


ARTICLE

# Internet Scamming and the Techniques of Neutralization: Parents' Excuses and Justifications for Children's Involvement in Online Dating Fraud in Nigeria

Richard Abayomi Aborisade\* 

Department of Sociology, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria

\*Corresponding Author: Richard Abayomi Aborisade, Department of Sociology, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria. E-mail: [aborisade.richard@ouagoiwoye.edu.ng](mailto:aborisade.richard@ouagoiwoye.edu.ng); [ra.aborisade@gmail.com](mailto:ra.aborisade@gmail.com)

(Submitted 19 June 2022; revised 4 July 2022; accepted 31 July 2022; first published online 30 August 2022)

## Abstract

Techniques of neutralization have largely been used to explain the triadic relationship between cybercrimes, offenders and victims, while the possible involvement of the offenders' social networks as accomplices has been ignored. Interviewing parents, a qualitative study of their children's romance scam involvement was conducted in Nigeria, exploring the parents' disposition towards their children's delinquent behaviour. In all, 52 interviews were conducted, and a thematic analysis of the narratives was carried out. Findings indicated that parents' initial opposition to cybercrimes and support for enforcing laws against perpetrators changed towards accepting their children's involvement in romance fraud. Parents adopted their children's neutralization techniques in accepting their deviance. These findings have important implications in understanding the depth of Internet scams and parents' social expectations in controlling their children's behaviours.

**Keywords** Internet scams, online dating, parents, romance fraud, techniques of neutralization

## INTRODUCTION

Globally, Internet scams have been acknowledged as one of the most common crimes, inflicting higher emotional, financial and psychological tolls on individuals worldwide (Hanoch and Wood 2021). For example, in the United States, the 2021 Internet Crime Report of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) indicated that 847,376 complaints were received, a 7% increase from 2020, with financial losses exceeding \$6.9 billion (FBI 2021). In dating scams, a global loss of \$547 million was reported in the year 2021, which represents an 80% increase compared to the 2020 figure (Fletcher 2022). This justifies research attention focused on

Internet fraud in order to understand what motivates the growth of Internet scams across the world (Ogunleye, Ojedokun, and Aderinto 2020; Uroko 2021), to understand the factors influencing vulnerabilities to being scammed (Hanoch and Wood 2021; Kadoya et al. 2021) and reporting behaviour of victims (Kemp et al. 2020), and to determine preventive measures (Whitty 2019). Similarly, existing theories have been extrapolated to explain the rise and persistence of Internet scamming (Boman and Freng 2018; Dearden and Parti 2021; Leukfeldt and Yar 2016; Louderback and Antonaccio 2021). Notably, techniques of neutralization are one of the theories often used to explain offenders' excuses and justifications for engaging in cyber-frauds (Brewer, Fox, and Miller 2020; Morris 2012).

In their neutralization theory, Sykes and Matza (1957) proposed five major types of neutralization techniques: denial of responsibility, of injury, and of the victim, condemnation of the condemners, and appeal to higher loyalties (Kaptien and van Helvoort 2019). The theory was premised on the postulation that delinquents also hold values, beliefs and attitudes similar to law-abiding citizens. However, they learn "techniques" that temporarily enable them to "neutralize" such values and attitudes and thus drift back and forth between legitimate and illegitimate behaviours. Indeed, appreciable studies in many different fields have used these five types of neutralization techniques to examine offender-focused justifications and excuses for deviant behaviours (Brewer et al. 2020; Morris 2012). However, before this study, methods of neutralization, as well as other theories, have largely been used to explain the triadic relationship between cybercrime, offenders and victims, while the possible involvement of offenders' social networks as accomplices has been ignored. Consequently, this current study intends to extend neutralization theory to explain the disposition of the parents of perpetrators of Internet dating fraud towards romance scams, drawing from Nigerian examples.

Regarding the global rating of online dating scams, Nigeria is the second most notorious country after the Philippines, with 1,129 romance frauds amounting to \$16.8 million in financial loss reported against the country in 2020 (Walstad 2021). In this type of cybercrime, an online dating fraudster creates fake profiles on popular social media and dating sites (Facebook, Instagram and dating applications) to attract someone online with the ultimate aim of defrauding whoever gets into a romantic relationship with them. The huge, compelling force for dating scams is financial motives, and the fraudsters gain the affection and trust of the victims (FBI 2021; Fletcher 2022).

The crime of online dating or romance scams is one of the illegal Internet-based infractions in Nigeria under the Cybercrimes Prohibition and Prevention Act of 2015. Despite this law, the practice continues to grow, with the country's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) alleging that parents are endorsing their children's involvement in cybercrimes (Nigerian Tribune 2019). In particular, the former acting chairman of the EFCC, Ibrahim Magu, alleged that mothers of Internet fraudsters form unions or associations to rally support for their children (Sahara Reporters 2019). These allegations and declarations have made it suitable for empirical studies to explore parental disposition towards children's involvement in Internet scams. Studies directed at this topic are particularly imperative in Nigeria, a country with a conservative culture, where parents are strongly held responsible for their children's deviance.

### ***Techniques of Neutralization Theory***

During the late 1950s, Gresham Sykes and David Matza devoted their attention to finding answers to questions of great relevance to explaining social control in society (Aborisade 2016). They wondered why, if the social pressures that lead to delinquency were so powerful, was it that even the worst of delinquents seemed to be fairly conventional people who conform in many other ways? Also, why was it that, although they continued to live in areas of crime and delinquency and continued to be faced with a lack of economic opportunity, the majority of them did not continue law-breaking behaviour beyond a certain age but settled down into law-abiding lives? In response to these questions, Sykes and Matza (1957) developed a unique perspective on social control that explains why some delinquents drift in and out of delinquency. As propounded, the theory of neutralization or drift theory proposed that juveniles sense a moral obligation to be bound by the law. They argued that such a bond between a person and the law is retained by the individual for most of the time, and when it is not in place, delinquency will drift in.

The theory proposes that delinquents disregard the influences of rules and values that control their behaviour and use techniques of neutralization to “weaken” the hold that society places over them. Sykes and Matza further argued that these techniques of neutralization enabled delinquents to occasionally engage in acts that violated the law even though they had accepted and obeyed these laws most of the time. They also stated that these neutralizations are not just available to delinquents but are equally available throughout society. This, therefore, underscores the relevance of extrapolating the techniques in examining parental disposition, excuses and justifications for their children’s involvement in Internet scamming as well as possibly benefitting either directly or indirectly from the proceeds of their children’s exploits from Internet scams.

