

The Scars of Childhood: Adverse Childhood Experiences and Youth Crime: A Correlational Study

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ABSTRACT

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) have been widely recognized as significant risk factors influencing behavioral and psychosocial outcomes among adolescents, including delinquent tendencies. This study examined the relationship between adverse childhood experiences and youth crime among Grade 10 students at Dumalinao National High School. Utilizing a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design, data were gathered through a structured survey instrument measuring three primary ACE indicators, abuse, neglect, and family dysfunction, and manifestations of youth delinquent behavior. Descriptive statistics and Kendall's tau-b correlation analysis were employed to determine the strength and significance of the relationship between the variables.

Findings revealed a weak yet statistically significant positive correlation between adverse childhood experiences and youth crime ($\tau = .134$, $p = .026$). This indicates that while ACEs exert a measurable influence on delinquent tendencies among adolescents, the magnitude of the relationship is relatively low. Nonetheless, the results support the alternative hypothesis and affirm that exposure to adverse childhood conditions contributes to increased risk of youth involvement in delinquent acts.

The findings underscore the importance of strengthening early intervention initiatives, enhancing family support mechanisms, and implementing schoolbased prevention programs to mitigate the long-term impact of adverse experiences on adolescent behavior. The study contributes to the growing body of criminological literature by emphasizing the preventive role of educational institutions and community stakeholders in addressing risk factors associated with youth crime.

Keywords: adverse childhood experiences, abuse, neglect, family dysfunction, youth crime, adolescent delinquency

INTRODUCTION

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) have emerged as a significant concern in criminology and developmental psychology due to their profound and long-term impact on youth behavior and social functioning. ACEs—including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse; neglect; and various forms of household dysfunction—disrupt normal developmental processes and impair emotional regulation, impulse control, and cognitive decision-making (Felitti et al., 1998; Hughes et al., 2017; Baglivio & Epps, 2016).

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that children exposed to multiple adversities are at increased risk of engaging in antisocial behavior, substance abuse, aggression, and delinquent activities during adolescence (Fox et al., 2015; Kerig & Becker, 2018; Wolff et al., 2018).

Within criminological theory, early trauma is closely associated with the development of maladaptive coping mechanisms, weakened social bonds, and heightened susceptibility to peer influence, all of which contribute to youth offending.

Globally, the prevalence of adverse childhood experiences underscores the urgency of examining their longterm consequences.

The World Health Organization (2020) reported that approximately 58% of children worldwide have experienced at least one ACE, while 17% have encountered four or more categories of adversity. Extensive meta-analyses reveal that cumulative exposure to ACEs significantly increases the likelihood of violent behavior, criminal justice involvement, and risky lifestyle patterns in adolescence and adulthood (Hughes et al., 2017; Bellis et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2020).

A landmark study by Vincent J. Felitti et al. (1998) first established the graded relationship between the number of adverse experiences and negative behavioral outcomes, laying the foundation for trauma-informed approaches in both public health and criminal justice systems.

In the Philippine context, childhood adversity remains a pressing social issue. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Council for the Welfare of Children (2016) National Baseline Study on Violence against Children revealed that 8 out of 10 Filipino children experienced some form of violence before reaching 18 years of age.

Local research further indicates that Filipino youth exposed to abuse, neglect, and family dysfunction are more likely to exhibit behavioral problems, engage in substance use, and commit minor offenses (Gonzales et al., 2021; David & Roman, 2020; Perez & Cabrera, 2022).

These findings suggest that socio-environmental stressors within the family and community context significantly shape adolescent behavioral outcomes and may contribute to rising concerns regarding youth delinquency.

Despite growing recognition of ACEs as a predictor of delinquent behavior, empirical findings on the strength and nature of this relationship remain varied.

Some studies report strong associations between cumulative ACE exposure and violent or chronic offending (Baglivio & Epps, 2016; Bellis et al., 2019), while others suggest that protective factors such as positive school attachment, parental support, and community engagement may buffer the criminogenic effects of early trauma (Miller et al., 2018; Duke et al., 2021).

Understanding the extent to which adverse childhood experiences correlate with youth crime is essential for developing evidence-based prevention strategies and trauma-informed interventions within educational and community settings.

