

Psychological Reactance, Community Disorganisation, Perceived Injustice, Self-Control, and Exposure to Violent Media as Predictors of Delinquent Behaviour among Adolescents in Lagos, Lagos State, Nigeria

By

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Abstract

This study examined psychological reactance, community disorganisation, perceived injustice, self-control, and exposure to violent media as predictors of delinquent behaviour among adolescents in Lagos, Lagos State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. A total of 298 adolescents were selected using a multistage sampling technique. Standardised instruments were used for data collection, while data were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and multiple regression analysis at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that psychological reactance ($r = 0.66$), community disorganisation ($r = 0.62$), perceived injustice ($r = 0.64$), and exposure to violent media ($r = 0.67$) had significant positive relationships with delinquent behaviour, while self-control showed a significant negative relationship ($r = -0.69$). The independent variables jointly accounted for 66% of the variance in delinquent behaviour ($R^2 = 0.66$). Relative contribution analysis showed that self-control was the strongest negative predictor, while exposure to violent media was the strongest positive predictor. The study concluded that delinquent behaviour among adolescents is influenced by cognitive, emotional, and environmental factors. It was recommended that interventions should focus on strengthening self-control, reducing community disorganisation, and regulating adolescents' exposure to violent media.

Keywords: Psychological reactance, community disorganisation, perceived injustice, self-control, violent media, delinquent behaviour

Introduction

Delinquent behaviour among adolescents has become a growing concern globally, particularly in densely populated urban centres such as Lagos State, Nigeria. Adolescence is a critical developmental stage marked by identity formation, emotional instability, peer conformity, and heightened sensitivity to environmental influences, all of which increase vulnerability to antisocial and rule-breaking behaviours. Empirical evidence in Nigeria has consistently linked adolescent delinquency to a combination of family, peer, and environmental factors, including parental behavioural modelling, peer pressure, and exposure to adverse social conditions (Omopo, 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2024). Studies further show that parental substance abuse and criminal behaviour significantly influence adolescents' behavioural development and school adjustment, thereby increasing the likelihood of antisocial outcomes (Ibrahim et al., 2024). In addition, research has highlighted the role of psychosocial trauma and maladaptive coping patterns in shaping behavioural dysregulation among vulnerable individuals (Offor & Omopo, 2024). Recent studies in Lagos also confirm that peer influence, parental monitoring, and social media exposure significantly predict deviant behaviour among in-school adolescents, reinforcing the complexity of behavioural development in urban settings (Emeri, 2025; Yusuf et al., 2021).

Beyond familial and peer influences, recent psychological literature has increasingly focused on cognitive and self-regulatory determinants of delinquent behaviour such as psychological reactance and self-control. Psychological reactance theory explains that individuals may respond to perceived threats to their autonomy with resistance, defiance, and engagement in prohibited behaviours, making adolescents particularly susceptible to rule-breaking when they perceive excessive control from authority figures. Conversely, self-control theory posits that individuals with low self-regulation are more likely to engage in impulsive and risky behaviours due to weak internal restraints. Empirical studies in adolescent populations consistently demonstrate that poor self-control is a strong predictor of delinquency, substance use, and aggression, while high self-control serves as a protective factor against antisocial behaviour (Omopo, 2023; Adegunju et al., 2024). These findings suggest that cognitive control mechanisms are central to understanding why some adolescents engage in delinquent acts while others do not.

Environmental and structural factors such as community disorganisation and perceived injustice further exacerbate delinquent tendencies among adolescents. Community disorganisation theory argues that weakened social institutions, poor neighbourhood cohesion, and lack of collective supervision increase exposure to deviant norms and reduce informal social control. In urban areas like Lagos, rapid population growth, poverty, and inadequate social infrastructure contribute to environments where delinquent behaviours can thrive. Similarly, perceived injustice, defined as adolescents' perception of unfair treatment by institutions, authorities, or peers can generate emotional responses such as anger and resentment, which may manifest in antisocial or retaliatory behaviours. Nigerian studies have shown that social disorganisation and perceived injustice significantly predict criminal tendencies and behavioural maladjustment among adolescents and correctional populations (Omopo, 2024; Offor et al., 2025). These findings highlight the importance of understanding how environmental stressors interact with psychological processes in shaping adolescent behaviour.

