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Clinical and Psychosocial Determinants of Truancy among In-School Adolescents in Ibadan: A Structural Equation Approach

By

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Abstract

Several researchers found that truancy among adolescents poses a paramount problem in educational attainment and youth development. This study examined the correlation between key psychosocial and demographic predictors of truancy, specifically the constructs of substance abuse, peer influence, emotional intelligence, childhood trauma, and family socioeconomic status among in-school adolescents in Ibadan. Using a cross-sectional design, data were obtained from 500 students aged 12-19 years from the selected public and private secondary schools across Ibadan through a multistage stratified sampling technique. All constructs were measured using validated instruments, and data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) embedded in AMOS 26. Findings revealed that the predictors of truancy were substance abuse ($\beta = 0.42$), peer influence ($\beta = 0.33$), and childhood trauma ($\beta = 0.31$) while emotional intelligence ($\beta = –0.27$) and family socioeconomic status ($\beta = –0.24$) were seen as having protective effects. From the mediation analysis, the significant mediators for the effects of peer pressure and childhood trauma on truancy were substance abuse and emotional intelligence. Family socioeconomic status moderated the relationship between peer pressure and substance abuse ($\beta = –0.15$, $p = .013$) such that the effect of peer pressure was less pronounced for adolescents of high SES. The structural model had good fit indices ($\chi^2/df = 2.42$, RMSEA = 0.048, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.92), thus confirming its adequacy. The present study emphasizes the multifactor nature of truancy and calls for an integrated intervention model that would address risk and protective factors from school, family, and peer outlooks to effectively reduce truancy and encourage adolescent educational engagement.

Keywords: truancy, substance abuse, peer pressure, emotional intelligence, childhood trauma, family socioeconomic status

Introduction

Truancy, medically synonymous with habitual non-attendance in school without excuse, is a global world issue that is putting best adolescents' performance at risk in academics, psychosocial development and of course, future prospects. A lot of studies have shown a relationship between truancy and different behavioral, social and psychological problems which include substance abuse, mental health disorders and negative influences from peers. The World Health Organization shows that there is an increasing trend in substance use among adolescents

taking psychoactive substances, especially in low and middle-income countries where systems cannot cope with absenteeism and youth drug abuse (Omopo & Odedokun, 2024). The use of substances is both caused by truancy and a contributing factor in it through impairment of engagement in school and reinforcement of deviant behaviors (Dumbili, Ebuenyi, & Ugoeze, 2021).

Underlying truancy and substance abuse in sub-Saharan Africa are poverty, political instability, and family breakdown. Manyike et al. (2016) found in South-East Nigeria that peer influence and stress were the major drivers of drug use by adolescents, which attendant school absenteeism. Methamphetamine use has worsened dropout rates and youth delinquency in the area (Obande-Ogbuinya et al., 2024). While studies have attempted to link childhood trauma to peer pressure and substance abuse as mechanisms of school disengagement in Nigeria, Omopo, Offor, and Ogunbowale (2024) observed that adolescents with backgrounds of trauma would easily yield to the substance use peer influence. They added that emotional intelligence and socioeconomic status highly contribute to susceptibility of these behaviours (Omopo, Adegunju, and Asiyanbi, 2024). There was also a direct correlation between exposure to drugs and erratic school attendance by adolescents, which Nnodim and Uwakwe (2023) observed as warranting an integrated school-based intervention approach. While their research on Akwa Ibom tertiary students showed peer pressure as a robust predictor of deviance, Udoinyang and Umoh (2024) findings likely hold for secondary students in areas such as urban Ibadan, where these pressures hold as well. In turn, these findings were complemented by Obosi, Fatunbi, and Oyinloye (2022), who noted the link between substance abuse and peer influence and poor mental health, thereby discouraging school attendance. This compendium would unveil truancy as a manifestation of deeper psychosocial stressors rather than a matter of misconduct.

