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Secondary School Violence Among Adolescents: The Contributing Factors and Way Forward

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A B S T R A C T

The school, which should be a relatively safe place where students can learn and grow, is gradually becoming a place of violence and fear. This study examined the pattern of relationship between school climate, peer influence, parental socio-economic status, and school violence. This study employed a descriptive survey of correlational design, and a multistage sampling procedure was utilized. Adolescents (N = 286; 40.9% female, 59.1% male) aged 11 to 17 took part. Participants completed standardized instruments: (School Climate Scale α = 0.84; Peer Influence Scale α = 0.80; Parental Socio-economic Status Scale α = 0.88; and Violent Behavior rating Scale α = 0.91). The results showed that school climate (r =0.246, p<0.05); socio-economic status (r =0.459, p< 0.05), and peer influence (r =0.575, p<0.05) all had a significant relationship with school violence. Also, peer influence recorded the most significant relative contribution to school violence, followed by school climate and parental socio-economic status, respectively. The study concluded that preventing school violence requires comprehensive and all-encompassing approaches, as addressing the problem with a single factor is unlikely to be sufficient.

A R T I C L E   I N F O

1. INTRODUCTION

Violence in school has become a subject of increasing concern in recent years. Worldwide, 246 million children and adolescents each year are victims of different types of school violence and bullying (Garner, 2014). The school, which should be a relatively safe place where students can learn and grow, is becoming a place of violence and fear. It was reported in 2018 that globally, about 150 million students aged 13-15 faced peer violence at school (Pereznieto *et al.*, 2010). That year, about 60% of children aged 6–10 years reported physical and emotional violence from peers at school (Devries *et al.*, 2018). These statistics reveal that the school is no longer a safe place. School violence is of no benefit to anyone.

The effects of school violence on students can hamper the achievement of their educational goals or self-actualization. Also, it may lead to a lifetime of crime or anti-social behaviors. Above all, it may lead to truncating students' academic careers or death. Schools with cases of school violence may receive undue popularity. Also, their reputation will most likely be tarnished, and products of such schools may be stigmatized. Violence in schools disrupts academic programs when it leads to unplanned school closures. Parents and guardians lose their financial investments when schools close abruptly. More importantly, they may lose their children or wards to death due to school violence. The continuous closure of schools makes educational planning arduous on the government's path. The society receives its share of the pains of school violence. The society suffers from a lack of peace and stability and diminished productivity.

The situation of school violence in Africa is becoming worrisome. According to a report by UNESCO in 2019, within the Sub-Saharan African context, 47.7% of boys and 50.5% of girls are bullied at school. In Kenya, Poipoi *et al.* (2011) reported that between 63 % and 82 % of the students who were interviewed in 17 public secondary schools in Nairobi suffered from one form of violence or another. In 2008, over a million South African learners were subjected to some form of violence at school (Mouton *et al.*, 2013; Onyemah & Omoponle, 2022). In 2016, over 50% of Nigerian children suffered physical violence in schools (UNICEF).

UNICEF reported in 2019 that nearly 2 million are being robbed of education in West and Central Africa due to violence and insecurity in and around their schools. The losses of school violence are not in any way minimal. According to the World Bank's press release in 2021, globally, it was estimated that the cost of violence in and around schools in lifetime earnings is US$11 trillion. This high cost shows that school violence is a subject that requires more attention globally. A culture of school-based violence is undermining the environment and climate needed for effective teaching and learning worldwide (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013; Adewuyi, 2023). This suggests that rather than concentrating on efficient teaching and learning, educators spend most of their time trying to find solutions to issues related to school violence. There is no doubt that school violence has robbed the educational sector globally.

School violence can take various forms. It may include physical violence, sexual violence, or bullying. Bullying may be physical, psychological, or sexual. Cyberbullying is another form of bullying that occurs in schools. In Nigeria, cases of bullying and sexual molestation across secondary schools, especially in boarding houses, are becoming very rampant. In December 2020, there was the famous case of Don Davis, an 11-year student of Deeper Life High School, Uyo. It was said that the school administration starved him for bedwetting and that his seniors had physically and sexually harassed him.