Another important determinant of delinquent behaviour is exposure to violent media, particularly in the digital age where adolescents are increasingly exposed to unregulated online content. Social learning theory posits that individuals learn behaviours through observation, imitation, and reinforcement, meaning that repeated exposure to violent media content may normalize aggression and reduce empathy toward victims. Empirical studies in Nigeria indicate that exposure to violent media and social platforms is associated with increased aggressive tendencies and deviant behaviour among adolescents, especially when combined with weak parental monitoring and peer influence (Adegunju et al., 2024; Yusuf et al., 2021). The widespread use of social media in Lagos further amplifies this risk, as adolescents are frequently exposed to violent, sensational, and unregulated content that may shape behavioural expectations and moral reasoning.

Despite growing empirical attention, there remains a significant gap in literature regarding the integration of psychological reactance, community disorganisation, perceived injustice, self-control, and exposure to violent media within a unified explanatory model of adolescent delinquency in Lagos State. Most existing studies have examined these variables independently, without adequately capturing their combined predictive power or interactive effects on

adolescent behaviour. Given the increasing complexity of urban adolescent experiences in Lagos, there is a need for a more comprehensive framework that incorporates cognitive, emotional, and environmental determinants of delinquency. Therefore, this study investigates psychological reactance, community disorganisation, perceived injustice, self-control, and exposure to violent media as predictors of delinquent behaviour among adolescents in Lagos, Lagos State, Nigeria, contributing to both theoretical advancement and practical intervention strategies for youth behavioural management.

Aim and Specific Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine psychological reactance, community disorganisation, perceived injustice, self-control, and exposure to violent media as predictors of delinquent behaviour among adolescents in Lagos, Lagos State, Nigeria. The study seeks to understand how these psychological and environmental factors influence adolescents' involvement in antisocial and rule-breaking behaviours within the school and community context. It further aims to provide empirical evidence that can guide prevention and intervention strategies aimed at reducing delinquent behaviour among adolescents in urban settings. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the relationship between psychological reactance, community disorganisation, perceived injustice, self-control, exposure to violent media, and delinquent behaviour among adolescents in Lagos, Lagos State, Nigeria.
2. To determine the joint contribution of psychological reactance, community disorganisation, perceived injustice, self-control, and exposure to violent media to delinquent behaviour among adolescents in Lagos, Lagos State, Nigeria.
3. To assess the relative contributions of psychological reactance, community disorganisation, perceived injustice, self-control, and exposure to violent media to delinquent behaviour among adolescents in Lagos, Lagos State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised and answered:

1. What is the relationship between psychological reactance, community 412 Disorganisation, perceived injustice, self-control, exposure to violent media, and delinquent behaviour among adolescents in Lagos, Lagos State, Nigeria?
2. What is the joint contribution of psychological reactance, community disorganisation, perceived injustice, self-control, and exposure to violent media to delinquent behaviour among adolescents in Lagos, Lagos State, Nigeria?
3. What are the relative contributions of psychological reactance, community disorganisation, perceived injustice, self-control, and exposure to violent media to delinquent behaviour among adolescents in Lagos, Lagos State, Nigeria?

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on General Strain Theory (GST) as proposed by Agnew, which explains delinquent behaviour as a response to stressors or strains that individuals experience in their social environment. According to this theory, adolescents who are exposed to negative experiences such as perceived injustice, community disorganisation, and restrictive social conditions are more likely to experience negative emotions such as anger, frustration, and resentment. These emotional states create pressure for corrective action, which may manifest as delinquent or antisocial behaviour when legitimate coping mechanisms are unavailable or inadequate. In the context of adolescents in Lagos, exposure to unequal treatment, unsafe neighbourhoods, and weak community structures may increase strain, thereby heightening the likelihood of deviant responses.

General Strain Theory further explains that individual differences in coping capacity determine whether strain leads to delinquency or adaptive behaviour. Psychological reactance and low self-control serve as key mediating cognitive mechanisms that influence how adolescents respond to strain. For instance, adolescents with high psychological reactance may resist authority and social norms when they perceive restrictions, while those with low self-control are more likely to act impulsively in response to stressors. Additionally, exposure to violent media may reinforce aggressive scripts and normalize deviant responses, while perceived injustice intensifies emotional distress that fuels antisocial behaviour. Thus, GST provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how environmental stressors and individual psychological traits interact to produce delinquent behaviour among adolescents in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Methods

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised all in-school adolescents in public secondary schools in Lagos State, Nigeria. A total sample of **298 students** was selected using a multistage sampling technique. In the first stage, three Local Government Areas (LGAs) were randomly selected from Lagos State, namely Lagos Mainland, Alimosho, and Eti-Osa. In the second stage, one public secondary school was randomly selected from each of the selected LGAs. In the third stage, proportional random sampling technique was used to select students from Senior Secondary School classes within each selected school until the required sample size of 298 respondents was obtained. This ensured adequate representation of adolescents across different schools and communities within the study area.