Given these gaps, this study examined the relationship between adverse childhood experiences—specifically abuse, neglect, and family dysfunction—and youth crime among Grade 10 students. By determining whether ACEs significantly correlate with delinquent tendencies, the research seeks to contribute to criminological literature and inform preventive policies, school-based intervention programs, and community rehabilitation initiatives aimed at reducing youth involvement in crime.

Objectives

1. Determine the socio-demographic profile of the respondents in terms of Age, Sex and Section.
2. Assess the level of trauma exposure among the respondents in relation to adverse childhood experiences.
3. Determine the level of youth crime committed by the respondents.
4. Examine whether a statistically significant relationship exists between adverse childhood experiences and youth crime among the respondents.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research approach utilizing a descriptive–correlational research design to examine the relationship between adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and youth crime among Grade 10 students at Dumalinao National High School.

Quantitative research enables the objective measurement of behavioral patterns, exposure to trauma, and the statistical association between variables through numerical data analysis, making it appropriate for examining psychosocial risk factors and delinquent behavior (Creswell & Creswell, 2021; Field, 2020; Bhandari, 2023).

The descriptive component of the study was used to determine the socio-demographic profile of the respondents, the level of trauma exposure, and the level of youth crime, while the correlational component examined whether a statistically significant relationship existed between adverse childhood experiences and youth delinquency (Baglivio & Epps, 2016; Hughes et al., 2017; Fox et al., 2015). This research design is widely used in criminology and developmental studies to analyze risk factors associated with antisocial behavior and juvenile offending (Kerig & Becker, 2018; Wolff et al., 2018; Bellis et al., 2019).

The study was conducted at Dumalinao National High School, located in the Municipality of Dumalinao, Province of Zamboanga del Sur. A total of 143 respondents participated in the study, consisting of 133 Grade 10 students and 10 teachers for the School Year 2025–2026. The study utilized complete enumeration sampling, wherein all members of the identified population were included in the data collection process.

This sampling technique ensured comprehensive representation, eliminated sampling error, and enhanced the accuracy and validity of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2021; Etikan et al., 2021; Campbell et al., 2020). Complete enumeration is particularly appropriate when the population size is manageable and when the objective is to obtain a full profile of the observed group.

Data were collected using a structured, researcher-made self-administered questionnaire designed to measure adverse childhood experiences and youth crime indicators. The instrument consisted of three major sections: (1) socio-demographic profile (age, sex, and section), (2) adverse childhood experiences indicators (abuse, neglect, and family dysfunction), and (3) youth crime or delinquent behavior indicators.

Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, a scale widely used in social science and criminological research to measure attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral tendencies reliably (Field, 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2021; Jackson et al., 2021). Before data collection, the instrument underwent expert validation and pilot testing to ensure clarity, reliability, and alignment with the study objectives.

Data were gathered with proper authorization from the school administration and in accordance with ethical research standards. Informed consent was obtained, and respondents were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation. Statistical analysis included frequency distribution, percentage, weighted mean, and Kendall's tau-b correlation coefficient using SPSS software to determine the strength and significance of the relationship between adverse childhood experiences and youth crime.

Kendall's tau-b is an appropriate statistical method for analyzing ordinal data and examining associations between variables in criminological and behavioral research (Field, 2020; Bhandari, 2023; Lum et al., 2020). Through these procedures, the study ensured methodological rigor and statistical reliability in determining whether adverse childhood experiences significantly correlate with youth delinquency.

Youth crime indicators were primarily assessed through teacher observational reports using structured behavioral checklists. Teachers evaluated observable delinquent behaviors based on their direct interactions and classroom observations of students. While observer-based assessment is appropriate for measuring visible behavioral patterns, it may be influenced by subjective interpretation and may not capture unreported or concealed delinquent behaviors. This limitation is acknowledged and should be considered when interpreting the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis, interpretation, and discussion of the data collected to examine the level of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and youth crime among Grade 10 students of Dumalinao National High School, and to determine whether a statistically significant relationship exists between these variables.

The results are organized according to the objectives of the study, beginning with the socio-demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex, and section.

This is followed by the assessment of the level of trauma exposure based on indicators of abuse, neglect, and family dysfunction, and the evaluation of the level of youth crime or delinquent tendencies among the respondents.

Finally, the section examines the statistical relationship between adverse childhood experiences and youth crime using Kendall’s tau-b correlation analysis.

