

Exploring the Nexus between Family Socioeconomic Status and Deviant Behaviour: A Study of Secondary School Students in Murang'a East Sub-County

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ABSTRACT

Background: There is a complex and multifaceted relationship between family socioeconomic status and deviant behaviour among secondary school students in Murang'a East Sub County. The purpose of the study was to investigate this relationship. The primary aim was to reveal contributing links and suggest best practices for interventions aimed at curbing deviant behaviour among secondary school students.

Materials and Methods: A mixed method approach collected data using self-administered questionnaires and conducted interviews from 15 Principals, 15 Guidance and Counselling Coordinators, and 390 students randomly sampled from 15 secondary schools. The study area encompassed 33 Principals, 33 Guidance and Counselling Coordinators, and 9,484 students across 33 schools. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, t-tests, and multiple regression analysis in SPSS 25. Results were presented in tables, charts, and bar graphs.

Results: The study revealed that there is a significant positive correlation between family socioeconomic status and deviant behavior, with students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds exhibiting greater tendencies toward deviant behaviours compared to those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, the influence of other factors like peer dynamics, school environment, and individual traits on deviant behaviour was identified.

Conclusion: In conclusion, this study underscores the pivotal contribution of family socioeconomic status to deviant behaviour among secondary school students.

Recommendation: The study recommends that interventions addressing deviant behaviour should consider addressing socioeconomic status. The study's distinctiveness lies in its emphasis on Kenyan secondary school students and its quantitative investigation of the link between family socioeconomic status and deviant behaviour. These findings provide valuable insights for shaping interventions targeting deviant behaviour not just in Kenya, but also in other developing nations.

Keywords: Family, socioeconomic, deviant behaviour, students, Murang'a East Sub County

INTRODUCTION

Children are profoundly influenced by the environment in which they are raised, with their family's socioeconomic status, interactions, and child-rearing practices playing pivotal roles. This can have a



profound impact on various nurturing dimensions such as emotional and verbal sensitivity, ultimately shaping the child's behavior (Sarsour et al., 2019).

Deviant behavior, characterized by a deviation from social norms or legal standards, manifests in various forms within secondary schools. Acts such as truancy, bullying, and drug abuse among students are prevalent, with some even being drawn into criminal activities, underscoring the urgency of addressing this issue (Diche, 2016). Maintaining positive behavior in schools is crucial for academic success, and failure to address deviant behavior can have far-reaching implications for the learning environment (Angel, 2016).

The escalation of deviant behavior among adolescents is not confined to a specific region. In the United States, an increase in antisocial activities, including physical assaults on teachers and student bullying, has become a growing concern (Parks, 2018). Similarly, in Nigeria, youth engagement in armed robbery, cultism, and drug abuse poses a threat to the learning process, often stemming from factors like poverty, peer pressure, and family instability (Muhammed et al., 2010). However, these studies have yet to propose effective solutions to tackle the issue.

In Kenya, secondary schools have also grappled with a surge in deviant behavior, marked by strikes, substance abuse, bullying, and truancy. Recent incidents of unrest within Kenyan secondary schools have pointed to a concerning rise in juvenile delinquency, demanding immediate attention and effective intervention (Ministry of Education, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

While extensive research has emphasized the link between socioeconomic status and deviant behavior among students, the persistence of deviant behavior among secondary school students remains a pressing concern (Oguntayo et al., 2020). Reports from educators further corroborate this trend, with a notable increase in incidents of student indiscipline in recent years (Aute et al., 2020). Statistical data reflects a concerning rise in the prevalence of deviant behaviors among students, as evidenced by an escalation in the number of school-related unrest incidents. The Ministry of Education reported that 107 schools experienced unrest in 2018, a stark increase from 123 occurrences in 2016, suggesting a growing trend of deviant behavior within the educational system (MOE, 2019).

In light of these developments, secondary schools have become increasingly unsafe for learners, despite the efforts of the government to create a secure learning environment (Angel, 2016). Instances of student riots pose significant risks not only to the students themselves but also to the safety of their peers and teachers, potentially leading to loss of lives and further compromising the educational institution's capacity to foster positive values.

