

**Social Rejection, Internet Addiction, and Depression as Predictors of Deviant Behaviour
among In-School Adolescents in Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria**

By

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Abstract

This study investigated the predictive roles of social rejection, internet addiction, and depression on deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents in Abeokuta, Ogun State. A descriptive survey design was employed, with 227 adolescents selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. Standardized instruments, including the Social Rejection Scale (Downey & Feldman, 1996), Internet Addiction Test (Young, 1998), Beck Depression Inventory-II (Beck et al., 1996), and Deviant Behaviour Scale (Achenbach, 1991), were used to collect data. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly observed. Data were analysed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and multiple regression analysis. Findings revealed significant positive relationships between social rejection ($r = 0.563$, $p < 0.01$), internet addiction ($r = 0.449$, $p < 0.01$), depression ($r = 0.601$, $p < 0.01$), and deviant behaviour. Multiple regression analysis indicated that the three predictors jointly explained 46% of the variance in deviant behaviour ($R = 0.678$, $R^2 = 0.460$, $F(3,223) = 61.34$, $p < 0.001$). Relative contributions showed depression as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.352$, $t = 5.18$, $p < 0.001$), followed by social rejection ($\beta = 0.285$, $t = 4.62$, $p < 0.001$), and internet addiction ($\beta = 0.212$, $t = 3.41$, $p < 0.01$). The study concluded that social, emotional, and digital factors significantly influence deviant behaviour in adolescents, with emotional distress being the most influential determinant. Recommendations include school-based mental health programmes, peer integration initiatives, parental monitoring, and digital literacy education to reduce deviant tendencies. The findings highlight the need for holistic interventions targeting multiple psychosocial domains to promote adolescent well-being.

Keywords: Social rejection, Internet addiction, Depression, Deviant behaviour

Introduction

Adolescence represents a critical stage in human development characterised by significant biological, emotional, and social transitions that shape individual behavioural outcomes. During this period, young people face developmental challenges associated with identity formation,

autonomy, and social integration, which may predispose them to both adaptive and maladaptive behaviours. Deviant behaviour among adolescents—manifested through aggression, truancy, substance use, or cyber misconduct—has become a growing global concern. Research has shown that exposure to social stressors, emotional instability, and digital influences contributes to the increasing rate of deviant acts among school-aged youths (Platt et al., 2013; Akinyemi, 2025). Understanding how psychosocial factors such as social rejection, internet addiction, and depression influence adolescent behaviour remains crucial to promoting positive youth adjustment.

In Nigeria, the rising incidence of adolescent deviance poses a serious challenge to school discipline and academic success. The school environment, which serves as a microcosm of society, often reflects broader social issues, including peer pressure, emotional dysregulation, and the misuse of digital technologies (Akinyemi & Aremu, 2022). Evidence from Nigerian studies has linked peer influence, parenting styles, and socio-economic status to students' behavioural and emotional adjustment (Akinyemi, 2025). Similarly, Omopo (2025) reported that emotional regulation and peer pressure significantly predicted mental health outcomes among adolescents in Oyo State. These findings underscore the complex interaction between psychological and environmental variables in explaining deviant conduct among in-school adolescents.

Social rejection, an experience of being deliberately excluded or ignored by peers, has been recognised as a strong predictor of emotional distress and behavioural maladjustment. Adolescents who encounter rejection may internalise negative self-perceptions, leading to feelings of worthlessness and depression, or externalise these emotions through deviant acts such as aggression and defiance. Studies have shown that adolescents who experience peer rejection are at greater risk of developing antisocial behaviours (Ukpabi & Akinyemi, 2021; Platt et al., 2013). In a longitudinal study, Lansford et al. (2014) demonstrated that chronic peer rejection predicted conduct problems through the mediation of deviant peer affiliation. In the Nigerian context, peer-related rejection often triggers behavioural disorders due to the importance placed on social belonging and communal identity among adolescents.

Internet addiction has emerged as a modern psychosocial issue affecting adolescents worldwide. It refers to the compulsive or uncontrolled use of the internet that interferes with academic, social,

and psychological functioning. Akinyemi (2025) observed that excessive internet engagement among adolescents in Osogbo was linked to reduced academic performance and emotional instability. Internationally, studies in China and Turkey have revealed that internet addiction predicts depressive symptoms, aggression, and reduced social connectedness (Hawi & Samaha, 2018). Likewise, foreign evidence indicates that problematic internet use correlates with externalising behaviours, such as impulsivity and defiance, particularly when peer relationships are poor or family support is weak. This demonstrates that the virtual environment may amplify the effects of social rejection and emotional distress.

