

Psychological Predictors of Adolescent Behavioural Adjustment: Implications for Parenting Practices and School Counselling Among Public Secondary School Students in Calabar Education Zone, Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract: Adolescence is a critical developmental period cumbered with significant psychological, emotional, social, and behavioural changes. Growing reports of truancy, aggression, substance abuse, examination malpractice, cult-related activities, poor emotional regulation, and school maladjustment among secondary school students have increased concerns among educators, counsellors, parents, and policymakers. This study investigated psychological predictors of adolescent behavioural adjustment among public secondary school students in Calabar Education Zone, Cross River State, Nigeria. The study drew insight from Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, Bandura's Social Learning Theory, and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. A descriptive survey design was employed. The population comprised 45,550 students enrolled in public secondary schools across Calabar Municipality, Calabar South, Akpabuyo, Bakassi, Odukpani, Akamkpa, and Biase Local Government Areas. Fifty public secondary schools were randomly selected, while a sample of 1,200 students was drawn using multistage sampling techniques. Data were collected using the Psychological Predictors and Adolescent Adjustment Questionnaire (PPAAQ). The instrument yielded a Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of .89. Mean, standard deviation, multiple regression, Pearson correlation, and ANOVA were adopted for data analysis at .05 significance level. Findings showed that self-esteem, emotional regulation, peer influence, family support, and academic self-concept significantly predicted adolescent behavioural adjustment. Emotional regulation emerged as the strongest predictor. Significant differences in behavioural adjustment were also observed across demographic groups. The study concluded that psychological variables play critical roles in adolescent adjustment and should be considered in parenting and counselling interventions. It was recommended that schools strengthen counselling services, while parents adopt supportive and responsive parenting approaches to enhance adolescents' psychosocial development.

Keywords: Adolescent Behaviour, Behavioural Adjustment, Psychological Predictors, Parenting Practices, School Counselling, Secondary School Students.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence represents one of the most dynamic periods of human development. It is characterized by rapid biological, emotional, cognitive, and social transitions that significantly influence behavioural outcomes. During this period, young people develop self-identity, emotional competence, interpersonal skills, and behavioural patterns that often extend into adulthood.

Globally, concerns about adolescent behavioural problems have continued to attract scholarly attention. Reports from the World Health Organization (2023) indicate increasing prevalence of anxiety, depression, aggression, risk-taking behaviours, substance abuse, school violence, and social maladjustment among adolescents. In Nigeria, these concerns are manifested through examination malpractice, cultism, truancy, internet addiction, cyber-bullying, substance use, and declining respect for authority.

Behavioural adjustment refers to the extent to which adolescents successfully adapt to school demands, family expectations, peer relationships, and societal norms. Well-adjusted adolescents typically demonstrate emotional stability, self-control, positive social relationships, academic commitment, and responsible decision-making. Conversely, maladjustment often manifests through behavioural misconduct, emotional instability, antisocial tendencies, and academic difficulties.

Current developmental literature suggests that adolescent behaviour is influenced by several psychological variables including self-esteem, emotional regulation, peer influence, family support, and academic self-concept. These factors shape how adolescents perceive themselves, respond to challenges, and interact with their social environment.

In Calabar Education Zone, increasing concerns have been expressed regarding student misconduct, emotional instability, poor academic engagement, bullying, substance abuse, and indiscipline within public secondary schools. Although disciplinary measures have been implemented in many schools, behavioural challenges continue to persist. Understanding the psychological factors underlying these behaviours is therefore necessary for effective counselling interventions and parenting strategies.

➤ *Statement of the Problem*

Despite efforts by schools, parents, religious organizations, and government agencies to promote positive youth development, behavioural maladjustment among adolescents remains a growing concern in public secondary schools within Calabar Education Zone. Cases of truancy, aggression, examination malpractice, substance abuse, bullying, social withdrawal, and poor emotional regulation continue to affect students' academic performance and psychosocial development.

Previous studies gave attention to environmental and socio-economic determinants of adolescent behaviour. However, limited empirical attention has been given to

psychological predictors such as self-esteem, emotional regulation, peer influence, family support, and academic self-concept as determinants of behavioural adjustment among adolescents in Cross River State.

This gap necessitated the present study, which investigated psychological predictors of adolescent behavioural adjustment and explored the implications for parenting practices and school counselling.

➤ *Objectives of the Study*

The study sought to:

- Examine the influence of self-esteem on adolescent behavioural adjustment.
- Determine the influence of emotional regulation on adolescent behavioural adjustment.
- Assess the influence of peer influence on adolescent behavioural adjustment.
- Examine the influence of family support on adolescent behavioural adjustment.
- Determine the combined predictive influence of psychological variables on adolescent behavioural adjustment.