The consequences of such widespread indiscipline among youth are far-reaching, contributing to the erosion of moral values and an alarming increase in juvenile delinquency (Agboola & Salawu, 2011). Various forms of deviant behavior, including absenteeism, substance abuse, and conflicts, not only disrupt the learning process but also undermine the fundamental objectives of education, posing a significant threat to the overall educational experience of students.

Despite existing research highlighting the association between socioeconomic status and deviant behavior, a notable gap persists in the development of comprehensive strategies to effectively tackle this pervasive issue (Bonjar, 2017; Kepper, 2019). Further investigation is warranted to explore additional underlying causes of deviant behavior, underscoring the critical need for a more holistic and targeted approach to effectively address the growing problem of deviant behavior among secondary school students.



Literature Review

The socioeconomic status of a family, influenced by household income, parental employment, and societal values, plays a critical role in shaping a child's educational prospects and future. Limited financial resources within lower socioeconomic households often hinder a child's access to essential educational resources, creating potential barriers to academic success (Eshiet, 2012).

Within the family context, the role of socioeconomic status is complex, as it can either positively contribute to a child's socialization or become a factor leading to delinquent behavior. The financial stability of the family significantly impacts a child's development and can act as a catalyst for delinquency, particularly in the face of poverty, inadequate living conditions, unemployment, and limited education within the family (Bonjar, 2017). Previous studies (Theobald et al., 2015; Qauyum et al., 2013; Onyango et al., 2012; Wairimu, 2013) have consistently linked delinquent behavior among young people to backgrounds characterized by low socioeconomic status.

Contrary to common perceptions, the involvement of juveniles from affluent households in delinquent activities often goes unnoticed by legal authorities. Nye's (2018) research findings suggest that high-income juvenile delinquents rarely face legal consequences, highlighting the disparities in the treatment of delinquency based on socioeconomic status. Additionally, delinquent behavior among upper-class children is often shielded from public scrutiny, as affluent parents tend to safeguard their family's reputation and status by concealing their children's wrongdoings (Onyejiaku, 2016).

The laissez-faire attitude of well-to-do parents toward their children further exacerbates the issue of delinquency among upper-class children. With abundant financial resources at their disposal, these children often lack adequate parental guidance or supervision, leading to a sense of entitlement and freedom that can potentially steer them towards delinquent activities (Onyejiaku, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

Albert Bandura's behavioral theory, the cornerstone of this study, emphasizes the role of social learning in shaping individual behavior (Bandura, 1978). It posits that people adjust their actions based on the responses they receive from their environment, with positive reinforcement encouraging desirable behavior and negative consequences deterring undesirable actions. Bandura's theory, rooted in the idea of behaviorism, asserts that criminal behavior is acquired in response to life's circumstances, highlighting the significant impact of environmental influences on an individual's conduct.

Of particular relevance to this research is Bandura's social learning theory, a crucial subset of the broader behavioral theory, which holds that individuals are not inherently predisposed to engage in violent behavior (Bandura, 1977). Instead, it suggests that behaviors such as violence and aggression are acquired through the process of observing and imitating the behavior of others. This theory underscores the critical role of the environment, especially influential models, in shaping the behavior of individuals, thereby linking it closely to the study's exploration of the relationship between family socioeconomic status and deviant behavior among secondary school students.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The research was carried out in Murang'a East Sub- County, focusing on a total of 33 secondary schools, involving 33 Principals, 33 Guidance and Counselling Coordinators, and 9,484 students. Employing a quantitative approach, data collection was accomplished through the distribution of self-administered questionnaires. Specifically, 15 Principals, 15 Guidance and Counselling Coordinators, and 390 students



were randomly selected from 15 secondary schools for data collection purposes. The collected data were subjected to analysis using descriptive statistics, t-tests, and multiple regression analysis conducted in SPSS 25. The findings were subsequently presented through the utilization of tables, charts, and bar graphs. Ethical considerations were upheld throughout the study, with necessary permissions obtained from the university and relevant authorities, i.e., Murang'a University of Technology, secondary schools and NACOSTI.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The objective of the study was to establish the impact of family socioeconomic status on deviant behavior among secondary school students in Murang'a East Sub County. The students were asked to give responses about their family socioeconomic status as well as responding on whether it influenced them to engage in deviant behavior.

