

VOLUME 3: NO. 1, JUNE 2013

THE PREDICTIVE ABILITY OF SOCIAL CONTROL THEORY IN EXPLAINING VIOLENCE

Udo Chikezie Osisioogu, PhD

Department of Sociology, Nasarawa State University, Keffi
udosis@hotmail.com

Abstract

This article is a theoretical examination of the predictive ability of social control theory in explaining violence and violent behaviour. Violent behaviour is of concern to all societies. After a review of various dimensions of control theory and violence, it is argued that individual and group socialization processes, social bonding and having a stake in society are attributes that could control (or inhibit), mitigate or enhance the culture and use of violence in any given society. However, moral relativism is a variable associated with the nature of social control and violence. It is suggested that policies, structures and support systems should be put in place that would educate and engage citizens and encourage integration or assimilation into society, hence facilitating adherence to laws, norms and values. This in turn would enable individuals to have fulfilled lives. In addition to operating a zero tolerance policy for violence, having clear rewards and sanctions for non-violent and violent behaviour respectively are good strategies to adopt.

Key words: theory, social control, violence, delinquency and crime

Introduction

Most societies and countries including Nigeria continue to grapple with individuals and groups who prefer to adopt violence as a method of responding to dissatisfaction and in the course of deviant or criminal activities. The elimination or reduction of violence in Nigeria is central for a healthy society, peace and order. Hence, this article intends to explore this phenomenon(a) from 'appropriate' sociological and criminological theoretical perspective(s). Violent crimes are defined as legally prohibited acts whose primary objective is to deliberately make use of force to cause injury on persons or objects, and also, the intention to engage in

such behaviour (Vold and Bernard, 1986). From sociological and criminological theory, certain perspectives contribute more to the understanding of particular deviant acts or crimes. For instance, psychoanalytic, reinforcement, and containment theories contribute to the understanding of the drug addict, the sex offender, the violent offender, the sociopath, and the juvenile delinquent. In this evaluation of theoretical perspective(s) on violence, attention will be on the Social Control Theory, which could also be referred to as the Containment Theory. In the course of exploring the nature of violence, and the predictive ability of the social control theory, this article is arranged according to themes associated with

control and violence, and proponents of control theory perspectives. First, the nature of violence is discussed below.

Violent Behaviour

The use of violence for attaining desires and acquiring property is generally unacceptable in all societies. Haskell and Yablonsky, (1978) noted that violence committed upon previously unknown victims with no logical or apparent reason or goals can be traumatic to people, and society in general. According to Haskell and Yablonsky (1978), there is a tendency to view one convicted of a violent crime as a dangerous person. The violent offender is seldom accorded leniency by a court, and is usually sentenced to a long prison term, and is regarded as dangerous while in prison. Schlesinger (1969) observed that violent offenders are a diverse group, and that studies indicate that violence observed in the home in childhood, the experience of accidents, diseases, physical beatings, and other traumatic incidents were found to be far more evident among murderers than a similar group of average citizens. However, he noted that for predictive purposes, these studies are of little help because millions of people may suffer through similar early life experiences without committing a violent crime. Also violent behaviour can be acquired through learning as elucidated in the “subculture of violence” explanation. Subcultures can provide an environment in which violent behaviour is learned. For instance, children brought up in a rundown environment where aggression is accepted and reinforced are likely to acquire violent attitudes and patterns of behaviour. Thus they may become predisposed to react violently.

The mass media has always been an avenue for learning. The content of the mass media is an important source for the

transmission of violent images that could attract the attention of developing minds. For instance, violence on television is a typical example. According to The Los Angeles Times of December 18, 1975 a review of literature on the subject matter did not reveal a single study which showed that violence did not have an effect. Generally, the literature and research indicate that television has an emotional appeal which could be educative and could prevent or reduce violent behaviours. Bromberg and George, (1969) noted that role models with violent disposition appearing on television could influence viewers. For Bromberg and George (1969) the use of television through a mass “emotional education” can prevent violence or in a practical way try to reduce it. In Nigeria, cable television networks have gained popularity and are commonly used in most homes – the extent to which children are supervised with this technology is yet to be determined.

The Surgeon General’s Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behaviour (1971) in the United States highlighted the following from their research:

- Program content includes an enormous amount of violence.
- Programs designed for children contained by far the most violence.
- An aspect of violence on television is that killing someone is an approved method of solving problems.
- In most cases, when the hero encounters the villain, he draws a weapon and fall him, and no action is taken against him.
- All this may very well influence the young viewer into seeking similar solutions to his problems.

