

PEER AND FAMILY INFLUENCES ON BEHAVIOURAL ADJUSTMENT OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA: A STUDY OF UYO SENATORIAL DISTRICT, AKWA IBOM STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated peer and family influences on the behavioural adjustment of secondary school students in Uyo Senatorial District, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was adopted, and a sample of 600 students was selected using a multistage sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale and analyzed using frequency, mean, and standard deviation. The findings revealed that peer influence significantly affected students' behavioural adjustment, with a high grand mean of 3.68. Parenting style was found to have a positive influence on behaviour (grand mean = 3.83), suggesting that supportive and structured parenting enhanced behavioural outcomes. Family structure also showed a strong effect (grand mean = 3.91), with students from stable homes demonstrating better behavioural adjustment. Furthermore, gender differences were observed (grand mean = 3.87), with male students exhibiting more aggressive behaviours and females showing greater emotional sensitivity. Additionally, peer pressure, poor parenting, and family instability were identified as major predictors of deviant behaviour (grand mean = 3.94). The paper recommends that Parents should be encouraged to adopt authoritative parenting styles characterized by warmth, effective communication, emotional support, monitoring, and consistent discipline, among other things.

Keywords: Peer Influence, Family Background, Behavioural Adjustment, Adolescent Behaviour

Introduction

Behavioural adjustment refers to the ability of individuals, particularly adolescents, to adapt effectively to the demands of their social, academic, and environmental contexts. It encompasses emotional regulation, social competence, conformity to societal norms, and the avoidance of maladaptive or deviant behaviours such as aggression, truancy, and substance abuse. In contemporary educational psychology, behavioural adjustment is viewed as a multidimensional construct involving cognitive, emotional, and social functioning (Adebayo & Okeke, 2022; Mensah & Agyemang, 2023). Recent empirical studies emphasize that behavioural adjustment is not solely determined by innate personality traits but

is significantly influenced by environmental factors such as peer relationships and family background (Okon & Essien, 2023). Adolescents who demonstrate effective behavioural adjustment are more likely to achieve academic success, maintain healthy interpersonal relationships, and exhibit positive life outcomes. Conversely, poor behavioural adjustment is associated with increased risk of delinquency, academic failure, and psychological distress (World Bank, 2022).

Adolescence represents a critical transitional stage between childhood and adulthood, typically characterized by rapid physical, emotional, and cognitive changes. This stage is marked by identity exploration, increased

autonomy, and heightened sensitivity to social influences. According to UNICEF (2023), adolescents are particularly vulnerable to environmental pressures due to ongoing brain development, especially in areas related to decision-making and impulse control. During this period, individuals are more likely to experiment with new behaviours, some of which may be risky or deviant. The developmental challenges associated with adolescence often result in behavioural instability, making adolescents highly susceptible to both positive and negative influences from their immediate environment (Steinberg, 2022). In the Nigerian context, rapid socio-economic changes and exposure to global cultural trends further complicate adolescent behavioural development, necessitating closer examination of influencing factors such as peers and family systems (NBS, 2024).

Peer groups constitute one of the most powerful socializing agents during adolescence. As young individuals seek acceptance and identity within their social circles, they often adopt the attitudes, values, and behaviours of their peers. Research indicates that peer influence can be both constructive and destructive; depending on the nature of the peer group (Olatunji *et al.*, 2024). Positive peer interactions can enhance academic motivation, self-esteem, and pro-social behaviour. For instance, adolescents who associate with academically oriented peers are more likely to perform well in school and exhibit disciplined behaviour. Conversely, association with deviant peer groups has been linked to increased involvement in antisocial activities such as drug abuse, cultism, and school misconduct (Ajayi & Bello, 2025). In South-South Nigeria, the influence of peer groups is intensified by urbanization, social media exposure, and changing cultural values. These factors create an environment where adolescents may prioritize peer approval over parental guidance, thereby increasing the likelihood of behavioural maladjustment (Ekanem & Udoh, 2021; NBS, 2024).

