



# Pathways and Trajectories to Life-Course Persistent Armed Robbery Offending Behavior in Contemporary Nigeria: Examining the Predictors and the Risks Factors

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## Abstract

*This study examines the relationship between previous antisocial behavior and persistent life-course armed robbery offending behavior in contemporary Nigeria. The key research question is whether predatory criminal behavior or experiences, offender's pattern of social relations with family and peers, and offender's awareness of family history of armed robbery correlate with involvement in armed robbery behavior in a later adult life-course criminal career. Using a sample of 68 career armed robbers drawn from three prisons in southeastern states of Nigeria, our findings found support for previous studies which suggest that certain crimes such as armed robbery may require certain degree of previous criminal experiences because of their high profile nature. We also found that becoming an armed robber in a later adult life-course criminal career is also a function of the offender's family robbery history and certain degrees of unsatisfactory relationships (exposure to negative social networks) which together provide normative supports for learning the techniques, motives, and rationalization necessary for armed robbery behavior. The paper recommends prevention design on the basis of knowledge of the relationship between delinquent offending behavior and life-course adult criminal behavior such as armed robbery.*

Keywords: Armed robbery, Nigeria, Trajectories and pathways, Risk factors.

## Introduction

In response to the ever-rising incidence of armed robbery in Nigeria, many criminologists have continued to search for plausible explanation for this type of criminal

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behavior. Following the traditional footsteps of criminologists and scholars of social problems, some Nigerian criminologists and scholars such as Marenin (1987), Olurode (1991), Otu (2003, 2010), Iwaramimie-Jaja (1987, 1993, 1998, 1999b), Ekpeyong (1989) have engaged some traditional criminology theories to demonstrate that armed robbery is either linked to the individual characteristics, or the broad socio-economic variables such as deprivation in terms of unemployment or joblessness, low income, and generally poverty and family disruption.

Every crime is, however, apparently unique in its own way—in terms of the motive, characteristics of the offenders and victims, the social context under which it occurs, techniques used, damages which resulted, and reactions of the victims and public (see Sutherland & Cressey, 1960, p. 237). This uniqueness also includes the social processes and trajectories by which these offending behaviors are initiated and nurtured into persistent life-course career.

Previously, Sutherland (1939), Sutherland and Cressey (1960) had become more lucid about the pathways to persistent life-course offending behavior when they explained that the life histories of persons who become an adult life robbers and burglars show that criminality proceeds from trivial (predatory) to serious (high profile), from occasional to frequent, from sport (recreational) to business (career), and from individuals or loosely organized groups to rather tightly organized groups. Implied in Sutherland and Cressey's argument, therefore, was that to become an armed robber requires for instance, that the intending person must have engaged previously, in other minor crimes, and acquire the experiences which are necessary and sufficient to do armed robbery. Fundamentally, Sutherland and later with Cressey explained that armed robbery behavior must be learned and that the learning includes, the techniques, the skills, the slang, motives and rationalizations for the criminal behavior (see also Shaw 1930, 1931; Sutherland, 1939; Sutherland & Cressey, 1960; Smith, Frazee, & Davison, 2000, p. 489).

The importance of relying on offenders' background and their previous delinquent experiences to account for a life-course of adult criminality (by extending their participation in high profile crimes such as armed robbery) has been recognized by many criminologists (see for e.g. Moffitt, 1993; Thornberry et al., 1994; Thornberry, 1987, Ferguson, Hordwood & Nagin, 2000, p. 544; Patterson, 1996; Patterson et al., 1989, 1998). The extant literature on the subject has shown that there are some antisocial misconduct which may serve as warning signals of progression into life-course persistent adult career criminal behavior.

In what also appears to be a reflection of the trajectories of offending behavior, Farrington (1995), Bursik and Grasmick (1993), Wikstrom and Loeber (2000) and Smith, Frazee and Davison (2000) explained that spatial factors such as distance and convenience affect the chances that criminal careers will initiate, escalate or desist. However, following this thesis on criminal career trajectories, our current understanding of the pathway to armed robbery in Nigeria may be inadequate or at its incipient stage. Iwarimie-Jaja (1993, 1994, 1999b), a Nigerian criminologist, while leaning on Sutherland's decades' writings on learning criminal behavior explained that armed robbery is a high profile crime which no one can just wake up one day and venture into. He, therefore, argued that armed robbery must be preceded by other kinds of predatory or previous crimes which are learnt and practiced by career armed robbers before engaging fully in the criminal career.

It is against this understanding that armed robbery is viewed as one of the high profile crimes which are very much likely to be preceded by other kinds of predatory/previous

crimes or experiences as risk factors that this present study sets out to investigate the probable risk and predictive factors to armed robbery in Nigeria. This study thus examines whether or not there exist certain anti-social (criminal) or pre-robbery behavior, which in all probability, may have acted as predictors to persistence life-course career of armed robbery in contemporary Nigeria. The focus of this study therefore is: are there predatory or previous criminal (pre-robbery) behavior which may animate, motivate, prepare, and encourage some Nigerian adolescents into engaging in a life course career armed robbery? No study in Nigeria to the best of our knowledge has examined this phenomenon. The causal processes, trajectories and pathways to armed robbery in contemporary Nigeria are, therefore, the point of departure of this study.

Discussing and explaining the trajectories, the causal and social processes of Nigerians engaging in armed robbery over time, and their temporal ordering, represents an effort at establishing the predictive pathways to persistent adult life-course criminal behavior such as armed robbery. The importance of this lies in the fact that when the pathways to criminal behavior are specified, it is possible to identify intervention points. This allows for the interruption of the causal factors that lead to antisocial, risk-predictive outcomes, and to strengthen the processes that lead to pro-social and protective outcomes (see also Hawkins & Catalano 1992; Huang et al., 2001; Thornberry, et al., 1995). The modeling is a point of reference for policy intervention and it provides a “looking glass” through which both the offence and offenders can more readily be understood.

This study utilizes descriptive, exploratory and analytical approaches in explaining this criminal phenomenon. Consequently, the study reviews and analyses the past antisocial or pre robbery behavior of a sample of armed robbers in Nigeria. Included in the study are the reflective thoughts of the study respondents such as their personal thoughts, feelings, speculations, ideas, hunches, impressions, and prejudices which are believed as future behavior predictors (see also Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 12) within the frameworks of trajectory theory, learning theory and social development model.

