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Family Influences on Moral Behaviour among Secondary School Students in Southwest Nigeria

AUTHOR(S): ASHIBI Denis Ekpan, OLATUNJI Rufus Adeleye, OGUNJOBI Oluwaferanmi Ebunoluwa

Abstract:

The family is the primary social environment in which children acquire values, behavioural expectations and patterns of conduct. Concerns about examination malpractice, bullying, truancy, substance abuse, cyber-related offences, disrespect for authority and violence among secondary school students have intensified interest in family factors associated with adolescents' moral behaviour. This study examined the relationships between family structure, parents' economic status, parents' educational level and moral behaviour among secondary school students in Southwest Nigeria. A descriptive survey design of the correlational type was adopted. The population comprised of Senior Secondary School students in public secondary schools in the sampled states. A multistage procedure yielded 600 students from 30 schools. Data were collected with the researcher-developed Family Influence and Moral Behaviour Questionnaire (FIMBQ), which was validated by experts in Social Studies Education and Measurement and Evaluation. Test–retest reliability among 40 students outside the study area yielded a coefficient of 0.83. Pearson's product–moment correlation was used to test the reported relationships at the .05 level. Family structure was positively related to moral behaviour ($r = .395$, $p < .05$). Parents' economic status also showed a positive relationship with moral behaviour ($r = .401$, $p < .05$), as did parents' educational level ($r = .398$, $p < .05$). The findings indicate that the three family characteristics examined were significantly associated with students' moral behaviour. The study supports stronger family support, parental involvement and school–family collaboration in promoting positive moral values among adolescents.

Keywords: family structure, parents' economic status, parents' educational level, moral behavior, secondary school students,

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About Author

Author(s):

ASHIBI Denis Ekpan
Department of Social Studies and Civic Education
Adeyemi Federal University of Education Ondo, Nigeria
ekpanis68@gmail.com

OLATUNJI Rufus Adeleye
Adeyemi Federal University of Education Ondo, Nigeria
olatunjira@afued.edu.ng

OGUNJOBI Oluwaferanmi Ebunoluwa
Department of Social Studies and Civic Education
Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, Nigeria.
kilankoo@afued.edu.ng

Introduction

The moral development of adolescents is significant to the family, school and society as values and behavioral patterns developed at this stage will influence students' behaviors in school and in society. Moral behaviour is defined in this study as behaviour that meets the accepted moral and social norms such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, respect to authority, self-control and respect to school and society. The family plays a major role in this process as it is the first environment in which children are exposed to models, discipline, communication and reinforcement.

The study has associated examination malpractice, bullying, truancy, substance abuse, cyber related offences, disrespect for authority and violence with concerns about moral behaviour among Nigerian secondary school students. These behaviours have led to an interest in what may be happening in families that are related to adolescents' moral behaviours. Three of the conditions are the focus of the present study: family structure, parents' economic status and parents' educational level.

The theoretical basis of the study is Bandura's Social Learning Theory. The theory suggests that behaviour is learnt by observing, imitating and interacting with important individuals and the broader social context (Bandura, 1977). In the family, parents and other caregivers are some of the first models of behaviour that children have to observe. Children can learn to be honest, responsible and disciplined through repeated observation and reinforcement; or they can learn to be neglected, aggressive, dishonest or inconsistently disciplined (Bandura & Walters, 1963). This is important for the current study because the structure of the family could influence the access to role models and supervision, and parents' economic and educational status could influence the home environment, guidance and opportunities for parental involvement.

Family structure relates to the make-up and stability of a child's family. Stable family environments are defined in the study as having parents present, emotional support, communication and effective supervision. Separation, long absences, conflict or lack of parental involvement could lead to less monitoring and increased exposure to other risk behaviors. Importance of family stability is supported by evidence examined in study. Bengesai and Nzimande (2020) found that the disruption of the family structure was linked to negative education outcomes for South African adolescents. Studies by Rachel et al. (2022) and Hoffmann (2022) found that among the factors associated with adolescent deviant behaviour was inadequate supervision and weak family support and poor parental role modelling, respectively, and substance-use risk was greater among adolescents from single-parent families, partly due to reduced supervision and unsupervised peer interaction.