The presentation and interpretation of the findings are supported by relevant criminological and developmental literature to provide both theoretical and empirical context. Statistical analysis plays a crucial role in identifying behavioral patterns, risk factors, and significant associations between childhood trauma and delinquent behavior (Field, 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2021; Hughes et al., 2017).

Understanding these relationships contributes to the broader discourse on trauma-informed criminology, juvenile delinquency prevention, and early intervention strategies, which are essential components in reducing youth offending and promoting rehabilitation-oriented approaches within educational and community settings (Baglivio & Epps, 2016; Kerig & Becker, 2018; Bellis et al., 2019).

Table 1. Demographic Profile

Socio – demographic profile in term of age, sex and section N=133

Sample Characteristics	Category	Frequency	% Share
Age Range	13–14	15	11%
	15–16	89	67%
	17–18	29	22%
Sex	Female	78	59%
	Male	55	41%
Section	Sapphire	26	19%
	Diamond	26	19%
	Amethyst	26	19%
	Emerald	27	21%
	Jade	28	22%

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex, and section. The data show that the majority of the respondents were between 15–16 years old, comprising 67% of the total population, followed by those aged 14–15 and 16–17, who represented the remaining percentage of the sample. In terms of sex distribution, females constituted 59% of the respondents, while males accounted for 41%.

With respect to section classification, Jade had the highest number of respondents with 28 students (22%), whereas Sapphire, Diamond, and Amethyst recorded the lowest frequency, with 26 students each (19%). These findings indicate that the respondents were predominantly within the typical age range for Grade 10 learners, which generally falls between 15 and 16 years old.

This age bracket represents mid-adolescence, a developmental stage often characterized by heightened emotional sensitivity, identity formation, peer influence, and increased risk-taking behaviors (Steinberg, 2017; Kerig & Becker, 2018; Hughes et al., 2017).

The predominance of female respondents may also influence the overall interpretation of trauma exposure and delinquent tendencies, as existing research suggests that males and females may differ in how they experience, internalize, and respond to adverse childhood experiences (Baglivio & Epps, 2016; Wolff et al., 2018).

Moreover, section distribution demonstrates relatively balanced representation across academic groups, ensuring that the findings reflect diverse classroom environments within the Grade 10 population. Socio-demographic characteristics such as age, sex, and educational grouping are important contextual variables in criminological research, as they shape adolescents’ exposure to risk factors, coping mechanisms, and behavioral outcomes.

The predominance of midadolescent respondents suggests that the findings provide relevant insights into a critical developmental period when vulnerability to trauma and susceptibility to delinquent behavior may intersect, thereby offering a meaningful foundation for understanding the relationship between adverse childhood experiences and youth crime.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Table 2 Abuse

No.	Statements	Mean	AE
1	I was hit, kicked, or otherwise physically harmed by an adult in my life.	3.23	M
2	I experienced physical punishment that left me feeling scared or hurt.	3.20	M
3	I was restrained or physically forced to do things against my will in a way that felt painful or humiliating.	2.65	M
4	I was threatened with physical harm as a way to control my behavior.	2.68	M
5	I was physically hurt as a form of discipline even when I hadn’t done anything wrong.	3.22	M
6	I was repeatedly belittled or made to feel worthless by someone who was supposed to care for me.	3.39	M
7	I was frequently made to feel like I was never good enough, no matter what I did.	3.20	M
8	I was emotionally manipulated or controlled through guilt, shame, or fear.	3.17	M
9	I was made to feel that my feelings or needs did not matter or were unimportant.	2.92	M
10	I was frequently humiliated or insulted in front of others by someone in my life.	3.40	M
—	Weighted Mean	3.11	M

Note: 4.21-5.00 - Very High (VH); 3.41-4.20 – High (H); 2.61- 3.40 – Moderate (M); 1.81-2.60 – Low (L); 1.00-1.80 – Very Low (VL).

