

Family Structure and Truancy Behaviour of Secondary School Adolescents in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined family structure and truancy behaviour among secondary school adolescents in Uyo Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, with 400 senior secondary school students sampled from a population of 5,862 students using stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Family Structure and Truancy Behaviour Questionnaire (FSTBQ)," which was validated and tested for reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.81$). Data were analysed using mean, standard deviation, and t-test statistics at 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that parenting styles significantly influence truancy behaviour, with authoritative parenting associated with lower truancy while authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful styles correlate with higher truancy. Parental involvement showed a significant negative correlation with truancy, indicating that higher parental involvement is associated with reduced truancy. Socioeconomic status also significantly influenced truancy, with students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds exhibiting higher truancy tendencies. The study concluded that family structure including parenting style, parental involvement, and socioeconomic status are significant predictors of truancy behaviour. It was recommended among many others that parent education workshops on effective parenting styles, and integration of social workers into school systems should be established.

Keywords: Family structure, parenting styles, truancy behaviour, adolescents, secondary school

Introduction

Education remains the most potent instrument for the socio-economic development of any nation. In Nigeria, secondary education occupies a strategic position in the educational system, serving as the bridge between primary and tertiary education levels. According to the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014), secondary education is expected to develop students into citizens who are socially independent, morally and mentally stable, physically alert, culturally adjusted, and intellectually equipped for their personal and societal benefit. However, the achievement of these objectives has been severely hampered by a persistent challenge of truancy among in-school young adolescents.

Truancy, defined as the deliberate avoidance of school without a valid justification, has become a prevalent issue among secondary school students in Nigeria (Isah & Muhammad, 2025). It is a major challenge facing the educational system, affecting students' academic performance, school discipline, and overall national development. The truancy problem has manifested in various forms as some students deliberately refuse to attend full school days, others attend school but run away after break, while some arrive at school after lessons have commenced. Additionally, some students attend school but intentionally stay out of classes they dislike due to teacher hostility or

subject aversion (Isah & Muhammad, 2025). Reports indicate an alarming rate of truancy in public secondary schools nationwide (Ogungbade, 2024).

The family, being the primary socializing agent for children, plays a pivotal role in shaping the behaviour and attitudes of adolescents. The rearing of children, also known as parenting, is described by Onuoha (2020) as a complex activity that includes specific behaviours of parents being reflected in the character of their children. Parents serve as primary role models, educators, guidance counsellors, and nurturers for their children (Abraham, 2023). The family environment, which includes: parenting styles, parental involvement, family structure, and socioeconomic status, has been consistently linked to children's behavioural outcomes, including truancy.

Research has identified other causes of truancy emanating from the home environment as including helping parents with household work, looking after young children, lack of recognition by parents, and other family-related structure (Iosr, *et al.*, 2015). Similarly, Breda (2014) found a growing recognition that truancy is not solely due to school-related structure but may stem from dysfunctional home circumstances as well. Adelokun, (2004) investigated the combined contributions of child, family, school, society, and government structure to truant behaviour and found that family structure significantly contributed to predicting truant behaviour.

This study is anchored on Baumrind's parenting style theory developed by Diana Baumrind in 1966. This theory identifies three primary parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive) based on two dimensions: parental responsiveness and parental demandingness. Subsequently, Baumrind added a fourth style - neglectful or uninvolved parenting. Authoritative parenting is characterized by high responsiveness and high demandingness, with parents being nurturing, affectionate, and non-punitive, disciplining through guidance and open communication. Authoritarian parenting is characterized by low responsiveness and high demandingness, with parents being strict, inflexible, and having high expectations with little room for negotiation. Permissive parenting is characterized by high responsiveness and low demandingness, with parents being nurturing but setting few or inconsistent boundaries. Neglectful or uninvolved parenting is characterized by low responsiveness and low demandingness, with parents being emotionally detached and providing inconsistent boundaries. The theory provides a framework for understanding how different parenting styles may influence truancy behaviour specifically in Akwa Ibom State.