Parents' economic status is an indicator of the material and monetary conditions of the parents. Economic hardship is defined in the study as a condition that can limit the availability of educational resources, increase family stress and decrease opportunities for parental supervision. Aboluwarin and Oyedapo (2023) found that there is a significant relationship between economic hardship and moral decay among pupils in public Primary schools in Southwest Nigeria. The cited evidence, although focused on moral decline, is relevant to the present study, which is focused on positive moral behaviour, and to the question of whether there is a relationship between parents' economic position and students' moral behaviour.

Parents' education is also considered a key family factor as it may be related to communication, involvement, supervision and guidance provided to children. Li and Qiu (2018) found that educational achievement and behavioural development of children were

related to their family background, such as their parents' educational attainment. Gu et al. (2024) also found a correlation between family factors and parental involvement and students' development. These patterns are pertinent in the context of Social Learning Theory because the quality and consistency of parental guidance is part of the immediate social context in which adolescents learn expectations of behaviour.

The study therefore positions family structure, parents' economic status and parents' educational level as related but distinct dimensions of family influence. Previous studies reviewed in the document largely focused on educational attainment, deviant behaviour, substance use, moral decline or academic outcomes. The present study narrows the focus to moral behaviour as a positive behavioural outcome among Senior Secondary School students in Southwest Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The study identifies increasing concern about undesirable behaviour among secondary school students and notes that much of the existing literature has examined moral decadence, academic achievement, substance use or general behavioural problems rather than positive moral behaviour. It further indicates that relatively few studies have examined family structure, parents' economic status and parents' educational level together in relation to moral behaviour among secondary school students in Southwest Nigeria. The problem addressed by this study was therefore the limited empirical evidence on how these three family characteristics are associated with the moral behaviour of students in this context.

Objectives of the Study

The study sought to:

1. determine the relationship between family structure and moral behaviour among secondary school students in Southwest Nigeria;
2. examine the relationship between parents' economic status and moral behaviour among secondary school students in Southwest Nigeria; and
3. investigate the relationship between parents' educational level and moral behaviour among secondary school students in Southwest Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between family structure and moral behaviour among secondary school students in Southwest Nigeria?
2. What is the relationship between parents' economic status and moral behaviour among secondary school students in Southwest Nigeria?
3. What is the relationship between parents' educational level and moral behaviour among secondary school students in Southwest Nigeria?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design of the correlational type to examine relationships between family characteristics and moral behaviour among secondary school students in Southwest Nigeria. The study area comprised the Southwest geopolitical zone of Nigeria, consisting of Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo States. Three states were selected by simple random sampling. The population comprised all Senior Secondary School I–III students in public secondary schools in the selected states.

A multistage sampling procedure was used to select 600 students from 30 public secondary schools. At the first stage, three states were randomly selected. At the second stage, five Local Government Areas were selected from each sampled state using the procedure described in the study as proportionate random sampling. Two public secondary schools were then selected from each Local Government Area through simple random sampling. At the final

stage, 20 students were selected from each school through stratified random sampling to ensure representation of Senior Secondary School students. This procedure produced the stated sample of 600 respondents.

Data were collected with a structured researcher-developed questionnaire titled the Family Influence and Moral Behaviour Questionnaire (FIMBQ). The instrument contained items on family structure, parents' economic status, parents' educational level and moral behaviour, rated on a four-point scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The items were developed from the literature and empirical studies contained in the study. Face and content validity were established through review by specialists in Social Studies Education and Measurement and Evaluation.

Reliability was determined through a test–retest procedure involving 40 students from two public secondary schools outside the study area. The two sets of responses were correlated using Pearson's product–moment correlation, producing a reliability coefficient of .83. Descriptive statistics comprising frequency counts, percentages, means and standard deviations were used to summarise the data, while Pearson's product–moment correlation was used to test the three reported relationships at the .05 level of significance.

Results

The results are presented without additional interpretation.

