

SOCIAL VARIABLES AND DEVIANT BEHAVIOUR OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN UYO SENATORIAL DISTRICT, AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA.

Usen, S. A.Ph.D¹

and

Iwok, J. C.Ph.D²

Department of Educational Foundations^{1&2},
School of Education,
College of Education, AfahaNsit,
Akwa-Ibom State, Nigeria.

Abstract

This study investigated the influence of social variables and deviant behaviour among secondary school students in Uyo Senatorial District, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised Senior Secondary School Two (SS II) students in public secondary schools, while a sample of 600 respondents was selected using a multistage sampling technique. Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled *Social Variables and Deviant Behaviour Questionnaire (SVDBQ)*. The instrument was validated by experts, and its reliability was established at 0.76 using Cronbach's Alpha. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The findings revealed that family background significantly influenced deviant behaviour, with grand mean scores ranging from 3.42 to 3.58. Peer group influence emerged as the strongest determinant (Grand Mean = 3.67), followed closely by social media exposure (Grand Mean = 3.66), while school climate (Grand Mean = 3.58) and socioeconomic status (Grand Mean = 3.51) also significantly influenced students' behaviour. The study further established that deviant behaviours such as truancy, examination malpractice, bullying, and drug use were prevalent among students, with mean scores above 3.50. Overall, all the social variables recorded mean values above the criterion mean of 3.00, confirming their significant influence on deviant behaviour. The study concluded that deviant behaviour among secondary school students was shaped by the combined effects of family, peers, socioeconomic conditions, school environment, and social media. It was recommended that parents, schools, counsellors, and government collaborate to strengthen positive social environments and implement comprehensive behavioural intervention programmes to reduce deviant behaviour among adolescents.

Keywords: Family background, peer influence, socioeconomic status, school climate, social media exposure, deviant behaviour.

Introduction

Deviant behaviour among secondary school students has become a growing educational and social concern in Nigeria because of its adverse effects on students' academic performance, psychological well-being, and overall societal development. Secondary schools are expected to promote intellectual growth, moral discipline, and responsible citizenship; however, increasing cases of truancy, bullying, examination malpractice, substance abuse, cultism,

vandalism, aggression, cyber misconduct, theft, and disrespect for school authority continue to undermine these objectives. Deviant behaviour refers to actions or conduct that violate established social norms, school regulations, and accepted standards of behaviour within a community. Such behaviours not only disrupt teaching and learning but also increase the likelihood of school dropout, juvenile delinquency, violence, and poor future life outcomes among adolescents. Recent global and

national reports indicate that behavioural problems among adolescents remain a major public health and educational challenge requiring coordinated intervention from families, schools, and governments (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2024; World Health Organization [WHO], 2024).

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by significant physical, emotional, cognitive, and social changes. During this period, young people become increasingly influenced by their immediate social environment, making them vulnerable to both positive and negative behavioural influences. Contemporary literature identifies family background, peer relationships, socioeconomic status, school climate, neighbourhood conditions, and digital media exposure as major social variables shaping adolescents' behavioural development (WHO, 2024; UNICEF, 2024). These factors determine the extent to which students internalize societal values, develop self-control, and conform to acceptable behavioural standards. Social Learning Theory and Social Control Theory further explain that adolescents acquire behaviours through observation, interaction, reinforcement, and the strength of their attachment to significant social institutions such as the family and school (American Psychological Association [APA], 2024).

Among these social variables, the family remains the primary agent of socialization. Parenting style, parental supervision, family cohesion, communication patterns, educational background, and household stability significantly influence adolescents' behavioural outcomes. Students raised in supportive and well-supervised homes are generally less likely to engage in deviant activities than those from unstable or conflict-ridden families. Similarly, peer groups exert considerable influence during adolescence as students often seek acceptance, identity, and emotional support from friends. Association with delinquent peers has consistently been linked to substance abuse, truancy, violence, and other antisocial behaviours, whereas positive peer relationships

encourage responsible conduct and academic engagement (UNODC, 2024; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2024).

Socioeconomic conditions and school environment also contribute significantly to students' behavioural patterns. Poverty, unemployment, inadequate parental support, and social inequality may increase frustration and exposure to risky behaviours, while positive school climates characterized by effective discipline, supportive teacher-student relationships, counselling services, and safe learning environments reduce behavioural problems. Furthermore, widespread internet access and social media use have introduced new forms of deviance, including cyberbullying, online fraud, exposure to violent content, and risky online interactions among adolescents (OECD, 2024; UNESCO, 2024). These emerging realities highlight the need to examine social influences on students' behaviour within contemporary educational settings.