Several attempts have been made to verify the assumptions made by the neutralization theory, and the results are yet to be conclusive. However, there are indications from empirical studies that some delinquents approve of social values while others do not (Maruna and Copes 2005). Some studies point out that delinquents support criminal behaviour, while others are against it (Fritsche 2005; Marx 2003). However, the neutralization theory remains a relevant contribution to the field of crime and delinquency (Cromwell and Thurman 2003; Curasi 2013; Gauthier 2001). One salient question that has been asked of the theory is: do delinquents neutralize law-violating behaviour before or after they commit an act? In this current study, some other questions will be addressed as they apply to parents of Internet scammers as possible accomplices of their children in fraudulent activities. For instance, how did they manage to neutralize the hold that societal values and beliefs had on them in providing support or ignoring the criminal involvement of their children? The extension of the neutralization theory in explaining apparent parental consent for children’s criminalities will no doubt further the theory’s applicability to non-juvenile deviant behaviours.

### ***The Present Study***

This study moves beyond other ones that deployed existing theories in explaining the triadic relationship between cybercrimes, offenders and victims to extend neutralization theory in exploring parents' excuses for their children's involvement in online romance scams. Essentially, the study is guided by five questions that align with the techniques of neutralization: what is the level of acceptance of responsibility by parents in their children's involvement in online dating scams? To what extent are the parents aware of the degree of injury effected on victims of romance scams? How conscious and empathetic are the parents towards the victims of romance scams perpetrated by their children? What is the level of guilt the parents feel about violating state laws and sidestepping social norms and values? Finally, what are the parents' excuses for justifying their children's delinquent acts and securing their social bonds and religious beliefs? Answers to these questions will broaden our understanding of online dating scams, the factors driving their perpetration, and the influence of offenders' social networks on their delinquent activities. Also, it will expose law enforcement agencies and other interventionists to the depth of the illicit practice in Nigeria. Ultimately, it will advance Sykes and Matza's neutralization theory in explaining techniques used to neutralize norms and values by associates of delinquents.

### **METHOD**

This study adopted a qualitative approach because online dating scamming is a complex issue, and a new and dynamic topic. Also, there was the need to capture participants' breadth of experience and viewpoints against dominant discourses and commonalities usually associated with cybercrimes.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

The Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the author's university approved the study. Emphasis was placed on the voluntary nature of the study throughout the process of recruitment and interviews. Considering the emotiveness of the topic in a conservative society like Nigeria, the author remained alert to signs of distress during the interviews. The study information was provided to participants 48 hours before the interviews, and their written consent was then requested. Assurances of anonymity and confidentiality were given to the participants, who were asked to choose pseudonyms instead of their real names to analyse the study's data.

### ***Procedures***

The community of interest in this study was parents: biological mothers and fathers of individuals that admitted to engaging in Internet dating scams. Their acceptance for the study was based on the condition that they had lived with their children (involved in romance scams) from childhood to adulthood. An initial approach to recruiting participants using varied methods (including placing posters in community venues, web advertisement and social media) failed, with only three

prospective participants volunteering to be part of the study. Therefore, to get more participants and optimize diversity, class announcements were made by volunteer lecturers who work in three government-owned universities in the southwestern part of Nigeria. Through the announcements, the volunteer lecturers and the author reached out to students who engaged in Internet scamming and wished to be part of a study. To elicit their participation, words, concepts and definitions bordering on the illegality of dating scams were avoided. For example, invitations were extended to “yahoo boys” and “yahoo girls” rather than Internet scammers. They were also informed that the study intended to shed light on the growth of “yahoo” practice in Nigeria.

By recruiting students as indirect participants to contact actual prospective participants – their parents – 144 students approached the recruiters. This exercise was for a continuous period of 14 months due to low turnout and acceptance by parents. Upon first contact, 24 students declined the idea of having their parents interviewed, and they claimed not to have both parents or not to have lived with their parents from their childhood to adulthood. In all, 80 students volunteered to provide their parents’ contact information or contact their parents directly about the study. Out of 147 parents eventually reached (78 mothers, 69 fathers), only 49 accepted to be part of the study (38 mothers and 11 fathers). For safety reasons, face-to-face interviews took place in community venues, shopping malls, religious places and restaurants as chosen by the participants. In total, 52 interviews were conducted.

### **Sample Participants**

In all, 52 parents (41 mothers and 11 fathers) of individuals (mainly students) who engage in various types of Internet scams were interviewed (see Table 1 for the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants). Despite men accounting for 46.9% of those contacted to participate in the study, more women (41/52) accepted to be part of the study. In age, participants were fairly evenly divided, with slightly more than half below 50 years (28/52). The participants were of diverse ethnic groupings, although the majority identified with Yoruba (26, 51.9%), one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. At the time of the interviews, more than half of them were married, with only six being single parents. Regarding their level of education, participants were fairly divided, with 15 having at least secondary education, closely followed by 14 participants who had had no formal education.

### **Analysis Strategy**

In analysing the data, thematic analysis was adopted, a method for detecting, examining and reporting patterns within data (Braun and Clarke 2006). This method is an accessible form of research that is flexible due to its unrestrictive use of any particular theoretical framework. It is also useful in a theoretically driven (top-bottom) or a data-driven (bottom-up) analysis. The author initially familiarized himself with the data before engaging in line-by-line coding in NVivo 12. He then grouped initial descriptive codes into themes refined using constant comparison: a process deployed through the analysis for comparing units of data with the entire dataset and emerging theories for modifying constructs and the relationship between them

**Table 1.** Participants' Sociodemographic Characteristics (Total  $n = 52$ )

Variables	Number	Percentage
Age in years		
<40	5	9.6
41–50	23	44.2
51–60	18	34.6
61–70	4	7.7
>70	2	3.9
Gender		
Male	11	21.2
Female	41	78.8
Ethnic affiliation		
Yoruba	27	51.9
Igbo	11	21.2
Ijaw	6	11.5
Benin	3	5.8
Others	5	9.6
Marital status		
Married	29	55.8
Separated/divorced	10	19.2
Widowed	7	13.5
Single/never married	6	11.5
Highest level of education		
No education	14	26.9
Primary school	11	21.2
Secondary education	15	28.8
Post-secondary	12	23.1
Occupation		
Petty trading, self-employed, artisan, casual work	32	61.5
Teacher/civil service	10	19.2
Unemployed	7	13.5
Private sector	3	5.8

Source: Field survey 2021.