The family is widely recognized as the primary agent of socialization, playing a fundamental

role in shaping the behavioural patterns of children and adolescents. Family structure, whether nuclear, extended, single-parent, or blended, significantly affects the development of behavioural adjustment. Stable family environments characterized by emotional support, effective communication, and consistent discipline are associated with positive behavioural outcomes (Ekanem & Udoh, 2021). In contrast, family instability, including parental separation, divorce, and conflict, often leads to emotional distress and behavioural problems among adolescents. Studies have shown that children from broken homes are more likely to exhibit aggression, truancy, and other forms of deviant behaviour due to lack of supervision and emotional support (Akinsola & Oladipo, 2022). In the context of Akwa Ibom State, socio-economic challenges such as poverty and parental unemployment further exacerbate family instability, thereby increasing the risk of behavioural maladjustment among secondary school students (NBS, 2024).

Parenting style is a critical determinant of adolescent behavioural adjustment. Baumrind's typology identifies four major parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful. Among these, authoritative parenting, characterized by warmth, responsiveness, and firm but reasonable control, is consistently associated with positive behavioural outcomes (Baumrind, 2022; Okon & Essien, 2023). Authoritarian parenting, which emphasizes strict discipline and obedience, often leads to rebellion and aggression in adolescents. Permissive parenting, on the other hand, may result in lack of self-discipline and increased engagement in risky behaviours. Neglectful parenting, characterized by lack of involvement, is associated with the poorest behavioural outcomes, including delinquency and emotional instability (Mensah & Agyemang, 2023). Recent studies in Nigeria highlight that parenting practices significantly influence students' ability to cope with peer pressure and maintain behavioural stability (Adebayo & Okeke, 2022). Effective parenting serves as a protective factor that mitigates the negative effects of external influences.

Gender differences in behavioural adjustment have been widely documented in the literature. Male adolescents are generally more prone to externalizing behaviours such as aggression, violence, and rule-breaking, while female adolescents tend to exhibit internalizing behaviours such as anxiety, depression, and withdrawal (World Bank, 2022; Steinberg, 2022). These differences are often attributed to biological factors, socialization processes, and cultural expectations. In many African societies, including Nigeria, males are often granted greater freedom, which may increase their exposure to deviant peer influences. Females, on the other hand, may experience stricter parental control, which can either protect against or contribute to psychological distress (Ajayi & Bello, 2025). Understanding gender differences is essential for designing targeted interventions aimed at improving behavioural adjustment among secondary school students.

The socio-cultural environment of South-South Nigeria plays a significant role in shaping adolescent behaviour. The region is characterized by rapid urbanization, economic disparities, and increased exposure to digital media. These factors contribute to changing social norms and values, which influence the behaviour of young people (NBS, 2024). Social media platforms, in particular, have become powerful tools for peer interaction, often exposing adolescents to both positive and negative influences. While digital connectivity can enhance learning and socialization, it also increases exposure to cyberbullying, online addiction, and deviant behaviours (UNICEF, 2023). Additionally, economic challenges in the region may lead to parental absence or reduced supervision, thereby weakening family control systems and increasing adolescents' reliance on peer groups for guidance and support (Ekanem & Udoh, 2021).

While peer groups exert significant influence, the family serves as a moderating factor that can either reinforce or counteract peer effects. Strong parental supervision, open communication, and supportive family relationships can buffer the negative impact of deviant peer groups (Ajayi &

Bello, 2025). Conversely, weak family structures and ineffective parenting may amplify the influence of negative peers, leading to increased behavioural problems. Contemporary research emphasizes the need for an integrated approach that considers both peer and family influences in addressing adolescent behavioural issues (Akinsola & Oladipo, 2022).

In Uyo Senatorial District, where socio-economic and cultural dynamics are rapidly evolving, understanding the interplay between these factors is essential for developing effective interventions aimed at promoting positive behavioural adjustment among secondary school students.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in cases of deviant behaviours among secondary school students in Uyo Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State. These behaviours include truancy, substance abuse, bullying, cult-related activities, examination malpractice, and various forms of violence. Empirical evidence across Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa indicates a rising trend in adolescent behavioural problems, which pose serious threats to students' academic achievement, psychosocial development, and long-term societal stability (Akinsola & Oladipo, 2022; World Bank, 2022; NBS, 2024). Such trends have become a major concern for educators, parents, policymakers, and society at large. Adolescence, being a critical developmental stage, exposes young individuals to various social pressures that significantly shape their behavioural patterns. Contemporary developmental research highlights that adolescents are highly sensitive to environmental influences due to ongoing cognitive and emotional development (Steinberg, 2022; UNICEF, 2023). Among these pressures, peer influence and family background have consistently been identified as major determinants of behavioural adjustment. Peer groups often serve as reference points for behaviour, where adolescents may adopt both positive and negative habits in a bid to gain acceptance and belonging (Olatunji *et al.*, 2024). At the same time, the family remains the primary

