

# Familial Characteristics and Adolescents' Behavioural Outcomes: A Comparative Study of Borstal Institute and Government High School, Buea, Cameroon

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this article was to investigate the nexus between familial characteristics and adolescents' social behaviours in the South-Western Region of Cameroon. This study used a mixed-methods design with a semi-structured questionnaire consisting of nine questions that were self-designed and self-administered to adolescents from Borstal Institute, Buea, and Government High School (G.H.S.), Lycée Classique de Buea. Purposive and convenient sampling methods were used to collect the data. The study population consisted of equal number of adolescents from two institutes (n=42), whose ages ranged from 10 to 19 years, with 14 years as their mean age. The data analysis was done through comparative analysis of the familial characteristics of adolescents and their social behaviours. Data was presented through the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods, relying on simple statistics, graphs, tables, and verbal presentation. The findings reveal that adolescents that were sampled from Borstal Institute were less-privileged in terms of their familial characteristics in four out of the five variables tested in the study, compared to adolescents sampled from G.H.S. It is thus recommended that the government engage in renewed efforts to improve family support services in the country.*

**Keywords:** Behaviour, Adolescents, Characteristics, Family, Study

**Declaration:** There are no any conflicts of interest and the research was conducted without breaching research ethics.

## INTRODUCTION

Part of the duties of the family, is to provide for the welfare of its member, especially that of the children. The function, however, does not stop at the provision of physical needs, as the provision of guidance and behavioural fine-tuning are also part of the primary responsibilities of the family to the children. In an ideal situation, parents are undeniably supposed to be sources of all-round support to children, with regards to their health, physical, mental, moral, spiritual and social development. Odebumi (2007, cited in Okorodudu 2010) suggests that attention, love and warmth received by children in the family go a long way in assisting their emotional development and adjustment. Therefore, the circumstances surrounding the birth and growing up of children, occasioned by the socio-demographic characteristics of their parents and the family environment, are unfavourable to their moral and social development thereby putting them at risk of negative behavioural outcomes.

Economic austerity, for instance, present a wide range of risks and vulnerabilities to children. A large number of parents find themselves working longer hours and sometimes far away from home, usually visiting home only once in a while, denying them enough time to foster meaningful physical relationship and attachment with their children. The possibility for such parents to acquire particular skills necessary for communicating with and training their children is equally diminished in such situations. This leaves the children involved self-care or to be cared for by people other than their primary care-givers, usually with informal arrangements, which may result in their exposure to various forms of physical and moral risks.

Some other parents, on the other hand, are under-employed or even completely unemployed, preventing them the economic opportunities to provide the children with basic necessities. In some cases, some of such children engage in child labour in order to support themselves, usually at the expense of their education. In some other cases, some children have lost one or both parents to various disruptive occurrences, sometimes without anyone to cater for them; whereas Larzelere and Patter (as cited in Cashwell & Vacc, 1996) explain that socio-economic status, parental monitoring, and parental supervision rate high (46%) in influencing adolescents' involvement in anti-social behaviour.

Separation, divorce and other consequences of differences between parents have been postulated by scholar as having negative effect on children who are victims of family instability. Children who find themselves in such situations may also experience unmet physical, emotional and financial needs which may prong adolescents into participation in delinquent behaviours

(Okorodudu, 2010). The recognition of the tremendous impacts of familial characteristics on children's behavioural development could provide insight for the promotion of pro-social behaviours in children and equally help in the prevention of, and intervention in situations where children present, anti-social behaviour.

**Problem Statement:** In research domain, adolescents' behaviours have been an issue. Are children and adolescents to be blamed for their mischievous, antisocial and improper behaviours? This is a question for all parents as well as the society at large, especially the people in the South-Western Region of Cameroon. Adolescents' involvement in anti-social behaviours makes the achievement of harmony and peace difficult in any society.

**Objective of the Research:** The objective of the study was to investigate the nexus between familial characteristics and adolescents' social behaviours in the South-Western Region of Cameroon.

**Research questions:** The research questions were designed to address the objectives of the study:

1. Do familial characteristics impact the behaviour of adolescents South-Western Cameroon?
2. Are the adolescents detained at Borstal Institute from less-privileged families?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The circumstances of the family have been variously associated with the forms of social behaviour exhibited by children (Cashwell and Vacc, 1996). The family has been associated with the ability to play both positive and negative roles in the life of a child, depending on the structure and organization of the family in which the child is born/ raised (Doggett, 2009). According to Cashwell & Vacc (1996), the impact of the family environment on a child is so strong and lasting to the effect that it influences an adolescent's interpersonal style, which in turn influences peer group selection. This indicates that childhood through adolescence is a delicate and important stage of personality formation which must be handled with utmost care in order not to risk raising mal-adjusted children.