(Glaser and Strauss 1967). Similar to stages in all qualitative analysis forms, these phases are not linear but iterative, with attempts to distill and hone cyclically (King and Horrocks 2010; Spencer, Ritchie, and O'Connor 2003). Two independent

coders were engaged, and discussions with them over discrepancies were done throughout the process. This enhanced the refining of the themes and provided some validation for the analysis. Also, reflexive field notes were reviewed after each interview to examine whether the honed themes and subthemes reflected key messages recorded therein. Second, to check whether the researcher's personal beliefs, values, assumptions and position regarding dating fraud, parenting and techniques of neutralization brought any bias to the research process.

## RESULTS

A total of 52 individuals who are biological parents (41 mothers and 11 fathers) of youths who admitted to being involved in Internet scams (online dating fraud) were interviewed between August 2020 and September 2021. Data from the interviews were thematically analysed (see Braun and Clarke 2006), and four overarching themes premised on neutralization techniques (Sykes and David 1957) were selected with their related subthemes. These overriding themes were: responsibility; injury/victims; condemnation; and appeal.

### *Overarching Theme 1: Responsibility*

This overarching theme reflected participants' awareness, perception, acceptance or denial of responsibility for children's involvement in online dating scams. These were separated and discussed in the following subthemes: awareness; perception; acceptance; and denial.

#### *Subtheme 1a: Awareness*

All the 52 participants acknowledged cybercrimes. However, only a few of them expressed adequate knowledge of its typologies. Similarly, all participants admitted knowledge of their children's involvement in Internet-based transactions; however, two indicated that they never knew that their children were engaged in illegal online dealings. Mr Adamu commented: "I only know he is into *Yahoo*, and I never knew what he does on his Yahoo business." Seven of the parents that admitted knowledge of the illegality of cybercrimes, and their children's involvement in it, however, stated that they never knew online dating scamming was illegal. Mrs Ajoke remarked: "How can dating someone be illegal? Is it every lady that a man dates that he must marry?" In all, 43 parents admitted having adequate knowledge about online dating scams, their illegality, and their children's involvement in the practice.

#### *Subtheme 1b: Perception*

The 43 participants were requested to express their perception of the illegality of online romance scams. Most of them (39/43) expressed their reservations about the illegality of the practice. Their disagreement with the law was premised on dating relationships being a private affair, dating partners being consenting adults, and deception being part and parcel of wooing. Mrs Adenike commented: "Love can go wrong at any time, and whatever gifts you offer your partner while dating are normally not returned." Madam Chizoba remarked: "I am amazed it is one of the

Yahoo things (cybercrimes). I advised my children against doing Yahoo. However, when they told me about this one (romance scam), I did not see why it was wrong.” Mrs Adesanya added: “From time immemorial, women had been collecting money and other valuables from men they knew they would not marry. So what is wrong if men are now doing the same thing? Why is it a crime?” Notably, 38 out of the 43 participants aware of the illegality of romance scams indicated that they were initially opposed to the practice and considered it worthy of being tagged illegal. However, they changed their hearts after their children or associates convinced them otherwise.

#### *Subtheme 1c: Acceptance*

Four participants indicated that they had adequate knowledge of online romance scams, agreed to their illegality, and accepted guilt for supporting their children who indulged in it. Ironically, two of these four participants confessed to having advised their children to engage in it. Celestina commented:

I just feel it is less serious of the crimes (cybercrimes). I am scared and skeptical of advance fee fraud, defrauding of business organizations and other types of crime as they may have serious implications. So I advised my son to get involved in online dating and get a rich girlfriend that would send him foreign currencies. A friend whose son also does this type of hustling told me about it.

The other participant, whose son had no prior involvement in cybercrime, confessed to introducing her son to online dating scams:

Our financial condition had been terrible over time; I was desperate, so when someone told me about Facebook dating of foreign girls and how one can make money from it, I asked my handsome boy to try his luck in it. (Mrs Adesuya)

The two other participants that accepted guilt premised their acceptance on knowledge of the illegality of the practice and refusal to dissuade their children from it, while they also benefited from the proceeds of the illegal acts. Mr Adekunle commented: “At first, I frowned at it and refused to be part of it even as my wife continued to support him. However, I later succumbed when he bought me a new car from the money he received.”

#### *Subtheme 1d: Denial*

Of the participants, 39 who knew about the illegality of online romantic scams refused to admit guilt in indulging their children who engaged in them. Their refusal to accept blame was mainly hinged on their disagreement over the illegal status of the act:

A relationship is a transaction between a man and a woman, and the money, emotion, energy and time invested into that relationship are at the lovers' risk.



Therefore, laws should not intervene as long as no partner is physically harmed or physically abused in any form. (Ms Constance, Lagos)

Some other participants absolved themselves from guilt by stating they were not part of their children's decision to take to such illegal practice. Mr Esan remarked:

In truth, I warned him that it is not good from the legal and religious angles. However, he continued with it, and I kept quiet because our role as parents is to let them know what is right and wrong.

Mr Esan admitted that he sometimes collected his son's gift items and financial aids. "Receiving those things from him does not stop me from telling him the truth so that he will not take up such practice as a career," he submitted. Other participants blamed the socio-economic situation of the country, especially poverty, unemployment, ethnic sentiments and nepotism, as factors that limit opportunities for all youths to realize their ambitions, hence driving them into criminalities. "Yahoo appears to be the fastest way a son of a *nobody* can become somebody in this present Nigeria. Other means of achieving greatness in the country seem to have been blocked or are failing," Mr Adamson posited.

### ***Overarching Theme 2: Injury/Victims***

This overarching theme is reflected in the excuses given by participants to absolve themselves and their children of the blame for depriving victims of their financial resources and valuable properties. The 43 parents that accepted awareness of its illegality and the seven other participants who indicated non-awareness were engaged in these discussions. Their comments were discussed in the following subthemes: unknown victims; victimless; and retribution.

#### ***Subtheme 2a: Unknown Victims***

Of the participants, 31 indicated that they accepted online romance scams because the interactions were usually between their children and foreigners, and, therefore, they perceived they had little or no moral responsibility to dissuade their children. "I am expected to be in solidarity with people of my ethnic group or nationality, but when it has to do with foreign people, especially those outside Africa, they are on their own," Mrs Adenike expressed. Some participants expressed anger over the laws making online dating fraud illegal in the country, considering that victims are not within the country or citizens of the country. According to Mrs Jibowu: "I am of the opinion that Nigerian laws are meant to protect Nigerians. So what justifies the persecutions of Nigerians over their private relationship with foreigners?" Mrs Chioma added: "I believe the Nigerian government's obligations should first be to its citizens. The so-called victims of dating scams are unknown to the government and people of Nigeria, so what is the fuss about?"