In June 2021, there was another famous case of a boarding house student of Premier Academy, Lugbe, Abuja. The victim, Karen-Happuch Aondodoo Akpagher, a 14-year-old, was reported to have been sexually assaulted at school and later died of complications. There was

the case of Dowen College, Lagos, in December 2021. Sylvester Oromoni, a 12-year-old boarding house student of the school, was reported to have died after nursing multiple internal injuries. He reportedly sustained the injuries after being beaten by fellow students who bullied him in school. The young lad was said to have refused to succumb to pressures from some fellow students to join a cult group.

The consequences of school violence are outnumbered. UNESCO, in a global status report on school violence and bullying in 2017, identified the inevitable consequences of school violence. According to the report, physical violence can result in various physical harms, including fatal injuries. The risks of HIV, other STDs, and unwanted pregnancy are increased by sexual violence (Omoponle & Veronica, 2023).

Furthermore, early exposure to bullying and violence can have detrimental long-term effects on one's health. It was found that children and teenagers who are bullied are more likely than their non-bullied peers to struggle with relationships, feel depressed, lonely, or anxious, have low self-esteem, and consider or attempt suicide. Bullying and violence in schools also affect the mental and emotional well-being of those who engage in it, as well as those who witness it (Garner, 2014).

School climate is the quality and character of the school environment, including the physical, social, and psychological elements that make up the learning environment. It encompasses the attitudes, values, and norms of the school community, as well as the policies and procedures that guide the interactions between students, teachers, and staff. A positive school climate is characterized by respect, safety, engagement, and support for learning, whereas a hostile school climate is marked by conflict, violence, and disengagement (Elianny, 2021).

School Climate can further be described as a school's intramural characteristics that distinguish it from another. School climate includes several dimensions of a school, such as the physical setting, the school culture, the organizational climate, and the social climate (Fotinos, 2006). School climate sets an educational institution's norms, values, rules, and structures (Opesemowo, 2018; Forber-Pratt *et al.*, 2021). Generally, school climate is a multidimensional concept describing the prevailing atmosphere in an academic institution (Hirschfield, 2018).

Several studies have found a strong relationship between school climate and meaningful student outcomes, including academic achievement, behavior, and mental health (Wentzel, 2009; Jenkins & Nickerson, 2019). For example, research has shown that students who attend schools with positive climates are more likely to perform academically, be engaged in learning, and experience fewer behavioral problems (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2010). On the other hand, students who attend schools with unfavorable climates are more likely to experience school violence, bullying, and other forms of aggression (Omoponle & Veronica, 2023).

Many studies have indicated that a positive and safe school climate is critical to reducing school violence. In contrast, a negative or hostile school climate can contribute to its increase. School climate has been a common subject in studies on school violence. Research has proven that a hostile school climate is a significant risk factor for bullying (Thapa *et al.*, 2013). Similarly, research has demonstrated that a positive school climate is associated with reduced bullying reports (Afolashade *et al.*, 2023; Jimerson *et al.*, 2021). Through their findings, Lynch *et al.* (2016) concluded that when students feel safe both socially and physically in the school environment, they tend to adopt more appropriate behavior and avoid violence in school.

Peer influence refers to situations in which an individual influences or is influenced by one or more individuals of a similar age (Laursen & Veenstra, 2021). Adolescence is a time when peer influence on social behaviors becomes particularly noticeable (Lenhardt *et al.*, 2018).

Peer contagion, a process of mutual influence whereby peers gradually become more alike in terms of various attributes, is connected to the idea of peer influence during this period (Kanmodi *et al.*, 2020). Peer Influence has been the subject of much research, particularly in sociology and psychology. For example, research has found that peer influence can have a powerful impact on adolescent behavior and development. For instance, in a study by Leemis *et al.* (2019), the authors found that individuals tend to conform to the norms and expectations of their peer group, particularly in situations where they are uncertain or seeking approval. Similarly, a study by Brown *et al.* (2020) found that peers can have a significant impact on the development of risk-taking behaviors in adolescents, including substance use and school violence.