### **Trends of robbery in Nigeria**

Several authors (criminologists and non-criminologists alike) in Nigeria have examined the prevalence of robbery in various parts of the country. A handful of these Nigerian authors include Marenin (1987), Iwarimie-Jaja (1987, 1993, 1994, 1999a, 1999b), Ekpeyong (1989), Shopeju (1999); Odey (2003), Otu (2003), Olurode (1991), Elechi (2003). The common theme which runs through the writings of the authors is that robbery is on the rise in Nigeria, affecting all classes of people who may have experienced victimization either directly or indirectly. Going by the account of these authors, armed robbery in Nigeria occurs at all times of the day with no place safe from armed robbery attack. The financial and emotional cost of armed robbery to the individual victims and the country at large is enormous (see Odey, 2000; Agekame, 2001; Otu 2011). Similarly, Adisa Jinmi (1994), Nwani, Ogbonnaya, Igwe, Nwite (2009) simply described armed robbery in Nigeria as the country’s most glamorous and fastest growing crime type.

Reflecting on the trend and incidence of crimes in Nigeria, the Nigeria police force in its annual reports reported that the offending behavior of armed robbery was the top three most serious crimes which were reported to the police force in the past four years (see Annual Report of the Nigeria Police Force for 2006, 2007 and 2008). According to this source, a total of 2,704 armed robbery offences were reported in 2005; 2, 863 in 2006;

2,327 in 2007 and 2,340 in 2008. The source also reported that six states—Kano, Ogun, Oyo, Delta, and Cross River states—were the worst affected among the 36 states of the federation with serious robbery incidences (see also National Bureau of Statistics 2008 Report).

Then, there are the news media, especially the print media, which carry daily reports of gory armed robbery incidents occurring across the various spectrums of Nigerian landscape. In February, 2010, the Vanguard newspaper online reported, with nauseating picture, armed robbery carnage along a major expressway (Ore-Lagos) connecting east-west part of the country. In the report, many commuters (victims) of a waylaid coach were forced to lie on the road while the driver of the coach was forced at gun-point to run over the victims (commuters) with the same coach because as the reports had it, they were traveling without cash or other valuables for the robbers to steal (see Dj zukk, 2010). Similarly in 2011, another highway armed robbery incident was widely reported in the prints and electronic media. This robbery incident took place at night on another highway which connects the west to the north-central part of the country and the Federal capital territory (Abagworo, 2011). In this attack 50 robbery victims were crushed under the wheels of the Bus, similar to the 2010 incident.

In Afikpo, a middle commercial town in the eastern part of the country, armed bandits kept the town permanently under siege for two years (see Igwe Jarome, the *Nigerian Mandate*, Jan./Feb. 2009 and personal witness, n.d.). For example, between the last quarters of 2007 and the third quarters of 2008, five horrendous bank robbery incidents took place in the town which houses only three bank branches. Several people (mostly passerby) lost their lives as a result of the indiscriminate shootings by the hoodlums. Millions of naira (the Nigerian currency) was also carted away by the bandits and in one occasion, a substantial part of their loots was thrown to the impoverished public who scrambled for a piece of the loot. Current armed robberies in Nigeria take place on the highways, in parks, residential and commercial places. They also occur in sacred public places such as churches and mosques, in the wee hours of the morning, nights and broad day lights (see Elechi, 2003).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Social learning theory, Social Development model and Trajectory theories have become dominant and influential in criminology and developmental literature. The three perspectives stand out among others as holding a strong promise in accounting for the existence of different criminal/delinquent trajectory groups having trajectory-specific etiologies, and by extension, to a more informed understanding of the trajectories of armed robbery in Nigeria. The Social Development Model (SDM) is a far more encompassing theory which proposes a general/integrated model that underscores a multiple but parallel pathways to delinquent involvement, depending on the socialization experiences of individuals. The highlight of SDM is that it provides theoretical explanations for a change or stability in patterns of offending across developmental periods based on socialization experiences (see Huang, et al. 2001). Thornberry's interactional theory (1987, 1996) adds value to the SDM and especially to our understanding of the trajectories of Nigerian armed robbers by drawing attention to the effects of prior behaviors, attachments and values on latter behavior. Apparently, SDM is consistent with a state dependence perspective such that prior participation in antisocial behavior is hypothesized to increase future participation by altering opportunities or life courses (see

Ezell 2007; Heckman 1981). Ezell's study is of particular relevance here because he used a sample of serious offenders to examine the length of their official criminal career. This author's study not only examined overall career length, but it also examined the career length for five categories of offenses namely serious, violent, serious violent, property, and drug and which also includes armed robbery behavior. The residual career length as a function of age, and the correlates of the average career length were also investigated by Ezell. The SDM further explained that children learn whatever patterns of behavior, whether antisocial or pro-social, and whether predatory or serious offending, behavior from the socializing agents of family, school, religious and other community institutions and their peers.

In a similar way, trajectory theories proposed that offending history data can be neatly classified into early onset life-course persistent offending and late onset/adolescent-limited offending trajectories, with these trajectory groups being related to different etiological factors. The trajectory theories, especially the one proposed by Moffitt (1993) and by Patterson and colleagues (1996), Patterson et al. 1989, 1998), are primarily concerned with explaining two distinct offending groups with distinct etiologies. However, of relevance to the present study is the fact that Moffitt and Patterson and their colleagues noted that life-course persistent offenders (we include armed robbers into this group) are those who show an early onset of antisocial behavior and perseverance of these behavior over the life-course. This group contrasts with the adolescence-limited offenders whom Moffitt explained engage in delinquent behavior only during adolescence, and develops as a result of processes of social mimicry which leads this group of youths to mimic the behavior of their delinquent peers.

In a nuanced manner but still in line with our key aim and proposition in this current study, Patterson (1996), Patterson *et al.* (1989), Patterson, *et al.* (1998) in a series of articles accentuated the claims of Moffitt and other trajectories theorists when they argued that individuals who show early onset of antisocial behaviors have a greater predisposition to continue to offend than those who show a later onset. The theoretically-based argument of these authors is that early onset of delinquency is largely shaped by a series of family processes, including poor parental monitoring, inept parental discipline which creates a socializing process in which children learn that coercive and antisocial behaviors have an adaptive value.

