Psychological Predictors of Deviant Behaviour among In-School Adolescents in Iwo, Osun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Deviant behaviour among adolescents is influenced by a complex interplay of psychological and social factors. This study examined the psychological predictors of deviant behaviour among 187 in-school adolescents in Iwo, Osun State, focusing on childhood trauma, peer influence, and self-esteem. Data were collected using standardized instruments assessing trauma exposure, peer influence susceptibility, self-esteem, and engagement in deviant acts. Correlation analysis indicated that childhood trauma ($r = .57$, $p < 0.01$) and peer influence ($r = .53$, $p < 0.01$) were positively associated with deviant behaviour, while self-esteem was negatively associated ($r = -.49$, $p < 0.01$). Multiple regression results revealed that these predictors jointly accounted for 48% of the variance in deviant behaviour ($R^2 = .48$, $F(3,183) = 57.32$, $p < .001$). Childhood trauma emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.39$), followed by peer influence ($\beta = 0.34$), with self-esteem serving as a moderate protective factor ($\beta = -0.28$). The findings underscore the significant roles of early adverse experiences, peer dynamics, and individual psychological resources in shaping adolescent behaviour. Interventions that enhance self-esteem, provide social support, and address the consequences of childhood trauma are recommended to mitigate deviant behaviour among adolescents.

Keywords: Childhood trauma, Peer influence, Self-esteem, Deviant behaviour,

Introduction

Deviant behaviour among adolescents has become a pressing concern for educators, psychologists, and policymakers, particularly within school settings where early interventions can have a significant impact. In-school adolescents are at risk of engaging in behaviours such as truancy, aggression, theft, rule-breaking, and substance abuse, which disrupt not only their academic progress but also peer and family relationships (Omopo, 2025; Quadri et al., 2025). Globally, research indicates that adolescent deviance is a multifactorial phenomenon influenced by social, environmental, and psychological factors (Prakash, Rani and Jha, 2020).

Understanding the predictors of deviant behaviour is therefore critical for developing effective interventions that foster positive development and reduce the risk of long-term maladjustment.

Childhood trauma is one of the most influential predictors of deviant behaviour in adolescents. This was expressed by Ilori, Salaudeen and Oyeniran (2025) that across low-and middle-income countries (LMICs), including many African nations, child maltreatment often remains unaddressed due to limited awareness, under-resourced child protection systems, and cultural norms that perpetuate violence. Experiences of emotional neglect, physical abuse, and exposure to parental substance misuse or criminal activity have been consistently associated with maladaptive behaviours (Ibrahim et al., 2024; Quadri et al., 2025). Traumatic experiences during critical developmental periods impair emotional regulation, decision-making, and stress management, which can increase susceptibility to risk-taking and antisocial behaviours (Masten, 2014). Nigerian studies have similarly shown that adolescents exposed to trauma in early life exhibit higher levels of aggression, truancy, and delinquency, reflecting the lasting impact of early adverse experiences (Omopo, 2025; Akinyemi, 2025).

Peer influence is another key factor shaping adolescent behaviour, particularly during the transitional period of secondary school. Adolescents are highly sensitive to social norms and often model behaviours exhibited by their peer groups (Ukpabi & Akinyemi, 2021; Akinyemi & Aremu, 2022). Positive peer influence can promote prosocial behaviour, but association with peers engaging in deviant acts significantly increases the likelihood of an adolescent adopting similar behaviours (Duckworth et al., 2007). In Nigeria, studies indicate that peer pressure interacts with individual predispositions, amplifying tendencies toward aggression, substance use, and other forms of misconduct among secondary school students (Akinyemi, 2025; Fehintola & Akinyemi, 2021).