*Subtheme 2b: Victimless*

Of the participants, 15 refused to acknowledge any form of victimization involved in online dating scams. Their refusal is premised on the perception of romance scams as the same as regular dating in which offering and accepting gifts are standard features:

Normally, we enter into a romantic relationship with the possibility that we will get love, which may end up in marriage. However, some people get into dating relationships for other purposes. A woman may want to be emotionally relieved from her experience; she may need someone to talk to. If a man makes himself available and helps alleviate the emotional suffering of the woman and, in the process, gets some gifts and monetary incentives in return, then it is fair. (Mrs Adeola, Ibadan)

Mrs Adeola was further probed about deceptive tactics that romance scammers usually deploy in getting money from their partners. She retorted:

Isn't it usual for men and women seeking a relationship to hide some truths from themselves? Will the lady at the other end be truthful about all aspects of her life? Is it because money is involved in this case?

Annie added: "Some of these foreign girlfriends have excess money and willingly give these monies to their partners. They may only claim victimized once they see that marriage is no longer on the table." This position appears to be supported by another participant:

What is the difference between a man that promised his girlfriend money after sex and could no longer give her money, then the angry girlfriend shouts rape, and the case of a woman promised marriage, only for that promise to fail? If the man involved in the so-called romance scam eventually marries the so-called victim, there would not be any criminal case. Therefore, the failed promise of marriage is the crux of the matter and not the money lost. After all, the money was given willingly. (Mrs Adesuwa, Lagos)

*Subtheme 2c: Retribution*

Of the participants, 42 expressed retribution as one of the excuses for their denial of victims/injury. They mainly said that since women from Western countries are usually the victims of romance scams, they are being punished for the past transgressions of the maltreatment of Africans during the slave trade and colonialism by Western countries. Mrs Simisola offered some details:

... The governments of these countries, whose citizens are often tricked, colonized and exploited Africa in the past. They took away our riches, our people and our path toward development. So I take this as pay-back-time. They should not complain as their citizens are getting scammed. I see them as no victims but as those paying for the sins of their forefathers.

Further probe of this position revealed that it is the excuse their children often use in cybercrimes and to co-opt their parents and other social networks to accept and support their cybercriminality. Some participants premised their disagreement with the laws against cybercrimes on this belief.

If colonialism and the trade of enslaved persons were not illegal in their countries when they came for our people and properties, why is our government making these interactions illegal? I see it as our government dancing to the tunes of the Western countries. (Mrs Nnamdi, Sagamu)

Some participants further stated that aside from the past exploitation of African people by Western countries, Africa remains at the mercy of Western countries under imperialism. Mr Adekunle said: "Africa is still under the siege of exploitations from Europeans and American countries; if Yahoo business has been benefiting their (Western) countries and citizens, I am sure there would not be this kind of clampdown on the practice."

### ***Overarching Theme 3: Condemnation***

This overarching theme reflected participants' resistance to the condemnation of romance scams by the international community, the Nigerian government and society. These were separated and discussed in the following subthemes: the international community; Nigerian government; police/EFCC; and the Nigerian society.

#### ***Subtheme 3a: International Community***

Participants expressed their reservations about the condemnation of romance scams by international organizations and the arrest of Nigerians involved in the practice worldwide. Some of them attributed the hostilities extended towards perpetrators of online dating fraud in Nigeria to the wrongful definition or classification of the practice as a fraud and a crime. According to Mrs Shoshanna: "Whatever they consider as crime is taken as a crime in Nigeria without our government considering the context or differences in culture." Mr Adekunle added: "Heartbreaks happen from any end; Nigerians romantically involved with a foreign citizen can fall victim to heartbreak too, and they may have invested their money and other resources in the process. as well." They also dwelt on the colonization of some African countries and how Western countries do not have the moral right to define romance scams as crimes against them. For Mrs Adetunji: "They are still exploiting Africa until now, so they have no justification for terming our fight back a crime."

#### ***Subtheme 3b: Nigerian Government***

All the participants blamed the Nigerian government and the political class for the country's growth of all forms of cybercrimes. Their blame is premised on their perception of the government's insincerity in creating a fair and enabling environment for youth development, employment opportunities and social justice. They particularly identified grand corruption, mismanagement of public funds, nepotism and

poor governance as factors that facilitated the growth of youth involvement in cybercrimes. Mrs Adenike commented:

They steal billions daily, which are reported in the news regularly. How won't the youths denied employment opportunities after their tertiary education take to such crimes? Are members of the ruling class serving as worthy role models? What moral justification does the embezzling government have to apprehend and convict the yahoo boys?

Other participants gave similar comments as regards the government's failure to offer social justice to the citizens. Mr Adekunle referred to the recently reported hoarding of the COVID-19 lockdown palliatives intended to be distributed to the people:

For a government that could not even pity its citizens in a time of crisis such as that of COVID-19, a government that hoarded food items from the masses, how can it guarantee the future of the youths? That is why these youths are desperate and taking to crimes.

Mrs Adeoti added:

Just look at the rate of unemployment and the number of youths wasting away, wallowing in poverty after obtaining a university education. That is why many youths say "education is a scam", because it no longer gives them any chance in society.

### *Subtheme 3c: Police/EFCC*

The perceived high level of corrupt practices by financial crime enforcement agencies is one of the main excuses given by participants to justify their children's involvement in online dating scams. They mostly held that the police, EFCC and other financial crime agencies are equally involved in sharp practices and, therefore, not sincere in arresting the crime. Mrs Nnamdi said: "There are many times that they arrest these boys and release them after they have collected money from them. They (EFCC/police) are not really interested in stopping the crimes; they only want their cuts."

Mrs Tuoyo commented:

My son, who was arrested at a time, told me when he was released that the officer-in-charge of his case expressed anger at him over the little money he collected from his *maga* (victim). They all understand these games, and some of them are partakers.

Most participants expressed that the EFCC/police officers are mostly after bribes rather than arresting the perpetrators for justice. "You all witnessed what happened during the #ENDSars protest and the revelations of how police officers kill yahoo boys that fail to give them money," said Mrs Shoshanna.

