

# Parental Perception of Child Behavior and Parental Abuse as Predictors of Delinquent Behavior among Adolescents in a Military Cantonment in Ibadan, Nigeria

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52006/main.v6i3.780>



ISSN 2672-3107 (Print) • ISSN 2704-288X (Online)  
Volume 6 Number 3 July-September 2023

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## Article history:

Submitted: 23 July 2023

Revised: 23 October 2023

Accepted: 30 December 2023

## Keywords:

Delinquent behavior  
Parental abuse  
Parental perception  
Child behavior  
Nigeria

**ABSTRACT.** The study investigated the parental perception of child behavior and parental abuse as predictors of delinquent behavior among adolescents in a Military Cantonment in Ibadan, Nigeria. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design using accidental sampling to sample 200 adolescents for data collection using validated scales. Data collected were analyzed using multiple regression and t-tests of independent samples. The results showed that parental perception of child behavior and parental abuse jointly predicted delinquent behavior among adolescents. Also, parental abuse independently predicted delinquent behavior while parental perception of child behavior did not. Finally, male adolescents scored higher on the delinquent behavior scale than female adolescents. The study concluded that parental perception and parental abuse are strong predictors of delinquent behavior among adolescents in a military cantonment. Therefore, it is recommended that parents should discourage negative behavior such as shouting and beating and encourage positive behavior such as positive relationships and encouragement to their children.

## 1.0. Introduction

Delinquent behavior refers to antisocial behaviors which are against societal norms, such as vandalism, drug and alcohol abuse, weapon carrying, rape, examination malpractices, school violence, bullying, cultism, truancy, school dropouts, stealing, running away from home/school, murder and abusing other children (Sanches et al., 2016; Marshall et al., 2022). These antisocial behaviors occur as adolescents negotiate their way from childhood to adulthood in a complex and confusing world (Kenchadze, 2015). There are two types of delinquent offenses engaged in among adolescents. The first is criminal offenses which are crimes committed by adolescents regardless of their age, such as stealing, arson, rape, drug offenses, murder, burglary, pickpocketing, and armed robbery (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023; Dardas et al., 2022). The second type is status offenses, which are crimes that are due to the age of the adolescents, such as running away from home, malingering, truancy, etc. (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023).

Globally, delinquent behavior among adolescents seems to remain a common phenomenon, as reported by the study by Ochoa and Roberts (2021). They

found that adolescents' delinquent behavior varied across the countries of the United States, Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico, Norway, Asian countries, and African countries with associated risk factors. Meanwhile, the involvement of adolescents in delinquent activities is on the increase in Nigeria. The Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (2023) reported that the last two decades witnessed crimes ranging from minor stealing to major robbery and killing perpetrated by adolescents. According to Urban Management Programme (2022), delinquent behavior has been attributed to be caused in Africa primarily to hunger, poverty, malnutrition, and unemployment, which are linked to the marginalization of adolescents in the already severely disadvantaged segments of society. Most of the urban poor live in slum and squatter settlements with overcrowded, unhealthy housing and a lack of basic services (Enzmann et al., 2018). All these would make the adolescents vulnerable to delinquent behaviors.

One factor considered in this study as a likely predictor of delinquent behavior among adolescents is the parental perception of child behavior which refers to the meaning parents give to the child's behaviors (Obungwah, 2022). How adolescents see how their parents relate to or treat other adolescents is considered parenting style. Four types of parenting styles have been described in the literature. The first

