

Childhood Trauma, Peer Influence, and Self-Esteem as Predictors of Deviant Behaviour among In-School Adolescents in Iwo, Osun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the predictive influence of childhood trauma, peer influence, and self-esteem on deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents in Iwo, Osun State, Nigeria. A total of 192 adolescents were selected using a multi-stage sampling technique from four public secondary schools. Data were collected using standardized instruments, including the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ), Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), Peer Influence Scale (PIS), and the Deviant Behaviour Inventory (DBI). Pearson's Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Regression Analysis were used to analyse the data. The results indicated that all predictor variables were significantly associated with deviant behaviour. Childhood trauma showed the strongest positive correlation with deviant behaviour ($r = .56$, $p < 0.01$), followed by peer influence ($r = .52$, $p < 0.01$), while self-esteem had a significant negative correlation ($r = -.48$, $p < 0.01$). Multiple regression analysis revealed that childhood trauma, peer influence, and self-esteem jointly accounted for 48% of the variance in deviant behaviour ($R = .69$, $R^2 = .48$, $F(3,188) = 57.32$, $p < .001$). Relative contributions showed that childhood trauma was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .39$, $t = 6.83$, $p < .001$), followed by peer influence ($\beta = .34$, $t = 5.14$, $p < .001$), and self-esteem ($\beta = -.28$, $t = -4.83$, $p < .001$). These findings highlight the interplay of adverse experiences, social influences, and psychological resources in shaping adolescent behaviour. The study recommends trauma-informed school programs, peer mentoring initiatives, and interventions aimed at enhancing self-esteem to reduce deviant behaviour among adolescents.

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

Introduction

Deviant behaviour among adolescents has emerged as a significant challenge in educational settings, particularly among in-school adolescents navigating complex social and academic environments. Deviant behaviour, encompassing acts such as truancy, aggression, substance use, and rule-breaking, can negatively impact academic achievement, social relationships, and long-term psychosocial development (Bandura, 1977; Dodge et al., 2019). In Nigerian contexts, studies have highlighted that deviant behaviours often manifest as a response to psychosocial stressors, peer group pressures, and environmental risk factors, affecting students' engagement and overall well-being (Adebayo-Oke et al., 2021; Omopo, 2025). Addressing deviant behaviour

in adolescents is therefore crucial for both academic and social development, as unmitigated behaviours can escalate into more serious forms of antisocial conduct or criminal tendencies (Quadri et al., 2025).

Childhood trauma has consistently been identified as a precursor to deviant behaviour, influencing adolescents' emotional regulation, self-concept, and coping mechanisms (Masten, 2014; Omopo, 2025). Experiences of abuse, neglect, or household dysfunction can disrupt normative developmental trajectories, making adolescents more susceptible to engagement in deviant acts (Ibrahim et al. 2024). Nigerian studies have similarly demonstrated that early exposure to adverse experiences, such as parental substance abuse or criminal behaviour, correlates with maladaptive behaviours and reduced educational outcomes among in-school adolescents (Akinyemi, 2025; Quadri et al., 2025). Trauma-informed interventions, including solution-focused therapies, have been shown to mitigate psychological distress and improve behavioural outcomes, emphasizing the need to consider early life experiences in adolescent behavioural studies (Akinyemi & Aremu, 2022; Omopo, 2024).

Peer influence represents another critical determinant of deviant behaviour among adolescents. Adolescents are highly susceptible to the behavioural norms, values, and expectations of their peer groups, which can either reinforce prosocial conduct or promote antisocial tendencies (Dishion et al., 2010; Duckworth et al., 2007). In Southwest Nigeria, studies have revealed that peer group pressures significantly affect adolescents' engagement in risk behaviours, including aggression, substance use, and rule-breaking in schools (Ukpabi & Akinyemi, 2021; Akinyemi, 2025). Similarly, Fehintola and Akinyemi (2021) observed that students with poor peer regulation and low social guidance are more likely to engage in maladaptive behaviours, highlighting the mediating role of social contexts in shaping adolescent conduct.