*Subtheme 3d: Nigerian Society*

Although all the participants acknowledged their social responsibility to control their children's behaviour, most of them stated that they do not have any sense of guilt over their support for their children's involvement in online dating scams. They absolved themselves of guilt by saying that social change has evolved within Nigerian society and that factors such as poverty, injustice, insecurity, and ethnic and religious conflicts have had negative impacts on cultural tenets. "There is moral panic in Nigerian society, and it is all about survival instincts. The same society gives honours to politicians that steal public funds," Mrs Ankroma explained. According to Mrs Rhodes: "Based on the growing desperation of parents to get their children involved in this hustle, I will not say the society generally frowns at it. Besides, no member of our immediate society is affected by the boys' business." Participants mostly posited that societal norms and values have been generally relaxed in recent times due to the unfavourable socio-economic conditions of the country. Some participants blamed it on the societal belief in materialism and a wealth-oriented value system:

Society gives a lot of regard to wealthy people without much care about how they made their money. Those without money are disregarded by their families and, by extension, society at large. Therefore, society hardly cares about the activities of scammers; as long as they make their money, they will be worshipped. (Mrs Ajoke, Abeokuta)

Parents mainly opined that Nigeria's strong cultural emphasis on success goals is not matched by an equally strong focus on socially approved means. "Worth is judged by material and monetary successes," Mr Adekunle submitted. Mrs Adenike added: "it is obvious that the Nigerian values attribute more importance to the acquisition of success, making money and wealth at all cost. A syndrome of 'do what you have to do but just get the money'." Mrs Adenike further added that when she opposed her son's involvement in romance scam, the family was poor and got little help from their social network; "however, when I started encouraging my son, and he bought me a car and changed our lives, people within our community started noticing and respecting us."

**Overarching Theme 4: Appeal**

This overarching theme reflected participants' appeal to higher loyalties based on interviewers' questions bordering on their disposition towards online dating scams and the tenets of their religious affiliations. These were disaggregated and discussed in the following subthemes: religiosity; appeal to religiosity; and reparation.

*Subtheme 4a: Religiosity*

The majority of the participants (28/52) identified with Christianity, with 24 of them identifying as Muslims. They were asked to rate their level of religiosity using a five-point scale of extremely religious, very religious, fairly religious, not so religious, and not religious. As participants were informed, the ratings were premised

on their level of belief in God, adherence to the tenets of their religions, and their level of attendance to religious rituals/worship centres. In their response, the highest frequency of 17 (32.7%) participants indicated being “very religious” followed by 14 (26.9%) participants that considered themselves “extremely religious”. Of the participants, 12 (23.1%) said they were “fairly religious” while the remaining nine participants rated themselves “not so religious”. None of them indicated “not religious”.

#### *Subtheme 4b: Appeal to Religiosity*

Since the participants’ religiosity ranged from extremely religious to not so religious, they were requested to consider the position of their religious tenets and dictates with their disposition towards their children’s involvement in romance scams. All the participants agreed that their religious beliefs forbid deception, extortion, infidelity and other “sins” connected to online dating scams. However, they expressed different views about how their Internet scam involvement will not contradict their religious inclinations. Mrs Hassan said: “Since we intend to cater for ourselves and my son’s hustle does not kill anyone, I do not see how this will affect my relationship with God.” Another 14 other participants shared Mrs Hassan’s standpoint. On her part, Mrs Adenike believed that online dating scams are a sin without excuse. However, she held on to the words of the biblical Scripture, which says that “all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God”. She added: “The blood of Jesus can do all cleansing and make us whole again.” Five other participants shared the position of Mrs Adenike by accepting guilt for their involvement in Internet scams along the religious line, while they also believed that they would enjoy the “grace of God” as long as they do not involve themselves in “life-threatening” acts or killing their fellow human beings in the process of acquiring wealth.

#### *Subtheme 4c: Reparation*

Participants that acknowledged that Internet scamming contradicts their religious tenets and beliefs expressed different ways by which they sought reparation for their sins. These include spiritual cleansing, fasting and praying for forgiveness, giving alms to the poor, sharing their wealth with their community, paying their tithes in church, sponsoring special prayers from their Alfas/Imams, and buying gift items for pastors as “men of God and churches”. Mrs Emoabino explained: “As long as we use a certain percentage of the proceeds to do God’s work, bless men of God and help the needy, we will be in good stead with the Lord.” The majority of participants in this category expressed similar views. Some stated that they appreciate God through giving testimonies in churches whenever their children receive a sizeable sum of money or item. “In a way, we are involved in the redistribution of wealth aside from our struggles for self-survival. Therefore, our intention and activities remain noble before God,” Madam Idoma affirmed. A few supported their beliefs and practices with verses from the Holy Scriptures.

## DISCUSSION

This study was undertaken to explore the applicability of Sykes and Matza's techniques of neutralization theory in explaining the excuses and justifications of the parents of Internet dating fraudsters towards their children's involvement in romance scams (Sykes and Matza 1957). In extending neutralization theory to explain parental acceptance and support for their children's deviance, the findings of this study demonstrate the depth of Internet dating offending beyond the earlier sole focus on perpetrators (Annadorai et al. 2020; Boman and Freng 2018; Dearden and Parti 2021; Hawdon, Parti, and Dearden 2020). Five questions aligned with the techniques of neutralization theory were drawn to guide the study, and four superordinate themes were derived from the specific methods: responsibility; injury/victims; condemnation; and appeal.

Despite the high level of awareness of the participants regarding the illegal status of online dating scams and their initial opposition and support for the enforcement of laws against perpetrators, the study sample expressed their reservations towards the unlawful status of romance scams. Their change from the negative perception of online dating scams to acceptance was a factor in their children's involvement in the fraud, the financial and material benefits that accrue to them, and their contact with associates favourably disposed to romance scams. Similar to the denial of responsibility technique for juvenile delinquents in Sykes and Matza's theory, in which the offender justifies their intended engagement in deviance, parents who had hitherto subscribed to laws and norms on cybercrimes were found to learn techniques of neutralization to accept romance scams (Sykes and Matza 1957). However, this finding is remarkable because parents adopted their children's neutralization techniques to accept their deviance. Consequently, this highlights the strength of romance scam perpetrators in gaining acceptance and support of their social network for their illicit acts. On the other hand, there are considerable implications of this finding on social control, as findings do not only imply the weakening of parental authority in checking children's deviant behaviours (Arthur 2005; Condry 2007; Fancy 2019), but also children's influence on parents' deviance.