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is an authoritative parenting style, which has a high level of parental control (demandingness) and a high level of responsiveness. Demandingness refers to how parents control their children's behavior or demand their maturity. In contrast, responsiveness refers to the degree to which parents accept and are sensitive to their children's emotional and developmental needs (Baumrind, 1991). Studies have confirmed significant relationships between demandingness parenting styles and delinquent behaviors among adolescents (Hancock Hoskins, 2014; Sarwar, 2016). The second authoritarian (disciplinarian) parenting style is associated with a high level of parental control (demandingness) but a low level of responsiveness (Baumrind, 1991). Studies have shown some degree of consistency in associations of authoritarian parenting with delinquent behavior among adolescents (Hoeve et al., 2011; Moitra & Mukherjee, 2012). The third is a permissive (indulgent) parenting style with low demandingness but high responsiveness. It is a non-traditional and lenient parenting style that does not require mature behavior but allows considerable self-regulation and non-confrontation (Baumrind, 1991). Hancock Hoskins (2014) found that adolescents from permissive homes showed higher levels of delinquent behavior (misconduct). The fourth is the neglectful (uninvolved) parenting style, associated with low demandingness and responsiveness. It is characterized by being indifferent to their children's needs and uninvolved in their lives. Sarwar (2016) found that children reared with a neglectful parenting style are most disadvantaged in terms of competence and adjustment. Also, neglectful parenting is associated with higher levels of delinquent behavior (Baumrind, 1991).

Generally, studies have found that parental perception of child behavior in terms of parenting styles is associated with higher levels of delinquent behavior (Balogun & Chukwumezie, 2010). Also, Moitra and Mukherjee (2012) reported that parental perception of child behavior positively correlates with delinquent behavior among adolescents in an Indian sample. Finally, studies have found that authoritative parenting style results are less in delinquent behavior than authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful parenting styles (Hoeve et al., 2009; Sangawi et al., 2015).

The second factor considered in this study as a likely predictor of delinquent behavior among adolescents is parental abuse, which refers to the extent to which parents maltreat their children (Fakunmoju & Bammek, 2013). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2015) defines child abuse (also referred to as child neglect or child maltreatment) as all forms of physical or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, or neglectful action, or commercial

or other mistreatment causing definite or possible harm to the child's health or authority. Child abuse is any parental/caretaker act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm to the child's physical or emotional health and development (National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information [NCCANI], 2006). Child abuse includes physical abuse and neglect and emotional abuse and neglect. Parents who abuse their children tend to produce adolescents who grow up to engage in delinquent behavior. Farrington et al. (2017) found physical punishment and physical abuse as predictors of delinquent behavior among adolescents. Child abuse and neglect increase a child's risk not only for delinquency and adult crime but also for violence. For example, Widom (2014) found that young people who have experienced child abuse or neglect reported more delinquent violent offenses than normally treated children. This increase in risk affects abused and neglected girls as well as maltreated boys (Widom & Wilson, 2014; You & Lim, 2015). Braga et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis on the relationship between maltreatment and adolescents' antisocial behaviors found that physical maltreatment by parents is related to violent delinquent behavior among adolescents. Also, parental verbal abuse tends to wound children's psyches so deeply that the effects remain apparent in young adulthood (Laskoski et al., 2022). Further study by Vallejo Valdivieso et al. (2022) on the prevalence of child abuse and criminal behavior among 425 male adolescents in Ecuador confirmed a significant relationship between the abuse suffered during childhood and the criminal behavior reported. Finally, Chow's (2021) multivariate analysis of the delinquent and risky behavior among high school students in a Canadian prairie city revealed that a high number of students were engaged in various risky and delinquent behaviors, mostly substance abuse, unprotected sex, gambling, vandalism and stealing (theft).

The third factor considered in this study as likely to influence delinquent behavior among adolescents is gender. Studies have confirmed gender significantly influences delinquent behavior among adolescents. For example, studies have found more males than females to be arrested for crimes in general and more than four times higher for violent crimes in the United States (Kaiser & Pinquart, 2016; Puzanchera et al., 2012; Snyder & Sickmund, 2006; Yusuf et al., 2021). Similar results were obtained in the Netherlands, where the arrest rate among boys was found to be about four times that of girls for general offenses and more than four times that of girls for violent crimes (Steketee et al., 2021). Another study confirmed the prevalence of delinquent behavior among boys to be about twice that of girls (Junger-Tas et al., 2011). This difference was more pronounced for violent and

serious offenses. Similarly, Wong (2012) revealed that males scored significantly higher than females and were more prone to delinquent behavior. Finally, Mirajkar (2015) found that the common delinquent behavior committed by adolescents that belong to the age group of between 7 and 18 years in India and the impact of technology has helped to increase the frequency of delinquent behavior such as breaking of the laws, substance abuse, immoral conduct around school premises, committing theft and pickpocketing, watching pornography, among others. However, some studies have found delinquent behavior not to be independent of gender (e.g., Vir Tyagi, 2004). Also, Alnasir et al. (2016) and Bingham et al. (2006) equally arrived at the same conclusion in their studies that no significant difference exists between male and female students based on delinquent behavior.