For Fergusson *et al.* (2000:526), although, the trajectory theories proposed by Moffitt and Patterson differ in certain details, both make two common significant assumptions. First, that the age/crime curve can be disaggregated into a series of groups, with each following differing offending trajectories. Two, that the etiological factors of offending vary for members of different trajectories. Both assumptions-theories predict that early onset or life-course-persistent trajectory is associated with dysfunctional social, family, or individual processes. They also acknowledge that there is a degree of learning antisocial behavior by the formation of affiliations with delinquent peers who may act to encourage, reward, and sustain tendencies to antisocial behaviors. Both theories, therefore, by implication clearly suggest that delinquency and adulthood of high profile crime follow a predictable pattern of the onset in predatory/previous crimes, mature into other high profile crimes, and desistence in criminality. They also implied however invariably, that the pathways which the offenders tow include associating and learning from delinquent subcultures. Surely, these theories, notwithstanding their apparent broad and unique

etiologiical propositions, have a degree of relevance to understanding the trajectories of armed robbery and armed robbers in contemporary Nigeria.

A related model which treads the two preceding pathways models, and which remains an important key to understanding the trajectory of armed robbery in contemporary Nigeria, is the previous criminal experiences/associations of Iwarimie-Jaja (1993, 1994, 1999a). Using armed robbery as his point of departure, Iwarimie-Jaja explained that armed robbery is a higher profile crime which requires some degree of apprenticeship in other less profile crimes or delinquencies. Participation in these less profile crimes or delinquencies will enable the potential candidate to acquire the necessary experiences for the criminal behavior. In specific terms, Iwarimie-Jaja (1993, 1999a and 1999b) while describing what appears to be the trajectory and pathways to robbery in Nigeria, explained that armed robbery involves high skills, experiences and expertise so that no one wakes up one day and dabbles into it. His analysis shows that robbery involves, first, associating with peer delinquents and acquiring in the process, the vital experiences needed to engage in the crime. It is in this line that Otu (2003) explained that becoming a robber entails identifying with the senior criminal friends especially in the urban cities where there is weakness in the traditional-informal ties.

### **Previous studies**

According to one unidentified writer, the concept of criminal career assumes that involvement in deviant behavior entails entry into a social role which develops over time, and which like conventional occupational roles, is governed by social systems and rules determining career adoption and progress. The Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development (Farrington and West 1990; Farrington 1995) found that the typical offender tends to be characterized by a deprived and disruptive family background which tends to be reproduced.

Some decades ago, Sutherland (1939), Sutherland and Cressey (1960) explained that the life histories of persons who become adult life robbers and burglars show that criminality proceeds from trivial (predatory) to serious (high profile), and from occasional to frequent. This criminal transition (as it were) more often than not includes learning the techniques, the skills, and the slang of committing these crimes (see also Shaw 1930, 1931; Sutherland and Cressey, 1960). Writing several decades ago on armed robbery in developing countries Clinard and Abbott (1973:42) explained that the lumping together of convicted armed robbers with adolescent delinquents in the prisons provide the opportunities for the latter to learn about armed robbery behavior which leads to the rise in the offence networks in Nigeria. Clearly therefore, it is in the prisons that the criminal techniques, the rationalization, and the required courage to perpetuate the act of robbery are learned and internalized. The experiences gained in this place not only provide the means to secure the firearm, but they also offer the courage and toughness which are important elements of robbery. On reflection, this is what Iwarimie-Jaja's (1999a and 1999b) described as previous criminal experiences or associations.

While describing the life-course-persistent offenders which apparently include armed robbers; Moffitt (1993) explained that the life-course-persistent offenders often show early onset of antisocial behavior and a persistence of this behavior over the life course. Patterson (1996), Patterson et al, (1989), Patterson, et al., (1998) studies also found similar results and they thus explained that individuals who show early onset of antisocial behaviors have a greater propensity to continue to offend, and to move up in the ladder of

criminal offending than those who show a later onset. Continuum antisocial offending will most probably lead the offender to graduate into a high profile offending behavior such as armed robbery, fraud and organized crimes. Ferguson, Hordwood and Nagin (2000:544) showed that the chronic offenders group (by extension, armed robbers) contain a small fraction of the population who show a long-term and persistent pattern of offending. The trajectory of these chronic offenders comes from the pathological, social, family and individual backgrounds.

In a classic and seminal study of armed robbers in the U.S in 1997, Richard Wright and Scott Decker (1997) discovered, among other important findings, that almost all the sample (96%) reported having committed other offenses, particularly burglary, theft, assault and drug selling. It does appear that these crimes predate our sample's participation in armed robbery in the present study. Wright and Decker (1997) also noted that despite the high number of robberies their sample had committed, 60% of them had never been convicted of the offence—a situation which we read to suggest high skills arising from experiences from other criminal exploits prior to being involved in armed robbery participation which account for the low or zero apprehension and conviction.

In a study reminiscence of the importance of previous criminal experiences to certain criminal behavior, Otu (2004, 2010) studied drug traffickers and drug trafficking in South Africa and found that most career drug dealers in Cape Town had a history of previous criminal delinquency and subsequent arrests. In fact, the examination of the life histories of some Cape Town residents involved in the illegal drug market revealed the link between their life-course persistence in the trade and their background experiences. Their unique characteristics are discernible in terms of childhood experiences and the overbearing influence of the environment under which they grew up. These are unsatisfactory and/or broken family relationships, family or custodian abuse and pressure, unemployment, poverty, and peer group pressure. In specific and quantitative terms, the study (Otu 2004) found that in a sample of 58, a total of 50 respondents admitted to have committed one type of delinquency or the other prior to their committed involvement in illegal drug business. Both drug use and general indiscipline were committed by twenty-two respondents (44%). Quarrelling and smoking were committed by twenty-two respondents (40%). Drug selling and alcohol drinking each had eighteen responses (36%). Sex offence had been committed by a handful of respondents. At least, ten respondents (20%) said they had committed the offence. Of critical importance to our present study was the fact that quite a number of our respondents explained that they learned about drug trafficking—the techniques and rationalization—while they were in the prisons for offences that were not related to drug trafficking.