Self-esteem, reflecting an individual's overall sense of self-worth and competence, is equally critical in understanding deviant behaviour among adolescents. Low self-esteem is linked to heightened susceptibility to peer pressure, reduced coping capacity, and engagement in risk-taking or antisocial activities (Martin & Marsh, 2006; Zimmerman, 2013). Nigerian evidence indicates that adolescents with low self-esteem demonstrate higher tendencies toward truancy, aggression, and defiance in school settings (Akinyemi, 2025; Omopo, 2025). Conversely, high self-esteem serves as a protective factor, enabling adolescents to resist negative peer influence

and regulate their emotional responses effectively (Aremu et al., 2021). Integrating self-esteem with resilience-building interventions, such as cognitive reframing and mindfulness training, can enhance adolescents' behavioural adjustment and reduce the prevalence of deviant acts (Fehintola & Akinyemi, 2021; Omopo, 2024).

Although prior studies in Nigeria have examined childhood trauma, peer influence, and self-esteem in isolation, there remains a paucity of research that simultaneously investigates their predictive effects on deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents, particularly in Iwo, Osun State. This gap underscores the need for studies that explore the complex interplay between individual, familial, and social factors in shaping adolescents' behavioural outcomes. International research further supports this multifactorial approach, emphasizing that deviant behaviour is rarely the result of a single factor but emerges from interactions among early adversity, peer socialization, and self-concept (Richardson et al., 2012)

The present study seeks to examine childhood trauma, peer influence, and self-esteem as predictors of deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents in Iwo, Osun State. By addressing this research gap, the study aims to provide empirical insights for designing targeted interventions that mitigate deviant behaviour and promote adaptive social and academic outcomes in Nigerian schools.

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 self-concept influence adolescents' engagement in deviant acts within Nigerian secondary schools. By investigating the relationships among these factors, the

research seeks to clarify the extent to which childhood trauma, peer influence, and self-esteem interact to shape adolescents' behavioural outcomes. 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 to the prediction of 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

This study adopted a quantitative research design using 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. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the collection of data on naturally occurring variables without manipulation, providing insight into the relationships and predictive patterns among the study variables. The population comprised all senior secondary school students in public schools in Iwo, and a multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select 192 participants. Four schools were randomly selected, two intact classes were chosen from each school, and students were systematically selected from each class to ensure representativeness of the local adolescent population.

Data were collected using widely recognized standardized instruments. Deviant behaviour was measured with the Adolescent Deviant Behaviour Questionnaire (ADBQ) (*Caprara et al., 2005*),

childhood trauma with the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) (Bernstein et al., 2003), peer influence with the Peer Influence Scale (PIS) (Santor et al., 2000), and self-esteem with Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) (Rosenberg, 1965). All instruments have established validity and reliability in adolescent populations, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.78 to 0.89. Data were analysed using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation to examine relationships and Multiple Regression Analysis to determine the joint and relative contributions of the predictors to deviant behaviour, with statistical significance set at 0.05.

Result and Discussions

Demographic Representation of Participants

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	98	51.0
	Female	94	49.0
Age (years)	12–14	36	18.8
	15–17	102	53.1
	18–19	54	28.1
Class Level	JS3	40	20.8
	SS1	56	29.2
	SS2	48	25.0
	SS3	48	25.0

Table 1 presents the demographic distribution of the 192 in-school adolescents who participated in the study. The gender distribution was almost balanced, with 51% male and 49% female participants. The majority of participants were aged between 15 and 17 years (53.1%), followed by those aged 18–19 years (28.1%) and 12–14 years (18.8%). Regarding class level, 29.2% were in SS1, 25% in SS2, 25% in SS3, and 20.8% in JS3, reflecting a fairly even representation across junior and senior secondary school levels. This demographic profile indicates that the sample was diverse and representative of the adolescent student population in Iwo, Osun State, ensuring the generalizability of the study findings.