Peer influence can manifest in various forms, including direct pressure to engage in violence, indirect exposure to violence through observation, and imitation of violent behavior. Empirical studies have also shown that students who have friends who engage in violent behaviors are more likely to involve themselves in violent behaviors (Adewuyi *et al.*, 2020).

Most people define socio-economic status (SES) as a person's or a group's social class or standing. The socio-economic standing of an individual or group is established by a variety of social and economic factors, including income, the type and level of education, the type and prestige of the occupation, the place of residence, and, in certain cases, the individual's ethnic or religious background (Smokowski *et al.*, 2020; Awopeju *et al.*, 2017).

The term "socio-economic status" (SES) refers to an overall concept that includes both prestige- and resource-based measures of an individual's socio-economic standing, such as their rank or status. These indicators can be measured at various points in time and at different societal levels, such as the individual, household, and neighborhood (Mehari *et al.*, 2020). SES includes not only income but also level of education, stability in one's finances, and one's subjective assessments of one's social standing and class. A person's socio-economic status can include their opportunities and privileges within society, as well as aspects of their quality of life. SES also consistently and reliably predicts a wide range of outcomes for a person's lifetime, including their physical and mental health. As a result, SES is pertinent to behavioral and social science research, practice, advocacy, and education.

Also, being a victim has been reported to be associated with poor parental education (Jiang *et al.*, 2018; Wang *et al.*, 2016), low parental occupation, economic disadvantage (Carolan & Wasserman, 2015), and poverty (Glew et al., 2005). A meta-analysis by Tippett and Wolke (2014) claimed that bullying behavior was associated with a higher socioeconomic level of the family. Similarly, research results by Gkatsa *et al.* (2015) on adolescents describe how the behavior of bullies is significantly influenced by the family's financial difficulties and the father's unemployment. On the contrary, Bonal and González (2020) did not find a relationship between socioeconomic status and bullying among youths in Australia in their research.

The general purpose of this study is to examine school climate, peer influence, and parental socio-economic status, as correlates of school violence. Specifically, the following research questions guided the study:

(i)   What pattern of relationship exists between (school climate, peer influence, parental socio-economic status) and school violence?
(ii) What is the joint contribution of (school climate, peer influence, parental socio-economic status) to school violence?
(iii) What is the relative effect of (school climate, peer influence, parental socio-economic status) on school violence?

2. METHOD

This study employed a descriptive survey of correlational design type. The target population of this study consists of all in-school adolescents in Ilorin Metropolis (Ilorin-East, Ilorin-South, and Ilorin-West). The sample size of the study was 300 (286 students finally completed). The researcher adopted a multistage sampling procedure in selecting the respondents. Firstly, the researcher used a Purposive sampling technique to choose the secondary school location in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara state, Nigeria. Secondly, the researcher used a simple random method to select fifteen (5 each) out of the Fifty-six schools in the three Local Government Areas. For the third stage, a stratified sampling technique was used to determine twenty students from each of the fifteen selected secondary schools in Ilorin. The samples consist of both male and female students from the senior secondary school category.

A structured questionnaire with two major sections, A and B, was used for this investigation. Section A collected demographic information from the respondents, including gender, age, ethnicity, religion, and kind of school. The responses about other variables were gathered in Section B of the Questionnaire. Experts in teacher education, educational assessment, and Educational Psychology were supplied with the instrument and the study questions to confirm its validity.

Based on the suggestions and opinions of the experts, the final text was revised. Using the test-retest approach, the instrument's reliability was ascertained. To ascertain the instrument's reliability, students in the schools that weren't included in the study's sample received the instrument twice, separated by three weeks. Using the test-retest approach, the reliability index of the instruments was taken as follows: (School Climate Scale $\alpha = 0.84$; Peer Influence Scale $\alpha = 0.80$; Parental Socio-economic Status Scale $\alpha = 0.88$; and Violent Behavior Rating Scale $\alpha = 0.91$) which confirmed the suitability of the instrument for the study.