➤ *Research Questions*

- To what extent does self-esteem influence adolescent behavioural adjustment?
- How does emotional regulation influence adolescent behavioural adjustment?
- What influence does peer influence have on adolescent behavioural adjustment?
- How does family support influence adolescent behavioural adjustment?
- What is the combined predictive influence of psychological variables on adolescent behavioural adjustment?

➤ *Research Hypotheses*

- H01: Self-esteem does not significantly predict adolescent behavioural adjustment.
- H02: Emotional regulation does not significantly predict adolescent behavioural adjustment.
- H03: Psychological predictors jointly do not significantly predict adolescent behavioural adjustment.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework of this study is built on the interaction between selected psychological variables and adolescent behavioural adjustment among public secondary school students in Calabar Education Zone, Cross River State, Nigeria. The framework explains how internal psychological dispositions and social-psychological experiences jointly shape behavioural outcomes in adolescents.

The independent variables in this study include self-esteem, emotional regulation, peer influence, family support, and academic self-concept. These variables represent internal psychological resources and external psychosocial influences that shape adolescent behaviour in school and social contexts.

The dependent variable is adolescent behavioural adjustment, which refers to the extent to which students demonstrate acceptable conduct, emotional stability, social competence, and adherence to school and societal norms.

The framework assumes that:

- Adolescents with high self-esteem are more likely to exhibit positive behavioural adjustment due to improved self-worth and confidence.
- Strong emotional regulation skills enhance behavioural control, reducing impulsivity and aggression.
- Peer influence can either positively or negatively shape behavioural patterns depending on group norms.
- Family support provides emotional stability and social grounding that promotes adaptive behaviour.
- Positive academic self-concept enhances school engagement and reduces maladaptive behaviours.

These psychological variables do not operate in isolation; rather, they interact dynamically within school, family, and peer environments. Consequently, parenting practices and school counselling interventions serve as moderating and corrective mechanisms that can enhance adaptive behavioural outcomes.

Thus, the framework positions adolescent behavioural adjustment as an outcome of continuous interaction between psychological dispositions and environmental influences.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on three complementary theories: Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, Bandura's Social Learning Theory, and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory.

➤ *Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory*

Erikson (1968) posits that adolescence is dominated by the developmental crisis of identity versus role confusion. During this stage, individuals seek to establish a coherent sense of self. Successful resolution of this crisis results in positive identity formation, improved self-esteem, and adaptive behavioural functioning.

Relating to this study, adolescents with stable identity formation are more likely to demonstrate behavioural adjustment, while those experiencing identity confusion are prone to maladaptive behaviours such as aggression, truancy, and peer conformity. This theory provides a psychological explanation for the role of self-esteem and academic self-concept in adolescent behaviour.

➤ *Bandura's Social Learning Theory*

Bandura (1977) asserts that behaviour is learned through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. Adolescents are highly susceptible to environmental modelling, especially from peers, parents, and teachers.

Within the context of this study, peer influence becomes a critical determinant of behavioural adjustment. Adolescents exposed to deviant peer groups may adopt maladaptive behaviours, while those in pro-social peer networks are more likely to exhibit positive adjustment. Emotional regulation is also influenced through learned coping behaviours observed in significant others.

➤ *Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory:*

Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasizes that human development occurs within nested environmental systems including the microsystem (family, school, peers), mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem.

This theory is particularly relevant to this study because adolescent behavioural adjustment is influenced by interactions between multiple systems. Family support represents the microsystem, while school counselling and peer relationships form part of the mesosystem. Dysfunction in any of these systems can lead to behavioural maladjustment.

Together, these theories provide a multi-dimensional explanation of adolescent behaviour, integrating psychological, social, and environmental determinants.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

➤ *Concept of Adolescent*

• *Behavioural Adjustment*

Adolescent behavioural adjustment involves the ability of young people to conform to social norms, regulate emotions, maintain interpersonal relationships, and function effectively within academic environments. Contemporary studies emphasize that behavioural adjustment is a key indicator of psychosocial well-being and academic success (Steinberg, 2021; Santrock, 2022).

Globally, adolescent maladjustment has been linked to increased rates of aggression, substance use, school dropout, and mental health challenges (World Health Organization, 2023). In developing countries, particularly Nigeria, behavioural problems among adolescents remain a growing concern in secondary schools (UNICEF, 2023).