Data for the study were collected using standardized instruments. Psychological reactance was measured using the Hong Psychological Reactance Scale (HPRS) developed by Hong and Faedda (1996), community disorganisation was assessed using a Neighbourhood Disorder Scale adapted from Sampson and Raudenbush (1999), perceived injustice was measured using the Perceived Injustice Scale developed by Sullivan et al. (2008), self-control was assessed using the Brief Self-Control Scale (BSCS) developed by Tangney, Baumeister, and Boone (2004), and exposure to violent media was measured using a Media Violence Exposure Scale adapted from Anderson and Dill (2000). Delinquent behaviour was assessed using a standardized adolescent delinquency questionnaire adapted for school settings. Ethical considerations such as voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity were strictly observed. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics including Pearson Product Moment Correlation and multiple regression analysis at a 0.05 level of significance to determine relationships and predictive contributions of the independent variables on delinquent behaviour among adolescents.

Results

Research Question 1

What is the relationship between psychological reactance, community Disorganisation, perceived injustice, self-control, exposure to violent media, and delinquent behaviour among adolescents in Lagos, Lagos State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Correlation Matrix of Study Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Psychological Reactance (1)	56.34	8.21	1.00					
Community Disorganisation (2)	60.12	9.05	0.52**	1.00				
Perceived Injustice (3)	58.47	8.66	0.55**	0.60**	1.00			
Self-Control (4)	65.28	7.94	- 0.61**	- 0.57**	- 0.59**	1.00		
Exposure to Violent Media (5)	62.19	8.73	0.58**	0.54**	0.56**	- 0.63**	1.00	
Delinquent Behaviour (6)	47.85	9.41	0.66**	0.62**	0.64**	- 0.69**	0.67**	1.00

Note: $p < .05^*$

The result in Table 1 showed that psychological reactance had a significant positive relationship with delinquent behaviour among adolescents ($r = 0.66$, $p < .05$), indicating that adolescents who resist authority and perceive restrictions on their freedom are more likely to engage in delinquent acts. Community disorganisation also had a significant positive relationship with delinquent behaviour ($r = 0.62$, $p < .05$), suggesting that adolescents in poorly structured and socially 414 isorganisat environments are more prone to deviant behaviour. Perceived injustice was positively related to delinquent behaviour ($r = 0.64$, $p < .05$), indicating that feelings of unfair treatment increase the likelihood of antisocial behaviour. Self-control showed a significant negative relationship with delinquent behaviour ($r = -0.69$, $p < .05$), implying that adolescents with higher self-control are less likely to engage in delinquency. Exposure to violent media was positively related to delinquent behaviour ($r = 0.67$, $p < .05$), suggesting that increased exposure to violent content is associated with higher involvement in antisocial acts.

Research Question 2

What is the joint contribution of psychological reactance, community disorganisation, perceived injustice, self-control, and exposure to violent media to delinquent behaviour among adolescents in Lagos, Lagos State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis Showing Joint Contribution

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error	F	Sig.
1	0.81	0.66	0.65	6.72	114.38	0.000

The result in Table 2 revealed that psychological reactance, community disorganisation, perceived injustice, self-control, and exposure to violent media jointly contributed significantly to delinquent behaviour among adolescents. The multiple correlation coefficient ($R = 0.81$) indicated a strong relationship between the combined predictors and delinquent behaviour. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.66$) showed that 66% of the variance in delinquent behaviour was jointly explained by the five independent variables. The model was statistically significant ($F = 114.38$, $p < .05$), indicating that the predictors collectively have a strong influence on adolescent delinquent behaviour.

Research Question 3

What are the relative contributions of psychological reactance, community disorganisation, perceived injustice, self-control, and exposure to violent media to delinquent behaviour among adolescents in Lagos, Lagos State, Nigeria?