The influence of peers is demonstrated in the findings by Liu and Wu (2022) remarked that substance use behaviours usually catch on within peer groups in the early school. The school is understood as a social environment where deviant behaviour can be either countered or reinforced. Such dynamics are especially strong in Ibadan where there is poverty, crowded schools, and lack of oversight by parents. According to the local studies by Omopo et al. (2024), Ibadan is identified as a critical location for concentrated intervention. Hence, this study aims to model how substance abuse, peer pressure, emotional intelligence, childhood trauma, and family

socioeconomic status interact in predicting truancy among in-school adolescents in Ibadan, using structural equation modelling (SEM). This method allows for the nuanced analysis of the multifaceted influences on truancy and supports evidence-based strategies for both educational and public health planning.

Purpose of the Study

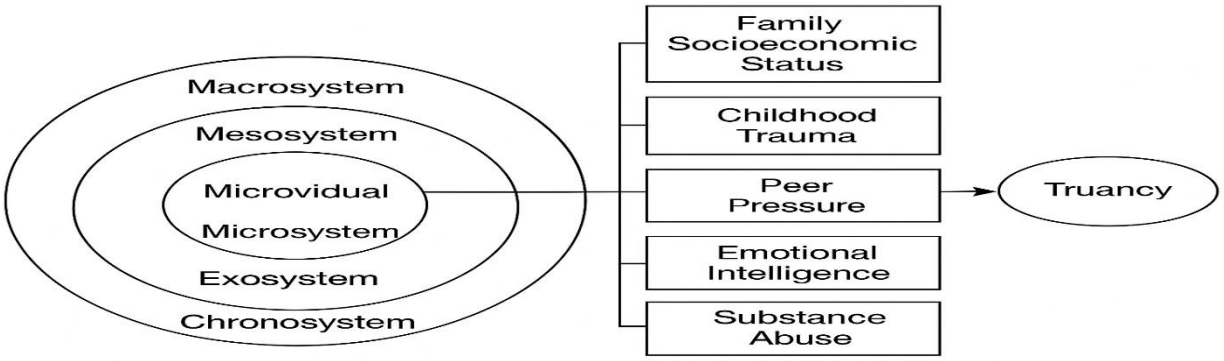
The primary purpose of this study is to examine the psychosocial predictors of truancy among in-school adolescents in Ibadan, with particular focus on substance abuse, peer pressure, emotional intelligence, childhood trauma, and family socioeconomic status. Specifically, the study aims:

1. To determine whether substance abuse, peer pressure, emotional intelligence, childhood trauma, and family socioeconomic status significantly predict truancy among in-school adolescents in Ibadan. *(H1)*
2. To examine whether substance abuse and emotional intelligence jointly mediate the relationships between peer pressure, childhood trauma, and truancy. *(H2)*
3. To investigate whether family socioeconomic status moderates the relationship between peer pressure and substance abuse. *(H3)*
4. To assess the overall goodness-of-fit of the proposed structural equation model in explaining truancy among in-school adolescents in Ibadan. *(H4)*

Theoretical Underpinning

The anchoring theory for this research is the ecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenner which gives a multilayered understanding of adolescent behavior patterns including truancy where multiple systems interact within which an individual grows. Human development resulted from the interaction of five related systems: Microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).Each of these systems yields a unique contribution in the development of adolescent behaviour. The microsystem includes proximal environments such as family, school, and peer groups contexts within which an adolescent interacts directly. It is here that school attendance may be influenced by peer pressure, parental guidance, emotional support, and exposure to substance use within the microsystem. The mesosystem, then, concerns the interactions among those settings; for example, parental communication with teachers may moderate a child's reaction to peer influence.

The other two systems, the exosystem and macrosystem, further elaborate indirect and societal influences that shape truancy behaviour. The exosystem in this instance would be things such as a parent's workplace or local health service availability, which may not directly contact the adolescent but does impact them as when money problems due to an unemployed parent create emotional problems at home. The macrosystem, on the other hand, is that cultural and societal environment-at-large set-up, which, including, societal attitudes towards education, drug use, and poverty, makes Nigeria especially in cities like Ibadan a very toxic deviant-nurturing ground whereby adolescents become truancy-prone. Bronfenbrenner's theory attempts to draw specific attention to the area of interaction amongst individual, family, and social factors, including substance abuse, peer influence, emotional intelligence, and socio-economic status as variables, thereby making it relevant to this study in understanding patterns of school attendance. This systems perspective presents the justification for the application of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to explore the interdependencies among the study variables. The conceptual model for the study is displayed in Figure 1