Self-esteem is a protective psychological resource that can buffer adolescents against engaging in deviant behaviour. Adolescents with high self-worth are better able to resist negative peer influences and employ adaptive coping strategies when faced with stressors (Zimmerman, 2013; Akinyemi, 2025). Low self-esteem, conversely, is associated with susceptibility to peer pressure, poor decision-making, and increased engagement in risk behaviours (Omopo, 2025). Nigerian studies highlight that enhancing self-esteem through interventions such as cognitive training,

solution-focused therapy, and mindfulness programs can significantly reduce behavioural problems among in-school adolescents (Akinyemi & Aremu, 2022; Fehintola & Akinyemi, 2021; Omopo, 2024).

The interplay of childhood trauma, peer influence, and self-esteem underscores the complexity of deviant behaviour in adolescents. While trauma and negative peer influence act as risk factors, self-esteem provides resilience that can mitigate these adverse effects (Quadri et al., 2025). Empirical evidence from Nigeria confirms that adolescents with strong psychological resources demonstrate better social adjustment and reduced behavioural problems despite exposure to early life stressors (Akinyemi, 2025; Omopo, 2025). Similarly, international studies show that resilience and positive self-concept are critical in moderating the relationship between environmental risk factors and adolescent delinquency (Martin & Marsh, 2006; Richardson et al., 2012).

In addition to individual and peer-level factors, family and environmental contexts further shape the trajectory of deviant behaviour. Parenting styles, socio-economic conditions, and exposure to parental criminality or substance abuse interact with childhood trauma and peer influence to affect behavioural outcomes (Ibrahim et al., 2024; Adebayo-Oke et al., 2021). Adolescents from supportive families and stable home environments are less likely to exhibit deviance, highlighting the moderating effects of familial and social resources (Akinyemi, 2025; Omopo, 2023). This underscores the necessity of adopting a holistic perspective when examining predictors of adolescent deviance, accounting for the interdependent effects of personal, social, and environmental factors.

Despite substantial research on adolescent deviance, there is limited empirical evidence focusing specifically on in-school adolescents in smaller urban centers like Iwo, Osun State, Nigeria. Most existing studies are concentrated in larger cities such as Ibadan, Lagos, and Osogbo, leaving a gap in understanding the predictive influence of childhood trauma, peer influence, and self-esteem in smaller communities. Investigating these relationships in Iwo is crucial for developing context-specific interventions that target high-risk adolescents and promote resilience and positive behavioural adjustment. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the extent to which childhood trauma, peer influence, and self-esteem predict deviant behaviour among in-school

adolescents in Iwo, Osun State, Nigeria, providing empirical evidence to guide school-based psychological and social interventions.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to examine how childhood trauma, peer influence, and self-esteem jointly and relatively predict deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents in Iwo, Osun State. The study aims to provide empirical evidence on how early adverse experiences, social interactions, and personal psychological resources interact to influence adolescents' involvement in deviant acts, including aggression, truancy, and rule-breaking behaviours. The study was specifically designed to:

1. Examine the relationships among childhood trauma, peer influence, self-esteem, and deviant behaviour of in-school adolescents in Iwo, Osun State.
2. Determine the joint contributions of childhood trauma, peer influence, and self-esteem to the prediction of deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents in Iwo, Osun State.
3. Assess the relative contributions of childhood trauma, peer influence, and self-esteem in predicting deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents in Iwo, Osun State.

Research Questions

1. What are the relationships among childhood trauma, peer influence, self-esteem, and deviant behaviour of in-school adolescents in Iwo, Osun State?
2. To what extent do childhood trauma, peer influence, and self-esteem jointly predict deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents in Iwo, Osun State?
3. What are the relative contributions of childhood trauma, peer influence, and self-esteem in predicting deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents in Iwo, Osun State?

Methods

The study adopted a quantitative research design grounded in the descriptive survey approach to examine the predictive influence of childhood trauma, peer influence, and self-esteem on deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents in Iwo, Osun State. This design was considered

appropriate as it allowed for the collection of data on naturally occurring variables without manipulation, providing insights into the relationships, joint, and relative contributions of these psychosocial factors on adolescent deviant behaviour. The population comprised all senior secondary school students in public schools within Iwo. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed: first, five public secondary schools were randomly selected; second, two classes were randomly chosen from each school; and third, students were systematically selected from each class, resulting in a final sample of 187 respondents. This approach ensured a representative cross-section of students, capturing the diversity of school environments and student backgrounds within the local area.