Ngale (2009) likewise views familial and parental factors as a potent factor in determining children's involvement in anti-social behaviour or not. Children who are at the greatest risk of becoming delinquent are those who suffer rejection by their parents, who are raised in homes with conflicting parents, or who are not adequately supervised Ngale (2009). (Okorodudu, 2010) suggest that a plethora of factors; which include economic, environmental, social, physical, psychological and family factors coupled with peer-group influence are responsible for determining the nature of adolescents' social behaviour.

Delinquency is constantly linked to several aspects of family life, one of which is the composition of the family. As a result, children who grow up in families devoid of their two biological parents—for example, single-parent households, step families, foster homes, families that are upended by parental death, divorce, or separation, or families where the primary caregiver changes frequently—are more likely to engage in undesirable and risky behaviours (Anastasia, 2012; Muyibi et al, 2010; Okorodudu, 2010). In family disruption and delinquency discourse, single-parent families are one of the first factors to be mentioned. (Anastasia 2012) defines a single-parent family as *“that type of family with one child or more who have not aged 18 years, which are raised by a single parent who may be widowed or divorced and that has not remarried later or has not ever been married”* (para. 2).

Children who are raised by single-parent, or by parents who had disrupted marital relationships, are more often predisposed to engagement in a wide a range of behavioural challenges, such as juvenile delinquency, than children who are raised in two-parent families (Thornberry, et al (1999, as cited in Doggett, 2009). Anastasia (2012) similarly emphasizes the recurrence of the social phenomenon of single parenthood by estimating that approximately 16% of all children live in single-parent families presently, at global level.

According to Okorodudu (2010) divorce or death of parents and incidence of parental separation have been identified as causes of dysfunctional family dynamics; parental divorce and separation may do the additional damage of leading to adolescents' feeling of embarrassment and depression, which may, in turn, result in truancy, poor academic performance and engagement in delinquent behaviours.

Guzzo & Gobbi (2023) assert that adolescents' reactions to parental demise are often negative, resulting in many victims of early parental death to exhibit new behavioural problems like anger, alcohol and drug use, risky sexual activities, suicide ideation, depression, decreased ability to focus and adjustment issues. Ellis et al. (2013) stress that the negative feeling from early parental death, especially before age 18, can be further compounded by *“the symbolic or temporary loss”* of the living parent to grief (p. 63). They also maintain that such feelings may remain for a long time thereby affecting the victims' coping behaviours at adulthood.

Wright & Wright (1994) however clarify the confusion around single-parenthood by explaining that even though single-parent families have always been identified as problematic, adolescents from these families are at greater risk of delinquency and victimization not just by the nature of their families, but simply due to the fact that there is one less person to supervise their behaviour. On the other hand, two-parent households are more likely to provide increased supervision and surveillance of family members and property.

Conversely, Okpako, (2004, as cited in Okorodudu 2010) elucidates that the explanation offered by Wright & Wright (1914) above is not always applicable to African settings where parents and parenthood expand beyond immediate mother and father to include members of the extended family, neighbours and every other person who is in one way or the other related to the family are involved in the upbringing of children. In agreement with the above, Ngale (2009) equally points out that traditionally in Cameroon, the man and his wife or wives are not the only adult members of the household. Adult relatives and friends are sometimes part of the household.

Some scholars equally warn against the over-generalization of the assumption that all two-parent families are healthy and conducive for children's moral and behavioural development (Johnson, 2010; Ngale 2009). In his study on delinquent adolescents detained in a Cameroonian juvenile correctional facility, statistics collected by Ngale (2009) revealed that 66.1% (about three-fifths of the delinquent children studied) came from two parent homes. Conversely, only 5.35% of the children's parents were divorced, 10.7% of their parents were separated, 7.2% of the respondents had lost their father, and 3.5% of the respondents of this study had lost their mothers, while only 1.8% of them were orphans.