• *Self-Esteem and Behavioural Adjustment*

Self-esteem plays a critical role in shaping adolescent behavioural outcomes. Adolescents with high self-esteem tend to exhibit better emotional stability, resilience, and social competence. Recent empirical findings suggest that self-esteem significantly predicts behavioural adjustment and academic engagement among secondary school students (Orth & Robins, 2022).

Low self-esteem, on the other hand, has been associated with aggression, peer conformity, and risky behaviour (Nguyen & Lee, 2021). Studies conducted in sub-Saharan Africa further confirm that self-esteem is a strong predictor of students' behavioural adaptation in school environments (Adebayo & Okafor, 2022).

- *Emotional Regulation and Behavioural Adjustment*

Emotional regulation refers to the ability to manage and respond to emotional experiences in adaptive ways. It is widely recognized as one of the strongest predictors of adolescent behavioural outcomes.

Gross (2015) established that emotional regulation is central to controlling impulsive and aggressive behaviours. Recent studies have reinforced this position, showing that adolescents with poor emotional regulation are more likely to engage in disruptive behaviours and academic misconduct (Miller & Zhang, 2023). Conversely, those with strong emotional regulation skills demonstrate higher levels of behavioural adjustment and social competence (Kim et al., 2024).

- *Peer Influence and Behavioural Adjustment*

Peer influence continues to be a powerful determinant of adolescent behaviour. Adolescents often conform to peer norms in order to gain acceptance and social identity.

Current research indicates that peer pressure significantly predicts both positive and negative behavioural outcomes depending on the nature of peer groups (Brown & Larson, 2021). In Nigerian secondary schools, studies have shown that association with deviant peers increases the likelihood of truancy, substance abuse, and examination malpractice (Eze & Uzochukwu, 2022).

However, positive peer influence can enhance academic motivation and prosocial behaviour (Adeyemi et al., 2023).

- *Family Support and Behavioural Adjustment*

Family support is a critical protective factor in adolescent development. Supportive parenting practices such as warmth, communication, and supervision are strongly associated with positive behavioural outcomes.

Recent studies confirm that adolescents from supportive family environments exhibit higher levels of behavioural adjustment and emotional stability (Olson & DeFrain, 2020). In contrast, poor parental support has been linked to delinquency, emotional distress, and academic failure (Chukwu & Nwankwo, 2022).

- *Academic Self-Concept and Behavioural Adjustment*

Academic self-concept refers to students' perception of their academic abilities. It has been identified as a significant predictor of motivation, engagement, and behavioural outcomes.

Contemporary findings reveal that students with positive academic self-concept are more likely to exhibit discipline, persistence, and classroom engagement (Marsh et

al., 2021). Conversely, low academic self-concept is associated with frustration, disengagement, and behavioural problems (Wang & Eccles, 2023).

- *Research Gap*

Despite extensive literature on adolescent behavioural development, several gaps remain evident:

- Most existing studies have focused on environmental and socio-economic factors, with limited attention to psychological predictors such as self-esteem, emotional regulation, and academic self-concept in a unified model.
- Few studies have simultaneously examined multiple psychological variables as joint predictors of behavioural adjustment among adolescents, particularly in the Nigerian context.
- In Cross River State, especially within Calabar Education Zone, there is a scarcity of empirical research integrating parenting practices, school counselling implications, and psychological predictors within one framework.
- Existing studies rarely explore how these psychological variables collectively explain behavioural adjustment variance among secondary school students.

This study therefore fills this gap by providing an integrated analysis of psychological predictors of adolescent behavioural adjustment and highlighting implications for parenting practices and school counselling interventions in Calabar Education Zone.

- *Contribution of this Study*

This study advances knowledge by:

- Providing a multi-variable psychological model of adolescent behavioural adjustment.
- Integrating self-esteem, emotional regulation, peer influence, family support, and academic self-concept into a single predictive framework.
- Offering context-specific evidence from Calabar Education Zone, Nigeria.
- Strengthening the role of school counselling and parenting practices in behavioural intervention strategies.

V. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design was considered appropriate because it enabled the systematic collection of data from a large sample of respondents and allowed for the examination of relationships among psychological variables and adolescent behavioural adjustment without manipulating any variable. The design is suitable for studies seeking to determine predictive relationships among naturally occurring phenomena in educational settings.

The study was conducted in Calabar Education Zone, Cross River State, Nigeria. The zone comprises seven Local Government Areas, namely: Calabar Municipality, Calabar South, Akpabuyo, Bakassi, Odukpani, Akamkpa, and Biase. The area was selected due to reported cases of adolescent behavioural challenges such as truancy, aggression,

examination malpractice, substance use, and poor emotional regulation in public secondary schools.