Conceptual Model for the Study: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Methods

The researcher carried out a quantitative cross-sectional study to determine psychosocial precursors of the school dropout among adolescents in Ibadan, Nigeria. The target population consists of public and private secondary schools in Ibadan metropolitan area. Multi-stage process was adopted in sampling to ensure representation and a lesser bias in sampling. In the first stage, three Local Government Areas (LGAs) were selectively chosen based on the concentration of

schools and the population density. In the second stage, according to a stratified random sampling method, schools were chosen within each LGA to ensure distribution across school types. The last stage involved a proportionate stratified sampling of students by class level (Junior Secondary School (JSS) and Senior Secondary School (SSS)) and gender, producing a total sample size of 500 adolescents, which had been statistically calculated for adequacy under statistical power considerations for Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Inclusion criteria considered that participants should be aged between 12 and 19 years, with proper consent from parents or guardians. Truancy status was identified based on school attendance records, teachers/school counsellors' referral, and parental confirmation.

The data were collected by self-administered structured questionnaire based on standardised instruments with developed psychometric properties. Measures include truancy behaviour scale; substance use questionnaire; peer pressure inventory; childhood trauma questionnaire short form; emotional intelligence scale; and family socioeconomic status index adapted for Nigerian contexts. Some 50 students from a neighbouring LGA took part in the piloting to assess the reliability and clarity of the instruments, yielding Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.78 to 0.91. The appropriate institutional review board has approved the scientific ethics, and formal approval was obtained from the Oyo State Ministry of Education. Written informed consent and assent were obtained from parents/guardians and individual students respectively. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) in AMOS version 26, allowing for the simultaneous estimation of measurement and structural models. Fit indices such as CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and χ^2/df were used to measure model fit. All analyses were carried out at the 0.05 significance level.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1. Demographic Profile of In-school Adolescents in Ibadan (n = 500)

Variable	Categories / Values
Gender	Male: 250 (50%); Female: 250 (50%)
Age (Mean ± SD)	15.7 ± 1.8 years
Class Level	Junior: 220 (44%); Senior: 280 (56%)
School Type	Public: 300 (60%); Private: 200 (40%)

The Table 1 displays the demographic representations of the respondents. It displays equal gender distribution, and the mean age of the respondents 15.7 with a standard deviation of 1.8

which reveals that most of the respondents are mid-adolescents. Class level data showed that 220 students (44%) were in junior secondary school, while 280 (56%) were in senior secondary school. In terms of the different types of school, 60% (300) of the respondents were in public schools, and 40% (200) were in schools with privacy. These distributions are representative of the adolescent student population in Ibadan.

Hypothesis 1: ***Substance abuse, peer pressure, emotional intelligence, childhood trauma, and family socioeconomic status significantly predict truancy among in-school adolescents in Ibadan.***

Table 2. Standardised Regression Estimates of Predictors of Truancy

Predictor	β	SE	CR	p-value
Substance abuse	0.42	0.06	7.00	<.001
Peer pressure	0.33	0.05	6.60	<.001
Emotional intelligence	–0.27	0.07	–3.86	<.001
Childhood trauma	0.31	0.06	5.17	<.001
Family SES	–0.24	0.08	–3.00	.003

The five predictors were significant at $p < .01$. Substance abuse was the strongest positive predictor ($\beta = 0.42$), followed by peer pressure ($\beta = 0.33$) and childhood trauma ($\beta = 0.31$). This suggests that the greater the exposure to the risk factors, the higher the likelihood of truancy. On the contrary, emotional intelligence ($\beta = –0.27$) and higher family socioeconomic status ($\beta = –0.24$) were negatively correlated with truancy, evincing some measure of protection by the two variables.

The results show that substance abuse, peer pressure, and childhood trauma significantly predict truancy in adolescents, with substance abuse being the strongest. Indeed, it implies that the adolescent with substance use may have decreased interest in academic activity, because either cognitive functioning is impaired, or motivation toward academic work has been lessened via an association with delinquent peer groups. The rest is peer pressure, which is at times critical, for adolescents will, at all costs, try to secure social acceptance, even if that means engaging in school-avoidant behaviours. So childhood trauma may interfere with emotional stability and academic motivation, which makes consistent school attendance difficult. These results highlight the importance of psychosocial factors in the reduction of truancy and engagement in education.

