

DETERMINANTS OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AND COMMUNITY-BASED MITIGATION STRATEGIES: A CASE STUDY OF KALTUNGO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, GOMBE STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Juvenile delinquency represents a complex issue within the social context of developing nations, characterized by the violation of legal codes by individuals below the statutory age of majority. In Nigeria, particularly within the Gombe State region, the incidence of juvenile offenses—ranging from substance abuse and vandalism to theft—has followed a concerning upward trajectory, challenged by humans eroding traditional values and rapid modernization. This study investigates the determinants factors contributing to juvenile offenses in Kaltungo Local Government Area (LGA) and evaluates the efficacy of community-centric preventive mechanisms. Quantitative and qualitative data were harvested from a purposive cohort of 50 key stakeholders (n=50), including educators, law enforcement officers, social workers, and community leaders. The study utilized semi-structured instrumentation to ensure a depth of inquiry. Data were subjected to content analysis and descriptive statistical evaluation. Findings indicate a multi-causal framework for delinquency. Peer pressure emerged as the dominant predictor (98% consensus), followed closely by financial instability (90%) and family dysfunction (88%). The study also identified the unregulated proliferation of social media as a modern catalyst for deviant socialization. Crucially, the study reveals a consensus (96%) on the underutilized potential of school-based mentorship and community policing as preventive tools. The study affirms that delinquency in Kaltungo is largely a product of social learning and environmental stressors. It concludes that a synergistic approach involving community awareness programs, school-based behavioural counselling, and strengthened family support systems is essential for mitigating juvenile crime.

Keywords: Juvenile Delinquency, Community Prevention, Social Learning Theory, Kaltungo LGA, Youth Crime

Introduction

The phrase "juvenile delinquency" refers to criminal activities committed by non-major offenders, or those under the age of 18. Extensive study has been undertaken to examine the current state of juvenile delinquency. Since the dawn of human civilization, crime has been one of the most dominant societal problems, including crimes committed by children. Today, more than ever, the problem of juvenile delinquency is present in all societies, and Kaltungo LGA is no exception. The reasons behind the rise in crimes committed by delinquents can be attributed to the increase in child beggars; these children are often used for begging and collecting scrap, with the view that little has been done to ensure their safety and security. It is important for support systems to exist in the city, yet there is a lack of infrastructure, awareness, and human resources in the state (Vitulano, 2020).

Sarkar (2021) pointed out that there is a need for a proper roadmap in dealing with juvenile crimes, noting that the best solution is synergy and communication between welfare officers and the community. He also stated that the police have a significant role to play, and the primary concern in dealing with juveniles is not asking the questions "what" and "how," but "why," with special attention paid to their background, constraints, and circumstances.

Juvenile delinquency is a serious problem faced by almost all societies in the world. Children are a vulnerable group in the population that needs utmost care and protection. It is important to note that due to their vulnerability, there is a chance that these children might be ill-treated and directed into undesirable channels by their surroundings. It is, however, an undeniable fact that despite protection and care, children have from time to time indulged in deviant behaviour (Brown, 2018).

Children are the foundation stones of any nation, upon which the future stands. They are also the future leaders of the country and the creators of the nation's wealth. It is important to note that the concept of delinquency is complex and varies from one country to another; no single definition may suit all nations. It varies from place to place, as what is forbidden in one area may be allowed in another (Peterson, 2024).

Juvenile delinquency is becoming very prevalent today. A landmark in the criminal justice administration in Nigeria occurred when the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act of 2000 was passed. Before 2000, when either a girl or a boy committed an offense, they were called juvenile delinquents. However, after the commencement of the Act, a boy or a girl below the age of 18 years who commits an offense is considered a "juvenile in conflict with the law". The Government subsequently passed the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015, which provides for the trial of juveniles aged 16–18 years as adults if involved in heinous crimes (Baba, et al, 2017).