## 2.0. Statement of the Problem

Millions of people worldwide, even in countries once considered relatively safe, seem to have a haunting fear of crime and violence in recent times. The once cherished sense of personal safety appears antiquated, and national security is being supplanted by deep anxiety and global terrorism. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2022) report about the state of children and crimes indicated increasing numbers of adolescents in Nigeria are getting involved in criminality. There is a growing concern over the increasing crime rate among adolescents that would lead them to engage in antisocial behavior. Tayo (2007) observed that the number of adolescent court cases has doubled over the past ten years in West Africa. The rise in destructive acts among adolescents seems to be evident in school dropout rates, teenage pregnancies, drug abuse, and a substantial increase in teenage crimes committed. In Nigeria today, the fear of crime permeates every aspect of human lives. This includes violent crimes such as aggravated robberies, rape, drug abuse, hijacking, and bank heists, which adolescents mainly commit. A careful analysis of the scenario by experts and scholars revealed that the trend is still increasing. What a dilemma!

Research on the parental perception of child behavior and parental abuse on delinquent behavior among adolescents in Nigeria is sketched. Hitherto, many crime research have been conducted on adult samples, with only a few studies focusing explicitly on adolescents. Therefore, the present study sought to investigate parental perception of child behavior and parental abuse as predictors of delinquent behavior in a sample of Nigerian adolescents.

The following specific objectives and hypotheses were stated and tested in this study: (1) Parental perception of child behavior and parental abuse would jointly and independently predict delinquent

behavior among adolescents in a Military Cantonment in the Ibadan metropolis and (2) Gender would significantly influence delinquent behavior among study participants. The relevance of the study is that it would provide fresh insights into psychosocial factors that influence delinquent behavior among adolescents in a regimental environment. The study would help to design programs to manage adolescents found to indulge in delinquent behaviors. Also, psychologists, social workers, teachers, and other stakeholders in the management of child's welfare and behavior would find the results of this study useful in helping to reduce the incidence of delinquent behaviors among adolescents early in their developmental phases.

## 3.0. Theoretical Framework

Three theoretical constructs that guide this study are briefly reviewed.

*Social Learning Theory.* This theory was propounded and revised over the years by Bandura et al. (2001) posit that individuals learn through exposure to attitudes and behaviors in a variety of settings. The social learning theory asserts that parental practices influence children through differential associations and learning rather than through direct or indirect controls. These definitions of acceptable responses are learned most frequently in intimate settings such as the family. Within this atmosphere, children learn to exhibit law-abiding or law-breaking behaviors based on the amount and intensity of the communication supporting either perception. Akers (2017) explains that the effect of early behaviors learned due to parenting may continue to be evidenced in the adolescent's choices concerning which types of peers to associate with. Again, we see that parenting is hypothesized to exert both direct and indirect effects on delinquency.

*General Strain Theory (GST).* This theory was refined by Agnew (2013). The theory posits that strains seen as unjust are associated with low social control, creating pressure for individuals to participate in criminal coping behaviors. The theory has been widely used to explain delinquent behavior among adolescents. For example, Iratzoqui (2018) and Watts and McNulty (2013) have used the GST to explain the effects of child abuse on delinquent behavior. Iratzoqui (2018) found that abused and neglected children were more likely to engage in substance use during adolescence than those who were not abused or neglected. Also, Watts and McNulty (2013) found that individuals who experienced physical or sexual abuse as children, particularly by their parents or caregivers, were more likely to engage in delinquent behavior than those children who were not physically or sexually abused by their parents or caregivers.