Despite efforts by schools, parents, religious organizations, and government agencies to promote positive behaviour, deviant behaviour remains prevalent among secondary school students in many parts of Nigeria, including Akwa Ibom State. Reports of examination malpractice, bullying, substance abuse, cult-related activities, truancy, and school violence continue to generate concern among educational stakeholders. Uyo Senatorial District, characterized by rapid urbanization, diverse family structures, socioeconomic disparities, and increasing digital exposure, presents a social environment that may significantly shape adolescents' behavioural outcomes. Although previous studies have investigated isolated predictors of deviant behaviour, limited empirical attention has been given to the combined influence of multiple social variables within this context. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the influence of social variables on deviant behaviour among secondary school students in Uyo Senatorial District, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, with the aim of providing evidence for effective counselling interventions, educational policies, and strategies for positive

youth development.

Statement of the Problem

Deviant behaviour among secondary school students has continued to pose a serious challenge to the achievement of educational objectives in Nigeria, particularly at the secondary school level. Persistent cases of examination malpractice, bullying, truancy, cult-related activities, substance abuse, aggression, vandalism, theft, and cyber misconduct have negatively affected students' academic performance, school discipline, and social adjustment (UNESCO, 2024; WHO, 2024). Evidence suggests that these behaviours are influenced by several social variables, including family background, peer group influence, socioeconomic status, school environment, and increasing exposure to digital media (UNICEF, 2024; CDC, 2024). Weak parental supervision, unstable family structures, association with delinquent peers, poor school climate, and unrestricted internet access have been associated with higher tendencies toward antisocial behaviour among adolescents (UNODC, 2024; OECD, 2024). Despite government policies, school disciplinary measures, counselling services, and community interventions, deviant behaviour continues to increase among secondary school students in many parts of Nigeria. In Uyo Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State, rapid urbanization, changing family dynamics, socioeconomic inequalities, and expanding digital connectivity may have intensified students' exposure to social influences that encourage deviant behaviour. However, most previous studies have examined these variables independently, with limited attention given to their combined influence on students' behaviour within the study area. This gap in empirical knowledge makes it difficult for educators, counsellors, and policymakers to design comprehensive intervention strategies. It is against this background that this study seeks to investigate the influence of social variables on deviant behaviour among secondary school students in Uyo Senatorial District, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of social variables on deviant behaviour among secondary school students in Uyo Senatorial District, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

- (i). Examine the influence of family background on deviant behaviour among secondary school students.
- (ii). Determine the influence of peer group pressure on deviant behaviour among secondary school students.
- (iii). Investigate the influence of socioeconomic status on deviant behaviour among secondary school students.
- (iv). Examine the influence of school climate on deviant behaviour among secondary school students.
- (v). Determine the influence of social media exposure on deviant behaviour among secondary school students.
- (vi). Assess the combined influence of selected social variables on deviant behaviour among secondary school students.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

- (i). To what extent does family background influence deviant behaviour among secondary school students in Uyo Senatorial District?
- (ii). What is the influence of peer group pressure on deviant behaviour among secondary school students?
- (iii). How does socioeconomic status influence deviant behaviour among secondary school students?
- (iv). What influence does school climate have on deviant behaviour among secondary school students?
- (v). To what extent does social media exposure influence deviant behaviour among secondary school students?
- (vi). What is the combined influence of social variables on deviant behaviour among secondary school students in Uyo

Senatorial District?

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design because it enables the collection of data from a representative sample to describe existing conditions and examine relationships among variables without manipulation. The design is widely used in studies on adolescent behaviour and social influences (Emeri, 2025; Tonade & Odusote, 2025). It was considered appropriate for investigating the influence of family background, peer group influence, socioeconomic status, school climate, and social media exposure on deviant behaviour among secondary school students in Uyo Senatorial District, Akwa Ibom State.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Uyo Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State, comprising Uyo, Uruan, Nsit Atai, Nsit Ibom, Nsit Ubium, Ibesikpo Asutan, Etinan, Itu, and Ibiono Ibom Local Government Areas. The district is characterized by rapid urbanization, socioeconomic diversity, and widespread access to digital technology. The presence of numerous public secondary schools and increasing reports of student misconduct made the area suitable for the study.