Apart from family composition, a number of researchers have supported the fact that children's behavioural outcome is equally determined by level of economic characteristics and viability of their families/ parents. The provision of children's physical needs is an equally important function of the family, one which the ability or inability of the family to fulfil could influence adolescents' involvement in anti-social behaviours (Cogan, 2006; Koffman, 2008; Okorodudu, 2010; Puspa, 2016). Ngale (2009) corroborated this by explaining that the atmosphere of physical, psychological, financial and moral lack, are conducive for the perpetration of non-violent offences like stealing, truancy both from home and school.

The absence of moral, psychological and financial viability at home as a result of various factors like family's economic disempowerment, permissive parenting style, and parents' heavy job-time overload, often motivate children to want to seek for means of survival beyond the family context (Ngale, 2012). Along this line, Ngale describes adolescent anti-social behaviour as deviant quests for fulfilment due to vulnerability; a means of escape from dysfunctional family settings which are "neither empowered nor empowering" (p. 14). Puspa (2016) similarly expresses the opinion that children and young people could end up engaging in anti-social behaviours if they are destitute of basic necessities and exposed to unhealthy environments and wrong companies.

In his study on "A Perspective on Anti-Social Behaviour" conducted in Ireland, Cogan (2006) equally points out that there seems to be a consensus among researchers that "anti-social behaviour is largely a problem associated with low-income, single-class, segregated" households (p. 45). He further demonstrates a direct relationship between poor socio-economic factors and anti-social behaviour by revealing that anti-social behaviours in Ireland are mainly evident in low-income social housing estates and areas of social deprivation which are characterized by:

...the dislocation of large sections of ... population, concentrations of poverty, social isolation and alienation, child density and lack of supportive services, coupled with the wider social reality of the fragmentation of families and the immature formation of others, ... spawned households which, lacking in parenting skills and unaccepting of many social behaviour norms, exhibit an astonishing breakdown of parental involvement and control over many children on these estates (Cogan 2006, p. 46).

Puspa (2016) equally opines that a large number of children who engage in anti-social behaviours are victims of socio-economic circumstances, which push them to engage in criminal and status offence. According to Eke (2004, as cited in Okorodudu 2010), criminal offences include stealing, arson, rape, drug offence and murder, burglary, pick pocket and armed robbery; while running away from home, malingering, truancy and similar offences are listed as examples of status offences. Koffman (2008) emphasized the relationship between poverty and the tendency for engagement in anti-social behaviours by arguing that children from poor socio-economic backgrounds are not only the perpetrators, but that, to a great extent, members of most disadvantaged families are also the victims of anti-social behaviour.

Apart from the fact that the lack of basic necessities could push adolescents to engage in anti-social behaviours, Ang & Goh (2006, as cited in Okorodudu, 2010) suggest that parents' excessive involvement in economic activities, in order to be able to meet up with family financial commitments, may hinder them from giving the essential parental monitoring and control that are required for adolescents' behavioural and moral development.