Table 1

Relationship between Family Structure and Moral Behaviour among Secondary School Students

Variable	N	M	SD	df	r	p
Family structure	600	2.99	0.88	598	.395	.000
Moral behaviour	600	2.89	0.86			

Family structure was positively and significantly related to moral behaviour, $r = .395$, $p < .05$. The study reports that the corresponding null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 2

Relationship between Parents' Economic Status and Moral Behaviour among Secondary School Students

Relationship	r	p	Decision
Parents' economic status and moral behaviour	.401	< .05	Significant

Parents' economic status was positively and significantly related to moral behaviour, $r = .401$, $p < .05$. The study reports that the corresponding null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 3

Relationship between Parents' Educational Level and Moral Behaviour among Secondary School Students

Relationship	r	p	Decision
Parents' educational level and moral behaviour	.398	< .05	Significant

Note. Additional descriptive statistics for Table 3 were not available in the study.

Parents' educational level was positively and significantly related to moral behaviour, r = .398, p < .05. The study reports that the corresponding null hypothesis was rejected.

Discussion

The first finding was that there was a positive relationship between family structure and students' moral behaviour. In the context of the correlational design, this finding suggests that there was a relationship between the family-structure measure and moral-behaviour scores, but not that one caused the other. The result is in line with the literature in the study. Bengesai and Nzimande (2020) reported a correlation between poor educational outcomes among adolescents and the disruption of the family structure, while Rachel et al. (2022) reported that poor supervision and weak parental support and poor role modelling were among the factors that were correlated with deviant behaviour. Hoffmann (2022) also found that adolescents living in one-parent households were more likely to engage in substance-use, but that this was partly due to less monitoring and more unsupervised peer interaction. Combined, these studies offer evidence to the relevance of parental presence, supervision and family stability to adolescent behaviour.

The second finding was that there was a positive correlation between parents' economic status and students' moral behaviour. This finding aligns with the study by Aboluwarin and Oyedapo (2023) who found that there was significant relationship between economic hardship and moral decadence among pupils in public primary schools in Southwest Nigeria. Although the direction of the constructs are different (economic hardship and moral decline in the earlier study and parental economic status and positive moral behaviour in the present study), both suggest the importance of family economic status to behavioural outcomes. Thus, the current findings should not be interpreted as evidence of the causal link between economic status and moral-behaviour scores, but rather as an association between the two.

The third finding revealed that there was positive correlation between parents' education and moral behaviour. This is in line with Li and Qiu (2018) who found that the educational background of parents is related to the educational and behavioral development of children, and Gu et al. (2024) who found that family factors and parental participation are associated with students' development. For the purposes of the current study, parental education might be considered as it is related to the study to communication, supervision and guidance. However, the correlational design does not allow the conclusion that the differences in moral-behaviour were caused by the differences in educational attainment itself.

The findings in the three are consistent with the Social Learning Theory. Bandura (1977) highlighted the significance of learning by observation, imitation and social interaction, whereas Bandura and Walters (1963) explained the role of social models in the development of behaviour. The family thus is a pertinent context to explain the associations found in this study. Family structure may influence the continuity of supervision and behaviour modelling; financial status may influence the home environment in which behaviour is modelled; and parental education may be related to communication and guidance. The statistical results, however, only determine relationships between the measured variables. The study does not support causal ordering and relative contribution of the three predictors when used together.

Conclusion

The study analysed relationship between family structure, parents' economic status, parents' educational level and moral behaviour of secondary school students in Southwest Nigeria. All three family variables were positively related to moral behaviour, and the relationships between family structure (r = .395), parents' economic status (r = .401) and parents'

educational level (r = .398) were statistically significant at p < .05. The results show that family conditions are pertinent correlates of students' moral behaviour in the sampled public secondary schools. As with the correlational design, the results should be interpreted as associations and not evidence that the family variables caused the behavioural outcomes observed.

Recommendations

1. Parents should provide stable and supportive family environments that promote effective supervision, open communication and positive moral values among their children.
2. Government and relevant stakeholders should implement programmes aimed at improving the socio-economic well-being of families, in line with the study's finding that parents' economic status was associated with students' moral behaviour.
3. Parents should participate actively in their children's educational and moral development by maintaining close relationships with schools, monitoring their activities and serving as positive role models.
4. Schools should strengthen guidance and counselling services and organise regular parent–teacher engagement programmes to support collaboration between families and schools in promoting students' moral behaviour.
5. Educational policymakers should develop family-based moral education programmes and parenting workshops intended to strengthen child-rearing and character-building practices.

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