*Social Interactionist Theory.* This theory posits

that early deficiencies in parental practices, such as monitoring and disciplining children, would lead to 'family members directly training the child to perform antisocial behaviors' (Patterson et al., 1989). This type of social learning within the dysfunctional family increases the likelihood of childhood antisocial behaviors and, thus, hinders the development of positive social and academic skills. For example, Dishion and Patterson (2015) used this theory to investigate delinquent behavior among adolescents and found that poor familial monitoring and children's involvement with delinquent peers increases their delinquent behavior.

#### 4.0. Methodology

**Research Design.** The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. The researchers were interested in investigating the parental perception of child behavior and parental abuse as predictors of delinquent behavior among adolescents in a Military Cantonment in the Ibadan metropolis. The independent variables were parental perception of child behavior and parental abuse while delinquent behavior was the dependent variable.

**Setting and Population.** The study was conducted in a Military Cantonment in Ibadan, the capital of Oyo State, South-west Nigeria. All adolescents in a Military Cantonment in Ibadan, Oyo State, constituted the population of the study.

**Sample and Sampling Technique.** A purposive sampling technique was used to select Adekunle Fajuyi Military Cantonment. In contrast, an accidental sampling technique was used to sample 200 adolescents living with their parents in the Military Cantonment in the Ibadan metropolis. Descriptive analysis showed that 68 (34.0%) of the participants were males while 132 (66.0%) were females; 4 (2.0%) of the participants were between 12-14 years age bracket, 87 (43.5%) were between 15-17 years age bracket, while 69(34.5%) were between 18-20 years. In terms of ethnicity, 136 (68%) were Yoruba, 38 (19%) were Ibo, and 26 (13%) were Hausa. Based on their religious affiliations, 146 (73%) participants were Christians, 47 (23.5%) were Muslims, and 7 (3.5%) did not indicate their religious affiliations.

**Instrumentation.** Three instruments were used for data collection. The deviant behavior was assessed using the Deviant Behaviour Variety Scale developed by Sanches et al. (2016). The scale assessed children's delinquent behavior. It is a 19-item scale presented in a Yes (1) and No (0) format. Sample items include: 'During the last year, have you ever been to school or class after drinking alcohol?' and 'Have you used public transport without paying?' Higher scores indicate higher levels of deviant behavior and vice versa Sanches et al. (2016) reported a

scale Cronbach's alpha of 0.83. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha is 0.91. On the other hand, the parental perception of child behavior was determined using the Parental Perception Questionnaire (PPQ) developed by Pasquali et al. (2012) to assess what children perceive as the styles or approaches their parents dominantly use to care for them. It is a 20-item scale presented on a 5-point Likert's format ranging from 'Not Applicable' (0) to Totally Applicable (4). Sample items include: 'My parents always reassure me when I am afraid' and 'My parents always seek to cheer me up when I am sad'. Pasquali et al. (2012) reported the scale Cronbach's alpha of 0.70. The scale of Cronbach's alpha for the current study is 0.72. Finally, child maltreatment was measured using the Perception of Child Maltreatment Scale, a 34-item scale developed by Fakunmoju and Bammeke (2013). Each item is presented in a 4-point Likert format that ranges from Yes (4), Maybe or Sometimes (3), Don't know (2), No (1). The scale has five subscales: Emotional/Psychological Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Child Neglect, Child Labour, and Physical Abuse. Sample items are: 'Have you seen your parent belittling a child habitually?' and 'Showing preferential treatment by not loving the children equally?' Fakunmoju and Bammeke (2013) reported the scale Cronbach's alpha of 0.95 and for the subscales: Emotional/Psychological Abuse ( $\alpha=0.93$ ), Sexual Abuse ( $\alpha=0.91$ ), Child Neglect ( $\alpha=0.89$ ), Child Labour ( $\alpha=0.86$ ), and Physical Abuse ( $\alpha=0.84$ ). For the current study, the scale composite Cronbach's alpha was 0.85.