Parental Income

The respondents were asked to indicate the type of occupation of their parents or guardians. The results were as follows:

Table 1: Parental	occupation
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Occupation	Fat	her	Mother		
	Ν	%	N	%	
Salaried employment	132	33.8	89	22.8	
Self employed	185	47.4	173	44.4	
Casual worker	58	14.9	57	14.6	
Unemployed	15	3.8	71	18.2	
Total	390	100	390	100	

The responses indicated that 3.8% of the participants had their father and 18.2% had their mother respectively unemployed. This means that such parents struggled to make ends meet. Most of the parents were self-employed meaning their source of income was business and farming. This information was critical as it informed the ability of the family to meet the needs of the students. The results further indicated that 33.8% of the respondents had their fathers in salaried employment and 22.8% of their mothers in salaried employment. This implies that those whose parents have a continuous flow of income can comfortably provide for their students, can give them pocket money, and can afford to acquire items that the students may need.

A principal had the following to say:

"...some students drop out of school because of school fees... their parents cannot afford it because they do not have a source of income and a few who have it is not stable... if we send such students home for fees it's like we give them a license to loiter in towns, take drugs because of the peers that might influence them and in the worst-case scenario join gangs..." (Principal 001/7, 2023)

These findings are in line with studies done by Rachel, C., Roman, N. V., & Donga, G. T. (2022) that children depend on their environment, especially their parents, to provide for their needs, encouragement, and support.

The students were asked whether they had ever been sent home for school fees. This was intended to

measure the level at which the parents were able to meet and sustain the students' needs while at school. The table below illustrates the results:

Table 2:	Sent home	for school fees
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		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	yes	287	73.6	73.6	73.6
Valid	no	103	26.4	26.4	100.0
	Total	390	100.0	100.0	

The results showed that 73.6% of the students had been sent home hence their parents could not afford their school fees while 26.4% had not been sent home for fees. The results revealed that 73.6% of the students have had their fees cleared on time. This shows that the parents were able to meet the needs of their children while in school.

The study also sought to find out whether their parents' income contributed to their behavior. The respondents presented varied responses with the majority suggesting that they behave the way they do either because their parents are unable to provide them with their basic needs. This resonates with the strain theory of criminality which purports that people would seek alternative means that are usually illegitimate to meet their needs. To measure whether poverty influenced their decision to engage in deviance, the respondents were asked whether they have ever done or thought of engaging in any deviant behavior due to lack of money. The results are displayed in the table below.

Table 3: Effect of Parental Income

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	yes	123	31.5	31.5	31.5
Valid	no	267	68.5	68.5	100.0
	Total	390	100.0	100.0	

68.5% of the students responded that they have never engaged in deviance because of lack of money while 31.5% have engaged in deviance. This is a clear indication that wants and material needs can be a trigger to engaging in deviance due to strain.

A guidance and counseling coordinator had the following to say when asked whether family socioeconomic status had an influence on deviance.

"... The students have been taught to not covet other people's property. If they don't have it, we tell them to work hard in school so that they can afford it in the future. Only a few of the students will be found stealing due to lack of fees...girls in urban areas sometimes are even more vulnerable to sponsors although the temptation to engage in deviant behavior especially for boys is high compared to the girls.," (Teacher 005/06, 2023)

This concurs with the findings of Saladino, V., et al, (2020) who found that adolescents who live in a low-SES context are more likely to be involved in risky conduct, such as becoming substance users.

Parental Involvement

The respondents were asked why students from affluent/rich families engage in deviant behavior. The researcher operated on the assumption that parents build a culture in their homes depending on their

involvement and thus shape the environment that the children learn from. The results are as follows:

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	seeking parental/teachers' attention	80	20.5	20.5	20.5
	access to resources	143	36.7	36.7	57.2
Valid	academic pressure	32	8.2	8.2	65.4
	parental expectations	35	9.0	9.0	74.4
	peer pressure	100	25.6	25.6	100.0
	Total	390	100.0	100.0	

Table 4: Students from rich families and deviance

The responses in Table 4 indicate that 36.7% of the respondents alluded to access to resources, 25.6% said it's peer pressure, 20.5% indicated seeking parental/teacher's attention, 9.0% alluded to parental expectations while 8.2% alluded to academic pressure.