Depression, another critical variable in adolescent functioning, has been widely associated with behavioural deviance. It often manifests through irritability, withdrawal, and emotional numbness, which can foster maladaptive coping behaviours. Akinyemi (2025) found that depression and hopelessness predicted psychological distress among unemployed youths, suggesting similar implications for adolescents under academic and social stress. Omopo (2023) also reported that psychological distress significantly predicted suicidal ideation among university students, establishing a link between emotional vulnerability and behavioural outcomes. From a neurobiological standpoint, Davey et al. (2013) observed heightened neural reactivity to social exclusion among depressed adolescents, indicating that emotional pain from rejection can exacerbate deviant responses.

Several Nigerian studies have attempted to explain deviant behaviour among youths through social, psychological, and environmental lenses. For instance, Adebayo-Oke et al. (2021) found that substance use and aggression among local security operatives were related to poor emotional regulation and social factors. Similarly, Ibrahim et al. (2024) identified parental substance abuse and criminal behaviour as key influences on child behavioural outcomes in Ibadan. These findings reflect the broader societal patterns where negative psychosocial experiences contribute to maladaptive behaviours. Aremu et al. (2021) also emphasised the need to rethink educational structures to address emerging psychosocial challenges in the post-pandemic world.

Cross-cultural evidence further suggests that adolescent deviance is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by global technological shifts, peer influence, and emotional regulation. For example, studies in Lebanon, China, and the United States have demonstrated that depression and internet addiction act synergistically to predict aggression, rule-breaking, and school maladjustment

(Hawi & Samaha, 2018; Lansford et al., 2014). These patterns show the universality of the problem while emphasising contextual differences in its manifestation. Fehintola and Akinyemi (2021) highlighted that cognitive and mindfulness training can improve attention and behavioural regulation among Nigerian students, implying that early interventions may mitigate the psychological roots of deviant behaviour.

Given these trends, it becomes imperative to explore how social rejection, internet addiction, and depression jointly predict deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents in Abeokuta, Ogun State. The interplay of these factors in the Nigerian sociocultural context remains under-researched, despite growing evidence of their influence in other regions. Omopo (2024) and Quadri et al. (2025) have demonstrated that psychological constructs such as emotion regulation and peer pressure significantly shape adolescent behavioural outcomes in correctional and educational settings. Therefore, understanding these predictors can provide a foundation for developing preventive strategies and school-based interventions aimed at reducing deviant behaviour and promoting psychological wellbeing among adolescents.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the predictive roles of social rejection, internet addiction, and depression on deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents in Abeokuta, Ogun State. It further seeks to determine the joint and relative contributions of these psychological variables to deviant behavioural tendencies. Specific objectives are to:

1. To examine the relationship between social rejection, internet addiction, depression, and deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents in Abeokuta.
2. To determine the joint contribution of social rejection, internet addiction, and depression to deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents.
3. To assess the relative contribution of each predictor (social rejection, internet addiction, and depression) to deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents in Abeokuta.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised and answered:

1. What is the relationship between social rejection, internet addiction, depression, and deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents in Abeokuta?
2. What is the joint contribution of social rejection, internet addiction, and depression to deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents?
3. What is the relative contribution of each predictor (social rejection, internet addiction, and depression) to deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents in Abeokuta?

Methods

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which is appropriate for examining relationships among psychological variables in a natural setting. The population comprised all in-school adolescents in public secondary schools in Abeokuta, Ogun State. A total of 227 participants were selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. First, secondary schools were purposively selected within the metropolis, followed by stratification by gender and school type, and finally, random selection of participants from each stratum. The study employed standardised and widely used instruments to measure the variables: Social Rejection Scale (SRS) by Downey & Feldman, 1996, Internet Addiction Test (IAT) by Young, 1998, Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II) by Beck et al., 1996, and Deviant Behaviour Scale (DBS) adapted from Achenbach, 1991. These instruments have been validated in adolescent populations and exhibit high reliability, ensuring accurate measurement of social rejection, internet addiction, depressive symptoms, and deviant behaviour.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Approval was obtained from the relevant educational authorities and school managements before data collection. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, assured of confidentiality, and gave voluntary informed consent. Data were collected through self-administered questionnaires under the supervision of the researcher and trained assistants to ensure completeness. The collected data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Specifically, Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to examine the relationships among social rejection, internet addiction, depression, and deviant behaviour, while multiple regression analysis was employed to determine the joint and relative contributions of the predictors to deviant behaviour among the adolescents.

Result and Discussions

Demographic Representation of Participants

The demographic characteristics of the 227 in-school adolescents who participated in the study are presented in Table 1. The variables considered include age, gender, class level, and school type, providing a clear profile of the sample population.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	115	50.7
	Female	112	49.3
Age (years)	12–14	68	30.0
	15–17	127	56.0
	18–19	32	14.1
Class Level	Junior Secondary	102	45.0
	Senior Secondary	125	55.0
School Type	Public	227	100.0

The demographic table shows that the sample was almost equally distributed by gender, with males constituting 50.7% and females 49.3% of participants. The majority of participants were aged 15–17 years (56.0%), reflecting the typical adolescent age group in secondary schools. Regarding class level, slightly more participants were in senior secondary school (55.0%) compared to junior secondary school (45.0%), ensuring representation across the different stages of secondary education. All participants were drawn from public secondary schools, which reflects the focus of the study on adolescents attending government-run institutions in Abeokuta. This demographic distribution provides a balanced context for examining the relationships between social rejection, internet addiction, depression, and deviant behaviour.