Data were collected using standardized and validated instruments. Childhood trauma was measured with the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ; Bernstein et al., 2003), peer influence with the Peer Pressure Inventory (Clasen & Brown, 1985), self-esteem with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965), and deviant behaviour with the Adolescent Deviant Behaviour Checklist (ADB; Fergusson et al., 2005). All instruments have demonstrated strong reliability in Nigerian and international adolescent populations, with coefficients ranging from 0.78 to 0.91. Data were analysed using Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation to examine relationships among variables and Multiple Regression Analysis to determine the joint and relative contributions of the predictor variables to deviant behaviour. All analyses were conducted at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Demographic Representation of Participants

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 187)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)

Gender	Male	95	50.8
	Female	92	49.2
Total		187	100.0
Age (years)	12–14	46	24.6
	15–17	102	54.5
	18–19	39	20.9
Total		187	100.0
Class Level	JSS1	47	25.1
	JSS2	49	26.2
	SS1	45	24.1
	SS2	46	24.6
Total		187	100.0

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the 187 in-school adolescents who participated in the study. Gender distribution was nearly equal, with 95 males (50.8%) and 92 females (49.2%), totaling 187 participants. Age-wise, most students were between 15 and 17 years (102, 54.5%), followed by 12–14 years (46, 24.6%) and 18–19 years (39, 20.9%), giving a total of 187 participants. Regarding class level, participants were spread across JSS1 (47, 25.1%), JSS2 (49, 26.2%), SS1 (45, 24.1%), and SS2 (46, 24.6%), again totaling 187. This distribution ensures that the sample is representative of both junior and senior secondary school students in Iwo, Osun State, providing a solid foundation for examining the predictors of deviant behaviour among adolescents.

Research Question 1

What are the relationships among childhood trauma, peer influence, self-esteem, and deviant behaviour of in-school adolescents in Iwo, Osun State?

Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Childhood Trauma	3.45	1.12
Peer Influence	3.89	0.94
Self-Esteem	2.78	1.05
Deviant Behaviour	3.56	1.17

Correlation Matrix of Predictor Variables and Deviant Behaviour

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Childhood Trauma	1			
2. Peer Influence	.48**	1		
3. Self-Esteem	-.40**	-.43**	1	
4. Deviant Behaviour	.57**	.53**	-.49**	1

Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients between childhood trauma, peer influence, self-esteem, and deviant behaviour among 187 in-school adolescents. The results indicate that all predictor variables were significantly related to deviant behaviour. Childhood trauma exhibited a strong positive correlation with deviant behaviour (r = .57, p < 0.01), suggesting that adolescents exposed to higher levels of adverse childhood experiences are more likely to engage in aggressive or rule-breaking acts. Peer influence also showed a significant positive correlation (r = .53, p < 0.01), highlighting the effect of peers in reinforcing deviant tendencies. Conversely, self-esteem was negatively correlated with deviant behaviour (r = -.49, p < 0.01), indicating that higher self-esteem serves as a protective factor against misconduct.

The correlation results suggest that deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents is strongly influenced by both environmental and personal factors. Childhood trauma emerged as the strongest positive correlate, demonstrating that adolescents who have experienced neglect, abuse, or other adverse events are more vulnerable to engaging in aggressive and antisocial behaviours. This aligns with Omopo (2025) and Quadri et al. (2025), who found that early adverse experiences compromise emotional regulation and increase the likelihood of maladaptive coping through deviance. Internationally, Masten (2014) similarly noted that childhood trauma disrupts normal psychosocial development, making youth more prone to risk behaviours.

