

Juvenile Delinquent Behavior Among In-School Adolescents: Examining The Roles Of Peer Influence And Gender

Olubunmi O. James¹, Emmanuel E. Uye^{2*}, Adeshina A. Ojo³

^{1&2} University of Ibadan, Nigeria , ³Lead City University, Ibadan, Nigeria

Email: emmanuel.e.uye@gmail.com¹

Abstract: *This study examines the contributions of peer influence and gender on juvenile delinquent behavior among in-school adolescents. Cross-sectional survey design was employed while purposive sampling technique was utilized to select Egor Local Government Area, Edo state. Data were conveniently collected from 218 participants using validated questionnaires and analyzed with independent samples t-test and the hypotheses accepted at $p < .01$ level of significance. The result revealed that peer influence significantly contributed to juvenile delinquent behavior among study participants, $t(218) = -10.53$, $p < .01$ such that those high on peer influence ($M=71.98$, $SD = 29.66$) reported significantly higher scores on juvenile delinquent behavior compared to their counterparts who scored low on peer influence ($M = 35.12$, $SD = 17.79$). Furthermore, the result confirmed that gender significantly influenced juvenile delinquent behavior among study participants, $t(218) = -12.28$, $p < .01$ such that male participants reported higher scores on juvenile delinquent behavior ($M = 73.36$, $SD = 27.49$) more than their female counterparts ($M=32.71$, $SD = 17.82$). The study concludes that peer influence and gender significantly determined the involvement of study participants in juvenile delinquent behavior. The study recommends that parents and educational institutions should sensitize adolescents on the menace of being involved in delinquent behaviors that would likely affect their lives in the future.*

Abstrak : *Penelitian ini mengkaji kontribusi pengaruh teman sebaya dan gender terhadap perilaku kenakalan remaja di kalangan remaja yang bersekolah. Desain survei potong lintang digunakan, sementara teknik pengambilan sampel bertujuan digunakan untuk memilih Wilayah Pemerintah Lokal Egor, Negara Bagian Edo. Data dikumpulkan secara acak dari 218 partisipan menggunakan kuesioner yang telah divalidasi dan dianalisis dengan uji-t sampel independen, dan hipotesis diterima pada tingkat signifikansi $p < 0,01$. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pengaruh teman sebaya secara signifikan berkontribusi terhadap perilaku kenakalan remaja di antara peserta penelitian, $t(218) = -10,53$, $p < 0,01$, sehingga mereka yang memiliki pengaruh teman sebaya tinggi ($M=71,98$, $S.D= 29,66$) melaporkan skor yang secara signifikan lebih tinggi pada perilaku kenakalan remaja dibandingkan dengan rekan-rekan mereka yang memiliki skor rendah pada pengaruh teman sebaya ($M = 35,12$, $SD = 17,79$). Lebih lanjut, hasil penelitian mengkonfirmasi bahwa jenis kelamin secara signifikan memengaruhi perilaku kenakalan remaja di antara peserta penelitian, $t(218) = -12,28$, $p < 0,01$, sehingga peserta laki-laki melaporkan skor yang lebih tinggi pada perilaku kenakalan remaja ($M = 73,36$, $SD = 27,49$) dibandingkan dengan rekan perempuan mereka ($M=32,71$, $SD = 17,82$). Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa pengaruh teman sebaya dan jenis kelamin secara signifikan menentukan keterlibatan peserta penelitian dalam perilaku kenakalan remaja. Studi ini merekomendasikan agar orang tua dan lembaga pendidikan meningkatkan kesadaran remaja tentang bahaya terlibat dalam perilaku kenakalan yang kemungkinan akan memengaruhi kehidupan mereka di masa depan.*

Keyword: *Peer influence, gender, juvenile delinquent behavior, in-school adolescents*

INTRODUCTION

Juvenile delinquent behavior is described as illegal acts, antisocial behavior whether criminal or status offences, which are committed by youth under the age of 18. It is that behavior on the part of adolescents which may, under the law, subject them to juvenile court. Juvenile delinquent behavior could be violent or non-violent. Eke (2004) identified two categories of delinquent behaviors among Nigerian adolescents as criminal and status offences. The criminal offences include stealing, arson, rape, drug offences, and murder, burglary, pick pocket, and armed robbery. On the other hand, status offences include running away from home, malingering, truancy and bullying.

Studies have identified factors contributing to juvenile delinquent behavior including social media, family structure, parenting styles, socio-economic status (Ajayi et al., 2023; Ezech et al., 2023; James et al., 2023; Parrado-Gonzalez et al., 2023), however, two factors: peer influence and gender are considered in this study. Peer influence is defined as an emotional or mental force from individuals that they belong to the same social group in terms of age, grade or status that would make them to act or behave in a manner like themselves (Jena, 2019). Furthermore, peer influence denotes the ability of youths from the same social group or age to influence another of the same age bracket (James et al., 2023). Peer influence contributes to several delinquent behaviors exhibited by adolescents including sexual behavior, cyberbullying, stealing, cheating, substance abuse, etc. (Ehondor et al., 2024; Eremie & Okwulehie, 2021). For instance, Roberts et al. (2024) found peer influence to be a strong predictor of substance abuse among their study participants. In addition, Sattar and Malik (2022) and Roberts et al. (2025) found peer influence to contribute to adolescents' involvement in delinquent behavior such as stealing, lying, cheating/gambling and sexual related behavior.

