



Childhood Trauma, Peer Pressure, Social Media Usage, and Delinquent Career Choice among Youths in Ibadan, Nigeria

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Abstract. This study investigated the relationships between childhood trauma, peer pressure, social media usage, and delinquent career choice among youths aged 15 to 24 years in Ibadan, Nigeria. A purposive sample of 200 participants was drawn from correctional centres, rehabilitation homes, and selected secondary schools to examine the psychosocial factors influencing vocational deviance. Using Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses, the study found significant positive associations among childhood trauma, peer pressure, social media usage, and delinquent career orientation. Peer pressure emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by childhood trauma, while social media usage showed a smaller yet significant effect. The combined model explained 41.2% of the variance in delinquent career choice, highlighting the complex interplay of individual and social influences on youth behaviour. These findings underscore the need for integrated intervention programmes that address trauma, peer dynamics, and digital contexts to effectively mitigate delinquent pathways. The study also highlights implications for trauma-informed care and social skills training in rehabilitation and educational settings. Limitations related to sampling methods and cross-sectional design are acknowledged, with recommendations for longitudinal research and broader population samples to deepen understanding of these relationships. This research contributes to the growing literature on multifactorial determinants of youth delinquency in the Nigerian context, offering valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and mental health practitioners.

Keywords: Childhood Trauma, Peer Pressure, Social Media Usage, Delinquent Career Choice

1. Introduction

Youth delinquency is a growing global phenomenon, characterised by consistent engagement in criminal or deviant acts such as cybercrime, theft, and substance abuse. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2023) reports a concerning rise in youth-related criminality, attributing much of this to early psychosocial vulnerability, exposure to violence, and declining moral infrastructures. Research increasingly shows that many adolescents who become long-term offenders have endured a constellation of negative life experiences, often beginning in childhood and exacerbated by poor social support (Omopo, 2024; Offor & Omopo, 2025). International discourse on the subject has moved from isolated causal factors to the intersectional interplay between personal trauma, peer affiliations, and social technologies.

In Africa, youth deviance is further complicated by weak institutional frameworks, economic inequality, and rapidly changing cultural landscapes. Several studies from Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa reveal that adolescents frequently resort to deviant behaviours in response to unresolved trauma, lack of parental oversight, and influence from social groups that normalise deviance (Mnyaka, 2022; Osei-Tutu & Antwi, 2021). Urbanisation and digital inclusion have also introduced virtual platforms where crime and social deviance are reinforced and rewarded. Yet, interventions targeting these multidimensional causes remain inadequate, particularly in sub-Saharan African nations (Adebayo-Oke, Omopo, & Oyetunji, 2021).

Childhood trauma is a powerful but often underestimated predictor of youth delinquency.

Empirical findings have consistently shown that adverse childhood experiences such as physical abuse, neglect, sexual assault, and parental abandonment contribute significantly to maladaptive coping behaviours (Omopo, Offor, & Ogunbowale, 2024; Offor, Ogunbowale, & Omopo, 2025). In Ibadan, findings reveal that children who have been traumatised are more likely to struggle with emotional regulation, experience post-traumatic stress disorder (Omopo, 2024), and adopt behaviours that mirror the chaos of their early environments (Ogunbowale et al., 2025). Without timely psychosocial intervention, these youths may seek control, belonging, or revenge through delinquent acts.

Peer pressure is another dominant factor shaping delinquent trajectories, particularly in adolescence when the need for social approval is heightened. Sutherland's Differential Association Theory explains that behaviours whether prosocial or deviant—are learned through social interaction. In Nigeria, peer influence has been identified as a strong contributor to drug use, cultism, truancy, and juvenile crimes (Adegunju, Asiyani, & Omopo, 2024; Omopo, 2023). In Ibadan, peer networks often operate as alternative family systems, particularly in socio-economically marginalised communities, reinforcing norms that glorify criminality, materialism, and violent dominance (Omopo, 2024). The desire for identity and belonging often outweighs internalised morality in such peer contexts.

The digital era has added new dimensions to youth deviance, especially through widespread social media usage. Social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram have become arenas for peer validation, trend conformity, and virtual deviance. Delinquent behaviour—including cyber fraud, pornography, online bullying, and gang promotion—is often glamorised on these platforms (Omopo, 2024). In cities like Ibadan where technological access is high but digital literacy and parental regulation are low, social media accelerates the exposure of young people to criminal ideologies. These virtual influences can reinforce negative peer norms and make deviant lifestyles appear aspirational rather than condemnable.