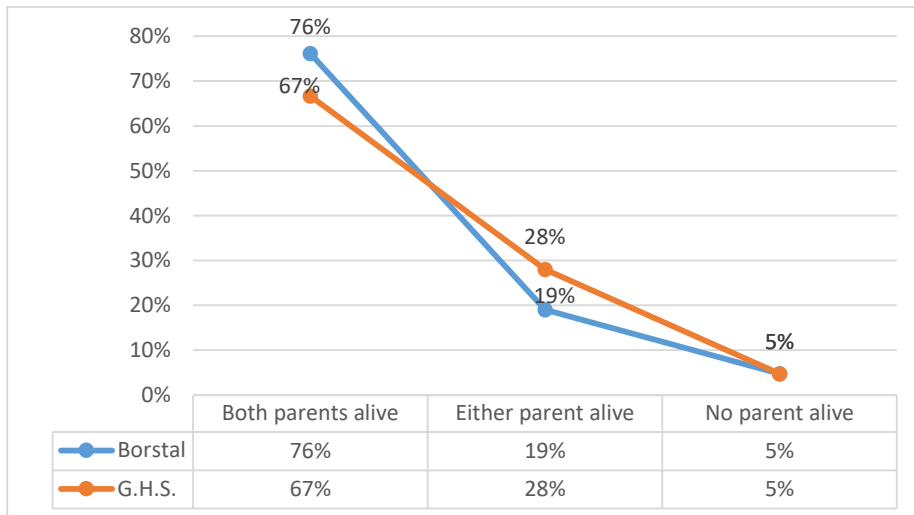
**METHODS**

This study was a mixed-method research involving the triangulation of semi-structured questionnaire and key-informant interview at two public institutions in Buea, South-Western Region of Cameroon. Letters of introduction from the Office of the Director of Pan African University Institute of Governance, Humanities and Social Sciences (PAUGHSS) to the principals of the two institutions granted me access to the institutions. The two institutions involved in the study were purposively sampled. The first institution – Borstal Institute, Buea – is a detention facility for adolescent offenders while Government High School (G.H.S), *Lycée Classique de Buea* is a regular secondary school which is the closest to the location of Borstal institute. Since Borstal Institute is a reformatory/ re-educational facility, a control group was introduced to the study population through the involvement of students from G.H.S., who were adolescent students without delinquent record but who belong to similar age bracket as the inmates of Borstal Institute. The respondents, on the other hand, were selected through convenient sampling. The questionnaire, which consists of nine questions, was structured to elucidate information about the demographic characteristics of both the adolescent respondents and those of their parents. The first four questions focused on the respondents’ demography i.e. their age, sex, level of education and position in the family; while the last five questions inquire about the respondents’ parents’ demography, including their educational level, occupation, and living/ residence arrangement. The data generated through the questionnaires was analysed through comparative analysis of the information given by the respondents from the two institutions, focusing on how disadvantaged familial demography could have influenced anti-social behaviours in the respondents sampled from Borstal Institute.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

**Respondents’ parents’ life/ death statuses**

The death of a parent(s) does generally have huge disruptive effect on young people/ adolescents. Thus, the first variable in this research was to compare the living status of the parents of adolescents sampled from the two study locations. Our findings revealed that adolescents that were sampled from Borstal institute had more advantage than adolescents sampled at G.H.S. by having more of their both parents alive. While 76% of Borstal residents reported that both of their parents were living, G.H.S. students reported that they had only 67% of both parents living. On the contrary however, 5% of adolescents sampled from the two locations reported that they are orphans.



*Fig. 1. Comparison between the life/ death statuses of the respondents’ parents*

Fig 1. reveals that adolescents sampled from Borstal institute were more privileged to have more of both of their parents alive than adolescents sampled from G.H.S. with 9%. This runs contrary to the findings from many researches in literature as they often associated disruptions in the lives of young children caused by early parental death with triggers for engagement in anti-social behaviours (Ellis et al., 2013; Guzzo & Gobbi, 2023; Okorodudu, 2010).

Guzzo & Gobbi (2023) claim that adolescents’ reactions to parental demise are, more often than not, negative – with many beginning to exhibit new behavioural challenges – including anger, alcohol and drug use, risky sexual activities, suicide ideation, depression, decreased ability to focus and adjustment issues. In their study on the victims of early parental death before age 18,

Ellis et al. (2013) emphasise that the feeling of disruption caused by the death of a parent are life-long thereby affecting victims' coping behaviours at adulthood.

Besides behavioural reactions to the early loss of a parent(s), it is also a common opinion that children's material/ financial and emotional needs can be better provided for through the joint efforts of both parents, thereby discouraging the children from involvement in anti-social behaviours. Okorodudu (2010) identifies divorce/ separation or death of a parent(s) as causes of dysfunctionality in homes. However, having both parents alive does not however mean that they were legally married, lived together or that they were jointly responsible to the children.

This findings from key-informant interview of staff at Borstal Institute however clarified that one of the categories of adolescents who are detained in the institute is socially delicate children – a group that include orphans, abandoned and street children – making one to hypothesize that one would find more orphans at Borstal Institute than one would find at G.H.S.. In a similar study on delinquent adolescents' resident in a Cameroonian juvenile correctional Centre, Ngale (2009) found out that 66.1% (about three-fifths) of the delinquent children studied were from-two parent homes; while only 1.8% of them are orphans.