Access to guns and other dangerous weapons have also been said to be a contributory factor to violence. For example, in the United States, crimes of violence and aggravated assault were committed through the use of fire arms according to the findings of the Federal Bureau of Investigation: Uniform Crime Reports 1975. It was believed that the availability of hand guns was blamed by many for the increase in such violent crimes as murder and robbery. In Nigeria, at the end of the civil war (1966-1969) criminals readily used weapons acquired during the war. Recent ethnic, religious and communal clashes have all lead to illegal acquisitions of weapons for 'self defence' and criminal activities.

With regards to the patterns of violence, four categories that encompass almost all patterns of violence have been put forward by Haskell and Yablonsky (1978). These are as follows:

- (i) Legal violence - violent acts which are supported in law. For instance, the soldier is trained for violent encounters and rewarded for this when carried out in the line of duty. Also, the duty of policing involves the use of violence if necessary. Other legal justified violence is found in certain sports such as boxing and wrestling, and certain acts of self defence.
- (ii) Socially sanctioned violence – this involves violence that is supported and approved by society even though it is illegal to do so. For instance, taking laws into one's hands by attacking sex offenders and adulterers.
- (iii) Rational violence or illegal non-sanctioned rational violence - this includes violence for financial gain such as robbery and assault upon a person, or the commission of homicide within the

structure of organized crimes, would be rational behaviour within the criminal context.

- (iv) Illegal, non-sanctioned, irrational violence - this category is usually referred to as "senseless violence." It includes such crimes as random shooting and violent gang homicide. Initially, the crimes appear unprovoked with no apparent motivation, and generally, the victim is unknown to the murderer.

From the aforementioned on violence, irrespective of the nature of violence or violent behaviour in question, there is some decision making process involved on the part of the actor. By implication, engaging in violent behaviour could occur when there is a 'breakdown' in individual and group control mechanisms. Even when random shootings or senseless violent behaviour is exhibited, the perpetrator still exhibits some level of planning and coordination sometimes in selecting locations and targets. The use of violence could be attributed to lack of personal control, the outcome of several factors or variables within the individual, family, group and community or society in general. Below, the nature of social control is highlighted before delving into theoretical perspectives that attempt to explain and predict deviant and violent behaviour, which is probably the result of dysfunctional social control measures.

The Nature of Social Control

According to Jensen, (2003: 2)

This type of theory has roots in the perspectives on human society proposed by the English social philosopher, Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679). In his best-known work, *Leviathan; or, The Matter, Form, and Power of a Commonwealth*

Ecclesiastical and Civil (1651), Hobbes argued that human nature would generate a perennial war of all against all were choices not constrained by implicit social contracts, agreements and arrangements among people. From such a perspective, there is nothing mysterious about theft and violence when it has no social or political costs. This argument does not imply that people are “naturally” evil or “bad.” Rather, such moral designations are created in the construction of social order, assigning costs and consequences to certain choices and defining some as evil, immoral and/or illegal.

To a large extent, the concept of violence is subjective and is culturally defined. Thus, like deviance and crime, the understanding, use of violence, and how violence or violent behaviour is managed may differ between societies. The social control theory proposes that an individual's socialisation and social learning process can be harnessed to build or create self-control and thus, reduce the tendency to engage in behavior recognised as antisocial (Wikipedia, 2012).

Control theory starts with the assumption that the motivation for criminal behaviour is a part of human nature, and that all individuals would naturally commit crimes if left to their own devices (Haskell and Yablonsky, 1978). Control theory focuses on the restraining or controlling forces imposed on individuals or members of the society. It then implies that if these forces breakdown, individuals are likely to commit crimes. According to O'Connor (2006), unlike most criminological theories that focus on the drives or motivation behind criminal actions, control theories focus on why people do not commit crimes. Further, control theorists believe that human beings by nature find it difficult to resist temptation, hence, emphasis should be on the retraining or

‘controlling’ factors that appear to be absent within the personalities of criminals and if restraining factors involve society (such as those involving norms), control theory can be regarded as ‘social’ control theory or social bond theory. The following are significant contributors to the social control theory concerning delinquency in particular and other deviant behaviours in general.