The population of the study consisted of 45,550 students enrolled in public secondary schools across the Calabar Education Zone. This population included students from Senior Secondary School One (SSS1) to Senior Secondary School Three (SSS3) in all public secondary schools within the zone.

A total sample of 1,200 students was drawn for the study. A multistage sampling technique was employed as follows:

➤ *Stage One: Stratification of Schools*

The schools were stratified according to the seven Local Government Areas in the education zone.

➤ *Stage Two: Random Selection of Schools*

A total of 50 public secondary schools were selected through simple random sampling (balloting without replacement) to ensure equal representation.

➤ *Stage Three: Selection of Respondents*

From each selected school, students were proportionately sampled using proportionate stratified sampling technique based on school population size.

➤ *Stage Four: Random Selection of Students*

Within each stratum, students were selected using simple random sampling technique to ensure that every eligible student had an equal chance of participation. This sampling procedure ensured representativeness and reduced sampling bias.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled: Psychological Predictors and Adolescent Adjustment Questionnaire (PPAAQ). The instrument was divided into two sections. Section A: Demographic information of respondents (age, gender, class level, and school type) and Section B: Items measuring psychological predictors (self-esteem, emotional regulation, peer influence, family support, academic self-concept) and adolescent behavioural adjustment. Responses were structured on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1)

The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by experts in Educational Psychology and Guidance and Counselling. The experts reviewed the items for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives. Their corrections and suggestions were incorporated to improve the quality and adequacy of the instrument.

The reliability of the PPAAQ was established using the Cronbach Alpha reliability method, which is appropriate for Likert-scale instruments measuring internal consistency. A pilot test was conducted outside the study area using a sample of students with similar characteristics to the target population. The instrument yielded a reliability coefficient of

0.89, indicating a high level of internal consistency and suitability for data collection.

The researcher administered the questionnaire personally with the assistance of trained research assistants. This ensured proper distribution and retrieval of instruments. Respondents were guided on how to complete the questionnaire, and confidentiality was assured to encourage honest responses. A high return rate was achieved due to on-the-spot administration and retrieval.

Data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

- Research Questions were answered using mean and standard deviation. A mean score of 2.50 and above was considered agreement, while below 2.50 was considered disagreement.
- Hypotheses One and Two were tested using simple linear regression analysis.
- Hypothesis Three was tested using multiple regression analysis to determine the joint predictive influence of psychological variables on behavioural adjustment.
- Additional analyses such as Pearson Product Moment Correlation and ANOVA were used to examine relationships and group differences where applicable.

➤ *All Hypotheses were Tested at a 0.05 Level of Significance.*

Permission was obtained from school authorities before data collection. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. No personal identifiers were collected, and data were used strictly for academic purposes.

VI. RESULTS

❖ *Research Question Analysis*

➤ *Hypothesis Testing*

• *Hypothesis One*

Table 1 Self-Esteem does not Significantly Predict Behavioural Adjustment.

Variable	β	T	P
Self-Esteem	0.42	8.67	0.0

Decision: Reject H01. Self-esteem significantly predicts behavioural adjustment.

Ranking of Psychological Predictors by Mean Scores:

- ✓ Emotional Regulation (3.84)
- ✓ Family Support (3.76)
- ✓ Behavioural Adjustment (3.70)
- ✓ Self-Esteem (3.68)
- ✓ Academic Self-Concept (3.61)
- ✓ Peer Influence (3.52)

• *Hypothesis Two*

Table 2 Emotional Regulation does not Significantly Predict Behavioural Adjustment.

Variable	β	T	P
Emotional Regulation	0.58	12.31	0.0

Decision: Reject H02. Emotional regulation significantly predicts behavioural adjustment.

• *Hypothesis Three*

Table 3 Psychological Predictors Jointly do not Significantly Predict Behavioural Adjustment.

Variable	β	T	P
Self-Esteem	0.24	5.83	0.0
Emotional Regulation	0.41	9.75	0.0
Peer Influence	0.19	4.26	0.0
Family Support	0.28	6.47	0.0
Academic Self-Concept	0.21	4.89	0.0

Table 4 Model Summary

R	R ²	F	p
0.78	0.61	374.82	0.0

Decision: Reject H03. Psychological predictors jointly significantly predict behavioural adjustment.

Psychological predictors jointly accounted for 61% of the variance in adolescent behavioural adjustment.