Table 2 presents the level of abuse experienced by the respondents, with an overall weighted mean of 3.11, interpreted as Moderate, indicating that respondents experienced certain forms of abusive behavior at a noticeable level. The highest weighted mean was recorded for the statement, “I was frequently humiliated or insulted in front of others by someone in my life,” (WM = 3.40), while the lowest mean was observed for the statement, “I was restrained or physically forced to do things against my will in a way that felt painful or humiliating,” (WM = 2.65). Although physical restraint obtained the lowest mean, it still fell within the moderate

range, suggesting that both emotional and physical forms of abuse were present, but humiliation and verbal insults were more commonly experienced among the respondents. These findings indicate that emotional or verbal abuse appears more prevalent than overt physical coercion, reflecting patterns identified in existing literature that psychological maltreatment is often more widespread yet less visible than physical abuse (Hughes et al., 2017; Kerig & Becker, 2018). Supporting this interpretation, a 2025 study published in *BMJ Open* found that childhood verbal abuse—including ridicule and humiliation—was strongly associated with negative mental health outcomes, even showing higher risk percentages than physical abuse. This suggests that non-physical forms of abuse may significantly affect adolescents’ emotional regulation and behavioral development. The moderate level of abuse exposure observed in this study highlights the importance of implementing traumainformed school programs and early intervention strategies to mitigate potential risks associated with youth delinquency.

Table 3 Neglect

No.	Statements	Mean	AE
1	I frequently went entire days without having enough food.	2.60	L
2	I was left alone or unsupervised for long periods in unsafe situations.	2.69	M
3	My basic physical needs (hygiene, shelter, or sleep) were frequently unmet.	2.52	L
4	I was not taken to a doctor or dentist when I needed medical or dental care.	2.75	M
5	I lived in consistently unsafe, dirty, or unhealthy conditions.	2.55	L
6	I rarely experienced affection, comfort, or emotional support.	3.23	M
7	I did not have comfort or reassurance when I felt upset, scared, or in need.	3.20	M
8	My feelings were frequently dismissed or ignored when I expressed them.	3.25	M
9	My emotional needs often went unrecognized or unmet.	2.80	M
10	I lacked a sense of emotional connection or bond.	3.08	M
—	Weighted Mean	2.87	M

Note: 4.21-5.00 - Very High (VH); 3.41-4.20 – High (H); 2.61- 3.40 – Moderate (M); 1.81-2.60 – Low (L); 1.001.80 – Very Low (VL).

Table 3 shows that the overall weighted mean for Neglect was 2.87, interpreted as Moderate, indicating that respondents experienced neglect to a noticeable degree. Statement number 8, “My feelings were frequently dismissed or ignored when I expressed them,” had the highest weighted mean of 3.25, suggesting that emotional neglect was the most prevalent form.

In contrast, statement number 3, “My basic physical needs (hygiene, shelter, or sleep) were frequently unmet,” obtained the lowest weighted mean of 2.52, interpreted as Low, indicating that physical neglect was less commonly experienced.

These findings are supported by Kolar et al. (2024), who found that emotional neglect was one of the most influential forms of childhood maltreatment, significantly predicting lower life satisfaction even when other mental health symptoms were considered.

This underscores the substantial impact of emotional dismissal on overall well-being and development.

Table 4 Family Dysfunction

No.	Statements	Mean	AE
1	I lived in a home where rules were unclear or always changing.	2.50	L
2	I often saw or heard fights and arguments in my home.	3.14	M
3	I had to do things that felt more like a parent’s job than a kid’s.	2.90	M
4	I did not feel a sense of stability or routine in my home.	2.92	M
5	I found it hard to talk openly with my family because it felt tense or uncomfortable.	3.17	M
6	I saw family problems being ignored instead of solved.	3.02	M
7	I was told not to talk about what happened in my family.	2.95	M
8	I saw family members act in unhealthy ways like a child taking on a parent’s role.	2.80	M
9	I was not included or considered when decisions were made.	2.84	M
10	I often felt nervous or uneasy in my own home.	2.87	M
—	Weighted Mean	2.91	M

Note: 4.21-5.00 - Very High (VH); 3.41-4.20 – High (H); 2.61- 3.40 – Moderate (M); 1.81-2.60 – Low (L); 1.001.80 – Very Low (VL).

Table 4 shows that the overall weighted mean for family dysfunction was 2.91, interpreted as Moderate, indicating that respondents experienced dysfunction to a noticeable extent. Statement number 5, “I found it hard to talk openly with my family because it felt tense or uncomfortable,” had the highest mean of 3.17, highlighting difficulty in open communication as the most common issue. In contrast, statement number 1, “I lived in a home where rules were unclear or always changing,” had the lowest mean of 2.50 and was interpreted as Low, suggesting that inconsistent rules were less frequently experienced.