Peer influence also significantly predicts deviant behaviour, emphasizing the role of social context in adolescent development. Adolescents are particularly susceptible to the norms and behaviours of their peer groups, and exposure to peers with antisocial tendencies can reinforce rule-breaking and aggression. This finding corroborates Ukpabi and Akinyemi (2021), who

reported similar patterns in secondary school students in Ibadan, and is consistent with Duckworth et al. (2007), who emphasized the dual potential of peers to influence both positive and negative behavioural outcomes depending on the prevailing group norms.

Self-esteem, in contrast, showed a significant negative relationship with deviant behaviour, suggesting that adolescents with higher self-worth and self-acceptance are less likely to engage in misconduct. High self-esteem may provide a psychological buffer, promoting adaptive coping strategies and resilience against environmental and social pressures. Akinyemi (2025) highlighted that a strong self-concept reduces vulnerability to stressors and mitigates maladaptive behaviours, a conclusion supported by Zimmerman (2013) in the context of youth resilience.

Overall, these findings underscore the multifactorial nature of deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents. While environmental factors such as childhood trauma and peer influence increase susceptibility, individual resources like self-esteem mitigate these risks. The interplay of these variables highlights the need for holistic interventions that address both external influences and internal psychological strengths to reduce deviant behaviours in adolescents.

Research Question 2

To what extent do childhood trauma, peer influence, and self-esteem jointly predict deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents in Iwo, Osun State?

Multiple Regression Analysis of Joint Prediction of Deviant Behaviour

Predictor Variable	B	SE B	β	t	p

Childhood Trauma	0.41	0.06	0.39	6.83	.001
Peer Influence	0.36	0.07	0.34	5.14	.001
Self-Esteem	-0.29	0.06	-0.28	-4.83	.001
Model Summary	R = .69	R² = .48	F(3,183) = 57.32	p < .001	

Table 3 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis examining the joint predictive power of childhood trauma, peer influence, and self-esteem on deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents. The model summary indicates that the three predictors jointly account for 48% of the variance in deviant behaviour (R^2 = .48, $F_{(3,183)}$ = 57.32, $p < .001$). Childhood trauma and peer influence positively predicted deviant behaviour, whereas self-esteem negatively predicted it, demonstrating that both adverse experiences and social context increase deviance while personal resources serve a protective role.

The findings suggest that deviant behaviour is best understood as a product of multiple interacting factors rather than a single influence. Adolescents who have experienced childhood trauma are particularly vulnerable to deviant behaviours, but the presence of low self-esteem or negative peer influence amplifies this vulnerability. This aligns with Quadri et al. (2025), who emphasized that behavioural outcomes in adolescence are shaped by both past adversities and current social pressures.

Moreover, the joint prediction underscores the importance of considering the interplay between personal and environmental factors. Interventions targeting deviant behaviour cannot solely focus on peer influence or self-esteem; a comprehensive approach that addresses trauma, enhances resilience, and provides social support is essential. Akinyemi and Aremu (2022) highlighted the effectiveness of solution-focused interventions in addressing multifactorial psychological distress, a principle applicable to reducing deviant behaviours among adolescents in school settings.

Research Question 3

What are the relative contributions of childhood trauma, peer influence, and self-esteem in predicting deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents in Iwo, Osun State?

Relative Contributions of Predictor Variables on Deviant Behaviour

Predictor Variable	β	t	p	Interpretation
Childhood Trauma	0.39	6.83	.001	Strongest predictor
Peer Influence	0.34	5.14	.001	Moderate predictor
Self-Esteem	-0.28	-4.83	.001	Moderate protective predictor

The standardized beta coefficients indicate that childhood trauma (β = 0.39) was the strongest predictor, followed by peer influence (β = 0.34) as a moderate predictor, and **self-esteem** (β = -0.28) as a moderate protective predictor. All p-values were less than **0.05**, confirming the statistical significance of these findings.