Akwa Ibom State, located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, has experienced significant educational development since its creation in 1987. Uyo, the state capital, hosts numerous public secondary schools that have been plagued with cases of student indiscipline, including truancy. Despite government policies such as free education at the primary and secondary levels, the problem of truancy persists, undermining the quality of education and the achievement of educational objectives. Thus, this study seeks to unravel family structure that could influence this truancy behaviour among secondary school students in Uyo Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State.

Statement of the Problem

Truancy among secondary school students in Nigeria has evolved from a minor disciplinary issue into a widespread educational crisis with far-reaching consequences. Despite the strategic importance of secondary education in preparing young people for higher learning and productive

citizenship, a significant number of adolescents persistently absent themselves from school without valid justification. This phenomenon manifests in various forms, from students skipping entire school days, arriving late, leaving early, or remaining on school premises while avoiding specific classes. The consequences are devastating which revealed in poor academic performance, increased dropout rates, heightened risk of juvenile delinquency, and the perpetuation of cycles of poverty and social exclusion.

The roots of truancy are multifaceted, but the family environment stands out as a particularly critical factor. The Nigerian family is undergoing profound transformations economic pressures which force most parents to work longer hours, traditional extended family support systems are eroding, and rising rates of divorce and single parenthood have created unstable home environments. These changes have significant implications for how parents monitor, guide, and support their adolescent children. Yet, there is insufficient empirical understanding of which specific family structure most strongly predicts truancy behaviour in the Nigerian context. Questions remain about whether authoritarian parenting is more detrimental than permissive parenting, whether parental involvement can compensate for socioeconomic hardship, and how family structure influences school attendance.

In Akwa Ibom State, particularly Uyo Local Government Area, the problem is acute as some students could be found loitering around the street of Uyo metropolis during school hours. Despite the state government's investment in free education, reports from school administrators indicate that truancy remains persistently high alongside other forms of student indiscipline. This paradox in high truancy rates despite free schooling points to deeper family-related causes that require investigation. Without understanding this underlying structure, interventions will continue to address symptoms rather than root causes. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the relationship between family structure and truancy behaviour among secondary school adolescents in Uyo Local Government Area. The findings will provide evidence that can guide parents, educators, counsellors, and policymakers in developing targeted interventions to keep Nigerian adolescents in school and on the path to productive adulthood.

Method

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which is appropriate for studies that seek to collect data on a population's characteristics, attitudes, or behaviours by administering questionnaires or conducting interviews to a sample of the population. The population comprised all senior secondary school students in 15 public secondary schools in Uyo Local Government Area. According to the Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Education (2026), there are a total student population of 5,862 senior secondary school students. The sample consisted of 400 SS2 students, determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table. Stratified random sampling technique was used, with schools stratified based on location (urban, suburban, and rural) and students randomly selected from each stratum and class level.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Family Structure and Truancy Behaviour Questionnaire (FSTBQ). The instrument was validated by three experts; two from from the department of Guidance and Counselling and in the Measurement and Evaluation, from the department of Psychological Foundations of Education, University of Uyo. During the validation, validates assessed the instrument's content for clarity, coherence, and appropriateness, checking whether the statements align with the study's questions and hypotheses. The instrument yielded

an overall internal consistency reliability of 0.81 after analysis with Cronbach Alpha. Data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics used included mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions while inferential statistics of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 significance level, using SPSS version 25.

Results

Table 1: Influence of Family Structure on Truancy Behaviour

Family Structure	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Intact Family	162	2.31	1.04	Low
Single-Parent Family	131	2.51	1.03	Moderate
Stepfamily	94	2.63	1.11	Moderate

Table 1 shows that students from stepfamilies had the highest mean truancy behaviour score (2.63), followed by those from single-parent families (2.51), and those from intact families (2.31). This suggests that family Structure influences truancy behaviour, with students from stepfamilies exhibiting the highest truancy tendencies.

Table 2: Parenting Styles and Truancy Behaviour

Parenting Style	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Authoritative	98	2.05	0.89	Low
Authoritarian	132	2.68	1.12	Moderate
Permissive	89	2.59	1.08	Moderate
Neglectful	68	2.71	1.15	Moderate

Table 2 shows that students whose parents adopted a neglectful parenting style had the highest mean truancy behaviour score (2.71), followed by those with authoritarian parents (2.68), permissive parents (2.59), and authoritative parents (2.05). This suggests that authoritative parenting is associated with lower truancy behaviour, while authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful parenting are associated with higher truancy behaviour.