Likewise, emotional intelligence and family socioeconomic status negatively correlated with truancy to indicate their protective roles. An adolescent with high emotional intelligence tends to control his or her emotional state, manage interpersonal conflict, and reject negative peer influence that can make a difference in a student's attending school continuously. These findings agree with those of Balogun et al. (2019), who reported that an Ibadan township emotionally intelligent adolescent was less likely to engage in truancy. That study demonstrated an increased protective role of family socioeconomic status, providing the opportunity to access educational resources, parent support, and a stable home environment facilitating regular school attendance. A higher socioeconomic status is found to benefit children's emotional development because of good parenting practice, indirectly boosting their participation in school activities, as Liu and Wu (2022) revealed. It becomes apparent, therefore, that holistic intervention would be needed, one that reduces risk factors while stepping up protective mechanisms against adolescent truancy.

Hypothesis 2: Substance abuse and emotional intelligence jointly mediate the relationships between peer pressure, childhood trauma, and truancy.

Table 3. Bootstrapped Indirect Effects of Mediators (95% Confidence Intervals)

Predictor	Mediator	Indirect Effect	95% CI	Significance
Peer pressure	Substance abuse	0.14	0.09 – 0.19	Significant
Childhood trauma	Substance abuse	0.12	0.07 – 0.17	Significant
Childhood trauma	Emotional intelligence	–0.08	–0.13 – –0.04	Significant

The substance abuse and emotional intelligence indirect pathways were statistically significant, given that the confidence intervals did not include zero. Peer pressure influenced truancy indirectly via substance abuse (0.14); childhood trauma exerted dual mediation effects through both substance abuse (0.12) and emotional intelligence (–0.08). Internal coping skills and behavioral risk may mediate the influence of peers and traumatic experiences on truancy, supported by the findings.

The results suggest that while peer pressure and childhood trauma influence truancy, they do so indirectly through mediating factors such as substance abuse and emotional intelligence. It underscores the significance of the intermediate psychological and behavioral mechanisms. One manifestation of peer pressure among adolescents is the outward demonstration of conformity through approved behaviors and norms of the group supporting risk activities and rebellion. It is

among the most painful phenomenon in adolescence when there is one need of social acceptance heightening such influences. Behavior such as substance use may impair the cognitive functions of adolescents, increase impulsivity, and lead to academic disengagement, ultimately creating a fertile environment for truancy. Concurrently, childhood trauma may also deactivate emotional intelligence through disruption of the child's ability to regulate their own and others' emotions. Childhood trauma hardwires low self-esteem and distrust, whereas in adolescence the same trauma, when not expressed, leads to low coping skills in academic settings. The substantial indirect paths indicate that these risk factors do not influence truancy independently but rather through more proximal psychological and behavioral mechanisms.

Adverse childhood experiences were shown to be linked to increased substance use by Ugandan adolescents mainly through reduced self-control capacities, which is a pattern similar to that of this mediation effect, according to Amone-P'Olak and Letswai (2022). Liu and Wu (2022) also add to the evidence that early adversity compromises emotional intelligence thereby affecting adolescents' ability to effectively navigate school-related challenges. These four studies collectively validate the mediating roles of substance abuse and emotional intelligence while stressing the importance of strengthening internal coping mechanisms in intervention programmes targeted at reducing truancy.

Hypothesis 3: Family socioeconomic status moderates the relationship between peer pressure and substance abuse.

Table 4. Moderation Analysis Summary

Predictor	**β**	**SE**	**CR**	**p-value**
Peer pressure	0.30	0.05	6.00	<.001
Family SES	–0.22	0.07	–3.14	.002
Peer pressure × SES	–0.15	0.06	–2.50	.013

Table 4 depicts the moderation analysis results conducted to test the proposition that family turned out to modifying influences peer pressure on substance use. The interaction term (peer pressure × SES) has been found to be significant (β = -0.15, p = .013), thus indicating possible moderation effect. More specifically, peer pressure positively predicted substance abuse (β = 0.30) and that this relationship diminished with higher SES. The main effect of SES was also found to be statistically significant and negative (β= -0.22, p= .002) showing that, independent of

any other variable, increased family SES reduces the use of substances. This suggests that SES may buffer children against bad influences from peers.