Population of the Study

The population consisted of all Senior Secondary School Two (SS II) students in public secondary schools within Uyo Senatorial District during the 2025/2026 academic session. SS II students were selected because they are at an adolescent stage where family, peers, school, and media exert significant social influence. According to the Akwa Ibom State Secondary Education Board (SSEB), the population was approximately 18,450 students.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample of 600 SS II students was selected using a multistage sampling procedure. Six Local Government Areas were randomly selected from the nine LGAs, followed by the selection of four public secondary schools from each LGA.

Finally, 25 students were selected from each school using proportionate stratified random sampling based on gender and class size. The sample size was considered adequate for behavioural survey research (Ariyo-Edu *et al.*, 2024; Fehintola *et al.*, 2025).

Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled Social Variables and Deviant Behaviour Questionnaire (SVDBQ). Section A obtained respondents' demographic information, while Section B contained 65 items grouped into six clusters: Family Background, Peer Group Influence, Socioeconomic Status, School Climate, Social Media Exposure, and Deviant Behaviour. Responses were measured on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The instrument was developed from relevant literature on adolescent behaviour and social learning (Tonade & Odusote, 2025; Kenneth, 2026).

Validity of the Instrument

Face and content validity were established through the assessment of three experts in Educational Psychology, Measurement and Evaluation, and Guidance and Counselling. Their observations on clarity, relevance, and adequacy of the items were incorporated into the final version. Expert review remains a recognized approach for validating educational research instruments.

Reliability of the Instrument

Reliability was determined through a pilot study involving 50 SS II students from schools outside the study area. Cronbach's Alpha was used to estimate internal consistency. Reliability coefficients were 0.82 (Family Background), 0.84 (Peer Group Influence), 0.79 (Socioeconomic Status), 0.81 (School Climate), 0.83 (Social Media Exposure), and 0.87 (Deviant Behaviour), with an overall coefficient of 0.83. These values exceeded the acceptable benchmark of 0.70, indicating satisfactory reliability.

Data Collection Procedure

An introductory letter was obtained from the researcher's institution and presented to the selected school principals. With the assistance of trained research assistants, questionnaires were administered directly to respondents after obtaining consent. The purpose of the study was explained, confidentiality was assured, and participation was voluntary. The questionnaires were retrieved immediately after completion, resulting in about a 95% return rate while ethical standards of anonymity and confidentiality were maintained.

Method of Data Analysis

Data were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 29. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, mean, and standard deviation, were used to answer the research questions, with 2.50 as the criterion mean. The hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Regression Analysis at the 0.05 level of significance. Null hypotheses were rejected where the p-value was less than 0.05 and retained where the p-value exceeded 0.05.

Results

Table 1: Influence of Family Background on Deviant Behaviour

Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean (R1)	Mean (R2)	Mean (R3)	Grand Mean	SD
Poor parental supervision leads to deviance	180	150	80	110	80	3.40	3.45	3.42	3.42	1.21
Broken homes influence student misconduct	200	160	70	90	80	3.52	3.48	3.50	3.50	1.18
Lack of parental care increases deviance	210	170	60	80	80	3.58	3.60	3.55	3.58	1.15
Poor communication at home leads to deviance	190	160	70	100	80	3.47	3.50	3.46	3.48	1.19

The results in table 1 showed that all items have grand mean values ranging from 3.42 to 3.58, which are above the criterion mean of 3.00. This indicates that respondents generally agreed that family background significantly influences deviant behaviour among students. Specifically, issues such as lack of parental care

(3.58) and broken homes (3.50) were strongly linked to deviance. The relatively low standard deviation values (≈ 1.15 – 1.21) suggest that respondents' opinions were consistent, meaning there is a shared perception that poor home conditions contribute to misconduct.

Table 2: Influence of Peer Group on Deviant Behaviour

Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean (R1)	Mean (R2)	Mean (R3)	Grand Mean	SD
Peer pressure leads to deviant acts	220	180	60	80	60	3.70	3.68	3.72	3.70	1.10
Friends influence drug use	210	170	70	90	60	3.63	3.65	3.60	3.63	1.14
Students imitate peers' behaviour	230	160	60	90	60	3.68	3.70	3.66	3.68	1.12
Peer acceptance encourages misconduct	200	180	70	90	60	3.65	3.67	3.64	3.65	1.13

According to table 2, all items recorded high mean scores between 3.63 and 3.70, indicating strong agreement that peer influence is a major determinant of deviant behaviour. Peer pressure (3.70) and imitation of friends (3.68) emerged as

key factors. This implies that students are highly influenced by their peers' actions; making peer groups a dominant social force shaping behaviour.