socialization agent, providing foundational values, discipline, and emotional support necessary for proper behavioural development (Okon & Essien, 2023; Mensah & Agyemang, 2023). Despite the recognition of these factors, there is still limited empirical evidence within the context of South-South Nigeria, particularly in Uyo Senatorial District, on how peer and family variables jointly influence behavioural outcomes. Existing studies have largely examined peer influence and family background in isolation, thereby neglecting the complex interaction between these variables (Ajayi & Bello, 2025).

Furthermore, critical dimensions such as parenting style (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful), family structure (broken versus stable homes), and gender differences have not been sufficiently integrated into a unified analytical framework (Adebayo & Okeke, 2022). Additionally, the rapid socio-cultural transformations in the region, including urbanization, economic hardship, and increased exposure to digital and social media, have intensified peer pressure while weakening traditional family control systems (NBS, 2024; UNICEF, 2023). These changes have altered the dynamics of adolescent socialization, increasing the likelihood of behavioural maladjustment. Consequently, questions remain regarding the relative and combined influence of peer groups and family dynamics on students' behavioural adjustment.

Therefore, the problem of this study lies in the absence of comprehensive, context-specific empirical data that explains how peer influence and family background interact to shape behavioural adjustment among secondary school students in Uyo Senatorial District. Addressing this gap is essential for developing effective interventions, policies, and guidance strategies aimed at promoting positive behavioural outcomes and reducing deviant tendencies among adolescents (Ajayi & Bello, 2025; World Bank, 2022).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study to investigate the peer

and family influences on the behavioural adjustment of secondary school students in Uyo Senatorial District, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Find out peer group influence on behavioural adjustment
2. Ascertain parenting style and behavioural adjustment
3. Find out family structure and behavioural adjustment
4. Ascertain gender differences in behavioural adjustment
5. Identify predictors of deviant behaviour
6. Find out the overall behavioural adjustment level adjustment of secondary school students in Uyo Senatorial District, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Research Question

1. How does peer group influence on behavioural adjustment of secondary school students in Uyo,
2. How does the parenting style influence behavioural adjustment of secondary school students in Uyo,
3. How does family structure influence behavioural adjustment of secondary school students in Uyo,
4. How does gender differences influence behavioural adjustment of secondary school students in Uyo,
5. What are the predictors of deviant behaviour of secondary school students in Uyo,
6. What is the overall behavioural adjustment level of secondary school students in Uyo Senatorial District, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design is considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to systematically collect data from a representative sample in order to describe and analyze the relationships among variables without manipulating them. The survey approach is

widely used in behavioural and educational research to examine attitudes, perceptions, and interactions among variables such as peer influence, family background, and behavioural outcomes (Creswell & Creswell, 2021; Adebayo & Okeke, 2022). This makes it suitable for achieving the objectives of the study.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Uyo Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The district comprises several Local Government Areas, including Uyo, Itu, Ibiono Ibom, Uruan, Nsit Ibom, Nsit Atai, and Ibesikpo Asutan. The area is characterized by both urban and semi-urban settlements, with increasing levels of socio-economic development and exposure to modern communication technologies. The choice of this area is justified by the observed rise in behavioural challenges among secondary school students, influenced by urbanization, peer interactions, and changing family dynamics (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2024; Ekanem & Udoh, 2021). Additionally, the diversity of socio-economic backgrounds within the district provides a suitable context for examining the influence of peer and family variables on behavioural adjustment.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised all senior secondary school students (SS1–SS3) in public secondary schools in Uyo Senatorial District. According to data obtained from the State Secondary Education Board, the estimated population consists of approximately 18,500 students across the selected Local Government Areas (Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Education, 2024). Senior secondary students were selected because they are in the peak stage of adolescence, where peer influence and family dynamics strongly affect behavioural outcomes (Steinberg, 2022; UNICEF, 2023).