## **Hypotheses**

It appears that in the absence of any guidance from the empirical literature focusing exclusively and specifically on the trajectories to the offending behavior of armed robbery, identifying expected outcomes on the basis of available theory is critical for our analysis in this current paper. In the light of the general trajectory theories and Social Development Model reviewed, the newly developed Iwarimie's Jaja previous experiences model already examined, and discussion of other related existing literature, we have no reason not to predict that armed robbery, as a high profile criminal behavior, follows a predictable pattern of trajectory.

Clearly, following the footstep of Iwarimie-Jaja's previous criminal experiences/association (we had already copiously reviewed and referenced in this paper), and the high risks which we found to be associated with armed robbery in contemporary Nigeria such as the culprit facing death penalty, instant mob lynching, long term detention and incarceration, we expect that only those potential offenders who have the necessary skills, experiences, and who parade the psychological investment of being tough and courageous, will take to the offending behavior. In sum, our current research is guided by the following four hypotheses, which represent clear deductions from the conceptual issues and existing literature discussed above.

**H<sub>1</sub>**: First, consistence with previous criminological studies, and with more general research on adolescents' antisocial behavior and confrontation with law enforcement agents, we expect that those who had strong previous or pre-robbery delinquent behavior will most probably acquire the criminal experiences necessary for participation in armed robbery in contemporary Nigeria. These previous antisocial behavior are measured in terms of but by no means limited to the followings: fighting, housebreaking, selling drugs and assault house breaking.

**H<sub>2</sub>** Having an unsatisfactory relationship with one's parent is positively related to participation in pre-antisocial behavior and subsequent participation in armed robbery behavior in a person's later life-course career.

**H<sub>3</sub>** The individual's level of social relationship with one's peers is positively associated with learning the criminal behavior of armed robbery in contemporary Nigeria.

**H<sub>4</sub>** A person whose family has a history of armed robbery, and who shares in that knowledge of the crime, is more likely to consider participating in the criminal behavior in a later life course. We expect that when a person comes from a family with robbery history, he will be exposed to the crime and easily possess the knowledge about the criminal behavior which will eventuate into consideration for participation in the criminal behavior.

## Methodology

Data used to test the hypotheses in this present paper is an extract from a survey of armed robbers in five southeastern states of Nigeria. The research design was holistic in nature, and it aimed to gain a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the broad sociology-criminology views of both the offence and offenders in five Nigerian prisons in the Southeastern state of Nigeria. The current paper is therefore a spin-off of the original holistic study plan which included the unearthing of the predictors and trajectories of entry into a life-course career armed robbery.

Our choice of survey design was decided because (i) preliminary enquiries we made from the prisons authorities suggested to us that our subjects were fairly large enough in the prisons (ii) our subjects were amenable to changes, that is, some may have completed their "doing time", while other new armed robbery inmates may be admitted in the course of the study. (iii) we were, from the onset, interested in doing both an exploratory and explanatory study of armed robbery and armed robbers in contemporary Nigeria from whereupon other emerging issues can be subjected to further interrogations by scholars. The design of the study is a cross-sectional survey and it included many measures that can be used to model key dimensions of the criminal career of armed robbers (see also Johnson et al 1995; Lewis et al 1992).



### **Sample frame, size and technique**

Using the theoretical and empirically relevant social-ethical contexts, as parameters for determining where to locate a fairly large numbers of armed robbers, we drew our samples from three prisons and cities (Abakaliki, Umuahia & Port Harcourt). The social contexts were: (1) media and police reports of armed robbery incidents occurring in the Southeastern states of the federation (2) armed robbers who were already convicted and were doing their times, or awaiting executions, or self-admitted armed robbers who are free and were never convicted (3) willingness to participate in the study (4) accessibility and convenience. The samples from each of the prisons were drawn from inmates that fall under the above number two (2) categories.

Excepting the few females who were passively connected to some of the robberies, the population of our armed robbers from whom we drew our samples, was basically males so that all our respondents were males. Apart from two respondents who were traditionalists, all the others were Christians—reflecting the predominance of Christians in this part of the country. They were mainly aged between 16-40 years old, and singles with only few of them who were married. Educationally, majority of our subjects were secondary school certificate holders. Few were either students, unemployed graduates or trained apprentices in mechanics, electrical or other artisans.

Being guided by practical constraints e.g., the number of people we had access to, financial resources, time frame, administrative and bureaucratic hiccups (see also Durrheim 1999 in Terre Balance & Durrheim, 1999, p. 45), we played to the technique of “sampling to redundancy”. By this we continuously interviewed a number of our subjects we had access to in the three selected prisons until we found that further respondents were incapable of providing any additional useful information to the study. But in practical terms, samples varied by prisons and state, reflecting the demographic strength and character of each of these prisons. Using two major data collection techniques, a total of 68 respondents (after a certain voluntary withdrawal by some of the sampled robbers) participated in the completion of the questionnaire. All the sixty-eight (68) were duly completed and form the basis of our analyses in the present study. A further eight (8) respondents were also selected for in-depth oral interview to complement information obtained from the questionnaire data. This latter information, however, did not feature in the current paper because we did not elicit information relating to their trajectories and pathways into armed robbery. Table 1 depicts the composition of the sample of respondents drawn from all the three prisons, including those by in-depth oral interviews which are not utilized in this current paper.

*Table 1. Composition of Sample Prisons by Prisons*

| <b>Prison</b>                | <b>Respondents initially included</b> | <b>Respondents after withdrawals</b> | <b>Respondents submitted useable questionnaires</b> | <b>Subjects interview</b> |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| Port Harcourt (Rivers State) | 35                                    | 30                                   | 27  | 4                         |
| Umuahia (Abia State)         | 24                                    | 20                                   | 18  | 2                         |
| Abakaliki (Ebonyi State)     | 27                                    | 25                                   | 23  | 2                         |
| <b>Total</b>                 | <b>86</b>                             | <b>75</b>                            | <b>68</b>   | <b>8</b>                  |

**Sampling Technique**

The broad non-probability sampling technique was utilized since we did not go about our sampling by any form of random processes. The specific kind of this non-probability sampling employed was the “respondent-driven sampling” (snowball). Erickson (1979) described this snowball sampling which focuses on hidden populations such as armed robbery as *chain-referral sampling*. In a sense, therefore, we employed chain referral to select our sample because of the ill-defined nature of our subjects. We also reasoned that members of the target population in each of the prisons knew one another, and are densely interconnected. Haralambos and Holborn (1991) explained that with groups such as professional criminals, it is not easy to use other sampling techniques. On the whole, the prisons staff in each prison facilitated the processes of selecting our final samples.