Table 3: Parental Involvement and Truancy Behaviour

Level of Parental Involvement	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
High Parental Involvement	142	2.05	0.92	Low
Moderate Parental Involvement	135	2.58	1.05	Moderate
Low Parental Involvement	110	2.88	1.18	High

Table 3 shows that students with low parental involvement had the highest mean truancy behaviour score (2.88), followed by those with moderate parental involvement (2.58), and those with high parental involvement (2.05). This suggests that higher parental involvement is associated with lower truancy behaviour.

Table 4: Socioeconomic Status and Truancy Behaviour

Socioeconomic Status	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
High SES	123	2.12	0.94	Low
Middle SES	145	2.48	1.07	Moderate
Low SES	119	2.82	1.21	High

Table 4 shows that students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds had the highest mean truancy behaviour score (2.82), followed by those from middle SES (2.48), and those from high SES (2.12). This suggests that socioeconomic status influences truancy behaviour, with students from low SES backgrounds exhibiting higher truancy tendencies.

Table 5: Summary of One-Way ANOVA on Influence of Family Structure on Truancy Behaviour

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-cal	F-tab	Sig.	Decision
Between Groups	3.45	2	1.73	1.52	3.04	0.22	Not Significant
Within Groups	416.94	384	1.09				
Total	420.39	386					

Table 5 shows that the calculated F-value (1.52) is less than the tabulated F-value (3.04) at 0.05 significance level with degrees of freedom (2, 384). The probability value (0.22) is greater than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This means that there is no significant influence of family structure on truancy behaviour among secondary school adolescents in Uyo Local Government Area. Although students from stepfamilies recorded the highest mean truancy score (2.63) followed by single-parent families (2.51) and intact families (2.31), the differences were not statistically significant.

Table 6: Summary of One-Way ANOVA on Influence of Parenting Styles on Truancy Behaviour

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-cal	F-tab	Sig.	Decision
Between Groups	18.62	3	6.21	5.89	2.63	0.001	Significant
Within Groups	401.77	383	1.05				
Total	420.39	386					

Table 6 shows that the calculated F-value (5.89) is greater than the tabulated F-value (2.63) at 0.05 significance level with degrees of freedom (3, 383). The probability value (0.001) is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that there is a significant influence of parenting styles on truancy behaviour among secondary school adolescents in Uyo Local Government Area.

Table 7: Summary of One-Way ANOVA on Influence of Parental Involvement on Truancy Behaviour

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-cal	F-tab	Sig.	Decision
Between Groups	15.73	2	7.87	7.22	3.04	0.001	Significant
Within Groups	404.66	384	1.05				
Total	420.39	386					

Table 7 shows that the calculated F-value (7.22) is greater than the tabulated F-value (3.04) at 0.05 significance level with degrees of freedom (2, 384). The probability value (0.001) is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that there is a significant influence of parental involvement on truancy behaviour among secondary school adolescents in Uyo Local Government Area. Students with high parental involvement exhibited the lowest truancy tendencies (mean = 2.05), while those with low parental involvement exhibited the highest truancy tendencies (mean = 2.88).

Table 8: Summary of One-Way ANOVA on Influence of Socioeconomic Status on Truancy Behaviour

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-cal	F-tab	Sig.	Decision
Between Groups	12.84	2	6.42	5.89	3.04	0.003	Significant
Within Groups	407.55	384	1.06				
Total	420.39	386					

Table 8 shows that the calculated F-value (5.89) is greater than the tabulated F-value (3.04) at 0.05 significance level with degrees of freedom (2, 384). The probability value (0.003) is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that there is a significant influence of socioeconomic status of parents on truancy behaviour among secondary school adolescents in Uyo Local Government Area. Students from high SES backgrounds exhibited the lowest truancy tendencies (mean = 2.12), while those from low SES backgrounds exhibited the highest truancy tendencies (mean = 2.82).