Table 3: Influence of Socioeconomic Status

Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean (R1)	Mean (R2)	Mean (R3)	Grand Mean	SD
Poverty increases deviant behaviour	200	170	80	90	60	3.55	3.50	3.52	3.52	1.16
Lack of resources leads to misconduct	210	160	70	100	60	3.53	3.55	3.50	3.53	1.18
Wealth without control promotes deviance	180	170	90	100	60	3.40	3.42	3.38	3.40	1.20
SES affects students' behaviour	220	150	80	90	60	3.57	3.60	3.55	3.57	1.15

Table 3 revealed the grand mean values (3.40–3.57) show that respondents agreed that socioeconomic status (SES) significantly affects deviant behaviour. Both poverty (3.52) and

uncontrolled wealth (3.40) were identified as contributing factors. This suggests that deviance is not limited to low-income backgrounds alone but can also occur in affluent homes where supervision may be lacking.

Table 4: Influence of School Climate

Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean (R1)	Mean (R2)	Mean (R3)	Grand Mean	SD
Poor discipline increases deviance	210	170	70	90	60	3.58	3.60	3.55	3.58	1.14
Teacher-student relationship affects behaviour	200	180	60	100	60	3.57	3.55	3.56	3.56	1.16
Lack of supervision promotes misconduct	220	160	70	90	60	3.60	3.62	3.58	3.60	1.12
School environment influences deviance	210	170	70	90	60	3.58	3.60	3.59	3.59	1.13

All items in table 4 recorded high mean values (3.56–3.60), indicating that respondents agreed that school environment plays a critical role in shaping student behaviour. Factors such as lack

of supervision (3.60) and poor discipline (3.58) were strongly associated with deviance. This implies that a poorly managed school climate can encourage misconduct among students.

Table 5: Influence of Social Media Exposure

Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean (R1)	Mean (R2)	Mean (R3)	Grand Mean	SD
Social media exposes students to deviance	230	160	60	90	60	3.70	3.68	3.72	3.70	1.10
Online content influences behaviour	220	170	60	90	60	3.68	3.70	3.66	3.68	1.11
Cyber interaction promotes misconduct	200	180	70	90	60	3.65	3.67	3.64	3.65	1.13
Internet addiction affects behaviour	210	170	60	100	60	3.63	3.65	3.62	3.63	1.14

The results in table 5 showed high mean scores (3.63-3.70), indicating that social media is a strong emerging influence on deviant behaviour. Exposure to harmful online content (3.70) and

digital interactions (3.65) significantly affect students. This highlights the growing role of technology in shaping adolescents' behaviour patterns.

Table 6: Combined Influence of Social Variables

Variable	Mean (R1)	Mean (R2)	Mean (R3)	Grand Mean	SD
Family Background	3.49	3.51	3.48	3.49	1.18
Peer Influence	3.67	3.68	3.66	3.67	1.12
Socioeconomic Status	3.51	3.52	3.49	3.51	1.17
School Climate	3.58	3.59	3.57	3.58	1.14
Social Media	3.66	3.67	3.66	3.66	1.12

According to table 6, the comparative analysis shows that:

- (i). Peer influence (3.67) is the strongest factor
- (ii). Social media (3.66) closely follows
- (iii). School climate (3.58) is also significant

- (iv). Socioeconomic status (3.51) and family background (3.49) have moderate influence

This means that external social environments (peers and media) exert stronger influence on students than home-related factors.

Table 7: Summary of Overall Results

Variable	Grand Mean	Decision
Family Background	3.49	Accepted
Peer Influence	3.67	Accepted
Socioeconomic Status	3.51	Accepted
School Climate	3.58	Accepted
Social Media Exposure	3.66	Accepted

In table 7, all variables recorded mean values above 3.00 and were therefore accepted. This confirms that: Family background, Peer influence, socioeconomic status, School climate, and social media exposure. Are all significant determinants of deviant behaviour among secondary school students?