Emile Durkheim

French sociologist Emile Durkheim's (1897) theory of anomie described the breakdown of social restraints on behaviours that are motivated by unlimited human needs. First, Durkheim believed that society is more important than the individual and that individuals learn the morality and values of society. Durkheim believed that social order was based on a core of shared values, and in small-scale societies solidarity is mechanical in nature – it is simple and relatively easy to have a common consensus on how to manage activities including sanctioning offenders. Here, norms, values, and beliefs are homogenous giving little room for individuality or deviance from this collective conscience and in traditional societies, codes of conduct embedded in religion was central in norms and values. According to Durkheim, in advanced societies solidarity is organic and complicated. Organic solidarity emanates as one of the by-products of the division of labour. For Durkheim the modern individual is not adequately integrated into society due to weak societal bonds. Thus, social regulation could disintegrate leaving individuals to devices. This could eventually give rise to ‘anomie’ (breakdown of norms that could result in suicide), deviance, social unrest, unhappiness, and stress. These conditions lead to social “disintegration,” with probable high rates of egocentric behaviour, norm violation, and consequent de-legitimation and distrust

of authority. Deductively, one can argue that resorting to violence and even terrorist activities could be responses adopted by individuals or groups in response to these frustrations. A criticism of Durkheim's ideas is that he presents society in an overly positivist, implying that the majority of citizens are satisfied with the way society has been organised.

Albert Reiss (personal, social controls and delinquency)

In Containment Theory, the inner and outer pushes and pulls on an individual will produce delinquency unless they are constrained or counteracted by inner and outer containment measures (See, 2004). Early control theory concentrated on explaining delinquency. Reiss (1951) argued that delinquency was the result of a failure of personal and social controls. In addition to the work of Reckless and Dinitz at Ohio State during the 1960s these explanations became known as containment theory, which is a perception of social controls consisting of "pushes" and "pulls" with self-concept as the main "insulator" from delinquency (O'Connor, 2006). Kutash *et al* (1978) observed that in one of the earliest propositions on social control Reiss (1951) carried out studies with delinquents by reviewing the records of some juvenile probationers. Reiss discovered that probation revocation was more likely when the juvenile was psychiatrically diagnosed as having weak ego or superego controls, and when the psychiatrist recommended either intensive psychotherapy in the community or treatment in a closed institution. Reiss (1951: 196) defined delinquency as, "...behavior consequent to the failure of personal and social controls." Personal control was defined as, "...the ability of the individual to refrain from meeting needs in ways which conflict with the norms and rules of the community" while social control was,

"...the ability of social groups or institutions to make norms or rules effective." Appraising this explanation, Vold and Bernard, (1986) noted that Reiss's argument was weak, since he did not take into consideration a variety of factors related to the strength of family and community controls over the juvenile. Further, Reiss' version did not specify the sources of the ability of groups or institutions to make norms and rules effective, and he also did not specify control mechanisms that lead to conformity.

Jackson Toby (behavioural control and stake in conformity)

Toby, (1957) introduced the concept of having a "stake in conformity" as the basic mechanism by which tendencies toward delinquency are controlled. Toby, (1957) argued that "the uncommitted adolescent is a candidate for gang socialization." He acknowledged "gang socialization" as part of causal and motivational factors that contribute to delinquency. Thus, he introduced the concept of "stakes in conformity to explain "candidacy" for such learning experiences. For Toby, many people experience the temptation of being delinquent, but majority refuse or reject this temptation because of the consideration that they had too much to lose in their given society. The young who had few stakes or investments in conformity were more likely to be drawn into gang activity. Thus, deviance is associated with an individual's judgement of what he or she has to lose if they violate the law – for instance, will it affect their livelihood or career?

Ivan Nye (family as source of control)

Nye's (1958) study focused on the family as the single most important source of social control for adolescents. He argued that most delinquent behaviour was the result of insufficient social control, and that if all

individual needs were met there would be no point in violations of the laws. Nye (1958) proposed that there are four types of control:

- (i) **Direct:** by which punishment is threatened or applied for wrongful behavior, and compliance is rewarded by parents, family, and authority figures.
- (ii) **Internal:** by which a youth refrains from delinquency through the conscience or superego.
- (iii) **Indirect:** by identification with those who influence behavior, say because his or her delinquent act might cause pain and disappointment to parents and others with whom he or she has close relationships.
- (iv) Control through needs satisfaction, i.e. if all an individual's needs are met, there is no point in criminal activity.