Furthermore, Ishola et al. (2025) found peer influence as a strong predictor of gambling behavior among in-school adolescents in Nigeria. Moreover, Ajayi et al. (2024) found peer influence to be a strong predictor of addictive gambling behavior among undergraduates. Finally, Parrado-Gonzalez et al. (2023) found that higher susceptibility to peer pressure, perceived gambling by peers were associated with higher probability of engaging in gambling as a form of delinquent behavior.

Gender is the second factor considered in this study. This implies determining whether the individual is male or female would influence the level of juvenile delinquent behavior they would engage in. Studies have confirmed that male adolescents committed more crimes than their female counterparts (Bennett, 2025; Hagan & Foster, 2020). For instance, Osagiede et al. (2024) found gender roles to predict truancy as a form of delinquent behavior that affects academic performance among in-school adolescents. In addition, Irene and Adekanmi (2024) found a significant relationship between gender and delinquent behavior among in-school adolescents. Other studies have supported that male

adolescents are more involved in delinquent behavior compared to their female counterparts (Roberts et al., 2025; Huesmann et al., 2017).

Studies on peer influence and gender have been conducted especially in developing countries. However, there are few studies that relate peer influence and gender to juvenile delinquent behavior especially in Egor Local Government Area of Edo state where juvenile delinquent behavior has been observed to increase, thus leaving a gap in knowledge to fill. Therefore, this study examines the roles of peer influence and gender on juvenile delinquency behavior among in-school adolescents in Egor LGA in Edo state, Nigeria. The study aims to provide an answer to the question: Will peer influence and gender contribute to juvenile delinquent behavior among in-school adolescents in Egor LGA?

The study findings would provide insight into the roles of peer influence and gender on delinquent behavior among in-school adolescents. In addition, parents, school administrators and other stakeholders would be able to design and implement policies to help reduce delinquent behavior among in-school adolescents.

Edwin Sutherland's Differential Association Theory posits that delinquent behavior is learned through intimate social relations with friends where attitudes favorable to law violation are acquired through association. That individuals imitate or otherwise internalize the quality of these associations. Furthermore, delinquencies are learned behaviors that are acquired from interacting with others who engage in such behavior. In other words, those with strong attachments to delinquents are more likely to become delinquents.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory posits that individuals learned behavior by observing, modeling and imitating what they see significant others do such as their peers, adults and parents. When the behavior of interest is positively reinforced, it leads to the perpetuation of such behavior. In the context of juvenile delinquency, adolescents learned bad behavior from peer groups, social media and practice such at every given opportunity. The hypothesis tested were: H1: Peer influence will have significant influence on juvenile delinquency behavior among in-school adolescents. H2: Gender will significantly influence juvenile delinquency behavior among in-school adolescents.

METHOD

The study was a cross-sectional survey where data were collected from the participants using validated questionnaires. The independent variables were peer influence and gender while the dependent variable was juvenile delinquent behavior. The study was conducted in two public secondary schools: Uselu Grammar School, and Benin Technical College in Egor Local Government Area (LGA), Edo state. These schools were selected because they are located within Benin metropolis which reflect demographic characteristics of in-school adolescents in Benin metropolis.

The age distribution showed that 35% of the participants were between the 9-11 years age bracket, 55.5% were between the 12-14 years age bracket, while 9% were between the 15-17 years age bracket. In terms of gender, 89 (41%) were males while 129(59%) were females. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the two schools used in this study while convenience sampling method was used for the administration of the questionnaires to the participants.

The Peer Pressure Questionnaire-Revised (Singh et al., 2011) was used to measure the influence of the peer group. The scale has 29 items which are rated on a 5-point Likert's format ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Sample items include: "Sometimes I miss classes because my friends urge me to do so" and "I feel pressure to chat long hours on the internet". Ehondor et al. (2024) validated the scale in Nigeria, and in the present study, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.78$ was obtained. Crime Behavior Factor Battery (Animasahun, 2008) was used to assess the crime behavior of study participants. It contained 33 items rated on a 5-point Likert's format ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). Sample items include: "I often tell lies to save myself from embarrassment" and "I must satisfy myself first before thinking about how others feel". Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.95$ was obtained, and in this study Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$. Participants' socio-demographic variables including gender, age were also collected.