**Research tool: Questionnaire**

After a pre-test on a dozen identified armed robbers in Abakaliki prisons suggested that subjects had difficulty making precise and accurate responses, including estimates when asked open-ended questions, we develop a category response set (close-ended) to record the lambda (frequency) of specific behavior, with five likert Atlas scale measures (strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, disagree and I don’t know). However, an open space was added to the end of the questions for our interviewees to provide their unrestrained responses.

Our final version of the questionnaire contained 86 items (sub-variables or items of measurement). It is from these items that sub-variables which tend to measure the correlation between our dependent and independent variables in the present study are derived from. The questionnaire contained eighth domains of information which were

sub-divided into two parts. The first part of the questionnaire concerned with robbers' socio-demographic characteristics. The variables were family backgrounds, age, sex, marital, education, religion, and occupation.

The second part of the questionnaire contained about seven domains of information with several sub-variables that sought after far-flung information about the offence and offenders. Within these domains, information obtained included how offenders' backgrounds, exposure to previous delinquency/criminal experiences, and pattern of association/relationship with peers and family may have influenced individual's participation in robbery in contemporary Nigeria. The questionnaires were in some cases self-administered, and in others not, depending on the respondent's literacy level.

### **Data and measures**

The unit of analysis for the trajectory of armed robbery in contemporary Nigeria is 68 armed robbers who were either already convicted and serving their various jail terms, or were detained and self-admitted armed robbers in the prisons we used. The study design included many measures which can be used to model dimensions of the armed robbery criminal career paradigm (see also Johnson et al 1995; Lewis et al 1992).

Leaning on previous studies on criminal trajectories (see Sutherland 1939; Iwarimie-Jaja 1999b), our dependent variable (armed robbery) was predicted as correlating with certain important individual and social dispositions (predatory offending behavior and patterns of social relationship). We constructed what we regarded as "Robbery Predictor Index" (RPI) as critical independent variables, and as constituting the pathways and trajectories to armed robbery. Our Robbery Predictor Index was simply conceptualized as "Predatory/Previous Offending Behavior" (POB). Thereafter we then developed and operationalized these predatory/previous offending behaviors by means of parameters such as fighting, selling of drugs, engaging in house breaking, and engaging in general assault behavior. The other concepts—patterns of social relationships and offender's family history of armed robbery behavior—were operationalized and measured by asking offenders to indicate their perceptions of the satisfactory or otherwise relationships with their parents and peers. Using the five point-likert scale, we assigned values to the response categories which we created as Strongly Agree, Agree, Strongly Disagree, and Disagree, and No response.

Our basic model examines robbery trajectories and pathways as a function of multicollinearity Robbery Predictors Index. We used seemingly uniform correlation (SUC) procedures to estimate separate models of each of the predictors for robbery career. By this, we were able to address the problem of multicollinearity.

The table 2 reveals the measures we derived reflecting the aggregate of previous/predatory criminal experiences (pre-robbery behavior) using a list of four important antisocial behavior which we found particularly common and relevant to young adolescents who are struggling to cope with stressful socio-economic life events. That is to say that our respondents reflected, in practical terms, on their social relations with their significant others, and how often they participated in pre-robbery delinquent behavior. The scale on the table represents summed average (mean) and standard deviation of factor-weighted scores for each item as represented in descriptive table 2.

*Table 2. Descriptive statistics for delinquent behavior showing factor loading like fighting, selling drugs, assault, house breaking, unsatisfactory relationship with parents, peers and family robbery history*

|        |   |        |   |         |        |
|--------|---|--------|---|---------|--------|
| Pair 1 | Armed Robbery                               | 2.7440 | 5 | .28228  | .12624 |
|        | Delinquent Behavior such as Fighting        | 1.3000 |   | .47598  | .21448 |
| Pair 2 | Armed Robbery                               | 2.7440 | 5 | .28228  | .12624 |
|        | Delinquent Behavior such as Selling of Drug | 1.2220 |   | .47908  | .21425 |
| Pair 3 | Armed Robbery                               | 2.7440 | 5 | .28228  | .12624 |
|        | Delinquent Behavior such as Assault         | 1.4000 |   | .39370  | .17607 |
| Pair 4 | Armed Robbery                               | 2.7440 | 5 | .28228  | .12624 |
|        | Delinquent Behavior such as House Breaking  | 1.9800 |   | .64187  | .28705 |
| Pair 5 | Armed Robbery                               | 2.7440 | 5 | .28228  | .12624 |
|        | Unsatisfactory R/Ship with Ones' Parents    | 1.9400 |   | .61887  | .27677 |
| Pair 6 | Armed Robbery                               | 2.7440 | 5 | .28228  | .12624 |
|        | Unsatisfactory R/Ship with Ones' Peer       | 1.7000 |   | .52915  | .23664 |
| Pair 7 | Armed Robbery                               | 2.7440 | 5 | .28228  | .12624 |
|        | History of Familys' Armed Robbery           | 1.2800 |   | .35637  | .15937 |
| Pair 8 | Armed Robbery                               | 2.7440 |   | .28228  | .12624 |
|        | Others                                      | 2.5120 |   | 1.23722 | .55330 |

**Table 3. Correlations of variables showing significant differences (N= 86)**

**Paired Samples Correlations**

|        |   | N | Correlation | Sig. |
|--------|---|---|-------------|------|
| Pair 1 | ARMED ROBBERY & DELINQUENT BEHAVIOUR LIKE FIGHTING        | 5 | .713        | .177 |
| Pair 2 | ARMED ROBBERY & DELINQUENT BEHAVIOUR LIKE SELLING OF DRUG | 5 | .748        | .146 |
| Pair 3 | ARMED ROBBERY & DELINQUENT BEHAVIOUR LIKE ASSAULT         | 5 | .547        | .340 |
| Pair 4 | ARMED ROBBERY & DELINQUENT BEHAVIOUR LIKE HOSUE BREAKING  | 5 | .351        | .562 |
| Pair 5 | ARMED ROBBERY & UNSATISFACTORY R/SHIP WITH ONES' PARENT   | 5 | .876        | .051 |
| Pair 6 | ARMED ROBBERY & UNSATISFACTORY R/SHIP WITH ONES' PEER     | 5 | .490        | .402 |
| Pair 7 | ARMED ROBBERY & HISTORY OF FAMILYS' ARMED ROBBERY         | 5 | .824        | .087 |
| Pair 8 | ARMED ROBBERY & OTHERS                                    | 5 | -.455       | .441 |