The family is the primary agent of socialization, and is a significant center for symbolic interaction and self-concepts. O'Connor (2006) summarised the outcome of research on the impact of the family factor on crime and deviance as follows: Criminal parentage (property crime); Divorce (serious crime), Stepfamily (rebelliousness and drugs); Adoption (mental illness), Punitive parenting (violence, mental illness and status; Incompetent parenting (property crime and mental illness; and Single parenting (status offences). It has been noted that the focus on the family as a source of control was in marked contrast to the emphasis on economic circumstances as a source of criminogenic motivation at the time (Wikipedia, 2012). According to O'Connor, (2006) the family explanation became significant in the history

of control theory because it addressed both personal and social forms of control. He added that Nye (1958) also pioneered the use of self-report data, such as the use of questionnaires to ask delinquents what behaviours they had engaged in.

Walter Reckless (inner and outer containment)

For Reckless (1961), all individuals are affected by a variety of forces driving them toward, and a variety of other forces restraining them from crime and delinquency. Reckless (1961) called the driving forces social control pressures. These social pressures include social pulls that draw the person away from accepted norms of living. He noted that there are also psychological pushes that drive the individual towards crime. Reckless also discussed what he referred to as external and internal containment. External containment being support groups, institutional reinforcements of rules and values and societal norms. Inner containment is said to be the product of internalisation, and consists of self-control, ego, superego strength and tolerance - ideas traceable to the works of psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. The id contains basic instincts and drives, such as the need for food, water, sex, and pleasure. The ego is referred to as the executive or rational part of the personality, and it acts to keep the id in check, while the superego is the part of the personality that contains the conscience of the individual (Nye, 1996).

According to See, (2004) the Freudian view of behaviour focuses on early childhood development claiming that criminal activity is the result of a conflict between the id, ego, and superego, which can eventually be traced back to a conflict in early childhood experiences. Thus, criminal behaviour is the result of a mental disturbance, probably the result of

conflict between the id, ego, and superego, or it may be the result of an anomaly during a stage of emotional development. See's (2004) appraisal of this explanation revealed that psychological theories are difficult if not impossible to test, and it is virtually impossible to see, identify, or measure the id, ego, or superego – thus, testing these theories becomes virtually impossible.

However, Reckless (1961) developed containment theory by focusing on a youth's self-conception or self-image of being a good person as an insulator against peer pressure to engage in delinquency. Thus, inner containment is associated with positive sense of self, while outer containment has to do with supervision and discipline. Inner containment through self-images is developed within the family and is usually formed by about the age of twelve. On the other hand, outer containment was a reflection of strong social relationships with significant others such as teachers and other sources of socialisation within ones' community. Hence, in this proposition there are "pushes" and "pulls" that will produce delinquent behaviour unless they are counteracted by containment. Some interesting motivations to deviate from societal norms, which are also 'pushes' include: discontent with living conditions and family conflicts; aggressiveness and hostility, perhaps due to biological factors; and frustration and boredom, for instance, those arising from membership of a minority group or through lack of opportunities to advance in school or find employment. 'Pulls,' refer to the enabling circumstances and environment for deviant behaviour such as delinquent peers, and delinquent subculture, which is elucidated below.

Gresham Sykes and David Matza (drift and neutralization)

In Sykes and Matza's (1957) study on delinquency, they noted that most of the time, delinquents are engaged in routine law-abiding behaviours just like everyone else, and that delinquents "age out" of delinquency and settle down to law-abiding lives when they reach late adolescence or early adulthood. They developed an analysis of "neutralization," a strategy adopted to rationalise deviant behaviour. Hence, deviant behaviour can be maintained, suspended or stopped in favour of conformist behaviour. According to Sykes and Matza, (1957) the five common techniques were: (i) denial of responsibility (I couldn't help myself) (ii) denial of injury (nobody got hurt) (iii) denial of victim (they had it coming) (iv) condemnation of the condemners (what right do they have to criticize me?) (v) appeal to higher loyalties (I did it for someone else). In a nutshell, delinquent subculture refers to the luring impact (pull factor) of peers or a group that could encourage an individual to embark on deviant behaviours or delinquency in order to get approvals or comradeship from the group or peers. In a later development, Matza (1964) developed his theory of "drift" which proposed that people used neutralisation to drift in and out of conventional behaviour. Thus, shifting some focus from moral restraints. Matza's (1964) Drift Theory noted that delinquents "drift" in and out of crime on an occasional basis, but conforming for the most part, and offending occasionally. In addition, most offenders "age out" of crime and settle down to law-abiding lifestyles and drift is caused by a broad sense of injustice and a sense of irresponsibility, which are both reinforced by the delinquent's views of

conventional legal standards for justice (O'Connor, 2006).