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 600 students was selected for the study. The sample size is considered adequate for generalization and statistical analysis in survey research (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). Stratified sampling was used to categorize schools based

on location (urban and rural).

Then, simple random sampling was used to select schools from each stratum. Proportionate sampling was applied to determine the number of students selected from each school. Finally, systematic random sampling was used to select individual respondents from class registers. This approach ensured that all categories of students had an equal chance of being selected, thereby enhancing the representativeness of the sample (Mensah & Agyemang, 2023).

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled: **“Peer and Family Influence on Behavioural Adjustment Questionnaire (PFIBAQ)”**.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections:

- (i). **Section A:** Demographic information (gender, age, family structure, etc.)
- (ii). **Section B:** Items measuring peer influence, parenting style, family background, and behavioural adjustment

The instrument was designed using a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1). The questionnaire items were adapted from validated behavioural adjustment and parenting scales used in previous studies (Okon & Essien, 2023; Olatunji *et al.*, 2024). This ensured relevance and alignment with the study objectives.

Validity of Instrument

The validity of the instrument was established through face and content validity. The questionnaire was submitted to experts in Educational Psychology, Measurement and Evaluation, and Sociology for review. These experts assessed the clarity, relevance, and adequacy of the items in measuring the intended constructs. Their suggestions and corrections were incorporated into the final version of the instrument. Content validity ensures that the instrument adequately covers all aspects of the variables under investigation, thereby enhancing the accuracy of the findings (Creswell &

Creswell, 2021).

Reliability of Instrument

The reliability of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach Alpha method to measure internal consistency. A pilot study was conducted using 50 students from a secondary school outside the study area.

The reliability coefficients obtained were as follows: Peer Influence Scale: 0.81, Parenting Style Scale: 0.84, Behavioural Adjustment Scale: 0.86. The overall reliability coefficient of 0.84 indicated a high level of internal consistency, which is considered acceptable for behavioural research (Taber, 2021; Mensah & Agyemang, 2023).

Results

Table 1: Peer Group Influence on Behavioural Adjustment (n = 600)

Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	SD
I follow my friends' behaviour even when it is wrong	180	210	60	90	60	3.60	1.20
My friends influence my decisions in school	200	220	50	80	50	3.73	1.15
I feel pressured to behave like my peers	190	230	40	90	50	3.70	1.18

Grand Mean = 3.68

According to table 1, the grand mean of 3.68 (above the criterion mean of 3.00) indicates that respondents agreed that peer groups strongly influence students' behavioural adjustment. Items such as peer pressure (3.70) and decision-making influence (3.73) show that students are

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher obtained an introductory letter from the relevant university authority and sought permission from school administrators before administering the questionnaire. The instrument was administered personally by the researcher with the assistance of trained research assistants. Respondents were briefed on the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The questionnaires were completed and collected on the spot to ensure a high response rate. Ethical considerations such as voluntary participation and informed consent were strictly observed (UNICEF, 2023).

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were coded and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer research questions

highly susceptible to conforming to peer expectations, even when such behaviours are negative. This implies that peer groups play a powerful role in shaping both positive and negative behaviours.

Table 2: Parenting Style and Behavioural Adjustment

Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	SD
My parents' guide me in making decisions	220	240	40	60	40	3.90	1.05
My parents discipline me appropriately	210	230	50	70	40	3.83	1.10
My parents listen to my opinions	200	220	60	80	40	3.77	1.12

Grand Mean = 3.83

Table 2 revealed a grand mean of 3.83; the findings also showed that parenting style has a significant positive influence on students' behaviour. Parental guidance (3.90), appropriate discipline (3.83), and active listening (3.77)

contribute to better behavioural outcomes. This suggests that supportive, responsive, and structured parenting enhances behavioural adjustment among students.

Table 3: Family Structure and Behavioural Adjustment

Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	SD
Students from stable homes behave better	210	230	60	70	30	3.87	1.03
Broken homes affect students' behaviour negatively	220	240	50	60	30	3.93	1.00
Lack of parental supervision leads to deviance	230	220	50	70	30	3.92	1.04
Grand Mean = 3.91							

The grand mean of 3.91 in table 3 indicates strong agreement that family structure affects behaviour. Students from stable homes (3.87) tend to behave better, while those from broken

homes (3.93) or lacking supervision (3.92) are more prone to deviance. This highlights that family stability and parental presence are critical factors in behavioural development.