**Table 4. Correlation of variables showing Coefficients of variables (N= 86)**

|   |                     | Correlations  |                                    |   |                                   |  |   |                                       |                                   |        |
|---|---------------------|---------------|------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|--|---|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------|
|   |                     | ARMED ROBBERY | DELINQUENT BEHAVIOUR LIKE FIGHTING | DELINQUENT BEHAVIOUR LIKE SELLING OF DRUG | DELINQUENT BEHAVIOUR LIKE ASSAULT | DELINQUENT BEHAVIOUR LIKE HOSUE BREAKING | UNSATISFACTORY R/SHIP WITH ONES' PARENT | UNSATISFACTORY R/SHIP WITH ONES' PEER | HISTORY OF FAMILYS' ARMED ROBBERY | OTHERS |
| ARMED ROBBERY                             | Pearson Correlation | 1             | .713                               | .748                                      | .547                              | .351                                     | .876                                    | .490                                  | .824                              | -.455  |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)     |               | .177                               | .146                                      | .340                              | .562                                     | .051                                    | .402                                  | .087                              | .441   |
|   | N                   | 5             | 5                                  | 5   | 5                                 | 5  | 5                                       | 5                                     | 5                                 | 5      |
| DELINQUENT BEHAVIOUR LIKE FIGHTING        | Pearson Correlation | .713          | 1                                  | .780                                      | .543                              | .179                                     | .767                                    | .167                                  | .570                              | -.389  |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .177          |                                    | .120                                      | .344                              | .774                                     | .131                                    | .788                                  | .315                              | .517   |
|   | N                   | 5             | 5                                  | 5   | 5                                 | 5  | 5                                       | 5                                     | 5                                 | 5      |
| DELINQUENT BEHAVIOUR LIKE SELLING OF DRUG | Pearson Correlation | .748          | .780                               | 1   | .940*                             | .670                                     | .482                                    | .575                                  | .491                              | -.007  |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .146          | .120                               |   | .018                              | .216                                     | .411                                    | .311                                  | .401                              | .991   |
|   | N                   | 5             | 5                                  | 5   | 5                                 | 5  | 5                                       | 5                                     | 5                                 | 5      |
| DELINQUENT BEHAVIOUR LIKE ASSAULT         | Pearson Correlation | .547          | .543                               | .940*                                     | 1                                 | .782                                     | .174                                    | .672                                  | .303                              | .285   |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .340          | .344                               | .018                                      |                                   | .118                                     | .779                                    | .214                                  | .620                              | .642   |
|   | N                   | 5             | 5                                  | 5   | 5                                 | 5  | 5                                       | 5                                     | 5                                 | 5      |
| DELINQUENT BEHAVIOUR LIKE HOSUE BREAKING  | Pearson Correlation | .351          | .179                               | .670                                      | .782                              | 1  | -.079                                   | .302                                  | -.133                             | .065   |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .562          | .774                               | .216                                      | .118                              |  | .899                                    | .622                                  | .831                              | .917   |
|   | N                   | 5             | 5                                  | 5   | 5                                 | 5  | 5                                       | 5                                     | 5                                 | 5      |
| UNSATISFACTORY R/SHIP WITH ONES' PARENT   | Pearson Correlation | .876          | .767                               | .482                                      | .174                              | -.079                                    | 1                                       | .176                                  | .832                              | -.672  |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .051          | .131                               | .411                                      | .779                              | .899                                     |   | .778                                  | .081                              | .214   |
|   | N                   | 5             | 5                                  | 5   | 5                                 | 5  | 5                                       | 5                                     | 5                                 | 5      |
| UNSATISFACTORY R/SHIP WITH ONES' PEER     | Pearson Correlation | .490          | .167                               | .575                                      | .672                              | .302                                     | .176                                    | 1                                     | .636                              | .532   |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .402          | .788                               | .311                                      | .214                              | .622                                     | .778                                    |                                       | .248                              | .357   |
|   | N                   | 5             | 5                                  | 5   | 5                                 | 5  | 5                                       | 5                                     | 5                                 | 5      |
| HISTORY OF FAMILYS' ARMED ROBBERY         | Pearson Correlation | .824          | .570                               | .491                                      | .303                              | -.133                                    | .832                                    | .636                                  | 1                                 | -.191  |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .087          | .315                               | .401                                      | .620                              | .831                                     | .081                                    | .248                                  |                                   | .758   |
|   | N                   | 5             | 5                                  | 5   | 5                                 | 5  | 5                                       | 5                                     | 5                                 | 5      |
| OTHERS                                    | Pearson Correlation | -.455         | -.389                              | -.007                                     | .285                              | .065                                     | -.672                                   | .532                                  | -.191                             | 1      |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .441          | .517                               | .991                                      | .642                              | .917                                     | .214                                    | .357                                  | .758                              |        |
|   | N                   | 5             | 5                                  | 5   | 5                                 | 5  | 5                                       | 5                                     | 5                                 | 5      |

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Variable correlations are shown in Tables 3 and 4. Albeit most variables are not highly correlated, many are noticeable. The strongest bi-variate relationship (.94) among the independent variables is selling of drugs and persistent life course armed robbery career at 0.05 level of significant. Albeit, there are high correlation coefficients between other variables, they are not significant at 0.05 level. There is extensive literature on the nexus between selling drugs and armed robbery (see, Ryan 1997; Bourgois, 1997; Otu 2004). This signifies that those who sell drugs at their adolescent ages are more likely to switch or combine it with robbery at the later stage of their criminal careers. There is also a very high positive correlation between armed robbery and unsatisfactory relationship with offenders' peers. Again, preponderance of literature on the influence of peers in criminal participation is documented (see Sutherland, 1973; Agnew, 1991; Akers et al., 1979; Bandura, 1973). One's peers offer enabling learning of all criminal and non-criminal behaviors.