Travis Hirschi (general self-control theory)

Attempts have been made to 'consolidate' social control theories into a General Theory of Crime with emphasis on 'control' and criminal activity or deviance. A major proponent Hirschi (1969) adopted Toby's (1957) concept of an investment in conventionality or "stake in conformity". He stressed the rationality in the decision whether to engage in crime and argued that a person was less likely to choose crime if they had strong social bonds. Hirschi's (1969) research on delinquency promoted researches that made use of self-report data collection methods. This model of the family, the school, and peers as the most important factors were given serious considerations in criminal justice administration (O'Connor, (2006). For instance, with regard to religion, research have supported and also disagreed with the notion that religion is a moderate insulator from delinquency and crime. However, O'Connor (2006) observed that the yard sticks used in measuring religiosity creates limitations in the studies. Thus, the attachment aspect of social bonding is often associated with the family, while issues such as commitment and belief are associated with religion. For clarity, some key definitions of terms associated with these explanations include: Attachment - affection, liking or love and sensitivity, compassion, understanding or sympathy to others; Commitment - investment in conventional society or stake in conformity, promise, pledge, obligation, vow, dedication, devotion or loyalty to family, group, community or society; Involvement - being busy, restricted opportunities for delinquency, participation, concern, connection or being part of a community; and Belief - degree to which person thinks they should obey the law,

faith or conviction on a matter or whatever is at stake.

Hirschi eventually shifted from his bonding theory, and in partnership with Gottfredson, developed a General Theory or "Self-Control Theory" in 1990 (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). In an evaluation of the self control theory, Akers (1991) argued that one of the limitations of this new theory was that Gottfredson and Hirschi did not define self-control and the tendency toward criminal behavior separately. For Akers, by implication, this omission suggests that the concepts of low self-control and propensity for criminal behavior are the same. It is noted in Wikipedia, (2012) that Hirschi and Gottfredson (1993) responded by rejecting Akers' argument and made it clear that their theory is actually an indication of the consistency of a General Theory – i.e. the theory is internally consistent by conceptualizing crime and deriving from that a concept of the offender's traits.

Jack Gibbs (control theory and homicide)

Gibbs, (1989) applied the social control theory in his explanation of the crime of homicide. For Gibbs, control refers to intervention in any shape or form to alter behaviour positively or negatively by a third party (an individual group or society – expectations, norms or values). Gibbs proposed that "Homicide can be described either as control or as resulting from control failure" (1989: 35,37), and he suggested that the homicide rate is an indication of the failure of social control measures. In addition, murder represented another violent attempt at direct control. In other words, people may resort to self-help when forms of social control are unavailable or fail. Gibbs was also critical of Hirschi's Social Control Theory because it assumed that social relationships, personal investments and beliefs that discourage

delinquency are social controls (a reason why Hirschi's theory is often referred to as a Social Bond Theory) (Wikipedia, 2012). Social Bonding Theory is a control theory that states that individuals will commit criminal or delinquent acts when their ties (bonds) to society are weakened or have broken, and there are four types of bonds: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. When the bonds are strong, an individual will refrain from criminal activity (See, 2004).

Ryan Cragun and Deborah Cragun (formal and informal social control)

Cragun and Cragun, (2006) noted that there are two general types of social control: formal social control refers to components of society that are designed for the re-socialisation of individuals who break formal rules, for example prisons and mental health institutions; while informal social control refers to elements of society that are designed to reinforce informal cultural norms, for example grounding erring teenagers in the home. Thus, under a control theory perspective, social control refers to those elements that keep an individual from committing a criminal or deviant act - examples include the family, church, and school. Social control theory proposes that people's relationships, commitments, values, norms, and beliefs encourage them not to break the law. The implication is that if individuals internalize moral codes and if they have a stake in their wider community, they will voluntarily limit their propensity to commit deviant acts (Wikipedia, 2012). However, stake in the community could result in rationalizations to use violence to achieve a particular objective – an indication of rational violence on the part of the actor.

Finally, below is an examination of the association between violence or the use of violence and personal or group control using examples from notable figures and incidents worldwide.