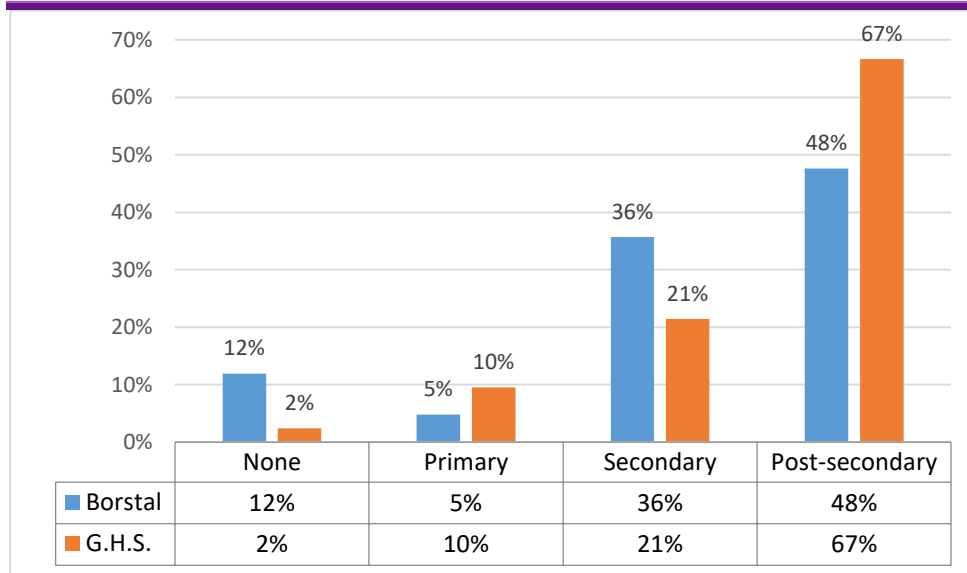
From the foregoing, it can be concluded that having lost one or both parents does not automatically make one vulnerable, especially in Africa where parenthood is seen as transcending biology. Okpako (2004, as cited in Okorodudu 2010) clarifies this by stating that the understanding of parenthood in African societies expands beyond immediate mother and father to include members of the extended family, neighbours and every other person who is, in one way or the other, related to the family. It is common practice in Africa for parents to give their children to families, friends and neighbours to raise; especially when the later are of better financial and educational standing than the children's biological parents. When they are orphaned, families and acquaintances therefore often feel a higher obligation to take up the responsibility for such children more than when their parent(s) were alive.

From our findings, it can be deduced that the will (feeling of obligation) and the wherewithal (moral and financial capability) to be responsible to children are far more important than who actually raises them. Therefore, it is very possible for a child whose both parents are alive to be anti-social if he is destitute of basic needs or if the parents themselves are anti-social; while another child, though an orphan, turns out to be pro-social if he has better guardianship from his foster parents. Thus, having one's parents alive does not automatically put one in a privileged position over another person whose parent(s) are late.

Similarly, previous literatures have placed far more emphasis on parental divorce and separation, over parental demise, as having more negative implications for adolescent behavioural outcome. This may be because adolescents who have lost a parent may share the pains and distress of the living parent, thereby feeling the obligation to make him/ her happy through their engagement in pro-social behaviours even when their needs cannot possibly be provided by the parent. On the other hand, adolescent whose parents are divorced/ separated may turn anti-social as a way of expressing their embarrassment and shame about the incident, not minding whether they have all their needs met or not.

### **Respondents' parents' educational level**

Comparing the highest level of education attained by the parents/ guardians of adolescents sampled from the two study locations, it was revealed that the parents of adolescents sampled from Borstal Institute were generally less educated than the parents of adolescents sampled from G.H.S. It was revealed that 12% of one or the two parents of adolescents from Borstal Institute were totally uneducated as opposed to just 2% of those of adolescents sampled from G.H.S.; while only 48% of one or the two parents of adolescent sampled from Borstal institute had post-secondary education compared to 67% of those of the adolescents from G.H.S.



**Fig. 2.** Comparison between the educational statuses of the respondents' parents

Fig. 2. shows that parents' education has negative relationship with adolescents' engagement in anti-social behaviours. Lack of education, especially at this age when knowledge is advancing by the day, could make parents to be uninformed or wrongly informed about child-rearing. These days, people are generally exposed to different forms of devices, situations and experiences, especially on the social media, which require appropriate parental guidance for them to be safely handled by young people. The lack of the required facts, familiarity and knowledge on such and similar situations, typical of uneducated parents, may render them incapable of providing the necessary control and supervision for adolescents on their use and practice. This may consequently put those adolescents at the risk of misuse or misapplication, therefore causing them to practise anti-social behaviours.