**Results**

**Table 5. Pearson correlation between armed robbery and the independent variables showing their statistical Significance**

|        |   | Paired Differences |                |                 |   |         | t      | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|--------|---|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|---|---------|--------|----|-----------------|
|        |   | Mean               | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference |         |        |    |                 |
|        |   |                    |                |                 | Lower                                     | Upper   |        |    |                 |
| Pair 1 | ARMED ROBBERY - DELINQUENT BEHAVIOUR LIKE FIGHTING        | 1.44400            | .34158         | .15276          | 1.01987                                   | 1.86813 | 9.453  | 4  | .001            |
| Pair 2 | ARMED ROBBERY - DELINQUENT BEHAVIOUR LIKE SELLING OF DRUG | 1.52200            | .32691         | .14620          | 1.11609                                   | 1.92791 | 10.411 | 4  | .000            |
| Pair 3 | ARMED ROBBERY - DELINQUENT BEHAVIOUR LIKE ASSAULT         | 1.34400            | .33642         | .15045          | .92628                                    | 1.76172 | 8.933  | 4  | .001            |
| Pair 4 | ARMED ROBBERY - DELINQUENT BEHAVIOUR LIKE HOSUE BREAKING  | .76400             | .60372         | .26999          | .01438                                    | 1.51362 | 2.830  | 4  | .047            |
| Pair 5 | ARMED ROBBERY - UNSATISFACTORY R/SHIP WITH ONES' PARENT   | .80400             | .39570         | .17696          | .31267                                    | 1.29533 | 4.543  | 4  | .010            |
| Pair 6 | ARMED ROBBERY - UNSATISFACTORY R/SHIP WITH ONES' PEER     | 1.04400            | .46171         | .20648          | .47071                                    | 1.61729 | 5.056  | 4  | .007            |
| Pair 7 | ARMED ROBBERY - HISTORY OF FAMILYS' ARMED ROBBERY         | 1.46400            | .20244         | .09053          | 1.21264                                   | 1.71536 | 16.171 | 4  | .000            |
| Pair 8 | ARMED ROBBERY - OTHERS                                    | .23200             | 1.38857        | .62099          | -1.49213                                  | 1.95613 | .374   | 4  | .728            |

In this present study, we start the presentation of findings by recalling and examining the hypotheses earlier formulated. In general, it was hypothesized that the effects of predatory criminal variables or pre-robbery antisocial behavior will co vary with armed robbery as later life-course career. That is, persistent life-course career armed robbers were more probably those who found themselves playing one or a combination of certain predatory armed robbery or other anti-social behaviors during their adolescent stages. This predatory criminal (armed robbery) variable is disaggregated and measured by parameters which include prior involvement with the selling of contraband drugs, fighting, burglary (house breaking) and assault behaviors. The other three hypotheses tested for this study are (1) having unhealthy relationships with family (2) having unhealthy relationship with one's peers, (3) family's history of armed robbery behavior are all related to both entry engagement into later life-course persistent armed robbery.

From the table 5, it is clear from the disaggregated variable that four predatory or previous criminal experiences sub-variables (as it were)—selling contraband drugs, assaults, family robbery history and fighting—have significant relationship values of less than 0.05

(that is, very dependable relationship). However, this goes to affirm the hypotheses stated earlier in this paper at 95% confidence level. For instance, armed robbery and delinquent or pre robbery behavior such as fighting has 0.001 significance. This implies that someone who is identified as violent prone during his teen years has a very high probability of participating in later life-course persistent armed robbery career. The same observation is applied to all our other measured variables thereby confirming our other hypotheses. In clear term, armed robbery and selling drugs, assault and house breaking has 0.000, 0.001 and 0.47 significance respectively. Again, the implication is that someone who is identified as a house breaker, assault in character, and who started selling drugs at an early age, are likely to engage in later life-course persistent armed robbery in Nigeria. Another variable (unhealthy relationship with ones' peers) and armed robbery has a significant value of 0.007, while armed robbery and offender's family history of armed robbery has 0.000 meaning that both our dependent variable (armed robbery) and the independent variables have high correlations. The significance of our results here lie in the fact that selling contraband drugs, housebreaking, assault behavior and fighting all have the element of violence which is the distinguishing feature of armed robbery.

## Discussion

Limited studies have been done in Nigeria on the career trajectories or transition from predatory criminal behavior to more serious and high profile criminal behaviors. We could not find any studies that examined the stages through which individuals develop into serious and high profile crime of armed robbery, considered as one of the most dreadful crimes in Nigeria.

Some studies, however, (see for e.g. Kandel & Faust, 1975; Farrington, 1986; Huang, Kosterman, Catalano, Hawkins, & Abbott, 2000) have identified sequences or stages of general offending behavior. Several other criminologists have both theoretically explained and empirically demonstrated why one should expect that certain individuals' prior criminal behavior are predictors for a more serious and later life-course adult criminal behavior (see for e.g., Sutherland 1939; Farrington 1986; Iwarimie-Jaja 1993, 1994, 1999a&b ).

In what appeared to be a clear identification of all the possible risk factors that may lead to a criminal career, the Cambridge's longitudinal studies in both UK and USA (see Farrington, 1986b) identified traits, such as impulsivity, intelligence, family factors, socio-economic deprivation, peer influence, school factors, community influences and situational factors as predictors of criminal behavior. In this Cambridge study, boys selected by teachers as lacking in concentration or have restless behavior patterns, those who are most daring, and those who were impulsive were all found to gravitate towards juvenile offending, and with few, though, going on into adult offending (Farrington & West, 1990). The same Cambridge study in delinquency development (Farrington & West, 1990; Farrington, 1995) found that the typical career offender tends to be characterized by a deprived and/or disruptive family background, leading to early delinquent behaviors which tend to be reproduced. Otu (2010) also found that the life histories of persistence Cape Town illegal drug dealers reveal the link between early participation in other pre-drug dealing offences and life-course persistence in selling drug. The unique characteristics of these Cape Town drug sellers are discernible in terms of childhood experiences and the overbearing influence of the environment under which



they grew up. Among these experiences are the unhealthy and/or broken relationships which these traffickers had with their families and peer groups.