Discussion

Parenting Styles and Truancy Behaviour

The finding that authoritative parenting is associated with lower truancy while authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful parenting are associated with higher truancy is consistent with previous research. Abraham (2023) concluded that there is a significant relationship between parenting style and truancy behaviour among secondary school students, with good parenting style promoting good behaviour and positive academic performance. Similarly, Nwosu (2018) found a moderate positive relationship between parenting style and truancy behaviour among primary school pupils ($R = 0.19$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that good parenting style has the capacity to reduce truancy behaviour.

The characteristics of authoritative parenting—high responsiveness and high demandingness, with parents being nurturing and affectionate while setting clear expectations and using guidance rather than punishment (Abraham, 2023)—create an environment that promotes positive behavioural outcomes. In contrast, authoritarian parenting (strictness without warmth), permissive parenting (warmth without boundaries), and neglectful parenting (neither warmth nor boundaries) create conditions that may contribute to truancy.

Parental Involvement and Truancy Behaviour

The finding that parental involvement significantly influences truancy behaviour, with higher parental involvement associated with lower truancy, aligns with Ehizode and Ogunji (2026), who found that parental monitoring had a negative significant effect on truancy ($\beta = -0.362$, $t = -6.619$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that higher parental monitoring is associated with lower truancy behaviour. The study also found that family conflict positively affected truancy ($\beta = 0.279$, $t = 5.108$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that conflict within the family contributes to truancy behaviour.

Osadolor (2026) similarly found that poor parental supervision is a major cause of truancy and juvenile delinquency, recommending that families should be sensitized to their roles in curbing truancy. The findings underscore the importance of parents being actively involved in monitoring school attendance, assisting with homework, attending school meetings, communicating with teachers, and providing emotional support for academic pursuits.

Socioeconomic Status and Truancy Behaviour

The finding that students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds exhibit higher truancy tendencies aligns with Osadolor (2026), who identified poverty as a major cause of truancy and juvenile delinquency. Ogungbade (2024) similarly identified unmet basic needs like food, clothing, or shelter as Structure responsible for truancy. The challenges associated with poverty, including financial difficulties, lack of resources for educational support, and the potential need for students to engage in income-generating activities, contribute to truancy.

The finding that students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds exhibit lower truancy tendencies can be explained by the availability of resources, including better nutrition, educational materials, and parental capacity to monitor and support academic activities. Sommer and Nagel (1991) also found that socioeconomic Structure, along with family structure and academic ability, were associated with truancy.

Family Structure and Truancy Behaviour

Although family structure did not show a statistically significant influence on truancy behaviour, the observed trend—students from stepfamilies exhibiting the highest truancy tendencies followed by single-parent families and intact families—is noteworthy. This finding aligns with Osadolor (2026), who found that broken homes are a major cause of truancy and juvenile delinquency. The challenges associated with stepfamilies and single-parent families including adjustment difficulties, potential parental discord, and limited parental resources—may contribute to truancy tendencies.

Conclusion

Parenting styles are significantly related to truancy behaviour. Authoritative parenting is associated with lower truancy, while authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful parenting are associated with higher truancy. Parental involvement significantly influences truancy behaviour. Higher parental involvement is associated with lower truancy, while lower parental involvement is associated with higher truancy. Socioeconomic status of parents significantly impacts truancy behaviour. Students from high SES backgrounds exhibit lower truancy tendencies compared to those from low SES backgrounds. Family structure, while showing a trend, does not have a statistically significant influence on truancy behaviour.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Parents should adopt authoritative parenting styles characterized by both warmth and appropriate discipline, as this is associated with lower truancy behaviour. Parents should be actively involved in their children's education by monitoring school attendance, assisting with homework, attending school meetings, and communicating with teachers.
2. School administrators should establish school-based family counselling programmes to provide support for students. Teachers should identify students at risk of truancy and provide early intervention. Guidance counsellors should organize counselling sessions for truant students and their families.
3. The Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Education should integrate professional social workers into school systems to provide counselling and rehabilitation services for truant students. Government and non-governmental organizations should embark on public enlightenment campaigns on the need for parents to adopt effective parenting practices.
4. Policies should be developed to strengthen collaboration between schools, families, and community stakeholders to address truancy behaviour. Anti-truancy policies should be implemented at the school and local government levels.

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