**Procedure.** The letter of introduction was collected from the Department of Psychology, University of Ibadan, as a means of identification for the researchers. Before the study, the researchers had written a letter that accompanied the research proposal and other relevant documents about the study and presented them to the Cantonment's authority for approval to conduct the study. Based on the approval obtained, potential participants were approached by the researchers in their respective houses, mosques, Churches, mini-markets, and recreational centers within the Military Cantonment. Potential participants who consented to participate in the study were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. They were told that participation in the study was voluntary, and they could decline to complete the questionnaires if they wanted to. The questionnaires were given to those who agreed to participate in the study. It took between 8 and 10 minutes to complete the questionnaires. A total of 209 questionnaires were administered, 205 were retrieved (i.e., a response rate of 98%), and four questionnaires were not properly filled and were discarded, leaving 200 questionnaires used for the analysis.

**Statistical Analysis.** Data collected were

analyzed using SPSS version 23. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data collected. Hypotheses one and two were tested using multiple regression analysis, while hypothesis three was tested using a t-test for independent samples. All hypotheses were accepted at  $p < .05$  level of significance.

**5.0. Results and Discussion**

Hypothesis one states that parental perception of child behavior and parental abuse will jointly predict delinquent behavior among adolescents in a Military Cantonment in the Ibadan metropolis. This was tested using standard multiple regression analysis, and the result is shown in Table 1. The result showed that parental perception of child behavior and parental abuse jointly predicted delinquent behavior among adolescents in a Military Cantonment [ $R^2=.035, F(2,192) = 3.61, p < .05$ ]. This means the two predictors accounted for 3.5 % of the variance in delinquent behavior among the adolescents in a Military Cantonment in the Ibadan metropolis.

Hypothesis two states that parental perception of child behavior and parental abuse will independently predict delinquent behavior among adolescents in a Military Cantonment in the Ibadan metropolis. This was tested using multiple regression analysis, and the result is presented in Table 2. The result revealed that parental abuse ( $\beta = .16, t = 2.27, p < .05$ ) independently predicted delinquent behavior among adolescents in a Military Cantonment in the Ibadan metropolis. However, parental perception of child behavior did not independently predict delinquent behavior among adolescents in a Military Cantonment in the Ibadan metropolis. Therefore, the hypothesis was partially supported.

Hypothesis three states that male adolescents will report significant differences in delinquent behavior than female adolescents in a Military Cantonment in the Ibadan metropolis. This was tested using a t-test of independent samples, and the result is presented in Table 3. The results indicated that gender had a significant influence on delinquent behavior among adolescents in a Military Cantonment in the Ibadan metropolis [ $t(198) = 2.39, p < .05$ ]. Further analysis revealed that male adolescents score higher ( $M = 7.39, SD = 4.73$ ) on delinquent behavior than

female adolescents ( $M = 5.59, SD = 5.23$ ). The results confirmed hypothesis three.

Insert Table 3

*Analysis.* This study examined parental perception of child behavior and parental abuse as predictors of delinquent behavior among adolescents in a Military Cantonment in Ibadan, Oyo State.

**Table 1**  
Multiple Regressions of Parental Perception of Child Behavior and Parental Abuse as Joint Predictors of Delinquent Behaviour among Adolescents

Predictor	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	p
Parental perception	.188	.035	3.16	<.05
Parental abuse				

Three hypotheses were generated and tested. The result of the hypothesis that parental perception of child behavior and parental abuse will jointly predict delinquent behaviors among adolescents in a Military Cantonment in the Ibadan metropolis was confirmed. This means that parental perception of child behavior of children's behavior and parental abuse interacted to predict delinquent behavior among adolescents in a Military Cantonment in the Ibadan metropolis.

**Table 2**  
Multiple Regression of Parental Perception of Child Behavior and Parental Abuse as Independent Predictors of Delinquent Behaviour among Adolescents

Predictors	$\beta$	t	p
Parental perception	-.06	-.030	>.05
Parental abuse	.16	2.27	<.05

This finding lent credence to the previous findings (Poduthase, 2012; Hovee et al., 2011; Sahinli, 2018) that parents' perception of their children's behavior and frequent abuse have direct and indirect effects on delinquent behaviors among their adolescent children in both regimental and nonregimental environments. This study supported Dardas et al.'s (2022) findings that a high percentage of youths engage in various types of delinquent behaviors, including substance

**Table 3**  
Difference in Gender and Delinquent Behaviour among Adolescents

Gender	N	M	SD	df	t	p
Male	68	7.39	4.73			
Female	132	5.59	5.23	198	2.39	<.05

consumption and physical offenses that include vandalism, burglary, theft, etc.