Regarding the denial of injury/victims, participants demonstrated limited knowledge of the emotional, financial and psychological harms of being victims of romance scams. This is a factor of the little information provided by their delinquent children in the process of winning their parents' support for their illicit practice. Denial of victims was premised on victims being foreign nationals, the perception that laws should only protect citizens, and the consenting nature of the relationship between scammers and their victims. Participants justified romance scam victimization because they believed it was a form of retribution. This retribution is hinged on the slave trade and colonialism experienced by Africans as inflicted by Western countries. Hence, they hold that cybercrimes against citizens of Western countries are forms of punishment for the earlier maltreatment and exploitation of Africans during the slave trade and colonialism eras.

Further probe of this belief and connection revealed that it was one of the neutralization techniques used by delinquent children to convince their parents to accept their practice. Findings from this study affirm EFCC's declaration that Internet scammers enjoy family support (Nigerian Tribune 2019) and further

underline the level of influence of delinquent children over their parents. This aligns with studies reporting the declining influence of the family as a social control unit in contemporary Nigerian society (Fancy 2019; Somefun and Odimegun 2019).

In condemning the condemner, participants blamed international communities for criminalizing online romance scams, interfering with Nigerian legal statutes regarding online dating, and demonizing romance between Nigerians and foreigners. Their positions in condemning global communities appear to support Joseph Heath's assertion that delinquents often use self-deception when they experience a contradiction between their behaviour that violates the norms and the resulting guilt and shame (Heath 2008). For its role in checking dating scams, the Nigerian government was condemned for insincerity in creating a conducive and enabling environment for youth development, employment opportunities and social justice, which are factors perceived as facilitators of youth criminality. The law enforcement agents are condemned for aiding and abetting Internet scams, exploiting scammers rather than arresting and prosecuting them, and for other corrupt practices. Their condemnation of the Nigerian government aligns with the usual public complaints and techniques deployed by criminals to excuse themselves from criminal responsibility (Aborisade and Adedayo 2018; Aborisade and Oni 2020; Ogunleye et al. 2020).

The study sample expressed considerable commitment to their religious beliefs despite their support for Internet scams. Most of them noted that the tenets of their religions are at variance with romance scams. However, they appealed to their religious loyalties with excuses that compelled them to support their children for financial gains. Such reasons include the need to reverse their poverty statuses, address their children's unemployment problem and generally survive harsh socio-economic conditions in Nigeria. They engage in spiritual fortification in different dimensions to protect their children against possible onslaughts from the state. Also, in furthering their appeal to higher loyalties of their religious affiliations, the study sample engages in reparations of various kinds to spiritually purge themselves of the sins committed and maintain their bonds with their religions.

Neutralization theory seeks to explain the paradox of offenders violating norms that they believe in while having seemingly little or no guilt (Kaptein and van Helvoort 2019). Their conscious efforts at convincing themselves that the crime is acceptable are evident from the interactions with the interviewees. In his study of embezzlers, Donald Cressey found that they rationalized their criminal behaviours through "vocabularies of adjustments" such as "only borrowed the money" (Cressey 1953). Just as in the case of Cressey's study, the sample of this study used such verbalizations to reduce the apparent conflict between their acceptance of children's deviance and the prevailing laws and norms. One important finding of this study is the children's apparent influence in "teaching" their parents' techniques of neutralization to accept romance scams. This is especially relevant considering that studies have identified families and, in particular, parents as social control units that must rise to the responsibility of reversing the trend of Internet scams (Aborisade and Oshileye, 2020; Fancy, 2019; Ogunleye et al. 2020; Somefun and Odimegun 2019).



### ***Implications for Theory, Policy, Practice and Research***

The need for the neutralization theory to consider more explicitly the wider community context within which delinquency occurs has been highlighted by the findings of this study. These findings indicate that, in addition to perpetrators of Internet dating scams learning techniques to neutralize the societal values, attitudes and beliefs they hold, they also influence their parents to share their neutralization techniques. Therefore, this suggests the need for an extension of neutralization theory in explaining practices used by social networks of delinquents in supporting the deviance of their relatives. Scholars are still working with two-dimensional models of romance scam perpetrators and victims. While it is appropriate that these two should be at the heart of any model, the complexities of parents' and other relatives' involvement remain insufficiently represented. Further development of neutralization theory is required to explain the rise and persistence of deviant behaviour.

Across the world, laws against cybercrime and policies implemented to check its growth have rarely considered the social context within which perpetration occurs. An example is the Nigerian Cybercrimes Prohibition and Prevention Act of 2015, which forbids different forms of Internet scams and acknowledges victimization but hardly recognizes the influence of the close associates of offenders as accomplices. For parents of Internet dating delinquents, in particular, consideration is needed to enlighten them in accepting their responsibilities towards dissuading their children from romance scams. Also, they should be educated about the gravity of the emotional, financial and psychological tolls on victims of Internet dating scams to appreciate the depth of injury suffered by victims.

The government and law enforcement agents must purge themselves of corruption and other unwholesome practices to negate the crusade against Internet scams. Lack of sincerity of purpose, nepotism, misappropriation of funds and other elements of bad governance that impede positive youth development and social justice should be addressed. Leaders of religious bodies, subjects of higher loyalties as found in this study, should use their position and charisma to teach and educate parents about their roles in regulating their children's behaviours rather than the children teaching them techniques to accept social deviance and deny their responsibilities.

Further studies need to triangulate the perspectives of offenders, victims and associates of Internet dating scams in the application of techniques of neutralization. This will enable multiple viewpoints on the use of neutralization theory in explaining the rise and persistence of Internet scams.

### **CONCLUSION**

While earlier research efforts have applied techniques of neutralization in examining the rise and persistence of Internet fraud, rarely have parents and other associates of Internet fraudsters been directly studied in terms of their disposition and possible support to their children in the perpetration of delinquent behaviour. This research has captured detailed descriptions of the techniques of neutralization deployed by parents of online dating scammers in accepting their children's deviance, excusing themselves from the liability of social norms and values, and extending their support for the continuous engagement of their children in illicit Internet

practices. The parenting techniques are found to be substantially influenced by their deviant children. This has grave implications for the primary role of the family, particularly the parents, in controlling their children's behaviours and checking the rise of Internet scams. The study also concludes that unless the government and law enforcement agents imbibe sincerity of purpose in their pursuit of ending cybercrimes in Nigeria, the spate of illicit practices will continue to increase. The Nigerian social system currently provides delinquents and their associates with substantial excuses to justify their involvement in Internet scams and neutralize the hold that social norms and values hitherto had on them.