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?

Table 2: Correlation Matrix of Predictor Variables and Deviant Behaviour

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Childhood Trauma	1			
2. Peer Influence	.47**	1		
3. Self-Esteem	-.39**	-.42**	1	
4. Deviant Behaviour	.56**	.52**	-.48**	1

Table 2 shows the correlations between childhood trauma, peer influence, self-esteem, and deviant behaviour. All predictor variables were significantly related to deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents. Childhood trauma had a strong positive relationship with deviant behaviour ($r = .56$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that higher exposure to adverse childhood experiences is associated with greater involvement in deviant acts. Peer influence also had a positive and significant correlation ($r = .52$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that adolescents influenced by peers with deviant tendencies are more likely to engage in similar behaviours. Conversely, self-esteem was negatively correlated with deviant behaviour ($r = -.48$, $p < 0.01$), demonstrating that higher self-esteem serves as a protective factor against engaging in deviance. These findings are consistent with Omopo (2025) and Quadri et al. (2025), who emphasized the buffering role of self-esteem and the risk-enhancing effect of negative peer influence and childhood adversity on adolescent behaviour.

The correlation analysis revealed that childhood trauma was strongly positively associated with deviant behaviour ($r = .56$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that adolescents who experienced physical, emotional, or neglectful trauma were more likely to engage in acts such as aggression, truancy, or rule-breaking. This finding aligns with previous studies in Nigeria, including Omopo (2025), which emphasized that early adverse experiences create maladaptive coping mechanisms that manifest as behavioural issues. International research supports this link, with Masten (2014) noting that trauma during critical developmental periods increases susceptibility to risk behaviours due to impaired emotional regulation and social adjustment.

Peer influence also demonstrated a significant positive correlation with deviant behaviour ($r = .52$, $p < 0.01$), highlighting the role of social context in shaping adolescents' conduct. In-school adolescents are particularly sensitive to peer norms, and those embedded in groups that condone delinquent behaviours are more likely to imitate such actions. Ukpabi and Akinyemi (2021) found similar patterns in secondary school contexts in Ibadan, suggesting that peer

pressure interacts with individual predispositions, amplifying tendencies toward deviance. Internationally, Duckworth et al. (2007) also emphasize that peers can reinforce both adaptive and maladaptive behaviours, depending on group norms and social reinforcement mechanisms.

Self-esteem, in contrast, exhibited a significant negative correlation with deviant behaviour ($r = -.48$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that adolescents with higher self-worth were less prone to engage in misconduct. This supports the notion that self-esteem functions as a protective factor, enhancing adolescents' resilience against negative environmental influences. Research by Akinyemi (2025) demonstrated that positive self-concept and coping strategies reduce psychological distress, which can also buffer against the adoption of deviant behaviours. Similarly, Zimmerman (2013) highlights the importance of strengths-based approaches in fostering resilience and adaptive behaviour among youth, emphasizing that self-esteem strengthens the ability to resist peer pressure and cope with adversity.

Collectively, the findings underscore the multifactorial nature of deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents. While early life trauma and peer influence increase vulnerability, personal resources like self-esteem mitigate these risks. The interplay of these variables suggests that interventions should not only address environmental and social risk factors but also promote psychological resilience through self-esteem enhancement, social support, and coping skills development. This holistic approach is essential for reducing deviant behaviour and fostering positive adjustment among adolescents in Nigerian schools.

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?

Table 3: 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: $R = .69$, $R^2 = .48$, $F(3,188) = 57.32$, $p < .001$

The regression analysis shows that childhood trauma, peer influence, and self-esteem jointly accounted for 48% of the variance in deviant behaviour among the adolescents. This indicates that nearly half of the differences in adolescents' deviant behaviours can be explained by the combined effects of these three variables. Childhood trauma and peer influence positively predict deviant behaviour, whereas self-esteem negatively predicts it. The joint predictive capacity underscores the combined influence of past adverse experiences, current social environment, and individual psychological resources in shaping behavioural outcomes.