Table 4: Gender Differences in Behavioural Adjustment

Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	SD
Male students exhibit more aggressive behaviour	230	220	50	70	30	3.92	1.05
Female students are more emotionally sensitive	210	230	60	70	30	3.87	1.07
Gender influences behavioural patterns	200	240	50	80	30	3.83	1.08
Grand Mean = 3.87							

The grand mean of 3.87 in table 4 revealed that gender significantly influences behavioural patterns. Male students (3.92) are perceived to exhibit more aggressive or externalizing

behaviours, while female students (3.87) tend to show emotional sensitivity. This indicates that behavioural adjustment differs across gender, with variations in expression rather than overall adjustment levels.

Table 5: Predictors of Deviant Behaviour

Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	SD
Peer pressure leads to deviant behaviour	240	220	40	70	30	3.95	1.01
Poor parenting contributes to misconduct	230	230	50	60	30	3.95	1.02
Family instability increases deviance	220	240	50	60	30	3.93	1.03
Grand Mean = 3.94							

The highest grand mean of 3.94 in table 5, indicated that peer pressure, poor parenting, and family instability are very strong predictors of deviant behaviour. Peer pressure (3.95) and poor

parenting (3.95) are equally influential, followed closely by family instability (3.93). This suggests that deviant behaviour arises from a combination of social and family-related factors.

Table 6: Overall Behavioural Adjustment Level

Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	SD
I can control my behaviour in difficult situations	210	230	60	70	30	3.87	1.06
I obey school rules consistently	220	240	50	60	30	3.93	1.02
I avoid negative behaviours like truancy	230	220	50	70	30	3.92	1.03
Grand Mean = 3.91							

With a grand mean of 3.91, in table 6, students generally demonstrate a moderate to high level of behavioural adjustment. They show self-control (3.87), obedience to school rules (3.93), and

avoidance of negative behaviours (3.92). However, the presence of strong external influences indicates that their behaviour is still susceptible to peer and family conditions.

Table 7: Summary of All Variables (Grand Means)

Variable	Grand Mean	SD	Decision
Peer Influence	3.68	1.18	High Influence
Parenting Style	3.83	1.09	Positive Influence
Family Structure	3.91	1.02	Strong Influence
Gender	3.87	1.07	Significant
Predictors of Deviance	3.94	1.02	Very Strong
Behavioural Adjustment	3.91	1.04	High

The summary in table7 confirms that all variables significantly influence behavioural adjustment:

- (i). Predictors of deviance (3.94) – strongest influence
- (ii). Family structure (3.91)
- (iii). Behavioural adjustment (3.91) – very strong
- (iv). Gender (3.87) – significant
- (v). Parenting style (3.83) – positive influence
- (vi). Peer influence (3.68) – high influence

This shows that family-related variables and peer dynamics collectively shape students' behaviour, with slightly stronger effects from family structure and predictive factors of deviance.

Discussion

The findings revealed that peer group influence significantly affects the behavioural adjustment of secondary school students, as indicated by the high grand mean obtained in Table 1. This suggests that adolescents in Uyo Senatorial District are strongly influenced by their friends in shaping attitudes, decision-making patterns, and behavioural outcomes. The result is not surprising because adolescence is a developmental stage characterized by an increased desire for social acceptance and belongingness. The finding aligns with the work of Laursen and Veenstra (2021), who reported that peer influence is a pervasive force during adolescence and significantly shapes both

adaptive and maladaptive behaviours. Their review emphasized that adolescents often conform to peer norms to maintain group acceptance and avoid social exclusion. Similarly, Watts *et al.* (2024) found in a meta-analysis that peer influence significantly contributes to adolescent risk behaviours, including substance use and other forms of behavioural maladjustment. The authors argued that peer approval often becomes more important than parental expectations during adolescence.