## References

- Aborisade, Richard.** 2016. *Crime and Delinquency: A Sociological Introduction*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
- Aborisade, Richard and Samuel Adedayo.** 2018. "Social Media and Youth Violence in Nigeria: A Psychosocial Review." *Ife Psychologia* 26(2):151–60.
- Aborisade, Richard and Similade Oni.** 2020. "Sociological Profiling of Armed Robbery Convicts in Kirikiri Female Prisons, Lagos, Nigeria." *International Annals of Criminology* 58(1):39–54.
- Aborisade, Richard and Temitope A. Oshileye.** 2020. "Voiceless Victims: Children Living in the Red-Light Areas of Ibadan, Nigeria." *Journal of Victimology and Victim Justice* 3(2):164–82.
- Annadorai, Kalaivani, Azianura H. Shaari, Mohammed R. Kamaluddin, and Pamela Krish.** 2020. "Factors Contributing to Online Dating Romance Scam Victimization: A Qualitative Study." *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation* 24(4):4434–47.
- Arthur, Raymond.** 2005. "Punishing Parents for the Crimes of their Children." *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice* 44(3):233–53.
- Boman, John H. and Adrienne Freng.** 2018. "Differential Association Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Technocrime." Pp. 55–65 in *Technocrime and Criminological Theory*, edited by K. Steinmetz and M. Nobles. New York: Routledge.
- Braun, Virginia and Victoria Clarke.** 2006. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(1):77–101.
- Brewer, Russell, Sarah Fox, and Caitlan Miller.** 2020. "Applying the Techniques of Neutralization to the Study of Cybercrime." Pp. 547–65 in *The Palgrave Handbook of International Cybercrime and Cyberdeviance*, edited by Thomas J. Holt and Adam M. Bossler. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Condry, Rachel.** 2007. *Families Shamed: The Consequences of Crime for Relatives of Serious Offenders*. Cullompton, Devon: Willan.
- Cressey, Donald R.** 1953. *Other People's Money: A Study in the Social Psychology of Embezzlement*. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press.
- Cromwell, Paul and Quint Thurman.** 2003. "The Devil Made Me Do It: Use of Neutralization by Shoplifters." *Deviant Behavior* 24(6):535–50.
- Curasi, Carolyn F.** 2013. "The Relative Influences of Neutralizing Behavior and Subcultural Values on Academic Dishonesty." *Journal of Education for Business* 88(3):167–75.
- Dearden, Thomas E. and Katalin Parti.** 2021. "Cybercrime, Differential Association, and Self-Control: Knowledge Transmission Through Online Social Learning." *American Journal of Criminal Justice* 46(6):935–55.
- Fancy, Cheronoh.** 2019. "Restoring the African Family: Inculturational Approach to Contemporary Family and Parenting Difficulties." *Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 24(5):36–41.
- FBI.** 2021. "Federal Bureau of Investigation: Internet Crime Report 2021." Washington, DC: Internet Crime Complaint Center. Retrieved 28 March 2022 (<https://www.ic3.gov/Home/AnnualReports>).
- Fletcher, Emma.** 2022. "Reports of Romance Scams Hit Record Highs in 2021." Federal Trade Commission. Retrieved 11 April 2022 (<https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/data-visualizations/data-spotlight/2022/02/reports-romance-scams-hit-record-highs-2021>).
- Fritsche, Immo.** 2005. "Predicting Deviant Behavior by Neutralization: Myths and Findings." *Deviant Behavior* 26(5):483–510.

- Gauthier, Deann K.** 2001. "Professional Lapses: Occupational Deviance and Neutralization Techniques in Veterinary Medical Practice." *Deviant Behavior* 22(6):467–90.
- Glaser, Barney G. and Anselm L. Strauss.** 1967. "The Constant Comparative Method of Qualitative Analysis." Pp. 101–58 in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, edited by B. Glaser and A. Strauss. Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Hanoch, Yaniv and Stacey Wood.** 2021. "The Scams Among Us: Who Falls Prey and Why." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 30(3):260–6.
- Hawdon, James, Katalin Parti, and Thomas E. Dearden.** 2020. "Cybercrime in America Amid COVID-19: The Initial Results from a Natural Experiment." *American Journal of Criminal Justice* 45(1):546–62.
- Heath, Joseph.** 2008. "Business Ethics and Moral Motivation: A Criminological Perspective." *Journal of Business Ethics* 83(4):595–614.
- Kadoya, Yoshihiko, Mostafa S. R. Khan, Jin N. Narumoto, and Satoshi Watanabe.** 2021. "Who is Next? A Study on Victims of Financial Fraud in Japan." *Frontiers in Psychology* 12:649565.
- Kaptein, Muel and Martien van Helvoort.** 2019. "A Model of Neutralization Techniques." *Deviant Behavior* 40(10):1260–85.
- Kemp, Steven, Fernando Miró-Llinares, and Asier Moneva.** 2020. "The Dark Figure and the Cyber Fraud Rise in Europe: Evidence from Spain." *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 26(1):293–312.
- King, Nigel and Christine Horrocks.** 2010. *Interviews in Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Leukfeldt, Eric R. and Majid Yar.** 2016. "Applying Routine Activity Theory to Cybercrime: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis." *Deviant Behavior* 37(3):263–80.
- Louderback, Eric R. and Olena Antonaccio.** 2021. "New Applications of Self-Control Theory to Computer-Focused Cyber Deviance and Victimization: A Comparison of Cognitive and Behavioral Measures of Self-Control and Test of Peer Cyber Deviance and Gender as Moderators." *Crime & Delinquency* 67(3): 366–98.
- Maruna, Shadd and Heith Copes.** 2005. "What Have We Learned from Five Decades of Neutralization Research?" *Crime and Justice* 32(1):221–320.
- Marx, Gary T.** 2003. "A Tack in the Shoe: Neutralizing and Resisting the New Surveillance." *Journal of Social Issues* 59(2):369–90.
- Morris, R.** 2012. "Computer Hacking and the Techniques of Neutralization: An Empirical Assessment." Pp. 457–73 in *Cyber Crime: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools and Applications*, edited by R. Morris. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
- Nigerian Tribune.** 2019. "Parents Back Yahoo Yahoo Youths, EFCC Cries Out." *Nigerian Tribune Newspapers*, 18 May 2019, retrieved 10 April 2022 (<https://tribuneonline.com/parents-back-yahoo-yahoo-youths-efcc-cries-out/>).
- Ogunleye, Yetunde O., Usman Ojedokun, and Adeyinka Aderinto.** 2020. "Pathways and Motivations for Cyber Fraud Involvement among Female Undergraduates of Selected Universities in South-West Nigeria." *International Journal of Cyber Criminology* 13(2):309–25.
- Sahara Reporters.** 2019. "Just In: Mothers of 'Yahoo Boys' Now Forming Association – Magu." *Sahara Reporters*, 31 October 2019, retrieved 24 March 2022 (<http://saharareporters.com/2019/10/31/just-mothers-%E2%80%99yahoo-boys%E2%80%99-now-forming-association-%E2%80%93magu>).
- Somefun, Oluwaseyi D. and Clifford Odimegun.** 2019. "The Protective Role of Family Structure for Adolescent Development in Sub-Saharan Africa." *PLOS ONE* 14(8):e0221723.
- Spencer, Liz, Jane Ritchie, and William O'Connor.** 2003. "Analysis: Practices, Principles and Processes." Pp. 199–218 in *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*, edited by J. Ritchie and J. Lewis. London: Sage.
- Sykes, Gresham M. and David Matza.** 1957. "Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency." *American Sociological Review* 22(6):664–700.
- Uroko, Favour C.** 2021. "Proverbs 4:10–19 and the Growing Spate of Internet Fraud Amongst Nigerian Youths." *HTS Theological Studies* 77(4):a6776.
- Walstad, Lassa.** 2021. "Catfish Analysis: The Countries with the Highest Rates." *TechShielder*, 6 December 2021, retrieved 11 April 2022 (<https://techshielder.com/catfish-analysis-the-countries-with-the-highest-rates>).
- Whitty, Monica T.** 2019. "Who Can Spot an Online Romance Scam?" *Journal of Financial Crime* 26(2):623–33.