The teachers when asked to comment on the same, views were on access to resources which parents are too busy to monitor how it is utilized. Some responses pointed out that parents gave their children a lot of pocket money and some try to compensate for being absent in parenting. A principal said the following;

'... Students from rich families form the majority of the students who engage in drugs and substance abuse. They have money that they don't know how to spend it since all their basic needs are catered for by their parents... sometimes they even get experimental and use drugs to the point that they can be at home and their parents don't even notice that their children use drugs...' (Principal 002/01, 2023)

The guidance and counseling coordinator said the following:

"... a student confided in me that he intentionally engaged in planning for a strike in school so that he could be sent home and the parent could later incur the cost of destruction of school property because they are busy working and never giving him the attention, he needs... they are busy looking for money and so I will spend it..." (Teacher 007/09, 2023)

The sentiments here point out that students from high socioeconomic status engage in deviant behavior with different motivations. These findings concur with the work of Saladino, V., et al, (2020) who found that higher levels of SES were associated with higher levels of Deviance Propensity. He further suggested this to be an area of future research. This present study found that some parents do not pay attention to information about their children's behavior, especially in the school setting. Since parental knowledge of a child's behavior may be considered one of the main resources for parents to avoid having a child that engages in deviant behavior (Criss et al. 2015), their lack of knowledge of the child's behavior promotes the deviant behavior, specifically his or her misbehavior at school. The level of involvement is in two levels: physical and emotional involvement. This study unveiled that parents who are affluent sometimes lack emotional involvement with their children and so such children engage in deviant behavior without their knowledge. In other scenarios, the children would engage in deviant behavior so as to attract the attention of their parents to their emotional needs.

Respondents were asked why students from humble backgrounds engage in deviant behavior; the results are as follows:



		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Coping with stress	49	12.6	12.6	12.6
	Peer influence	100	25.6	25.6	38.2
Valid	Limited parental involvement	76	19.5	19.5	57.7
	Socioeconomic Challenges	165	42.3	42.3	100.0
	Total	390	100.0	100.0	

Table 5: Students from humble families and deviance	e
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The results connote that 42.3% of the respondents attribute the engagement in deviance by students from humble backgrounds to socioeconomic challenges, while 25.6% to peer influence. 19.5% attribute it to limited parental involvement while 12.6% attribute it to a mechanism of coping with stress.

The teacher's response was as follows:

'... some students from humble backgrounds find themselves engaging in deviant behavior such as absenteeism and so we try to understand them... some tell us that they went to look for casual work so that they can get money... though peer pressure also plays a part in deviance because these students want to belong to a certain squad either in school or at home' (Teacher 008/12, 2023)

The findings concur with the work by Hoeben & Weerman, (2016) which suggests that adolescents who have more friends endorsing antisocial behaviors are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior than those with non-deviant friends.

The respondents were asked about the influence of family background on deviance. The results were as follows:

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	very large extent	120	30.8	30.8	30.8
	large extent	209	53.6	53.6	84.4
Valid	small extent	61	15.6	15.6	100.0
	Total	390	100.0	100.0	

Table 6: family background and deviance

A principal had the following to say:

"...family background has a key role to play in the student's behavior. The family background will influence the type of values a student is instilled as well as the parenting styles adopted while raising the students and even the schools their children will attend... it determines the environment a student will interact with..." (Principal 010/12, 2023)

The family environment strongly influences the behavior and well-being of people within that family, according to the socio-ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 1994). This concurs with the behaviorism theory that purports learning occurs in the circles of social bonds and family is such a unit where people would learn deviant behavior just like any other behavior.

Moreover, 87.7% of the respondents responded that the way they were raised by their parents helped them remain disciplined in school while 12.3% were of the contrary opinion. The findings imply that the family background is very critical to the environment that a student is exposed to and that influences their behavior response. Parents act as role models to their children as well as assuming the disciplinary role. The behavior



of the parents guides their children's behavior, beliefs, and attitudes both in the present and in the future. Parents can either be positive or negative role models to their children. Carlson, A. (2012) states that If a parent acts in a negative way, the child is more likely to follow their parent's negative attitude. They are also more likely to generalize this attitude to the rest of society. This shows that students acquire behavior through modeling.