The hypothesis that states parental perception of child behavior and parental abuse will independently predict delinquent behavior among adolescents in a Military Cantonment in the Ibadan metropolis was confirmed. This means that the way parents perceive the behaviors of their adolescents and the types of

abusive parenting styles displayed by the parents have significant effects on the levels of delinquent behavior perpetuated by their adolescent children. This finding supported previous results (Okorodudu & Okorodudu, 2004; Shaffer, 2005; Rubin et al., 2003) that parental perception of child behavior and parental abuse are significant predictors of delinquent behavior among adolescents in their various study populations. Parenting styles in Nigeria are associated with poor supervision, erratic, harsh discipline, parental disharmony, rejection of the child, and low involvement in the child's activities.

The final hypothesis that male adolescents will report higher delinquent behavior than female adolescents was supported. Male adolescents score significantly higher on delinquent behavior scales than female adolescents. This finding is consistent with Kafetsios (2004), who found a significant difference between delinquent attitudes and behavior among male and female adolescents over time. However, this finding is in variation with other studies (Alnasir et al., 2016; Bingham et al., 2006; Vir Tyagi, 2004) results which found that delinquent behavior among adolescents was not influenced by individuals' gender. This suggests that there was no significant difference between male and female adolescents on delinquent behavior. Finally, Mirajkar (2015) confirmed that more males than females were involved in criminal activities among the study samples.

## 6.0. Conclusion

This study has confirmed that parental perception of child behavior and parental abuse are good predictors of delinquent behavior among the study participants. In addition, contrary to previous findings, there was a significant difference between male and female delinquent behavior among adolescents in a Military Cantonment in the Ibadan metropolis.

## 7.0. Limitations of the Findings

Some limitations in these findings need to be mentioned. First, one military cantonment and only 200 adolescents constituted the sample size which was not adequate. Thus, the findings cannot be generalized beyond the study population. Hence, future research should include more military cantonments and increase the sample size. Second, only two independent variables, parental perception of child behavior and parental abuse, were investigated in this study. Further studies should include self-esteem, personality traits, and social support to explore delinquent behavior among adolescents in both military cantonment and open society. Finally, the time required to obtain permission from the military authority to gather data was a limiting factor in this study. Further studies should approach the

military authority well in time to secure approval.

## 8.0. Practical Value of the Paper

The results revealed that parents' perception of their children's behaviors and their abusive behaviors to their children are significant predictors of delinquent behavior among their children in a military cantonment. What this means is that as parents abuse their children, their delinquent behavior increases in school, at home, and in society. This is socially undesirable behavior due to its negative effects on human relations and interpersonal relationships. It needs to be stated that delinquent behavior leads to crime, and this shapes many of the antisocial behaviors perpetuated by adolescents in the larger society. It is recommended that parents' abusive behaviors, such as shouting, depriving a child of food as a form of punishment, inflicting injury, or physical pain, blaming, withholding love and affection, and beating or abusing the child, should be discouraged by parents. Parents should be life coaches to their children through modeling, self-talk, counseling, and telling children stories and tales that would help them build a better way of living which discourages them from engaging in delinquent behaviors.

Finally, gender was found to have a significant influence on delinquent behavior among adolescents in Adekunle Fajuyi Military Cantonment. Male adolescents were found to score significantly higher on delinquent behavior compared to female adolescents. Therefore, the study recommends that parents should concentrate more and look for ways to manage their male adolescents compared to female adolescents since males are more prone to delinquent behavior than female adolescents. Also, programs should be organized for male children to manage what triggers them to engage in delinquent behavior.

## 9.0. Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest in this paper. Also, there was no financial assistance from any source. The study was self-sponsored by all the authors.

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