After obtaining the authorities' clearance from the sampled schools, the researchers obtained each participant's agreement and followed all ethical norms. The respondents were also assured of the confidentiality of the information collected, which helped avoid distortion of facts. The researchers and five research assistants collected the data for this study. Data collected regarding the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency count and percentage) for demographic data. PPMC and multiple regression statistical tools were used to answer the research, all at 0.05 significance level.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Research Question 1: What Pattern of Relationship Exists Between (School Climate, Peer Influence, Parental Socio-Economic Status) and School Violence?

Table 1 shows that there were positive significant relationships between the variables; school climate (r =0.246, p<0.05); socio-economic status (r =0.459, p<0.05), and peer influence (r =0.575, p< 0.05) all had a significant relationship with school violence. The result equally confirms that the independent variables used in this study are appropriate to predict the independent variable.

3.2 Research Question 2: What is the Joint Contribution of (School Climate, Peer Influence, and Parental Socio-Economic Status) to School Violence?

Table 2 shows the composite contribution of school climate, peer influence, and parental socio-economic status to school violence. The table shows the coefficient of multiple correlations (R = 0.532) and multiple regression adjusted ($R^2 = 0.523$). This implies that 53.2% of the variation in school violence was accounted for by the joint effect of the independent

variables when taken together. At the same time, the remaining may be due to other factors and residuals. The table also showed that the analysis of variance for the regression yielded F (55.572, p<0.05) significant at 0.05 level.

Table 1. Descriptive and correlation matrix showing the relationship between school climate, peer influence, parental socio-economic status, and school violence.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
School violence	286	30.95	5.74	1			
School climate	286	20.50	8.84	.246**	1		
Peer influence	286	33.47	6.23	.575**	.596**	1	
Parental socio-economic status	286	5.23	1.61	.459**	.446**	.661**	1

**Correlation Significant at 0.01 levels; *Correlation Significant at 0.05 levels

Table 2. Summary of multiple regression analysis on composite contribution of independent variables to school violence.

Analysis of variance				
	The sum of Square (SS)	DF	Mean Square	F
Regression	5242.437	3	873.739	55.572
Residual	4606.710	282	15.723	
Total	9849.147	285		

a) R = 0.730
b) R^2 = 0.532
c) Adjusted R^2 = 0.523
d) Standard error of estimate= 3.96517

3.3. Research Question 3: What is The Relative Effect of (School Climate, Peer Influence, and Parental Socio-Economic Status) on School Violence?

Table 3 reveals the relative contribution of each of the independent variables (school climate, peer influence, and parental socio-economic status) to the dependent variable (School Violence) among secondary school students in Ilorin; school climate (β = 0.439, p<0.05), peer influence (β = 1.246, p<0.05), and parental socio-economic (β = 0.507, p<0.05) had a significant relative contribution to school violence. However, peer influence recorded the most significant relative contribution to school violence among secondary school students in Ilorin, followed by social school climate, and parental socio-economic status respectively.

Table 3. Relative contribution of independent variables to school violence.

	Unstandardized coefficients	Standardized coefficients		t	p
Model	B	Standard error	Beta		
Constant	8.567	1.955		4.381	0.000
School climate	0.386	0.039	0.439	9.853	0.000
Peer influence	1.149	0.086	1.246	13.320	0.000
Parental socio-economic status	-0.507	0.239	-0.142	-2.123	0.035

3.4. Discussion of Findings

The result from the first research question shows that there is a significant relationship among the predictor variables in the study. There is a significant relationship between school climate, peer influence, parental socio-economic status, and school violence among secondary school students, as demonstrated by a growing body of research; for example,

school climate has a significant impact on students' experiences in school. School climate with high levels of deficient facilities can create a sense of fear and anxiety, leading to increased insecurity and violence in schools (Chen & Rosen, 2011). Furthermore, (Omoponle, 2023) found that parental social environments, such as those loaded with poverty and crime, were related to school violence.