These findings concur with Dufur, M.J., et al (2015) who found that many of the factors associated with delinquency that are drawn from social bonding and social learning theory are easily identifiable as forms of social capital reflecting time parents spend monitoring, communicating, teaching, and bonding with their children. Parental bonding, attachment, support, monitoring, and discipline are associated with decreased incidents of deviant behavior and, on the other hand, the absence of these factors is found to be associated with increased incidents of deviant behavior (Stone et al. 2012; Tharp and Noonan 2012; Lac and Crano 2009; Lam et al. 2014; Mair et al. 2015).

Family Livelihood

The students were asked to indicate the type of neighborhood that they live in. The assumption that the researcher had is that family livelihood would greatly influence the form of neighborhood they would consider due to their economic status. The table below shows the distribution.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Urban Area		46.4	46.4	46.4
Valid	Rural Area	209	53.6	53.6	100.0
	Total	390	100.0	100.0	

Table 7: family neighborhood and deviance

The results show that 53.6% of the students live in the rural area while 46.4% live in urban areas. The respondents were asked to give their responses on their perception of the influence of family socioeconomic status on deviant behavior as per the provided Likert scale. The results are shown in the table below:

Table 8: Family Socioeconomic Status and Deviant Behavior

Statements on Family socioeconomic status and deviant behavior	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	σ	Decision
Students engage in deviant behavior because their parents are busy to monitor their behavior	130 (33.3)	125 (32.1)	18 (4.6)	47 (12.1)	70 (17.9)	3.5077	1.49676	High perception
Lack of parental guidance promotes deviant behavior in their children	168 (43.1)	102 (26.2)	17 (4.4)	41 (10.5)	62 (15.9)	3.7000	1.45962	High perception
Students engage in deviant behavior to meet their needs if their parents cannot afford	118 (30.3)	114 (29.2)	12 (3.1)	94 (24.1)	52 (13.3)	3.3897	1.49713	High perception



Students engage in crime if their parents are not involved in their studies or have given them somuch freedom	145 (37.2)		42 (10.8)	54 (13.8)	3.6897	1.41735	High perception
Students refrain from deviant behavior because their parents taught them to be obedient	59 (15.1)	67 (17.2)	112 (28.7)	100 (25.6)	2.6359	1.38695	Low perception

Note: N = 390, SA = strongly agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, Decision = Weighted average = 3.3846

Based on the results, the majority of the respondents insinuated that students engage in deviant behavior because their parents are busy to monitor their behavior. They also purported that lack of parental guidance promotes deviant behavior among the children. This was corroborated by the responses given by the teachers that parents are not playing the active role of modeling good behavior to their children. The respondents perceived that students engage in deviant behavior to meet their needs if their parents cannot afford it. This was remarked to be an alternative means of meeting their needs to avoid stressing their parents. Similarly, the majority of the respondents opined that students engage in crime if their parents are not involved in their studies or have given them too much freedom. On the other hand, the majority of the respondents had a low perception of students refraining from deviant behavior because their parents taught them to be obedient.

This study found that Parental occupation and parental level of income greatly influenced the behavior of their children. This dictated the backgrounds and environment in which the students were raised. The study found out that students from affluent families engaged in deviant behavior mainly because they have access to resources and peer pressure while those from humble backgrounds engage in deviant behaviors due to socioeconomic challenges and peer influence. Peer influence is the common factor in the two categories. This agrees with the behavioral theory which highlights peer influence as a contributor to deviance. Parental involvement with their children was also found to be a factor that was influenced by the economic status of the family. This was found to affect the level of interaction between parents and their children. The students whose behavior was not monitored or whose parents failed to model good behavior were found to engage in deviant behavior.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated the crucial role of family socioeconomic status in shaping deviant behavior among secondary school students. The findings underscore the need for a comprehensive understanding of the influence of socioeconomic factors on student conduct. Addressing these socioeconomic dynamics is imperative for effectively mitigating deviant behavior and fostering a conducive learning environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Interventions aimed at addressing deviant behavior among secondary school students should prioritize a holistic approach that acknowledges the impact of family socioeconomic status. By tailoring strategies to account for these socioeconomic influences, educators and policymakers can better address the underlying factors contributing to deviant behavior. This approach can help create a more nurturing educational environment that promotes positive student conduct and overall well-being. Moreover, this research highlights the relevance of incorporating socioeconomic considerations in interventions targeting deviant behavior, not only in the context of Kenyan secondary schools but also in similar educational



settings globally.

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