Similarly, the lack of parental education may translate to unemployment or less earnings when employed, compared to the experience of their educated counterparts. This may therefore mean that poor, uneducated parents would find it difficult meeting the emotional, financial and material needs of their family on one hand, or may have to work for longer hours for them to be able to meet such needs. The longer the period spent working, the further the parents would be from their children, thus reducing the time spent on monitoring, controlling and disciplining the children.

Ang & Goh (2006, as cited in Okorodudu, 2010) similarly confirm that parents' excessive involvement in economic activities, in order to be able to meet up with family financial commitments, may hinder them from giving the essential parental monitoring and control that are required for adolescents' moral and behavioural development. Children whose behaviours and conduct are not properly controlled may thus end up engaging in risky and anti-social behaviours. This is because adolescence is generally characterized by risk-taking desires, while lacking risk-assessment ability (Muyibi et al, 2010; Puspa, 2016).

### Respondents' parents' employment statuses

Adolescents who reported that they has one or both parents alive (N=40) were asked to indicate their parents' employment status. The aim of this question was to evaluate the ability of the parents to take responsibility for adolescents' needs – a factor that is often associated with influencing adolescent social behaviour. Our findings from adolescents sampled from Borstal Institute showed that 50% of adolescents reported that both of their parents were employed, 30% had only one parent employed, while 20% reported that none of their parents were employed. On the contrary, 75% of adolescents sampled from G.H.S. reported that both of their parents were employed, 20% reported that one of their parents was employed while 0% reported that none of their parent was unemployed.

Table 1: Comparison of the employment status of the respondents' parents

	Borstal	G.H.S.
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Both parents employed	50%	75%
Only one parent employed	30%	25%
No parent employed	20%	0%

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Table 1. reveals that parental unemployment and the consequent financial incapability to be responsive to the daily needs of their children has a positive relationship with children’s engagement in anti-social activities and behaviours. This confirms the hypothesis that adolescents that are resident at Borstal institute have less-privileged familial demographic characteristics than adolescent sampled at G.H.S.

Parental financial independence resulting in their ability to provide for children’s financial and material needs is generally portrayed as having negative relationship with children’s involvement in anti-social behaviours. It is often believed that most anti-social adolescents are victims of destitution which often pushes them to seeking gratification outside the protective cover of the family (Ngale, 2012), thus causing them to suffer both as victims and perpetrators of anti-social behaviours (Koffman, 2008).

Puspa (2016) similarly suggests that a large number of children who engage in anti-social behaviours are victims of socio-economic circumstances, which push them to engage in delinquent and status offences. Anti-social behaviours, in this case, can be described as adolescent deviant quests for fulfilment due to vulnerability and as a means of escape from dysfunctional family settings (Ngale, 2012).

Going by the above, it is obvious that there is a high probability that some of the respondents from Borstal Institute who indicated that their parents were unemployed have found themselves at the institute as a result of frustration from the destitution at home. While a number of the key-informants from the Borstal Institute agreed with this opinion that the inability or failure of parents to provide for adolescents’ needs could result in their involvement in anti-social behaviours, one of the key-informants however insisted that “over-protection” and “too much comfort” could bring about the same behavioural outcome in adolescents. According to him, children can become delinquent and irresponsible if they always have all the things they want without proper checks from their parents.

Contrarily, however, Ang & Goh (2006, as cited in Okorodudu, 2010) maintain that parents’ employment can be detrimental, just as it can be beneficial to children’s development. While they agree that parents’ employment allows them to meet their financial obligations at home, they equally point out that parents’ excessive involvement in economic activities, in order to be able to meet up with family financial commitments, may hinder them from giving the essential parental monitoring and control that are required for adolescents’ moral development.

### **Respondents’ parents’ marital status**

The comparison of the state of marriage of the parents of adolescents sampled from Borstal institute and of those from G.H.S. revealed a gap in the marital status of the respondents’ parents. Our findings shows that 57% of our respondents from Borstal reported that their parents were legally married, while 67% of our respondents from G.H.S. reported that their parents were legally married.