These findings highlight the importance of considering school and home factors when examining the relationship between school climate and school violence. Also, peer influence has emerged as a major influence on students' attitudes and behaviors. Research has shown that peer influence can contribute to cyberbullying and the spread of violent ideology, leading to an increased risk of school violence (Laursen & Veenstra, 2021; Hildenbrand *et al.*, 2013). Studies have shown that positive peer influence can have a positive impact on student behaviors in school (Dorn & Fiore, 2013; Smith, 2017).

Peer influence can also play a major role in shaping students' attitudes and behaviors. Research has demonstrated that students who associate with peers who engage in violent behavior are more likely to do so themselves (Egan & Siever, 2014). Therefore, these factors all interact to create a complex landscape that affects secondary school students and their experiences with school violence. Understanding these relationships is crucial in developing effective strategies to address and prevent violence in schools.

Findings from research question two show that the independent variables (school climate, peer influence, and parental socio-economic status) are good predictors of school violence. There is evidence to suggest that the independent variables jointly contribute to the dependent variable of school violence among secondary school students. For instance, studies have shown that negative peer influence can increase the risk of school violence (Hornby & Nickerson, 2019). In turn, students from low socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to experience negative school behaviors, as well as limited access to resources, which can increase their risk of involvement in violent behavior (Brennan & Bossong, 2016). Moreover, peer influence has been shown to play a role in shaping students' attitudes and behaviors (Egan & Siever, 2014; Sylvester *et al.*, 2023).

From the last research question, peer influence recorded the most significant relative contribution to school violence, school climate, and Parental socio-economic status, respectively are good predictors and determiners of school violence among secondary school students. School violence among secondary school students in Ilorin is a complex issue that is influenced by a range of factors, including school climate, socioeconomic status, and peer influence. While all of these factors contribute to the incidence of school violence, research has indicated that peer influence has the most significant relative contribution. The school climate can play a critical role in shaping students' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Nickerson *et al.*, 2021).

For example, a positive school climate that promotes a sense of belonging, safety, and respect can help reduce the incidence of school violence (Adewuyi, 2021; Dorn & Fiore, 2013). Mihalic and Elliot (2004) found that students experiencing a negative school climate who had low grades, poor attendance, and a history of disciplinary problems were more likely to engage in violent behavior compared to students who did not have these risk factors. The socio-economic status of students has also been linked to school violence, with research indicating that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to experience violence in school.

4. CONCLUSION

This study offers innovative insights into the relationships between school climate, peer influence, parental socio-economic status, and school violence. According to the findings, there is a statistically significant relation between the predictor variables and the outcome variable (school violence) among students who, in particular, have not yet reached the age of legal responsibility. The findings highlight the importance of considering multiple factors in understanding and preventing school violence, as all the predictor variables were found to have a significant contribution to the outcome.

This highlights the need for comprehensive and holistic approaches to preventing school violence, as a single factor is unlikely to be sufficient to address the issue effectively. The findings also provide important insights into the complex relationships between the variables of this study, suggesting that the factors interact and influence one another in complex ways. For example, a positive school climate may help to counteract the negative effects of peer influence or socio-economic status. At the same time, high levels of social media usage may exacerbate the impact of peer influences. Understanding these complex relationships is critical for effectively addressing school violence in Ilorin and other similar contexts.

It is possible to create safe and supportive learning environments for all students, which can help to reduce the risk of school violence and promote positive academic outcomes; the following are recommendations:

(i) Schools should focus on making a good school climate by making sure all students have a safe and supportive place to learn. This can be done with good communication, programs to solve conflicts, and teacher training.

(ii) Schools should put in place programs and initiatives that help students do better in school. This can help lower the risk of violence at school and help students do well.

(iii) The government and schools should work together to make sure that all students have the same access to resources and educational opportunities and that there aren't any differences based on social class.

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6. AUTHORS' NOTE

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