These findings are supported by Huang et al. (2023), who found that poor family communication was significantly linked to higher levels of family violence, anxiety, and depression among adolescents. This underscores the critical role of open and healthy communication in preventing family dysfunction and promoting positive mental health outcomes.

Youth Crime

Table 5 Property Offense

No.	Statements	Mean	AE
1	I have observed the student taking items belonging to others without permission (e.g., stealing money, stationery, electronic devices).	2.23	L
2	I have observed the student possessing items that do not belong to them and cannot account for their origin (e.g., unexplained possession of new items).	2.21	L
3	I have observed the student attempting to conceal items (e.g., hiding items in pockets, bags).	2.17	L
4	I have observed the student exhibiting a pattern of taking small items repeatedly (e.g., repeatedly taking pens, erasers).	2.23	L
5	I have observed the student engaging in behavior that suggests planning or premeditation in taking items (e.g., bringing a bag to school specifically for stealing).	2.27	L

6	I have observed the student intentionally damaging school property (e.g., breaking desks, writing on walls).	2.15	L
7	I have observed the student intentionally damaging the property of others (e.g., defacing books, breaking another student's belongings).	2.29	L
8	I have observed the student being careless with other people's belongings, resulting in damage (e.g., throwing items, not handling with care).	2.62	M
9	I have observed the student showing a lack of respect for property in general (e.g., littering, not cleaning up after themselves).	2.72	M
10	I have observed the student engaging in vandalism (e.g., graffiti, marking desks, damaging school equipment).	2.59	L
—	Weighted Mean	2.35	L

Note: 4.21-5.00 - Very High (VH); 3.41-4.20 – High (H); 2.61- 3.40 – Moderate (M); 1.81-2.60 – Low (L); 1.001.80 – Very Low (VL).

The table shows that the overall weighted mean for Property Offense was 2.35, interpreted as Low, indicating that property-related misconduct was not highly prevalent. Statement number 9, “I have observed the student showing a lack of respect for property in general (e.g., littering, not cleaning up after themselves),” had the highest weighted mean of 2.72, suggesting that minor but frequent acts of carelessness were more common.

In contrast, statement number 6, “I have observed the student intentionally damaging school property (e.g., breaking desks, writing on walls),” had the lowest weighted mean of 2.15, indicating that deliberate vandalism was less frequently observed.

These findings are consistent with Puzzanchera and Hockenberry (2023), who reported that minor property offenses are more prevalent among youth than severe acts of destruction. This suggests that everyday disregard for property may serve as a common indicator of delinquent behavior.

Table 6 Offense against Persons

No.	Statements	Mean	AE
1	I have observed the student physically assaulting another student (e.g., hitting, kicking, pushing).	2.27	L
2	I have observed the student verbally assaulting another student (e.g., using threats, insults, name-calling).	2.56	L
3	I have observed the student harassing another student (e.g., persistent teasing, following, unwanted attention).	2.41	L
4	I have observed the student bullying another student (e.g., intimidation, social exclusion, cyberbullying).	3.04	M
5	I have observed the student threatening physical harm to another student.	2.74	M
6	I have observed the student engaging in intimidation tactics towards other students (e.g., staring, gestures).	2.68	M
7	I have observed the student spreading rumors or gossip about other students.	3.33	M

8	I have observed the student excluding other students from social activities intentionally.	2.68	M
9	I have observed the student making inappropriate physical contact with other students.	3.08	M
10	I have observed the student engaging in cyberbullying (e.g., online harassment, spreading false information).	2.77	M
—	Weighted Mean	2.79	M

Adjectival Equivalence (AE) of the Mean: 4.21-5.00 - Very High (VH); 3.41-4.20 – High (H); 2.61- 3.40 – Moderate (M); 1.81-2.60 – Low (L); 1.00-1.80 – Very Low (VL).

Table 6 shows that the overall weighted mean for Offense against Person was 2.79, interpreted as Moderate, indicating that interpersonal offenses were observed to a considerable extent. Statement number 7, “I have observed the student spreading rumors or gossip about other students,” had the highest weighted mean of 3.33, suggesting that relational aggression was the most common behavior. In contrast, statement number 1, “I have observed the student physically assaulting another student (e.g., hitting, kicking, pushing),” had the lowest weighted mean of 2.27, interpreted as Low, indicating that physical aggression was less frequent.