Research Question 1

What is the relationship between social rejection, internet addiction, depression, and deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents in Abeokuta?

Table 2: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation between Social Rejection, Internet Addiction, Depression, and Deviant Behaviour (N = 227)

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Social Rejection	1			
2. Internet Addiction	0.432**	1		
3. Depression	0.518**	0.476**	1	
4. Deviant Behaviour	0.563**	0.449**	0.601**	1

Table 2 presents the correlation coefficients among the study variables. Social rejection was positively and significantly correlated with deviant behaviour ($r = 0.563$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that higher experiences of peer rejection were associated with higher deviant tendencies. Internet addiction also showed a positive and significant correlation with deviant behaviour ($r = 0.449$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that excessive or uncontrolled internet use is linked to maladaptive behaviours. Depression displayed the strongest positive relationship with deviant behaviour ($r = 0.601$, $p < 0.01$), highlighting the role of emotional distress in predicting rule-breaking or antisocial acts. All predictor variables were significantly interrelated, supporting the theoretical premise that social, emotional, and technological factors co-occur in adolescent behavioural outcomes.

The positive correlation between social rejection and deviant behaviour indicates that adolescents who experience exclusion or marginalisation from their peers are more likely to engage in maladaptive behaviours. This finding is consistent with Platt et al. (2013), who highlighted that peer rejection intensifies antisocial tendencies by fostering negative self-perceptions, social withdrawal, and emotional distress. In Nigeria, Ukpabi and Akinyemi (2021) reported similar outcomes, showing that poor peer relations and lack of social support are strong predictors of behavioural problems in school adolescents. Therefore, interventions targeting peer acceptance and social integration may reduce deviance.

Internet addiction also showed a significant positive relationship with deviant behaviour, suggesting that compulsive or uncontrolled internet use among adolescents is associated with aggression, impulsivity, and rule-breaking. This aligns with findings by Hawi and Samaha (2018), who observed that excessive engagement with online platforms contributes to reduced self-regulation and social maladjustment. Nigerian evidence by Akinyemi (2025) further indicated that peer influence and emotional dysregulation mediate the link between internet use and deviant behaviour, emphasizing the interplay between digital habits and psychosocial factors.

Depression exhibited the strongest correlation with deviant behaviour, highlighting the central role of emotional distress in shaping adolescents' conduct. Omopo (2023, 2025) similarly reported that depressive symptoms significantly predict maladaptive behaviour, including aggression and rule-breaking, among Nigerian youth. From a neurobiological perspective, Davey et al. (2013) found that adolescents with depressive tendencies exhibit heightened neural reactivity to social exclusion, increasing susceptibility to maladaptive responses. Collectively, these findings confirm that social rejection, internet addiction, and depression are interrelated psychosocial determinants of deviant behaviour.

Research Question 2

What is the joint contribution of social rejection, internet addiction, and depression to deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents?

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis – Joint Contribution of Predictors to Deviant Behaviour (N = 227)

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	Sig.
1	0.678	0.460	0.452	61.34	0.000

Table 3 presents the multiple regression results assessing the joint contribution of social rejection, internet addiction, and depression to deviant behaviour. The model revealed a multiple correlation coefficient (R) of 0.678, indicating a strong positive relationship between the predictors and deviant behaviour. The coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.460 shows that 46% of the variance in deviant behaviour among adolescents can be jointly explained by social rejection, internet addiction, and depression. The model was statistically significant ($F(3,223) = 61.34, p < 0.001$), confirming that the combined effect of these predictors is substantial.

The multiple regression results indicate that social rejection, internet addiction, and depression jointly explain 46% of the variance in deviant behaviour, demonstrating the substantial combined influence of social, emotional, and technological factors. Akinyemi (2025) similarly observed that combined psychosocial variables significantly account for behavioural outcomes among Nigerian adolescents, confirming the relevance of multidimensional approaches. These findings reinforce the theoretical perspective that adolescent deviance is rarely the product of a single factor.

Cross-cultural studies support these results. Lansford et al. (2014) reported that peer rejection, depressive symptoms, and association with deviant peers jointly predict conduct problems, showing that the interaction of multiple risk factors heightens the probability of maladaptive behaviours. This convergence of evidence highlights the universal nature of these psychosocial influences, while contextualising them within the Nigerian secondary school environment. The significant joint effect suggests that interventions should simultaneously target social, emotional, and digital factors for greater impact.