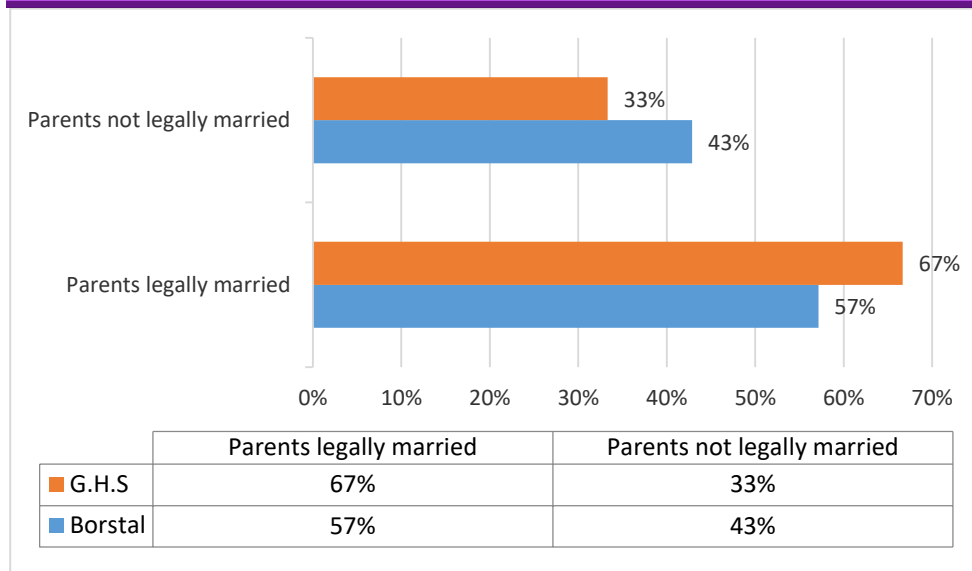


Fig. 3: Comparison of the marital statuses of the respondents' parents

Fig. 3. reveals that parents' marital statuses have implications for adolescents' behavioural and moral development. The findings support the hypothesis that adolescents that are resident at Borstal Institute have less-privileged familial characteristics than adolescent sampled at G.H.S. Parents who were legally married are more likely to be more united, emotionally stable and better prepared for their children's upbringing than parents who were not legally married. This is because there is the general opinion that legal marriage, as against mere cohabitation or single parenthood, makes parents to be more responsive, more responsible and more committed to the children.

In addition, marriage agreement in Africa often goes beyond the independent decision of the couple involved. Parents and families from both sides are usually involved from the point of initiating the marriage and remain a very strong force in determining what becomes of the marriage at any point in the future. Therefore, even if a marriage eventually ends in divorce or separation, the families often ensure that each parent or the families themselves continues to perform their obligations towards the children that are the products of such marriage.

As it was gathered from one of our key-informants, unmarried mothers sometimes dumped / abandoned their children when they did not have anybody to take responsibility for them. All the key-informants equally attested that one of the reasons for establishing Borstal Institute was to see to the welfare of such children, known as "socially-delicate children" and they likewise confirmed that some of such abandoned children were resident at the institute as at the period of conducting this research.

### Respondents' parents' living arrangement

The assessment of the living arrangement of the respondents who have earlier responded that both of their parents were alive (n=30) was done by asking the adolescents to respond to the question that asked whether their parents lived together or not. As it was hypothesized, the data generated from this question revealed that more respondents from Borstal Institute whose both parents were alive reported that their parents did not live together (44%) as compared to respondents from G.H.S. who reported that 36% of their parent did not live together.

Table 2: Comparison of the living arrangement of the respondents' parent

Responses	Borstal	G.H.S
Parents live together	56%	64%
Parents live apart	44%	36%



A follow-up question was posed to adolescents who responded that their parents did not live together in order to know the exact reason why they lived apart. The responses to this question showed that all the adolescents from Borstal institute who reported that their parents were not living together gave divorce (43%) and separation due to disagreement (57%) as the causes of their parents' not living together. Contrarily, the most popular reason given by the respondents from G.H.S. was separation due to work demand (one of the parents worked away from home but remained committed got reunited with the family at certain points) given by 60% of the respondents; 40% gave separation due to disagreement while 0% gave divorce as the reason why their parents were living separately.