These findings support the study of Barlett et al. (2021), which found that relational aggression is more prevalent than direct physical violence in school settings. This suggests that indirect forms of aggression are more common indicators of student misconduct.

Table 7 Offense Against Public Order

No.	Statements	Mean	AE
1	I have observed the student disturbing the peace in the classroom (e.g., excessive noise, disruptive behavior).	2.56	L
2	I have observed the student disrupting the learning environment for other students (e.g., constant talking, distracting others).	2.72	M
3	I have observed the student engaging in disorderly conduct (e.g., fighting, shouting, arguing).	2.73	M
4	I have observed the student using abusive or offensive language towards others.	2.77	M
5	I have observed the student engaging in inappropriate behavior in public areas of the school.	2.65	M
6	I have observed the student ignoring requests to quiet down or behave appropriately.	2.74	M
7	I have observed the student deliberately causing a disturbance to disrupt class activities.	2.50	L
8	I have observed the student refusing to comply with school rules and regulations.	2.63	M
9	I have observed the student engaging in behavior that creates a hostile environment for others.	2.52	L
10	I have observed the student showing a lack of respect for authority figures.	2.34	L
—	Weighted Mean	2.62	M

Note: 4.21-5.00 - Very High (VH); 3.41-4.20 – High (H); 2.61- 3.40 – Moderate (M); 1.81-2.60 – Low (L); 1.00-1.80 – Very Low (VL).

Table 7 The table presents the findings on Offense against Public Order, with an overall weighted mean of 2.62, interpreted as Moderate, indicating that public order violations were observed to a noticeable extent within the school setting. Statement number 4, “I have observed the student using abusive or offensive language towards others,” obtained the highest weighted mean of 2.77, suggesting that verbal misconduct was the most prevalent form of disruption. In contrast, statement number 10, “I have observed the student showing a lack of respect for authority figures,” recorded the lowest weighted mean of 2.34, interpreted as Low, indicating that direct defiance toward authority was less frequently observed. These results highlight that verbal aggression, rather than overt resistance to authority, was the more common manifestation of public order offenses. Supporting this interpretation, Maguin and Loeber (2020) noted that verbal aggression and disruptive behaviors are among the most frequent public order offenses in school environments. Their findings emphasize that behaviors such as offensive language, shouting, and disorderly conduct significantly affect classroom dynamics and peer relationships, even if they are less severe than other delinquent acts. This aligns with the present study, where abusive language emerged as the most common indicator of public order offenses.

Adverse Childhood Experiences and Youth Crime

Table 8 Adverse Childhood Experiences and Youth Crime		
Variables		Perception on law enforcement credibility
Abuse	Correlation coefficient	.064
	P value	.291
Neglect	Correlation coefficient	.268
	P value	.000
Family Dysfunction	Correlation coefficient	.131
	P value	.032

Table 8 indicates that abuse had a very weak and statistically non-significant relationship with the dependent variable ($r = 0.064$, $p = 0.291$), suggesting that it did not meaningfully influence the outcome in this study. In contrast, neglect showed a moderate and statistically significant relationship ($r = 0.268$, $p = 0.000$), indicating that it played a more substantial role in shaping the dependent variable. Family dysfunction demonstrated a weak but significant correlation ($r = 0.131$, $p = 0.032$), implying that although its influence was limited, it still contributed to the outcome. These findings highlight that among the three indicators, neglect emerged as the most influential factor. The results suggest that not all adverse experiences exert equal impact on the dependent variable. While abuse is often assumed to have a strong direct effect, the present findings indicate otherwise, emphasizing the need to consider other contributing factors.

The significant relationships of neglect and family dysfunction underscore the importance of examining environmental and relational conditions, as even moderate or weak correlations can meaningfully shape behavioral or developmental outcomes when combined with other variables.

The non-significant relationship between abuse and youth crime in this study may reflect contextual and protective factors present within the school environment. It is possible that supportive school relationships, peer networks, and adaptive coping mechanisms mitigated the behavioral impact of abuse among the respondents. Additionally, reliance on observer-based behavioral assessments may not fully capture internalized behavioral responses associated with abuse, such as emotional distress or withdrawal, which do not always manifest as observable delinquent behavior.

This finding highlights the importance of examining mediating and moderating variables that may buffer the criminogenic effects of adverse childhood experiences.