Control Theory and the Use of Violence (local and international examples)

Examples of individuals who exhibited great control in the course of their agitations include Mahatma Gandhi a prominent and political leader during British rule in India. He denounced violent confrontations. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a civil rights activist and leader in the African-American Civil Rights Movement. He adopted and vigorously pursued the advancement of civil rights using nonviolent civil disobedience. Nelson Mandela, former President of South Africa was an anti-apartheid revolutionary and politician who denounced violence. All these leaders exhibited restraint and encouraged their followers to do same in spite of intimidation, harassment and actual imprisonment from the ruling authorities. Reasons for their actions are not far apart from those identified by the theorist discussed in this article – for example, having a stake in conformity and the need to live up to their responsibility at the time. Other examples include events described as the “Arab Spring” denoting the demonstrations, riots and protests which were both violent and nonviolent in several Arabic countries such as Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen and Morocco. The ruling authorities sometimes confronted the protesters with violence – the country of Syria is an example.

In Nigeria for instance, certain groups have adopted violent behaviours to draw attention to their needs and demands, for example, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND and the Boko Haram

sect(s). Firearms and explosives are often used in the course of the quest for 'social justice.' One major concern is the use of apparently young people as vessels for these violent crimes (Adesoji, 2010). According to Adesoji (2010) various underlying factors such as economic disequilibrium, envy, pervasive poverty and rampant unemployment render many youths willing tools in the hands of patrons. Maiangwa and Uzodike, (2012:5) noted that this assertion is corroborated by the fact that states most susceptible to religious violence and terrorism are those that are "poorer, unstable, and have a chronic history of violence." Individual control and adherence to the law cannot be disassociated from the social (e.g. cultural, ethnic and religious dynamics), economic (e.g. resource control and utilisation), political (power and citizenship, including the concept of the 'social contract') situations prevalent at the time, and the efficacy of the criminal justice system – ensuring equity and justice in all parts of the nation, country, state or polity. Co-opting children and young people to engage in terrorist activities requires a degrees of socialization and rationalizations to challenge authority. In the case of the Arab spring, causes have been attributed to dissatisfaction with their governments, poverty, unemployment, corruption in leadership and the quest for social, economic and political change. It is unfortunate that in most of the jurisdictions cited, the use and threat of violence appeared to have enabled the desired change or 'progress.'

Conclusion

First, the relevance of the social contract theory in this theoretical examination emanates from the works of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Locke (1632-1704) and Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and other

philosophers. The concept hinges on the notion that in any given society, people have the moral obligation to obey the generally shared norms and values, and the law in particular. Though the origin of this theory was based on the concept of political authority, social contract theory can be defined as a hypothetical or actual agreement between society and the state (Russel, 2008). If citizens abide by the laws, in return, they expect protection and good governance, especially as it concerns meeting their basic needs. Hence, weakened social control and resorting to violence could be as a result of anomalies within a social contract. In this regard the law abiding individuals or groups have a deeper sense of community bonding and other civil methods of seeking redress. However, violent crimes tend to attract harsher societal reprisal than non physical crimes such as fraud. Social control refers to the various means used by a society to get its members to abide by the norms and values as stipulated by the culture or constitution. For See, (2004) control theories are a classification of theories that claim to ask not why do people commit criminal acts, but why do they not commit criminal acts? These theories assume everyone has the desire to commit criminal and deviant acts, and seeks to answer why some people refrain from doing so.

The social control theory is not devoid of criticisms. The social control theory does not consider motivational issues, simply stating that human beings may choose to engage in a wide range of activities, unless the range is limited by the processes of socialization and social learning (Wikipedia, 2012). Further, early research is based on self-reporting studies which can be problematic because there may be different motives for disclosing information, and it is not unlikely that questions

could be interpreted differently. However, conclusions from research suggest that generally, individuals will not engage in crime if they think that this will negatively impact on the affection or respect of significant others, or cause them to lose their liberty and employment.

The writer is of the opinion that in spite of the difficulty in determining the impact of societal control measures, both formal and informal measures prevent individuals and groups from engaging in violent behaviour, and one cannot overlook wider societal issues when seeking for explanations for violent behaviour. In understanding violence, control theory appears to offer plausible explanations.