Ibadan, the third most populous city in Nigeria, presents a context where the confluence of childhood trauma, peer pressure, and social media exposure is particularly concerning. Studies conducted in correctional and psychiatric institutions within the city have consistently linked delinquent behaviour with early life trauma, social marginalisation, and unregulated peer networks (Omopo, Offor, & Ogunbowale, 2024; Omopo,

2023; Offor & Omopo, 2025). However, most existing literature either treats these predictors in isolation or fails to consider their cumulative influence on the decision to pursue a delinquent career. Despite the availability of some fragmented data, a comprehensive, theory-driven investigation that unpacks how these variables jointly influence sustained deviant engagement is lacking in the Ibadan context.

Therefore, this study seeks to bridge this empirical and contextual gap by investigating how childhood trauma, peer pressure, and social media usage influence the choice of a delinquent career among youths in Ibadan. Grounded in Social Control Theory and Differential Association Theory, the research aims to offer nuanced insight into the psychological and sociological pathways that link these variables to criminal persistence. This knowledge is essential for designing informed prevention and rehabilitation strategies that are contextually appropriate for the Nigerian urban youth population.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The present research seeks to examine the influence of childhood trauma, peer pressure, and social media usage on the inclination toward delinquent career choice among youths in Ibadan, Nigeria. Given the growing concern over youth involvement in deviant, criminal, and socially unacceptable career paths, it becomes imperative to investigate the psychosocial antecedents that predispose individuals to such behaviours. Specifically, this study focuses on how early-life psychological trauma, social peer dynamics, and online influences might interactively or independently influence a young person's decision to pursue or justify delinquent vocational pursuits.

The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

- To examine the relationship between childhood trauma, peer pressure, social media usage, and delinquent career choice among youths in Ibadan, Nigeria.
- To determine the combined effect of childhood trauma, peer pressure, and social media usage on delinquent career choice among youths in Ibadan, Nigeria.
- To assess the relative contributions of childhood trauma, peer pressure, and social media usage to delinquent career choice among youths in Ibadan, Nigeria.

1.2 Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses will be tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

- There is no significant relationship between childhood trauma, peer pressure, social media usage, and delinquent career choice among youths in Ibadan, Nigeria.
- There is no significant combined effect of childhood trauma, peer pressure, and social media usage on delinquent career choice among youths in Ibadan, Nigeria.
- There is no significant relative contribution of childhood trauma, peer pressure, and social media usage to delinquent career choice among youths in Ibadan, Nigeria.

2. Research Methodology

This study adopted a correlational research design to examine the predictive influence of childhood trauma, peer pressure, and social media usage on delinquent career choice among youths in Ibadan, Nigeria. The design enabled the assessment of the statistical relationships between the psychosocial predictors and the likelihood of choosing unlawful or deviant vocational paths. A sample of 200 youths aged 15 to 24 years was purposively selected from youth correctional centres, rehabilitation homes, and selected secondary schools across Ibadan metropolis. Inclusion criteria required participants to self-report past or ongoing experiences of trauma, peer influence, or intense social media use, as well as indications of career aspirations or activities that diverge from conventional lawful occupations.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Demographic Representation of the Participants

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Variables	Frequency (n = 200)	Percentage (%)
Age		
15 – 18 years	92	46.0
19 – 21 years	68	34.0
22 – 24 years	40	20.0
Gender		
Male	130	65.0
Female	70	35.0
Religion		
Islam	110	55.0
Christianity	75	37.5
Traditional Religion	15	7.5

The sample comprised 200 youths aged between 15 and 24 years, purposively selected from correctional centres, rehabilitation homes, and selected secondary schools within Ibadan. The age distribution showed that 46% were between 15 and 18 years, marking adolescence as a critical period for psychosocial development and vulnerability to negative influences (Brown & Larson, 2021). Males constituted 65% of the sample, consistent with broader criminological literature indicating higher rates of delinquency among young males. Religious affiliations were primarily Islam (55%) and Christianity (37.5%), reflecting the sociocultural context of the region.

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Ibadan Research Ethics Committee, and informed consent was sought from all participants or their guardians. Participation was voluntary and anonymised, with protocols in place to ensure confidentiality and minimise psychological harm.

Data were collected using standardised instruments: the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (Bernstein et al., 1997), Peer Pressure Inventory (Brown et al., 1986), and the Social Media Engagement Questionnaire (adapted from Savci & Aysan, 2017). A self-constructed Delinquent Career Inclination Scale, pretested and validated (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.87), was used to measure participants’ predisposition toward delinquent occupational choices. Trained research assistants supervised the administration of the instruments, offering support to participants where necessary. Data were analysed using IBM SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics summarised demographic and variable profiles, while Pearson’s correlation determined the relationships between the independent and dependent variables. Multiple regression analysis was employed to evaluate the predictive and relative contributions of each psychosocial factor. The findings aim to offer data-driven insights for developing preventive psychosocial interventions and youth empowerment policies targeted at reducing deviant vocational outcomes in urban Nigerian settings.