Table 9

Summary on Independent and Dependent Variable			
Variable		Youth Crime	
Adverse Childhood Experiences	Childhood	Correlation coefficient	.136
		P value	.026

Table 9 shows that the correlation between adverse childhood experiences and youth crime was weak but statistically significant ($r = 0.134$, $p = 0.026$), indicating a slight yet reliable association between the variables. Although the strength of the relationship was minimal, the significance value below 0.05 confirms that adverse childhood experiences were meaningfully related to youth crime. This result led to the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis and the rejection of the null hypothesis, suggesting that early adverse experiences contribute, albeit modestly, to delinquent behavior.

This finding is consistent with John Bowlby’s Attachment Theory, which posits that early caregiver relationships influence emotional regulation and later behavioral outcomes. Even weak but significant associations may reflect the long-term effects of insecure attachment patterns formed through inconsistent or inadequate caregiving. Supporting this perspective, Schimmenti and Bifulco (2015) found that insecure attachment was significantly associated with maladaptive behaviors and increased vulnerability to negative developmental outcomes. These findings emphasize that while the correlation is not strong, early attachment experiences remain an important factor in understanding pathways to youth crime.

Although the results revealed a statistically significant relationship between adverse childhood experiences and youth crime, the strength of the correlation was weak ($r = .134$), indicating that ACEs explain only a limited portion of delinquent behavior among the respondents. This finding suggests that youth crime is influenced by multiple interacting factors beyond early adverse experiences, including peer influence, school attachment, parental supervision, and individual coping mechanisms. Additionally, the measurement of youth crime relied primarily on observer-based assessments, as indicated by the phrasing of the questionnaire items (“I have observed the student...”), which suggests that teachers served as the primary behavioral evaluators. While teacher observations provide valuable behavioral insight, this approach may introduce observer bias and may not fully capture unobserved or concealed delinquent behaviors. Future research should incorporate multiple sources of behavioral data, including student self-reports and school disciplinary records, to improve measurement validity and provide a more comprehensive assessment of youth crime.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and youth crime among Grade 10 students. The findings revealed a statistically significant but weak relationship between the variables ($r = 0.193$, $p = .002$), indicating that while ACEs contribute to youth crime, they are not the primary determining factor. The rejection of the null hypothesis confirms that adverse childhood experiences have a measurable influence on delinquent behavior; however, the relatively low correlation suggests that other social, environmental, and individual factors also play substantial roles in shaping youth crime. These results imply that early negative experiences are important risk factors, but they operate within a broader network of influences affecting adolescent behavior.

The findings are consistent with the study of Kurpiel, Connell, and Font (2024), which reported that child maltreatment, particularly neglect and family dysfunction, is associated with increased risk of youth offending. These results are further supported by Robert Agnew’s General Strain Theory, which posits that exposure to adverse experiences generates emotional strain that may lead adolescents to engage in delinquency as a coping mechanism. Empirical studies by Moon and Morash (2020), as well as Mersky et al. (2017), further demonstrate that unresolved trauma and strain increase the likelihood of aggression and antisocial behavior. Overall, the present study underscores that while the relationship between ACEs and youth crime is not serious, early adverse

experiences remain meaningful contributors to developmental and behavioral outcomes and should be addressed through preventive and supportive interventions.

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. The sample was limited to a single school, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other educational settings and populations. Additionally, youth crime was measured primarily through teacher observations, which may introduce observer bias and limit the comprehensiveness of behavioral assessment. The weak correlation observed suggests that adverse childhood experiences represent only one of several factors influencing youth delinquency. Future research should include larger and more diverse samples, incorporate multiple behavioral data sources, and examine protective and mediating variables such as resilience, peer relationships, and school attachment to provide a more comprehensive understanding of youth crime development.

Ethical Consideration

Institutional ethical procedures were strictly observed throughout the conduct of this study. Before data collection, approval was secured from the appropriate research ethics committee to ensure that the study complied with established ethical standards. Permission was also obtained from the school authorities before administering the research instruments to the Grade 10 students.

Participants were fully informed about the purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of the study before their involvement. Informed consent was obtained, and respondents were assured that they had the right to decline participation or withdraw at any time without penalty. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by not requiring identifying information in the survey questionnaires, and all collected data were used solely for academic purposes. These measures ensured the protection of participants' rights, privacy, and overall wellbeing throughout the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The writers disclose no conflicts of interest.

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