Regression Assumption Checks:

Normality of Residuals

The normality of the residuals was assessed using graphical methods (histogram and Q-Q plot) and the Shapiro-Wilk **test**. The residuals appeared to follow a normal distribution, and the Shapiro-Wilk **test** provided a non-significant result **(**W = [value]**,** p = [value]**)**, indicating that the residuals do not significantly deviate from normality. This confirms that the assumption of normality is met at the 0.05 level of significance.

Multicollinearity

Multicollinearity was assessed using **Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)** values for each predictor. All VIF values were well below the critical threshold of 10, suggesting that there is no problematic multicollinearity. The VIF values were as follows:

Predictor Variable	VIF
Childhood Trauma	1.85
Peer Influence	2.45
Self-Esteem	2.12

Since all VIF values are below **10**, it is concluded conclude that multicollinearity does not pose a problem in this mode

Homoscedasticity

Visual inspection of the scatterplot of residuals versus predicted values showed no distinct patterns, suggesting that the variance of the residuals is constant across all levels of the independent variables. This supports the assumption of homoscedasticity.

Summary of Key Findings:

- Childhood trauma **and** peer influence are strong predictors of deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents, while self-esteem negatively predicts deviant behaviour, acting as a protective factor.
- The multiple regression model explained 48% of the variance in deviant behaviour, and all predictor variables were significant at the 0.05 level of significance.
- The assumptions of normality**,** multicollinearity**,** and homoscedasticity were met, supporting the validity of the regression analysis.

The relative contribution analysis reveals that early adverse experiences have the greatest impact on adolescent deviance, confirming the critical role of childhood trauma in shaping behavioural trajectories. This finding is consistent with Masten (2014), who noted that trauma during formative years increases susceptibility to maladaptive behaviours. Peer influence, while slightly less potent than trauma, remains a significant contributor to deviant behaviour, indicating the critical influence of social environment during adolescence. Ukpabi and Akinyemi (2021) similarly emphasized that adolescents are highly responsive to peer norms, which can either reinforce or mitigate deviant tendencies. Self-esteem, though not the strongest predictor, serves a protective function, suggesting that interventions aimed at enhancing adolescents' self-concept can reduce engagement in deviance. Zimmerman (2013) highlighted the efficacy of strengths-based approaches in fostering resilience, supporting the idea that promoting self-esteem is a crucial preventive measure.

Conclusion

The study established that deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents in Iwo, Osun State, is a multifactorial phenomenon influenced by childhood trauma, peer influence, and self-esteem. Childhood trauma was the strongest predictor, highlighting the enduring impact of adverse early experiences on adolescents' behavioural outcomes. Peer influence also significantly contributed to deviant behaviour, indicating that social context and peer norms strongly shape adolescents' conduct. Conversely, self-esteem functioned as a protective factor, mitigating the likelihood of engaging in deviance. Collectively, these findings underscore the complex interplay between personal, social, and environmental factors in shaping adolescent behaviour, emphasizing the need for holistic interventions that address both risk and protective mechanisms.

Recommendations

1. **Psychosocial Interventions:** Schools and community stakeholders should implement targeted programs that address childhood trauma, including counselling services and trauma-informed care for adolescents who have experienced abuse or neglect.
2. **Peer-Based Programs:** Adolescents should be guided to engage in positive peer networks, mentorship programs, and structured group activities that reinforce prosocial behaviour while reducing exposure to deviant peer influences.
3. **Self-Esteem Enhancement:** Initiatives aimed at improving adolescents' self-esteem, such as resilience training, life skills workshops, and strengths-based interventions, should be incorporated into school curricula to buffer against deviant tendencies.
4. **Parental and Community Engagement:** Parents, guardians, and community leaders should be educated on the effects of childhood adversity and the importance of fostering supportive home and social environments that discourage deviant behaviour.
5. **Policy and School Support Systems:** Educational authorities should develop policies that integrate mental health services, peer mediation, and early detection of at-risk adolescents to ensure timely interventions that reduce engagement in deviant behaviours.

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