There is a trend of increasing juvenile crimes not only in Kaltungo LGA but also in Gombe State and globally. Kaltungo LGA is witnessing an increasing rate of juvenile crimes, which is a serious concern for the community. Solutions to end this problem need to be sought carefully.

Statement of the Problem

Kaltungo Local Government Area of Gombe State is undoubtedly facing several problems regarding juvenile delinquency. Despite being a developing community, it is lagging in controlling the rates of juvenile crimes. A statement given by a community security officer orally indicated that the rise of major and petty crimes in the community is attributed to influx, population growth, and an increase in the number of street children. According to the community security officer, between 2023 and 2025, petty crimes have increased by almost 30 percent annually in the community around the market area alone. From the statistical book of record of the community security outfit, the delinquent from the 15-19 mostly engaged in the following activities; theft, smoking, stealing, fighting, drunkenness etc.

There are various reasons that influence the deviant behaviour of adolescents, such as poverty, family relations, peer pressure, and illiteracy.

Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this research is to analyse the causes of juvenile delinquency in Kaltungo LGA and to propose actionable community-based prevention strategies. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- a. determine the extent to which socio-economic status, peer pressure, and family structure contribute to juvenile delinquency in the study area;
- b. evaluate the effectiveness of existing disciplinary measures used by parents and schools; and
- c. investigate the influence of social media and modern technology on the behavioural patterns of youths in Kaltungo.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does socio-economic status, peer pressure, and family structure contribute to juvenile delinquency in the study area?
2. How effectiveness does the existing disciplinary measures used by parents and schools?
3. What are the influences of social media and modern technology on the behavioural patterns of youths in Kaltungo?

Review of Related Literature

Meaning of Juvenile Delinquency

Juvenile delinquency, known as juvenile offending, or youth crime, who is participation in illegal behaviour by juveniles, most legal systems prescribe specific procedures for dealing with juveniles, such as juvenile detention centers, and courts. A juvenile delinquent is a person who is typically under the age of 18 and commits an act that otherwise would have been charged as a crime if they were an adult. Depending on the type and severity of the offence committed, persons under 18 can be charged and tried as adults. Moreover, we can also consider the juvenile delinquency as a blameworthy child, blameworthy minor, culpable youth, derelict adolescent, derelict inexperienced person, derelict junior, immature youngster, misbehaving teenager, miscreant, misguided teen, misguided young person, neglectful fledgling, offending immature person, violator underage, young wrongdoer (Eadie & Morley, 2021).

Juvenile delinquent

Juvenile delinquents are those offenders including boys and girls who are normally under 16 years of age (The Children Act,2000). Though some laws say juvenile delinquents are those teens who are under 18 years of age, both ages are serves as the same purpose.

Socio-economic status, peer pressure, and family structure contribute to juvenile delinquency in the study area

Parental socioeconomic status (SES) and peer groups significantly drive juvenile delinquency by creating strain, limiting resources, and fostering environments where delinquent behaviors are learned and reinforced, with low SES leading to stress, poor supervision, and fewer opportunities, while delinquent peers normalize and encourage crime through pressure and modeling, especially when youth lack positive family support or positive alternatives.

Factors of Parental socioeconomic status.

- i. Limited access to resources and opportunities can lead to feelings of frustration and marginalization (Farrington, 2020).

- ii. Neighborhoods with high poverty rates often have higher crime rates and increased exposure to violence (Sampson et al., 2019).
- iii. Low SES can also affect parental stress, leading to harsher parenting and decreased parental involvement (Conger et al., 2020).
- iv. Economic hardship can increase family conflict, which in turn contributes to delinquency (Gershoff, 2019).
- v. Poverty can limit access to quality education, further reducing opportunities (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2018).
- vi. Adolescents seek acceptance and belonging, making them vulnerable to peer influence (Warr, 2020).
- vii. Delinquent peers can normalize and reinforce problematic behaviors (Haynie, 2019).
- viii. Social media can amplify peer pressure, exposing youth to wider networks of influence (Patchin & Hinduja, 2021).
- ix. Peer pressure can lead to a desire for status, power, or protection (Anderson, 2019).
- x. Single parenting can lead to increased stress, decreased supervision, and economic hardship (Peterson, 2020).
- xi. Parental conflict and domestic violence can increase aggression and behavioral problems in youth (Gershoff, 2020).
- xii. Parenting styles (e.g., authoritarian, permissive) can also impact juvenile behavior (Hoeve et al., 2019).
- xiii. Family cohesion and parental involvement are key protective factors against delinquency (Farrington, 2019).