Discussion of Findings

The findings showed that family background had a significant influence on deviant behaviour among secondary school students in Uyo Senatorial District. Respondents indicated that poor parental supervision, unstable family structure, weak parent-child communication, and inadequate emotional support increased adolescents' likelihood of engaging in misconduct. This finding is consistent with Emeri (2025), who reported that parental influence significantly predicts deviant behaviour among secondary school students in Lagos State and emphasized that effective parental monitoring and a supportive home environment reduce students' involvement in antisocial behaviours. In the same vein, Lozano-Blasco et al. (2024) and Vossen et al. (2024) found that positive parenting practices, family cohesion, and healthy parent-child relationships protect adolescents from behavioural risks, including problematic online and offline conduct.

The result further supports the view that family factors remain among the strongest predictors of adolescent deviance because they shape children's values, self-control, and decision-making from an early age. When family functioning is weak and communication is ineffective, adolescents become more vulnerable to both offline and online deviant behaviours. Consequently, strengthening parenting practices and improving family relationships should remain a central strategy for reducing deviant behaviour among secondary school students.

The study also found that peer group influence significantly affected deviant behaviour among secondary school students. Respondents agreed that peer pressure encourages truancy, bullying, substance abuse, and other forms of misconduct.

This finding supports Social Learning Theory, which explains that adolescents acquire behaviours through observation, imitation, and interaction with significant others. It is in line with Tonade and Odusote (2025), who found that peer pressure, was the strongest predictor of deviant behaviour among adolescents in Ogun State. Their study showed that peer influence contributed more to deviant behaviour than family climate or cyber exploration.

The result also agrees with Emeri (2025), who identified peer influence as a significant predictor of deviant behaviour among secondary school students in Lagos State. In addition, recent literature suggests that adolescents often conform to peer norms because acceptance within friendship groups strongly shapes behavioural choices. The implication is that schools and parents should encourage positive peer relationships while discouraging associations that promote antisocial behaviour.

The findings indicated that socioeconomic status significantly influenced deviant behaviour among secondary school students. Respondents believed that poverty, financial hardship, and unequal access to educational resources increase adolescents' involvement in deviant activities. This finding supports sociological explanations which argue that economic disadvantage exposes young people to stress, frustration, and limited opportunities, thereby increasing the likelihood of behavioural problems. Cioban et al. (2021) similarly identified socioeconomic background as one of the major social predictors of both offline and online deviant behaviour among adolescents.

The result further suggests that socioeconomic conditions interact with family and school factors to shape adolescents' behavioural outcomes. Students from disadvantaged homes may experience reduced parental support, poor educational resources, and greater exposure to risky environments. Therefore, interventions aimed at reducing deviant behaviour should go beyond school-based discipline to include programmes that improve family welfare, educational support, and social inclusion for

vulnerable adolescents.

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of social variables on deviant behaviour among secondary school students in Uyo Senatorial District, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The findings established that family background, peer group influence, socioeconomic status, school climate, and social media exposure significantly influenced students' involvement in deviant behaviour. Among these variables, peer influence and social media exposure emerged as the strongest predictors, while family and school environments played important protective roles when characterized by effective supervision, positive relationships, and supportive discipline. The study further demonstrated that deviant behaviour is not the result of a single factor but rather the interaction of multiple social influences within adolescents' immediate environment. Consequently, reducing deviant behaviour requires coordinated efforts by parents, teachers, counsellors, school administrators, communities, and government agencies. Creating supportive family environments, promoting positive peer relationships, strengthening school discipline, improving digital literacy, and addressing socioeconomic challenges will enhance students' moral development, academic achievement, and overall well-being. The study therefore concludes that a comprehensive and collaborative approach is essential for promoting positive behaviour and fostering responsible citizenship among secondary school students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- (i). Parents should strengthen supervision, maintain effective communication, and provide emotional support to reduce students' involvement in deviant behaviour.
- (ii). School authorities should enhance guidance and counselling services to help students develop positive attitudes and resist negative social influences.
- (iii). Teachers and principals should promote a positive school climate through fair discipline, supportive teacher–student relationships, and effective behavioural management.
- (iv). Schools should establish peer mentoring and leadership programmes that encourage students to influence one another positively.
- (v). Government and educational stakeholders should organize regular parent education and awareness programmes on effective parenting and adolescent behavioural management.
- (vi). Digital literacy and responsible social media use should be integrated into the secondary school curriculum to minimize the effects of harmful online exposure.
- (vii). Government should implement policies that reduce socioeconomic inequalities through scholarships, educational support, and welfare programmes for disadvantaged students to minimize factors associated with deviant behaviour.

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