Family socioeconomic status (SES) moderates the relationship between peer pressure and substance use, which means that people under peer influence had less substance usage as their SES increased. Thus, it can also be inferred that teenagers with a higher SES background have more protective resources from peer pressure which should lead to riskier behaviors. Well-resourced families generally set up structured atmospheres that allow children access to appropriate extracurricular activities as well as parental supervision; hence, minimizing exposure of the adolescent to deviant peer networks or lowering their susceptibility to being influenced. Furthermore, adolescents from households with higher SES are more likely to have benefited from advice from their parents on the dangers of drug abuse as well as timely emotional or psychological support, thereby increasing their resilience against peer influences compelling them to resort to substance use.

The studies before have provided support for this moderating effect. For example, it was found by Trucco, Colder, and Wieczorek (2011) that peer delinquency had a greater influence on alcohol use among adolescents with lower levels of parental monitoring, which is generally much greater in families with a high SES. In the same way, Yap, Cheong, Zaravinos-Tsakos, Lubman, and Jorm (2017) showed in their review that parenting styles of support and organized families significantly reduced the risk of adolescents through substance use-even when they were with deviant peers. These phenomena are more typically present in high-SES settings, which is possibly what has diluted the effect of peer pressure on substance abuse among this group. Collectively, these findings suggest family SES itself could act as a buffer, intervening to protect adolescents from peer risk factors.

Hypothesis 4: The overall structural model demonstrates a good fit in explaining truancy among in-school adolescents in Ibadan.

Table 5. Model Fit Indices for the Structural Equation Model

Fit Index	Recommended Threshold	Obtained Value
χ^2/df	< 3	2.42
RMSEA	< 0.08	0.048
CFI	> 0.90	0.94

TLI	> 0.90	0.92

Fit indices for the overall structural equation model are presented in Table 5. The model obtained a ratio of $\chi^2/df = 2.42$, which is well below the recommended cut-off value of 3.0. The RMSEA was at 0.048 (less than the 0.08 cut-off), thus indicating close fit. Both indices, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.94) and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI = 0.92), exceeded the required minimum benchmark of 0.90, thus suggesting that the model fits well. These values stand to confirm that the proposed structural model is adequate for the purpose of explaining the intricate relationships among the various factors that influence truancy.

Conclusion and Limitation

This research sought psychosocial and demographic predictors of school absenteeism among in-school adolescents in Ibadan. The study found that substance abuse, peer pressure, and childhood trauma had significant increased risk for truancy, while emotional intelligence and family socioeconomic status were established protective factors. Further interaction of substance abuse and emotional intelligence as a mediator and SES as a moderator on peer-related substance use outlines the complex interplay between individual and contextual factors in truancy behaviour. Strong fit indices for the structural model attest to its appropriateness in elucidating truancy patterns. Some limitations exist in this study: the design being cross-sectional impedes causal inferences, and reliance on the self-reported nature of the data might introduce bias through underreporting or social desirability. Further, these findings may not be generalizable beyond Ibadan, and exclusion of school-level constructs such as staff support, and school policies may miss other significant contributing factors. Nonetheless, the study provides rich data that can serve as a basis for future research and interventions.

Recommendations

Several pragmatic recommendations follow from the study findings. School-based interventions should incorporate psychosocial support services focusing on emotional intelligence and resilience-building of students, especially those with trauma backgrounds. Substance-abuse prevention programs should target peer-related risks and be harnessed in public as well as private schools. Policymakers and educators should deliberate using strategies to strengthen parental involvement and support from low SES families, incorporating community outreach and

parenting education. Longitudinal studies are recommended, with additional contextual variables including school environment, neighbourhood safety, and digital media. A comprehensive, multilevel approach will be necessary in order to prevent truancy of Nigerian adolescents.

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