## TRANSLATED ABSTRACTS

### Abstracto

Las técnicas de neutralización se han utilizado en gran medida para explicar la relación triádica entre ciberdelitos, infractores y víctimas, mientras que se ha ignorado la posible implicación de las redes sociales de los infractores como cómplices. En Nigeria, se llevó a cabo un estudio cualitativo de la participación de hijos en estafas románticas, explorando la disposición de los padres hacia su comportamiento delictivo. Se realizaron 52 entrevistas y se realizó un análisis temático de las narrativas. Los hallazgos indicaron que la oposición inicial de los padres a los delitos cibernéticos y el apoyo para hacer cumplir las leyes contra los perpetradores cambiaron hacia la aceptación de la participación de sus hijos en fraudes románticos. Los padres adoptaron las técnicas de neutralización de sus hijos al aceptar su desviación. Estos hallazgos tienen implicaciones importantes para comprender la profundidad de las estafas en Internet y las expectativas sociales de los padres para controlar el comportamiento de sus hijos.

**Palabras clave** estafas por Internet, citas en línea, padres, fraude romántico, técnicas de neutralización

### Abstrait

Les techniques de neutralisation ont largement été utilisées pour expliquer la relation triadique entre les cybercrimes, les auteurs et les victimes, tandis que l'éventuelle implication des réseaux sociaux des auteurs comme complices a été ignorée. Une étude qualitative de l'implication de leurs enfants dans les escroqueries amoureuses a été menée au Nigéria, explorant la disposition des parents à l'égard du comportement délinquant de leurs enfants. Cinquante-deux entretiens ont été menés et une analyse thématique des récits a été réalisée. Les résultats ont indiqué que l'opposition initiale des parents aux cybercrimes et le soutien à l'application des lois contre les auteurs ont évolué vers l'acceptation de l'implication de leurs enfants dans la fraude amoureuse. Les parents ont adopté les techniques de neutralisation de leurs enfants en acceptant leur déviance. Ces résultats ont des implications importantes pour comprendre la profondeur des escroqueries sur Internet et les attentes sociales des parents en matière de contrôle des comportements de leurs enfants.

**Mots-clés** escroqueries sur Internet, rencontres en ligne, parents, fraude amoureuse, techniques de neutralisation

### 抽象的

中和技术在很大程度上被用来解释网络犯罪、犯罪者和受害者之间的三元关系，而犯罪者的社交网络作为共犯的可能参与却被忽略了。在尼日利亚对其孩子的浪漫骗局进行了定性研究，探讨了父母对孩子犯罪行为的态度。进行了 52 次访谈，并对叙述进行了主题分析。调查结果表明，父母最初对网络犯罪的反对和对执法打击犯罪者的支持转变为接受他们的孩子参与浪漫欺诈。父母采用了孩子的中和技巧来接受他们的偏差。这些发现对于理解网络诈骗的深度和父母在控制孩子行为方面的社会期望具有重要意义。

**关键词：**网络诈骗，网上约会，父母，恋爱诈骗，中和技术

### العمل المخصص

تم استخدام تقنيات التحديد إلى حد كبير لشرح العلاقة الثلاثية بين الجرائم الإلكترونية والجناة والضحايا، في حين تم تجاهل المشاركة المحتملة للشبكات الاجتماعية للجناة كشركاء. أجريت دراسة نوعية عن تورط أطفالهم في الاحتيال الرومانسي في نيجيريا، لاستكشاف تصرف الوالدين تجاه سلوك أطفالهم المجرم. تم إجراء 52 مقابلة وتحليل موضوعي للروايات. أشارت النتائج إلى أن معارضة الوالدين الأولية للجرائم الإلكترونية ودعم إنفاذ القوانين ضد الجناة تغيرت نحو قبول تورط أطفالهم في الاحتيال الرومانسي. اعتمد الآباء تقنيات تحييد أطفالهم في قبول انحرافهم. هذه النتائج لها آثار مهمة في فهم عمق عطلات الاحتيال عبر الإنترنت والتوقعات الاجتماعية للآباء والأمهات في التحكم في سلوكيات أطفالهم.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** احتيال الإنترنت، المواجهة عبر الإنترنت، الآباء، الاحتيال الرومانسي، تقنيات التحديد

**Richard A. Aborisade**, PhD, is a Reader in criminology and victimology at the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State. He received his doctorate from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. He also holds an MBA in Information Technology from Coventry University, UK. His research themes include violence against women and girls, policing 21st-century Nigeria, security and sustainable development in Nigeria, and family-based violence. He has published in both local and international journals in these areas. He is the author of *Crime and Delinquency: A Sociological Introduction*, published by Ibadan University Press.

**Cite this article:** Aborisade, R. A. 2022. Internet Scamming and the Techniques of Neutralization: Parents' Excuses and Justifications for Children's Involvement in Online Dating Fraud in Nigeria. *International Annals of Criminology* 60, 199–219. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cri.2022.13>