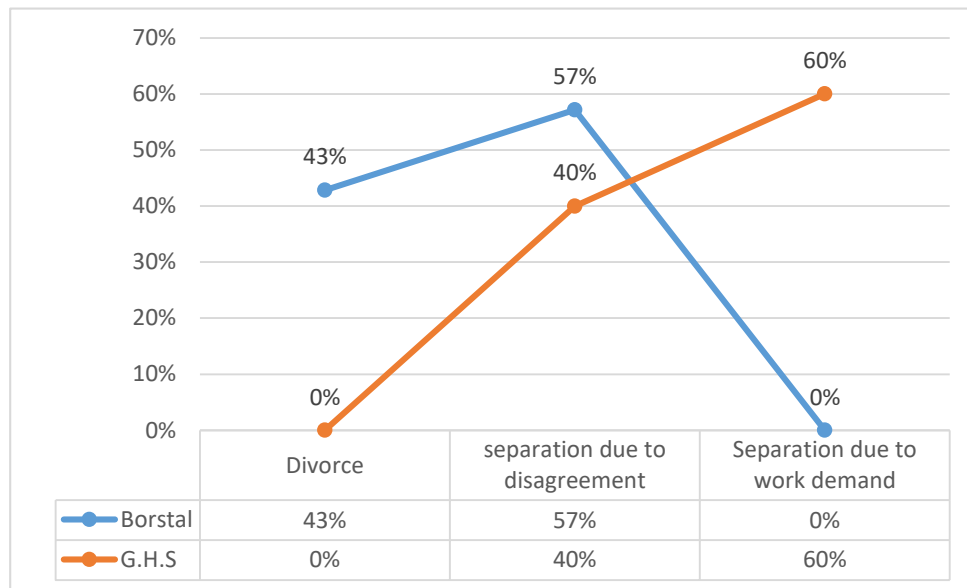


Fig. 4. Comparison of the reasons why the respondents' parents lived separately

Fig. 4. shows that parental divorce and separation (due to disagreement) do have strong positive relationship with their adolescent children's involvement in anti-social behaviours. This confirms the hypothesis that Borstal residents are adolescents with more disadvantaged familial demographic characteristics as compared to adolescents sampled from G.H.S. The findings here equally reveal that the fact that parents do not live together does not automatically have negative effects on adolescents' behaviour because this may be for positive reasons (such as in work demand).

However, when parents live apart as a result of either divorce or separation, it often has negatively affects the moral and behavioural development of the children. This is particularly true in nuclear families where contact with extended family members is minimal, coupled with the fact that the single parents have to work, sometimes for longer hours in order to support the family (especially if he/ she finances the family solely, which is usually the case). Parents' divorce or separation automatically means there is one person less to control and monitor the conduct of the children.

There is also the likelihood that children raised in single-parent families will have less of their financial and material needs met as compared to children that are raised in two-parent families where the parents jointly contribute towards providing for the children. Therefore, it can be said that it is likely for children from single-parent families to experience a higher degree of depravity, compared to their mates from two-parent families, which is often positively associated with adolescents' involvement in anti-social behaviour.

Lastly, adolescents who are victims of parental divorce or separation may express their anger and disappointment towards their parents through their engagement in anti-social behaviours. Thornberry, et al (1999, as cited in Doggett, 2009) assert that children who are raised in families with only one parent, or by parents whose marriages have been disrupted by divorce or separation, are more often predisposed to exhibiting varieties of delinquent behaviours, compared to children who are raised in two-parent families. Okorodudu (2010) equally points out that divorce and separation may result in adolescents' embarrassment, depression, truancy, poor academic performance and participation in delinquent behaviours.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The influence of familial characteristics on adolescents' behavioural and moral development have been analysed through the five variables examined in this work. It was revealed that the characteristics of the family and parental demography have got a lot of

impacts on adolescents' personality traits and social behavioural exhibition. Conclusively, familiar characteristics do shape the moral and behavioural development of children and thus, influence children's tendencies towards exhibiting either pro-social or anti-social behaviours at adolescence.

Renewed effort to improve family support services in the country is recommended. This could be in form of creating more employment opportunities and economic empowerment programmes in other to reduce poverty in families. This would work to ensure that families get a means of livelihood for their members. This is necessary as poverty and deprivation, as it has also been demonstrated by our findings, are positively associated with adolescent involvement in anti-social behaviours.

In very extreme cases where the family situations are hopeless or where the families are not available/ accessible – such as in the cases of abandoned children, street children, orphans and vulnerable children – the government should make efforts towards providing support for individual child rather than embarking on endless search for their parents/ families. Such children should, first of all be rehabilitated into the normal and acceptable way of life in the society, after which those who are of school age among them should be re-enrolled in school while those above school age should be economically empowered. This will enhance their economic independence and, with proper monitoring and guidance, reduce their probability of recidivism.

### LIMITATIONS

The author recognizes that the objectivity of this study may be limited by the disposition of individuals to hide the shortcomings of their families.

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