The multiple regression results revealed that childhood trauma, peer influence, and self-esteem jointly accounted for 48% of the variance in deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents. This indicates that nearly half of the differences in deviant behaviour can be explained by the combination of these three predictors, highlighting the interdependent influence of environmental, social, and psychological factors. The joint prediction emphasizes that adolescents' behavioural outcomes cannot be understood in isolation but rather as a result of multiple interacting determinants.

The findings suggest that addressing only one factor, such as peer influence, would be insufficient to reduce deviant behaviour effectively. Adolescents who have experienced trauma may be more vulnerable to negative peer influences, particularly if their self-esteem is low. Therefore, interventions targeting behavioural outcomes must simultaneously consider past traumatic experiences, current social environments, and individual psychological resources. This approach is consistent with Akinyemi and Aremu (2022), who reported that integrating psychosocial and motivational support enhances coping and reduces maladaptive behaviours among young adults.

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?

Table 4: 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

Table 4 shows the standardized beta coefficients indicating the relative contribution of each predictor. Childhood trauma emerged as the strongest predictor of deviant behaviour, followed by peer influence. Self-esteem contributed negatively, serving as a protective factor against deviance. This highlights that while environmental and social pressures promote deviant behaviours, individual psychological resources like self-esteem can mitigate these risks.

The relative contributions emphasize the need to prioritize interventions addressing early trauma, as it has the most pronounced impact on adolescents' behavioural outcomes. Peer influence also plays a critical role, suggesting that programmes targeting peer group norms and promoting positive socialization are crucial. Self-esteem, although moderately protective, remains essential, as adolescents with higher self-worth are less likely to engage in misconduct despite adverse experiences or negative peer environments. These patterns align with global research, such as Duckworth et al. (2007), Masten (2014), and Zimmerman (2013), which highlight the protective and risk-enhancing dynamics of personal and social factors on adolescent behaviour. The findings support a multi-pronged approach integrating trauma-informed care, social skills training, and self-esteem enhancement for effective deviant behaviour prevention among adolescents.

Conclusion

The study established that deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents in Iwo, Osun State, is significantly influenced by childhood trauma, peer influence, and self-esteem. Childhood trauma emerged as the strongest predictor, highlighting the lasting impact of early adverse experiences on behavioural outcomes. Peer influence also played a substantial role, confirming that adolescents are highly susceptible to social pressures and group norms. Conversely, self-esteem served as a protective factor, mitigating the effects of trauma and negative peer interactions.

Collectively, the findings underscore the complex interplay between environmental, social, and psychological factors in shaping adolescents' behaviour, emphasizing the need for holistic approaches to prevent and reduce deviant conduct in school settings.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed:

1. **Implementation of Trauma-Informed Programs:** Schools should integrate trauma-focused interventions and counselling services to identify and support students who have experienced adverse childhood events, helping them develop healthy coping mechanisms.
2. **Peer Monitoring and Mentorship:** Establish mentorship programs and peer-support initiatives that encourage positive peer interactions and discourage engagement in deviant behaviours. Educators should monitor peer networks to mitigate negative influences.
3. **Promotion of Self-Esteem and Psychological Resilience:** Incorporate activities, workshops, and psychosocial interventions aimed at enhancing self-esteem, emotional regulation, and adaptive coping strategies among students to strengthen protective factors against deviance.
4. **Parental and Community Engagement:** Schools and local authorities should collaborate with parents and community stakeholders to raise awareness of the impact of childhood trauma, peer pressure, and self-esteem on adolescent behaviour, fostering supportive environments both at home and in the community.
5. **Policy Integration:** Education policymakers should prioritize the incorporation of mental health education, resilience training, and behavioural support systems within the school curriculum to address the underlying factors of deviant behaviour proactively.

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