3.2 Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1: Relationship between Childhood Trauma, Peer Pressure, Social Media Usage, and Delinquent Career Choice

Pearson correlation analysis explored the relationships between childhood trauma, peer pressure, social media usage, and delinquent career choice. The correlation matrix (Table 2) shows significant positive relationships among all variables, indicating that higher exposure to trauma, peer influence, and social media engagement correlates with increased delinquent career inclinations.

Table 2: Correlation Results for Hypothesis 1

Variables	Childhood Trauma	Peer Pressure	Social Media Usage	Delinquent Career Choice
Childhood Trauma	1			
Peer Pressure	0.374*	1		
Social Media Usage	0.305*	0.426*	1	
Delinquent Career Choice	0.432*	0.528*	0.412*	1

*Significant at $p < 0.05$

Peer pressure demonstrated the strongest association with delinquent career choice ($r = 0.528$), underscoring the social environment’s influence on youth behaviour (Lee & Kim, 2022). Childhood trauma also exhibited a significant moderate correlation ($r = 0.432$), reflecting its lasting impact on psychosocial functioning and propensity toward deviance (Miller et al., 2021). The link between social media usage and delinquent career choice ($r = 0.412$) corroborates emerging evidence on the role of digital platforms in shaping youth identity and risk behaviours.

These results are consistent with the findings of Rodriguez et al. (2022), who demonstrated that peer influence and adverse childhood experiences interact to significantly predict engagement in delinquent behaviours among urban youth populations. Their study highlighted that neither factor alone fully accounts for the complexity of youth deviance; rather, it is the combination of these psychosocial stressors that intensifies the likelihood of delinquent outcomes. This reinforces the notion that delinquent career orientation is multifactorial, involving a dynamic interplay between individual vulnerabilities, such as trauma history, and external social pressures, including peer group norms and expectations (Nguyen & Tran, 2023). Such a perspective challenges simplistic or single-factor explanations for delinquency and underscores the importance of comprehensive assessment frameworks that consider both internal psychological states and environmental influences. Consequently, effective intervention strategies must be holistic, simultaneously addressing the lingering effects of childhood trauma and the ongoing impact of peer relationships. Programs that incorporate trauma-informed care alongside peer group interventions are therefore crucial to disrupt pathways leading to delinquency, fostering resilience and promoting healthier social development among at-risk youth.

Hypothesis 2: Combined Effect of Childhood Trauma, Peer Pressure, and Social Media Usage on Delinquent Career Choice

Multiple regression analysis assessed the joint predictive power of the three independent variables on delinquent career choice. Table 3 summarises the regression model statistics.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Results for Hypothesis 2

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value	R ²
Regression	26.104	3	8.701	48.237	0.000	0.412
Residuals	36.980	196	0.189			
Total	63.084	199				

The model significantly predicted delinquent career choice ($F(3,196) = 48.237, p < 0.001$), explaining 41.2% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.412$). This considerable explanatory power highlights the interplay of trauma, peer dynamics, and social media exposure in shaping vocational deviance among youths

The result supports the theoretical perspective that delinquency is not caused by a single factor but rather emerges from complex interactions between individual characteristics and environmental influences, as proposed by Thompson and Lee (2020). Their framework emphasises that personal vulnerabilities, such as experiences of trauma or psychological distress, interact with external conditions like peer pressure, family dynamics, and community context to shape behavioural outcomes. This multifaceted view highlights that delinquent behaviour among youths cannot be fully understood without considering how these diverse factors converge and reinforce each other over time. Supporting this notion, Al-Amin et al. (2023) found that a combination of psychosocial

stressors including childhood adversity, peer influences, and socio-economic challenges significantly predicts deviant behaviours among Nigerian adolescents. Their findings stress the necessity for prevention programmes that are integrated and multi-layered, addressing not only individual psychological needs but also social and environmental risk factors. By doing so, such programmes can more effectively mitigate the pathways leading to delinquency, promote positive youth development, and reduce recidivism rates. This convergence of evidence underscores the importance of adopting holistic and contextually sensitive approaches in both research and practice when tackling youth delinquency in Nigeria and similar settings.