The researchers were identified by the letter collected from the Department of Psychology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria presented to the respective school authority selected for the study. Based on the review of study protocol by the Principal, Vice-Principal or the School Counselor as the case was in different schools, potential participants were assembled in a classroom for the administration of the questionnaires. Informed consent was sought and obtained from them and those who did not want to participate in the school excused themselves. Before the administration of the questionnaires, they were duly informed that participation in the study was voluntary and all responses obtained from them would be treated confidentially. The questionnaires were distributed and collected on the spot which took less than 17 minutes. A total of 221 questionnaires were distributed in the two schools, however, during the screening and coding, three questionnaires were not properly filled and were removed leaving 218 used for the analysis. IBM SPSS version 23 analyzed the collected data. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were computed. The hypotheses were tested using independent samples t-test and accepted at $p < .01$ level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

H1: Peer influence will have significant influence on juvenile delinquency behavior among in-school adolescents. The hypothesis was tested using independence samples t-test and the result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Independent t-test of peer influence on juvenile delinquency behavior among in-school adolescents

	Peer influence	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Juvenile delinquency behavior	Low	90	35.12	17.79	216	-10.53	<.01
	High	128	71.98	29.66			

Note: N=218, significant at $p < .01$

Table 1 presents independent samples t-test of peer influence and juvenile delinquency among in-school adolescents. The result showed that peer influence significantly influenced juvenile delinquency among study participants, $t(218) = -10.53$, $p < .01$ such that those high on peer influence ($M=71.98$, $SD= 29.66$) reported significantly higher scores on juvenile delinquency behavior compared to their counterparts who are low on peer pressure ($M = 35.12$, $SD =17.79$). Therefore, the hypothesis was supported.

H2: Gender will significantly influence juvenile delinquency behavior among in-school adolescents. The hypothesis was tested using the independent t-test and the result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Independent samples t-test of gender on juvenile delinquency behavior among in-school adolescents.

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Juvenile delinquency behavior	Male	89	73.36	27.49	216	-12.28	<.01
	Female	129	32.71	17.82			

Note: N=218, significant at $p < .01$

Table 3 presents independent samples t-test of gender influence on juvenile delinquency among in-school adolescents. The result revealed that gender significantly influenced juvenile delinquent behavior among study participants, $t(218) = -12.28$, $p < .01$ such that male in-school adolescents reported

higher scores on juvenile delinquency behavior ($M = 73.36$, $SD = 27.49$) more than their female counterparts ($M = 32.71$, $SD = 17.82$). Therefore, the hypothesis was accepted.

The hypothesis that peer influence will have significant influence on juvenile delinquency behavior among in-school adolescents in Egor Local Government, Benin City was supported. Participants who reported high peer influence significantly reported higher scores on juvenile delinquency behavior. This implies that peer influence significantly influences juvenile delinquency behavior among in-school adolescents. This is supported by the differential association theory that delinquent behavior is learned through intimate social relations with friends where attitudes that violate the law are acquired through association. The theory posits that delinquent behavior is learned behaviors that are acquired from interacting with others who engage in such behavior. In other words, those with strong attachments to delinquents are more likely to become delinquents.

The present finding aligns with the result by Eremie and Okwulehie (2021) peer influence contributes to several delinquent behavior exhibited by adolescents including sexual behavior, cyberbullying, stealing, cheating, substance abuse, etc. Specifically, the result of the current study supported previous findings that peer influence could lure in-school adolescents to engage in gambling behavior (Ajayi et al., 2024; Ezeh et al., 2023; Ishola et al., 2025; Parrado-Gonzalez et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the present finding corroborates results that peer influence significantly affects in-school adolescents going into substance use and substance abuse (Ehondor et al., 2024; James et al., 2023; Roberts et al., 2024). Finally, the study supports Sattar and Malik's (2022) results that peer influence contributed to adolescents' involvement in stealing, lying, cheating/gambling and sexual related behavior.

Finally, the hypothesis that gender will have significant influence on juvenile delinquent behavior among in-school adolescents in Egor Local Government, Benin City was supported. Male in-school adolescents reported higher scores on juvenile delinquent behavior than their female counterparts. This aligns with previous studies where male adolescents were found to be more involved in delinquent behavior than their female counterparts (Irene & Adekanmi, 2024; Osagiede et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

The study investigated peer influence and gender on juvenile delinquent behavior among in-school adolescents in Egor LGA. The study has empirically confirmed that peer influence and gender significantly contributed to delinquent behavior demonstrated among study participants. The study recommends that parents and educational institutions should sensitize adolescents on the menace of being involved in delinquent behaviors that would affect their lives in the future.

Also, uniformed clubs and society such as the girl scouts, boy scouts, church youth groups, and other voluntary educational clubs should be activated to allow adolescents to learn social skills that would counteract peer influence.

Because of the use of self-reported questionnaires for data collection, response bias would not be ruled out, therefore, further study would benefit by including focus group discussion, documentary evidence from the school counsellors on the cases of delinquent behaviors among in-school adolescents. Furthermore, the use of one Local Government Area (LGA) and sample size of 218 limit generalization of study findings, hence, further study should increase LGAs use and sample size to enhance generalization of study findings. Finally, the independent variables investigated were not exhaustive, further study should include personality traits, self-esteem and parental support in the study of delinquent behavior among in-school adolescents.

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