References

- Adesoji, A. (2010) 'The Boko Haram Uprising and Islamic Revivalism in Nigeria,' *Africa Spectrum*, 45 (2), pp. 95-108.
- Akers, R.L. (1991). 'Self-control as a general theory of crime,' *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 7, 201-211.
- Cragun, R.T. and Cragun, D. (2006). *Introduction to Sociology*, Wikibooks Edition 1.0, 6th March. [http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Introduction to Sociology](http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Introduction_to_Sociology) Accessed January 10, 2013
- Durkheim, E. (1897/1951). *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. (J. Spaulding, & G. Simpson, Trans.) New York: The Free Press.
- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI): Uniform Crime Reports (1975). Washington, DC: US Department of Justice.
- Gibbs, J.P. (1989). *Control: Sociology's Central Notion*, Illinois: University of Illinois Press.
- Gottfredson, M. and Hirschi, T. (1990). *A General Theory of Crime*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Haskell, M.R. and Yablonsky, L. (1978). *Crime and Delinquency*, Third Edition, Chicago IL: Rand McNally and Co.
- Hirschi, T. (1969). *Causes of Delinquency*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hirschi, T. (1983). 'Crime and the Family.' In J. Wilson (Ed.) *Crime and Public Policy*. San Francisco: ICS.
- Hirschi, T. (2002). *Causes of delinquency*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers.
- Hirschi, T. and Stark, R. (1969). 'Hellfire and Delinquency,' *Journal of Social Problems*, 17:202-213.
- Hirschi, T. and Gottfredson, M. (1986). 'The Distinction between Crime and Criminality.' In T. Hartnagel and R. Silverman (Eds.), *Critique and Explanation: Essays in Honor of Gwynne Nettler*, (pp. 44-69). New Jersey: Transaction.
- Hirschi, T. and Gottfredson, M. (1993). Commentary: Testing the general theory of crime, *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 30(1), 47-54.
- Jensen, G.F. (2003). 'Social Control Theories.' In *Encyclopedia of Criminology*, R. A. Wright (Editor), Fitzory Dearborn Publishers.
- Kutash, I.L., Kutash, S.B. and Schlesinger, L.B. (1978). *Violence: Perspective on Murder and Aggression*, London: Jossey-Bass Inc Pub. Jossey-Easi.
- Maiangwa, B. and Uzodike, U.O. (2012). 'The Changing Dynamics of Boko Haram Terrorists,' *Al Jazeera Centre for Studies*, 31 July, <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/> Accessed on October 26, 2012
- Matza, D. (1964). *Delinquency and Drift*. New York: John Wiley.
- Nye, F.I. (1958). *Family Relationship and Delinquent Behaviour*, New York: John Wiley.
- O'Connor, T. (2006) 'Control Theories of Crime.' Retrieved on September 22, 2012 from <http://www.drtoconnor.com/1060/1060lect06b.htm>
- Reiss, A. (1951). 'Delinquency as the Failure of Personal and Social Controls.' *American Sociological Review* 16:196-207.
- Reckless, W. C. (1961). *The Crime Problem*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Russell, B. (2008). *A History of Western Philosophy*, Oxford: Routledge Classics
- Schlesinger, M.A. Jr. (1969). *The Crisis of Violence*, Busto: Houghton Myhin
- See, E. (2004). *Student Study Guide for Ronald L. Akers and Christine S. Sellers' Criminological Theories: Introduction, Evaluation and Applications*, Fourth Edition, Roxbury Publishing Company: Los Angeles, California. Retrieved December 12, 2012 from <http://roxbury.net/images/pdfs/ct4ssg.pdf>
- Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior (1971). 'Television and Growing Up: The impact of televised violence,' *Report to the Surgeon General United States Public Health Service*. Retrieved on December 25, 2012 from <http://profiles.nlm.nih.gov/ps/access/NNBCGX.pdf>
- Sykes, G. M., and Matza, D. (1957) 'Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency' *American Sociological Review*. 22(6): 664-70
- Toby, J. (1957). 'Social Disorganization and Stake in Conformity,' *Journal Criminal Law & Criminology* 48:12-17.
- Vold, G.B. and Bernard, T.J. (1986). *Theoretical Criminology*, Third Edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Walter Bromberg and Gerald George (1969). 'Can TV Crime Shows Present Violence?' *Today's Health*, 47 May

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia 'Social Control Theory,'
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_control_theory, Accessed on September 22 2012.

Wolfgang, M.E., Savitz, L. and Johnston, N. (1970). *The Sociology of Crime and Delinquency*, Second Edition, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.