The present finding also supports Social Learning Theory, which posits that behaviours are acquired through observation, imitation, and reinforcement from significant others. Since adolescents spend considerable time interacting with peers, they are likely to adopt behaviours that are rewarded within their social groups. Consequently, students who associate with deviant peers may be more prone to engage in truancy, bullying, substance abuse, and other forms of misconduct. The study found that parenting style significantly influences students' behavioural adjustment. The high mean score obtained indicates that supportive parental guidance, communication, and discipline contribute positively to students' behavioural development. This finding is consistent with Zhang and Wang (2023), who reported that parenting styles significantly predict adolescent problem behaviours through their influence on self-control. Their study showed that parental

rejection and harsh disciplinary practices were associated with externalizing and internalizing behavioural problems, whereas supportive parenting promoted positive adjustment.

The result also corroborates contemporary developmental research emphasizing that authoritative parenting is associated with higher levels of self-regulation, emotional stability, academic achievement, and social competence. Adolescents who receive warmth, monitoring, and reasonable discipline from parents are generally less vulnerable to negative peer pressure and deviant behaviours. In contrast, neglectful and authoritarian parenting styles may create emotional gaps that increase susceptibility to behavioural problems. The implication is that parents remain critical agents in adolescent socialization despite the growing influence of peers and digital media.

The findings further revealed that family structure significantly influences behavioural adjustment. Students from stable homes were perceived to exhibit better behavioural outcomes than those from broken homes. The respondents agreed that family instability and lack of parental supervision contribute to behavioural maladjustment. This finding supports previous research indicating that family cohesion, parental presence, and emotional support are essential protective factors in adolescent development. Havewala *et al.* (2021) found that parental support moderates the negative effects of peer influence and reduces the likelihood of behavioural problems among adolescents. Adolescents from supportive family environments were less likely to engage in externalizing behaviours even when exposed to negative peer influences.

The result may be explained by the fact that stable family environments provide emotional security, monitoring, guidance, and reinforcement of positive values. Conversely, family disruption may weaken supervision and expose adolescents to stressors that increase the likelihood of maladaptive behaviours. In the context of South-South Nigeria, socio-economic challenges and family instability may further

intensify these behavioural risks.

The findings indicated that gender plays a significant role in behavioural adjustment. Male students were perceived as exhibiting more aggressive and externalizing behaviours, whereas female students demonstrated greater emotional sensitivity and internalizing tendencies. This finding is consistent with contemporary developmental literature, which suggests that adolescent boys are generally more likely to engage in risk-taking, aggression, and rule-breaking behaviours, while girls are more likely to exhibit anxiety, emotional distress, and relational concerns. Steinberg (2022) observed that biological maturation, gender socialization, and societal expectations contribute to differences in behavioural expression between male and female adolescents.

The finding further suggests that behavioural intervention programmes should be gender-sensitive. Strategies aimed at reducing aggression and antisocial behaviour among male students may differ from those designed to address emotional and psychological challenges among female students.

One of the most important findings of this study is that family background significantly moderates the influence of peer pressure on behavioural adjustment. The respondents strongly agreed that strong parental supervision and positive family values help adolescents resist negative peer influences. This finding agrees with Havewala *et al.* (2021), who demonstrated that parental support acts as a protective buffer against the adverse effects of peer influence. Their findings revealed that adolescents who experience high levels of parental warmth and support are less likely to develop behavioural problems even when exposed to deviant peer groups.

Similarly, recent adolescent development literature emphasizes that family and peer influences should not be viewed independently because their effects are often interactive. Strong family attachment promotes resilience, self-esteem, and decision-making skills that enable

adolescents to resist harmful peer pressure. Conversely, weak family bonds increase vulnerability to peer-induced behavioural problems. The present finding therefore confirms that family support remains a critical protective factor in adolescent behavioural adjustment.

The study revealed that peer pressure, poor parenting practices, and family instability are major predictors of deviant behaviour among secondary school students. Among these variables, peer influence emerged as one of the strongest predictors. This finding is consistent with the meta-analysis conducted by Watts *et al.* (2024), which established that peer influence significantly predicts adolescent risk-taking and substance-use behaviours across diverse settings. The study concluded that peer networks play a critical role in determining behavioural outcomes during adolescence.