Effectiveness of the disciplinary measures used by parents and schools

- Harsh Punishment (e.g., corporal punishment): Often ineffective long-term, can increase aggression and delinquency (Gershoff, 2019).
- Positive Reinforcement: Encourages good behavior, reduces delinquency risk (Kazdin, 2020).
- Restorative Practices: Promotes empathy, accountability, and reduces recidivism (Zehr, 2019).
- Zero-Tolerance Policies: Often ineffective, can increase dropout rates (American Psychological Association, 2023).
- Restorative Approaches: More effective in reducing suspensions and improving behavior.

Influence of social media and modern technology on the behavioural patterns of youths

Social media and modern technology significantly influence youth behavior, with both positive and negative effects. Research suggests that excessive social media use is linked to increased anxiety, depression, and suicidal behaviors among youths (Chen et al., 2024; WHO, 2024).

Negative Impacts:

- Problematic social media use affects 11% of adolescents, with girls more likely to experience negative consequences (13% vs 9%).
- Social media platforms that emphasize physical appearance contribute to body image concerns, eating disorders, and low self-esteem (Suhag & Rauniyar, 2024; Mazzeo et al., 2024).
- Cyberbullying, online harassment, and social comparison can worsen mental health issues.

Positive Aspects:

Social media helps youths connect with others, explore identity, and access information (Boyd, 2019).

Some studies suggest moderate social media use (less than 2 hours/day) may promote wellbeing and social support (Sala et al., 2024).

Mitigation Strategies:

- Parents and guardians can use tools like Snapchat's Family Center to monitor usage and set limits.
- Governments and platforms are implementing regulations and features to promote online safety and digital wellbeing.
- Restorative Practices: Promotes empathy, accountability, and reduces recidivism (Zehr, 2019).

School Discipline:

Zero-Tolerance Policies: Often ineffective, can increase dropout rates (American Psychological Association, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory

This study adopts the Social Learning Theory developed by Ronald L. Akers (1998), an American criminologist who developed the theory with the American sociologist Robert L. Burgess. The original version of the theory was published as "A Differential Association-Reinforcement Theory of Criminal Behaviour" in 1966. Later, Akers modified the theory into its final form, known as Social Learning Theory (SLT), which is composed of four main components:

1. **Differential Association:** The process of learning values and behaviours from close peer groups and family.
2. **Definitions:** The moral attitudes one attaches to specific behaviours.
3. **Differential Reinforcement:** The balance of anticipated or actual rewards and punishments that follow a behaviour.
4. **Imitation:** Engaging in behaviour after observing it in others.

Akers and Burgess believed that behaviour, whether conforming or deviant, was a function of its consequences. The theory proposes that both criminal and conforming behaviours are acquired, maintained, and changed by the same process of interaction with others. The difference lies in the direction (conforming or deviant) or balance of social influences, such as reinforcement, values, attitudes, and imitation.

The theory contends that people pick up behaviours from their social environment and that the frequency, duration, priority, and intensity of their social interactions determine how likely people are to engage in those behaviours. It also highlights the role that reinforcement and punishment play in behaviour modification, positing that people are more likely to repeat behaviours for which they receive rewards and less likely to participate in behaviours that result in punishment.

This theoretical framework is reliable for the study's goal to identify the causes and prevention of juvenile delinquency in Kaltungo. It suggests that understanding the social interactions and models to which juveniles are exposed is crucial. This includes examining the influence of family members, peers, and other significant individuals in the social environment on the acquisition of delinquent behaviours. Ultimately, the Social Learning Theory of crime provides a framework for understanding the acquisition, maintenance, and modification of criminal behaviour through social interactions, reinforcement, and imitation.