VII. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study established that self-esteem significantly predicts adolescent behavioural adjustment among public secondary school students in Calabar Education Zone. This implies that adolescents with a positive sense of self-worth tend to demonstrate better behavioural control, healthier social interactions, and improved adjustment to school demands. This position aligns with Rosenberg, who emphasized that self-worth is central to adaptive functioning, as well as Erik Erikson, who argued that successful identity formation during adolescence promotes emotional stability and responsible behaviour. In addition, empirical evidence from Santrock (2022) and Steinberg (2021) supports the view that low self-esteem is associated with increased vulnerability to peer pressure, delinquency, and academic maladjustment.

Furthermore, the study revealed that emotional regulation is the strongest predictor of adolescent behavioural adjustment. This suggests that adolescents who are able to effectively manage their emotional responses are more likely to exhibit appropriate behaviour, maintain discipline, and relate positively with peers and teachers. This finding is consistent with James Gross, who conceptualized emotional regulation as a core process in adaptive psychological functioning. Gross (2015) further noted that poor emotional regulation is strongly linked to impulsivity, aggression, and

behavioural disorders during adolescence. The prominence of emotional regulation in this study therefore underscores its central role in shaping behavioural outcomes among students.

Again, the findings indicated that peer influence significantly predicts adolescent behavioural adjustment. This implies that adolescents are highly susceptible to the behavioural norms and expectations of their peer groups, which may either promote positive adjustment or encourage maladaptive conduct. This finding is consistent with Albert Bandura, who posited that behaviour is acquired through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. It also corroborates the views of Steinberg (2021), who observed that peer associations strongly influence adolescent risk-taking behaviours such as substance use, truancy, and antisocial conduct.

Moreso, family support was found to significantly influence adolescent behavioural adjustment. This indicates that adolescents who experience strong emotional, social, and psychological support from their families are more likely to demonstrate positive behavioural outcomes. This finding aligns with Urie Bronfenbrenner, which identifies the family as a crucial microsystem that shapes development. It is also supported by Masten (2018), who emphasized that supportive parenting fosters resilience and protects adolescents from maladaptive behavioural tendencies.

In addition, the study revealed that academic self-concept significantly contributes to behavioural adjustment. This suggests that adolescents who perceive themselves as academically competent are more likely to display discipline, motivation, and positive engagement in school activities. Santrock (2022) similarly noted that positive academic self-concept enhances achievement motivation and school adjustment, whereas negative self-perception is associated with withdrawal, truancy, and disruptive behaviour.

Finally, the multiple regression analysis showed that psychological variables jointly accounted for a substantial proportion of variance in adolescent behavioural adjustment. This finding reinforces the ecological systems perspective of Bronfenbrenner, which emphasizes the interaction of multiple environmental and personal systems in shaping behaviour. It also aligns with Jessor’s problem behaviour theory, which explains adolescent behaviour as a product of the interaction between personality systems and environmental influences. The result therefore confirms that behavioural adjustment among adolescents is multidimensional and cannot be explained by a single factor, but rather by the combined influence of emotional, cognitive, and social variables.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that emotional regulation is the most influential predictor of adolescent behavioural adjustment, followed by family support, self-esteem, peer influence, and academic self-concept. These results are consistent with established theoretical and empirical literature, confirming that adolescent behavioural adjustment is shaped by an interaction of psychological and social factors.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The study examined psychological predictors of adolescent behavioural adjustment among public secondary school students in Calabar Education Zone. Findings revealed that self-esteem, emotional regulation, peer influence, family support, and academic self-concept significantly predict behavioural adjustment, both independently and jointly. Emotional regulation emerged as the most influential predictor, indicating its central role in determining how adolescents manage behaviour in school and social contexts. The study therefore concludes that adolescent behavioural adjustment is largely a function of interrelated psychological and social factors, and not a single isolated variable. Effective behavioural outcomes among adolescents are best achieved through the combined influence of emotional competence, positive self-perception, supportive family environments, constructive peer associations, and strong academic self-concept.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

- School counsellors should prioritize emotional regulation training through structured counselling programmes, focusing on anger management, stress control, and coping skills.
- Parents should adopt supportive and responsive parenting practices that enhance emotional security, communication, and positive behavioural modelling in adolescents.
- Schools should strengthen functional guidance and counselling units to address behavioural, emotional, and academic adjustment challenges among students.
- Structured peer mentoring and peer education programmes should be introduced to promote positive peer influence and reduce deviant peer association.
- Regular self-esteem and academic self-concept enhancement interventions should be organized to improve students' confidence, motivation, and behavioural adjustment.
- Government and education stakeholders should provide adequate funding, training, and resources to support effective school counselling services in secondary schools.

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