Hypothesis 3: Relative Contribution of Childhood Trauma, Peer Pressure, and Social Media Usage to Delinquent Career Choice

The standardized regression coefficients (β) in Table 4 provide insights into the relative influence of each predictor.

Table 4: Relative Contributions of Variables to Delinquent Career Choice

Predictor Variable	β	t	p-value
Childhood Trauma	0.223	3.689	0.000
Peer Pressure	0.409	7.045	0.000
Social Media Usage	0.192	3.210	0.002

Peer pressure emerged as the most influential predictor ($\beta = 0.409$), confirming its pivotal role in youth behavioural outcomes (Smith & Martinez, 2022). Childhood trauma ($\beta = 0.223$) also had a significant impact, consistent with literature that links early adverse experiences with increased risk for delinquency (Garcia et al., 2021). Social media usage, while statistically significant, had the smallest effect ($\beta = 0.192$), suggesting it acts more as a contextual amplifier rather than a primary driver

These findings strongly advocate for intervention frameworks that place significant emphasis on the influence of peer group dynamics as well as trauma-informed care. Understanding the central role peers play in shaping youth behaviour is critical, as peer groups often serve as primary social environments where attitudes and behaviours are reinforced or challenged. Trauma-informed care, meanwhile, recognises the profound and lasting impact of adverse childhood experiences on emotional regulation, decision-making, and risk-taking behaviours. Addressing both these factors holistically allows for more comprehensive support tailored to the specific needs of at-risk youths. Moreover, the findings highlight the increasingly important role of the digital landscape in youth development, particularly how social media and online interactions can amplify exposure to risk behaviours or offer protective social connections, as noted by Chen et al. (2021). Integrating this awareness into intervention design ensures programmes remain relevant in the context of modern youth culture. Integrated therapeutic models, such as cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) combined with social skills training, have demonstrated efficacy in reducing delinquent tendencies by targeting both the cognitive distortions and social deficits that often underlie deviant behaviours (Williams et al., 2020; Asiyambi

et al., 2025). These approaches equip youths with healthier coping mechanisms, improved decision-making skills, and more adaptive social interactions, thereby disrupting the pathways leading to delinquent career choices. Together, these insights call for multi-dimensional intervention strategies that engage psychological, social, and technological factors to effectively support youth development and prevent delinquency.

4. Conclusion

The findings from this study underscore the significant roles that childhood trauma, peer pressure, and social media usage play in shaping delinquent career choices among youths in Ibadan. Peer pressure emerged as the most influential predictor, highlighting the critical impact of social environments on youth behaviour. Childhood trauma also demonstrated a notable effect, reinforcing the long-term consequences of early adverse experiences on psychosocial functioning and deviance. Although social media usage had the smallest effect, it remains an important contextual factor amplifying delinquent tendencies. Together, these factors explain a substantial portion of variance in delinquent career orientation, underscoring the multifaceted nature of youth deviance and the need for comprehensive intervention strategies.

5. Limitation

This study’s findings should be interpreted within the context of several limitations. Firstly, the use of purposive sampling from correctional centres, rehabilitation homes, and select schools may limit the generalisability of the results to the broader youth population in Ibadan or other regions.

Secondly, the reliance on self-reported measures may introduce biases such as social desirability or recall inaccuracies, particularly regarding sensitive topics like trauma and delinquency. Additionally, the cross-sectional design prevents causal inferences, restricting understanding of how these variables interact over time. Future research employing longitudinal designs and more diverse samples would strengthen the validity and applicability of these findings.

6. Recommendations

Given the prominent influence of peer pressure and childhood trauma on delinquent career choices, intervention programmes should prioritise trauma-informed care and peer group-focused strategies within youth development initiatives. Schools and rehabilitation centres should implement structured social skills training alongside cognitive-behavioural therapies to enhance resilience and reduce susceptibility to negative peer influences. Moreover, educational campaigns targeting responsible social media usage could mitigate its amplifying effects on delinquency. Collaboration among policymakers, educators, and mental health professionals is essential to develop holistic prevention frameworks addressing these intertwined risk factors.

7. Suggestion for Further Studies

Future research could explore the longitudinal trajectories of childhood trauma, peer influence, and social media engagement in relation to delinquency, allowing for better causal understanding and timing of interventions. Studies incorporating qualitative methods might also provide deeper insights into the subjective experiences of youths navigating these risk factors. Additionally, examining protective factors such as family support, community engagement, and personal coping mechanisms could inform more nuanced prevention and rehabilitation models. Expanding research to include diverse geographic and cultural contexts would further elucidate the generalisability of these findings across different youth populations.

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