change to give their children the childhood training they deserve. Snee (2020) noted that therapy is important for building a new and improved cycle in the family and advised staying away from the toxic environment to avoid regular misunderstanding.

## 5. Conclusion

From the findings of the study, the researchers conclude that adult citizens perceived the existence of dysfunctional families. The dysfunctional families contribute to adolescents' engagement in kidnapping. Several measures such as respecting other people's boundaries, spiritual counselling as well as taking responsibility of one's life and feeling among others could be adopted in transforming dysfunctional families to functional families for enhancing adolescents' healthy growth, development and adaptation in the society.

## 6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers recommend as follows:

1. Parents in dysfunctional homes should embrace anger control and emotion management strategies to reduce chaos, anarchy and conflict in their homes which are detrimental to their children healthy living and functioning in the society.
2. Corrections may be doomed if the family members are not interested in a family revival or transformation therefore every member of a dysfunctional family should desperately and sincerely cooperate and desire for a change for there is nothing glorious about a dysfunctional family rather than shame and reproach.
3. Members of dysfunctional families should learn to set boundaries and avoid subjects or discussions that cause disagreement so that good social relationship, peace and love which are attributes of a functional home will reign.

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