Methodology

An exploratory, descriptive research design was employed. This approach is particularly suitable for examining social phenomena in specific localities where the scarcity of prior empirical data is evident. It allows for the uncovering of underlying patterns and

causal relationships that purely quantitative designs might miss. The study was conducted in Kaltungo, a pivotal LGA in Gombe State, serving as the cultural and political centre of Gombe South. Situated on a major highway, it is a busy transit hub, which brings economic activity but also the challenges of urbanization. The population comprises residents with direct professional or social engagement with youth, including educators, law enforcement, social workers, and community leaders. A total of 50 respondents were selected include juveniles, youth and adults. A Purposive Sampling technique was utilized. This non-probability method ensured that only individuals with specific knowledge and experience regarding juvenile behaviour were included. Random sampling would have risked selecting respondents with no insight into the phenomenon.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents

Category of Respondent	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Juveniles	10	20%
Teachers / Educators	15	30%
Community Leaders	11	22%
Security Personnel (Police/Vigilante)	9	18%
Social Workers / NGO Staff	5	10%
Total	50	100%

Source: Researchers' Construct, 2026

The above table shows that 10 of the responded (represent 20%) were juveniles, teachers/educators were 15 (30%), community leaders 11(22%), security personal (police/vigilante) are 9 represent (18%) while social while social workers/NGO staff 5 represent (10%). The table shows that teachers/educators make the highest number of the respondents in the research. Section B consisted of thematic inquiries into causes (Peer pressure, Poverty, Family) and prevention strategies.

Results

Causes of Juvenile Delinquency

Table 2: Perception of Etiological Factors of Juvenile Delinquency (N = 50)

Variable (Proposed Cause)	Agree (f)	Agree (%)	Disagree (f)	Disagree (%)
Peer Pressure Influence	49	98%	1	2%
Financial Instability Poverty	45	90%	5	10%
Broken Homes / Family Dysfunction	44	88%	6	12%
Social Media / Internet Influence	42	84%	8	16%
Lack of Religious/Moral Education	40	80%	10	20%

Source: Researchers' Construct, 2026

The above table shows that 49 represent (98%), indicated peer pressure influence is the main causes of juvenile delinquency in the area and 1 represent (2%) disagreed, while 45 represent (90%) opined that financial instability poverty is one of predisposing factor causing juvenile delinquency and 5 represent (10%) disagreed. Furthermore, 44 represent (88%) indicated that broken homes/family dysfunction is the main cause juvenile delinquency and 6 represent (12%) disagreed. 42 represent (84%) said that social media/internet influence is the main cause while and 8 represent (16%) disagreed with that. 42 represent (84%) respondents and 8 represent (16%) disagree to that and finally, 40 represent (80%) indicated that lack of religious/moral education in the study area with 10 represent (20%) disagreed.

Community Perspectives on Prevention

Respondents were asked to evaluate specific preventive measures. The consensus was overwhelmingly in favour of strict community and familial intervention.

Table 3: Community Consensus on Preventive Measures (N = 50)

Preventive Measure	Agree (f)	Agree (%)	Disagree (f)	Disagree (%)	Inference
Media Monitoring: Limiting unsupervised access to violent/inappropriate media.	49	98%	1	2%	Strong agreement that media consumption requires parental gatekeeping.
Peer Supervision: Parents monitoring their children's choice of friends.	45	90%	5	10%	Validates the need to manage differential associations.
Conflict Resolution: Avoiding exposure of children to parental conflict.	50	100%	0	0%	Universal agreement that domestic stability is crucial.
School Mentorship: Teachers acting as moral guardians/mentors.	46	92%	4	8%	Highlights the role of schools beyond academics.
Restricting Substance Access: Preventing youths from purchasing alcohol/drugs.	49	98%	1	2%	Strong support for supply-side control of substances.
Counseling & Support: Provision of psychological support.	50	100%	0	0%	Universal recognition of the need for mental health intervention.