Overall, the examination of the life histories of some armed robbers in Nigeria show a link between their life-course persistence in criminal behavior and their previous or pre-armed robbery antisocial experiences. It also reflects a kind of unhealthy pattern of the relationship which exists between our sampled armed robbery offenders and their families and peers. These are risk-predictive factors, and the extant literature suggests that these risk-predictive factors (also known as correlates and causes) and the protective factors represent the pathways to, or desistance from deviant act or crime (see Wikstrom & Loeber, 2000). Indeed, the unique characteristics of our sampled convicted armed robbers are discernible in terms of their positive and congenial family-robbery-history, patterns of relationship with peers and the overbearing influence of their pre-robbery behavior.

As social learning theory further suggests, criminal behavior/experiences are learned when the potential learner is exposed to delinquent peers and significant others favorably disposed to law violation behaviors (see also Sutherland, 1939). Thus, it appears that our sampled armed robbers clearly learned their criminal pathways and trajectories to robbery by maintaining congenial relationships with their families and peers which remain their major sources of reinforcements. Fergusson et al, (2000) analysis of early onset and later onset offending behavior among adolescents revealed that the prevalence of offending often tends to peak between ages 14 and 19 especially among boys of lower class and low educational achievement examined for this study. These adolescent boys are also more likely to have high impulsivity, high desire for excitement, material goods, and social status. Lacking the opportunity to achieve these goals through a conventional way, they resort to illegal means. The tendency for them to form affiliations with other delinquent peers who may continue to encourage, approve, reward, and sustain these offending behaviors are also high.

One key finding in the present study is the importance of fighting and selling of contraband drugs as predictable factors to later life-course armed robbery. As armed robbery is a criminal behavior which has the element of violence or threat as one of its main features, therefore it is less surprising that these factors are most significantly connected to the offending behavior. Both fighting and drug dealing are characteristically violent in nature. Huang, Kosterman, Catalano, Hawkins, and Abbott (2001) found that fighting and aggression are relatively common in childhood and early adolescence so that these two elements constitute key predictors to violent and aggressive criminal behavior such as armed robbery. In contemporary Nigeria, young adolescents are seemingly caught between balancing their traditional and western values. Many of them therefore are choosing to join “cults” (equivalent of gang) and are often engaging in rival cults fighting, selling and using drugs, engaging in other fearless risk taking behaviors including predatory robbery (see also Nwachukwu, 2007).

Also embedded in our concept of previous or predatory criminal experiences aggregate are the antisocial behavior of housebreaking and assault. We also found these two pre-robbery behaviors to strongly correlate with participation in armed robbery in later life in contemporary Nigeria. Again, like drug dealing and fighting, housebreaking and assault behavior are quite similar to robbery by the fact that there are also some degrees of violence involved.

In sum, the pre-robbery behaviors (fighting, drug dealings, assault and house breaking) are learnable behaviors such that the importance of learning theory here cannot be overemphasized. Most of the time, learning is facilitated by association with criminal-like-peers. As Iwarimie-Jaja (1993 and 1999b) explained, it is by associating with criminal peers and committing some offences (even as he did not mention particular offences) that the juveniles may learn to engage in delinquent behavior. Furthermore, with the juveniles coming in contacts with hardened criminals, the rational and the modus operandi of committing other high profile crimes such as armed robbery will be reinforced (Iwarimie-Jaja, 1999a:56-58). We agree with Sutherland's (1939) explanation that the life histories of persons who become adult life robbers and burglars show that criminality proceeds from trivial (predatory) to serious (high profile), from occasional to frequent, from spot to business, and from crime committed by isolated individuals or very loosely organized groups, to crimes committed by rather tightly organized groups. Clearly, Sutherland's argument tends to suggest that to become an armed robber for instance, the intending person must have engaged in other minor crimes which are necessary pre-requisites to robbery, and be followed by learning robbery properly.

### Conclusion

There are many studies that explore and examine predictors of general offending behavior (see e.g. Farrington, 1995; Loeber & Wikstrom, 1993; Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985; Wikstrom & Loeber, 2000). Generally, such studies focus predominantly on examining the general risk and protective factors which are determinants of persistent life-course adult offending behaviors. There is less focus however, on the determinants of the specific adult life-course offending behavior of armed robbery, and whether there are variations on the influence of these determinants across different societies and countries. In view of the high incidence of armed robbery in contemporary Nigeria (see Marenin 1987; Olurode 1991; Iwarimie-jaja 1993, 1999; Otu 2003, 2010), it has become expedient to pay special attention to certain warning signals of high profile adult criminal behaviors such as armed robbery in an emerging economy such as Nigeria.

The study used data on convicted and self-admitted awaiting trial robbers drawn from four prisons in the South-Eastern States of Nigeria to assess and establish the pathways and trajectories to career armed robbery in contemporary Nigeria. Controlling for individual biogenic dispositions, our main finding is that becoming an armed robber is significantly dependent on acquiring previous or predatory or pre-robbery criminal experiences, the influence of peers and family, and the offender family's robbery history. In specific term, we disaggregated these previous or pre-robbery criminal experiences into four key measurement sub variables: fighting, dealing drugs, house-breaking and assault. We found all the sub variables to have significant correlation with engagement in armed robbery. Indeed, dealing drugs and fighting—two kinds of criminal behavior with strong element of violence—were found to have the strongest correlation with participation in armed robbery in contemporary Nigeria. We also found that having what we termed unhealthy relationship with ones peers and family, in a metaphorical sense of it, and coming from a background with armed robbery history were warning signs to getting involved in persistent adult life-course robbery as a later criminal behavior.

These findings cut across, and are consistent with the social development model, trajectories theory, social learning and its spin-off previous criminal experiences of Sutherland and Iwarime-Jaja respectively. These frameworks, with hypotheses drawn from

the variables that constitute them, suggest that specific previous and/or predatory criminal behavior of potential armed robbers will exacerbate such potentialities so that the likelihood of engaging in later life course armed robbery becomes high. Clearly, a need for more researches on armed robbery pathways and trajectories that widen the predictors have surely become alluring. This is especially so as some authors such as Sutherland (1939) and Iwarimie-Jaja (1999) have both alluded to the fact that criminal behavior progresses from trivial to serious, and that nobody wakes up one day to go and commit such high profile crimes such as armed robbery without first acquiring the needed experiences for such crime.

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