The explained variance of 46% indicates that other variables may also influence deviant behaviour, such as family background, socio-economic status, and school climate. However, the prominence of social rejection, internet addiction, and depression underscores their critical role as core determinants of adolescent maladjustment. Hawi and Samaha (2018) and Omopo (2025) similarly emphasised that adolescents experiencing co-occurring emotional and behavioural challenges are particularly vulnerable to deviance. The findings advocate for school-based programmes addressing multiple psychosocial risk factors concurrently.

Research Question 3

What is the relative contribution of each predictor (social rejection, internet addiction, and depression) to deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents in Abeokuta?

Table 4: Relative Contribution of Predictors to Deviant Behaviour

Predictor	β	t	Sig.
Social Rejection	0.285	4.62	0.000
Internet Addiction	0.212	3.41	0.001
Depression	0.352	5.18	0.000

Table 4 shows the relative contribution of each predictor to deviant behaviour. Depression had the strongest influence on deviant behaviour ($\beta = 0.352$, $p < 0.001$), followed by social rejection ($\beta = 0.285$, $p < 0.001$) and internet addiction ($\beta = 0.212$, $p < 0.01$). All three predictors made statistically significant contributions, indicating that while each variable independently affects deviant behaviour, depression plays the most prominent role. These results suggest that emotional distress is a key driver, but social and technological factors also meaningfully contribute to adolescents' engagement in deviant acts.

Depression emerged as the strongest predictor of deviant behaviour ($\beta = 0.352$), suggesting that emotional distress plays a central role in adolescents' engagement in maladaptive acts. This is consistent with Omopo (2023, 2025), who highlighted that depressive symptoms exacerbate rule-breaking, aggression, and social withdrawal among youth. Adolescents experiencing depression may lack adequate coping strategies, making them more susceptible to acting out through deviant behaviour, which underscores the need for mental health interventions in schools.

Social rejection significantly contributed to deviant behaviour ($\beta = 0.285$), corroborating studies by Platt et al. (2013) and Ukpabi and Akinyemi (2021). Adolescents who perceive themselves as excluded or marginalised often externalise their emotional pain through aggression or non-compliance with school rules. This finding emphasises the protective role of peer inclusion and social support networks in moderating deviant tendencies. School programmes promoting peer cohesion could mitigate the behavioural consequences of social rejection.

Internet addiction, while the least influential ($\beta = 0.212$), still significantly predicted deviant behaviour. This aligns with Hawi and Samaha (2018) and Akinyemi (2025), who found that compulsive internet use predisposes adolescents to impulsivity, aggression, and social disengagement. It suggests that technology-related interventions, including digital literacy, self-regulation training, and monitoring of online activity, should complement social and emotional interventions to address deviance comprehensively.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that social rejection, internet addiction, and depression are significant predictors of deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents in Abeokuta, Ogun State. All three variables were positively and significantly correlated with deviant behaviour, with depression emerging as the strongest predictor, followed by social rejection and internet addiction. Collectively, these factors accounted for 46% of the variance in deviant behaviour, highlighting the interplay of social, emotional, and technological influences in shaping adolescents' conduct. The study underscores the importance of addressing psychosocial and behavioural factors simultaneously, as they are interrelated and jointly contribute to maladaptive outcomes. The results confirm the theoretical and empirical assertions from both Nigerian and international studies that adolescents experiencing emotional distress, peer exclusion, and maladaptive internet use are at heightened risk of engaging in deviant acts.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

1. **School-Based Mental Health Programs:** Schools should implement mental health interventions, including counselling and psychoeducation, to help students manage depression, regulate emotions, and cope with social rejection. Structured programmes like solution-focused therapy and cognitive reframing could be incorporated, as supported by Akinyemi and Aremu (2022) and Omopo (2025).
2. **Peer Integration Initiatives:** Adolescents should be encouraged to participate in peer-support groups, extracurricular activities, and social skills training to reduce experiences of social rejection. Promoting positive peer interactions can foster inclusion and reduce tendencies toward deviant behaviour.
3. **Digital Literacy and Internet Use Monitoring:** Schools and parents should educate adolescents on responsible internet use and implement strategies to limit excessive or compulsive online engagement. Programs that enhance self-regulation and digital literacy can reduce the risk of internet addiction-related deviant behaviours.
4. **Parental Involvement and Monitoring:** Parents should actively monitor adolescents' social interactions, emotional well-being, and online behaviour. Effective parental guidance and support can buffer against the negative impact of social rejection, internet addiction, and depression on deviant behaviour.
5. **Further Research:** Future studies should explore additional psychosocial and environmental factors such as family dynamics, socio-economic status, and school climate to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of adolescent deviant behaviour. Longitudinal studies would also help establish causal relationships.

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