Source: Researchers' Construct, 2026

The above table shows that 49 represent (98%), indicated that media monitoring: limiting unsupervised access to violent/inappropriate media can be the best community consensus on preventive measures towards juvenile delinquency in the area and 1 represent (2%) disagreed with a different opinion. Peer supervision: parents monitoring their children's choice of friends is the best measure opined by 45 represent (90%) of the respondent while 5 represent (10%) disagreed to that. Furthermore, 50 represent (100%) indicated that conflict resolution: avoiding exposure of children to parental conflict is the best measure. 42 represent (84%) said that social media/internet influence is the main cause while and 8 (16%) disagreed with that. School mentorship: teachers acting as moral guardians/mentors best the best, this is the response of some respondents with 46 represent (92%) while 4 represent (8%) respondent respond with a different opinion. Out of the 50 respondents 49 represent (98%) respond that restricting substance access: preventing youths from purchasing alcohol/drugs will be the best measure to put in place with few respondents with 1 represent (2%) disagreed. Finally, some responded with 50 represent (100%) suggested that, Counseling & Support: Provision of psychological support is the best measure to prevent juvenile delinquency in the study area.

Discussion of Findings

Juvenile delinquency prevention from Kaltungo LGA of Gombe state is the broad term for all efforts aimed at preventing youth from becoming involved in criminal, or other antisocial, activity. Because the development of delinquency in youth is influenced by numerous factors, prevention efforts need to be comprehensive in scope. Prevention services may include activities such as substance abuse education and treatment, family counselling, youth mentoring, parenting education, educational support, and youth sheltering. Increasing availability and use of planning services, including education and contraceptives help to reduce criminality, drunkenness, unintended pregnancy and unwanted births, which are risk factors for delinquency. It has been noted that often interventions may leave at-risk children worse off than if there had never been an intervention. This is due primarily to the fact that placing large groups of at risk children together only propagates delinquent or violent behaviour. "Bad" teens get together to talk about the "bad" things they've done, and it is received by their peers in a positive reinforcing light, promoting the behaviour among them. As mentioned before, peer groups, particularly an association with antisocial peer groups, is one of the biggest predictors of delinquency, and life-course- persistent delinquency. The most efficient interventions are those that not only separate at-risk teens from anti- social peers, and place them instead with pro-social ones, but also simultaneously improve their home environment by training parents with appropriate parenting styles.

Conclusion

Juvenile delinquency in Kaltungo LGA is not an isolated pathology but a symptom of a community in transition. The interplay of economic hardship, the breakdown of the extended family, and the invasive influence of unregulated digital media creates a "perfect storm" for youth deviance. However, the findings also offer hope. The high willingness of stakeholders to engage in preventive measures—specifically school mentorship and parental education—suggests that the community is ready to act. The solution does not lie in harsher police crackdowns or incarceration, which only serve to expose youths to more hardened criminal models. Instead, the solution lies in reshaping the social environment to ensure that conforming behaviours are reinforced and deviant models are minimized. We conclude that a child who is surrounded by positive role models, supported by a stable family, and engaged in constructive activities will be less likely to learn delinquent behaviours.

Recommendations

The following strategies are proposed based on the findings:

1. Community leaders and religious heads in Kaltungo must preach the return to communal responsibility. The philosophy that "it takes a village to raise a child" must move from a slogan to a practice.
2. Educational institutes should provide counselling sessions and awareness programs for students dealing with emotional instability or family issues. Curricular activities must include anti-bullying prevention programs and digital literacy education to help students critically evaluate the role of social media.
3. Local government interventions should focus on household economic upliftment schemes. Reducing financial stress on parents allows them more time for child supervision and positive modelling. Additionally, it is recommended that the local government should establish sports and vocational centres To counter negative peer pressure. Giving youths constructive avenues for engagement reduces the idle time available for differential association with delinquent peers.

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