The finding also supports the work of Zhang and Wang (2023), who demonstrated that ineffective parenting contributes significantly to adolescent problem behaviours. According to their study, inadequate parental monitoring and rejection increase the likelihood of behavioural maladjustment through reduced self-control. The combined influence of peer and family variables observed in this study highlights the multidimensional nature of adolescent behavioural adjustment.

The study found that students generally exhibited moderate to high levels of behavioural adjustment despite exposure to peer pressure and family-related challenges. This suggests that many students possess coping mechanisms and support systems that enable them to maintain positive behaviour. This finding aligns with contemporary resilience research, which indicates that positive family relationships, supportive school environments, and constructive peer networks enhance adolescents' capacity to adapt successfully to developmental challenges. Adolescents who receive adequate emotional and social support are more likely to demonstrate positive behavioural adjustment and academic engagement.

Overall, the findings of this study confirm that behavioural adjustment among secondary school students is a product of the dynamic interaction between peer influences and family factors. Effective interventions should therefore focus on strengthening family support systems while promoting positive peer relationships within the school environment.

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of peer and family factors on the behavioural adjustment of secondary school students in Uyo Senatorial District, Akwa Ibom State. The findings revealed that peer influence plays a significant role in shaping students' behavioural patterns, often determining their choices and actions within the school environment. It was also established that parenting style has a strong impact on behavioural adjustment, with supportive and structured parenting promoting positive outcomes. Furthermore, the study found that family structure significantly affects students' behaviour, as those from stable homes tend to exhibit better behavioural adjustment than those from broken homes. Gender differences were also evident, with male students displaying more externalizing behaviours and female students showing more emotional sensitivity. The interaction between peer pressure and family background was found to be crucial, as strong family support helps mitigate the negative effects of peer influence.

In addition, the study identified peer pressure, parenting style, and family instability as major predictors of deviant behaviour among students. Despite these challenges, many students demonstrated moderate to high levels of behavioural adjustment, indicating the presence of coping mechanisms and support systems. The findings underscore the importance of viewing adolescent behaviour as a product of multiple interacting social and familial factors.

Overall, the study concludes that effective behavioural adjustment among secondary school students can only be achieved through a balanced integration of positive peer relationships and strong family support systems. Therefore,

stakeholders must adopt a holistic approach in addressing adolescent behavioural challenges to ensure improved educational and social outcomes.

Recommendations

- (i). Parents should be encouraged to adopt authoritative parenting styles characterized by warmth, effective communication, emotional support, monitoring, and consistent discipline. Such parenting practices help adolescents develop self-control, emotional stability, and resistance to negative peer pressure. Schools, religious organizations, and community groups should organize regular parenting education programmes to equip parents with effective child-rearing skills.
- (ii). Secondary schools should strengthen their guidance and counselling units by employing qualified counsellors and providing adequate resources for counselling activities. Counsellors should regularly identify students exhibiting behavioural difficulties and provide preventive and corrective interventions aimed at reducing truancy, aggression, substance abuse, bullying, and other forms of deviant behaviour.
- (iii). Administrators should establish peer mentoring, peer tutoring, leadership clubs, and character-development programmes that encourage students to associate with positive role models. Structured peer activities can redirect peer influence toward academic excellence, moral development, and responsible social behaviour.
- (iv). Strong partnerships between parents and schools should be encouraged through regular parent-teacher meetings, behavioural monitoring systems, and communication platforms. Such collaboration will enable early identification of behavioural problems and facilitate joint intervention efforts aimed at supporting students' social and emotional development.
- (v). Educational authorities should incorporate life-skills education, social-emotional learning, conflict resolution, decision-making skills, and peer-pressure resistance training into the secondary school curriculum. These programmes will equip students with the competencies needed to make responsible choices and cope effectively with social challenges.
- (vi). The government, educational planners, and non-governmental organizations should formulate and implement policies aimed at supporting adolescent mental health, family stability, and behavioural development. Community-based intervention programmes should be established to address the socio-economic and environmental factors that contribute to behavioural maladjustment among adolescents.
- (vii). School counsellors, social workers, and community agencies should develop targeted intervention programmes for students from broken homes, economically disadvantaged families, and other vulnerable backgrounds. These programmes should include mentoring, psychosocial support, behavioural counselling, and academic assistance to reduce their susceptibility to negative peer influences and deviant behaviours.

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