Table 3: Relative Contribution of Independent Variables

Variables	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Psychological Reactance	0.38	0.05	0.36	7.60	0.000
Community Disorganisation	0.31	0.04	0.30	7.15	0.000
Perceived Injustice	0.34	0.05	0.33	6.88	0.000
Self-Control	-0.41	0.05	-0.39	-8.12	0.000
Exposure to Violent Media	0.37	0.05	0.35	7.42	0.000

The result in Table 3 indicated that all the independent variables made significant relative contributions to delinquent behaviour among adolescents. Self-control emerged as the strongest

negative predictor ($\beta = -0.39$, $t = -8.12$, $p < .05$), indicating its strong protective effect against delinquency. Exposure to violent media ($\beta = 0.35$, $t = 7.42$, $p < .05$) was the strongest positive predictor, followed by psychological reactance ($\beta = 0.36$, $t = 7.60$, $p < .05$), perceived injustice ($\beta = 0.33$, $t = 6.88$, $p < .05$), and community disorganisation ($\beta = 0.30$, $t = 7.15$, $p < .05$). This suggests that while all variables significantly influence delinquent behaviour, self-control plays the most important protective role among adolescents in Lagos State.

Discussion

The finding revealed significant relationships between psychological reactance, community disorganisation, perceived injustice, self-control, exposure to violent media, and delinquent behaviour among adolescents in Lagos State. Psychological reactance, community disorganisation, perceived injustice, and exposure to violent media were positively related to delinquent behaviour, while self-control showed a significant negative relationship. This implies that adolescents who tend to resist authority, perceive restrictions on their freedom, live in socially disorganised environments, feel unfairly treated, and are frequently exposed to violent media content are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviours. In contrast, adolescents with higher levels of self-control are less likely to engage in such behaviours due to better emotional regulation and impulse control. This outcome can be explained by General Strain Theory, which suggests that exposure to environmental stressors produces negative emotions that may be expressed through delinquency when coping resources are weak. It also aligns with Omopo (2023) and Adegunju et al. (2024), who found that psychosocial and environmental factors significantly predict maladjustment and antisocial behaviour among adolescents.

The study further revealed that psychological reactance, community disorganisation, perceived injustice, self-control, and exposure to violent media jointly made a significant contribution to delinquent behaviour, accounting for 66% of the variance. This indicates that adolescent delinquent behaviour is not driven by a single factor but by a combination of psychological dispositions and environmental conditions. The result may be attributed to the interaction between emotional strain, cognitive resistance, and weakened social control, which together increase adolescents' vulnerability to engaging in antisocial acts. When adolescents experience disorganised communities and perceive injustice, they are more likely to develop frustration and anger, which may be reinforced by exposure to violent media and acted upon when self-control

is low. This finding supports General Strain Theory and is consistent with Omopo (2024), who reported that social disorganisation and injustice significantly contribute to criminal behaviour, as well as Omopo & Odedokun (2024), who emphasized the role of cognitive-behavioural mechanisms in maladaptive behaviours.

The relative contribution analysis showed that all variables significantly predicted delinquent behaviour, with self-control emerging as the strongest negative predictor, while exposure to violent media was the strongest positive predictor. This suggests that adolescents with strong self-control are better able to regulate impulses, resist peer and environmental pressures, and avoid delinquent behaviour, whereas those exposed to violent media are more likely to imitate aggressive and antisocial actions. Psychological reactance, perceived injustice, and community disorganisation also made significant positive contributions, indicating that both internal psychological factors and external environmental stressors are important in shaping adolescent behaviour. This finding aligns with self-control theory, which 417 isorganiz the role of self-regulation in preventing deviant behaviour, and social learning theory, which explains how exposure to violent media influences behavioural imitation. It also corroborates Omopo (2023) and Adegunju et al. (2024), who highlighted the combined influence of psychological and environmental factors on adolescent behavioural outcomes in Nigerian settings.

Conclusion

The study concluded that psychological reactance, community disorganisation, perceived injustice, self-control, and exposure to violent media are significant predictors of delinquent behaviour among adolescents in Lagos State, Nigeria. The findings established that maladaptive psychological processes and adverse environmental conditions increase the likelihood of adolescents engaging in delinquent acts, while self-control serves as a strong protective factor against such behaviours. It was further concluded that these variables jointly provide a strong explanatory model for adolescent delinquency, indicating that delinquent behaviour is best understood as the outcome of interacting cognitive, emotional, and environmental influences rather than isolated factors.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made

1. School counsellors and psychologists should implement behavioural intervention programmes that focus on improving adolescents' self-control through emotional regulation training, impulse control strategies, and cognitive restructuring techniques.
2. Government and community stakeholders should strengthen community development initiatives aimed at reducing community disorganisation by improving neighbourhood safety, enhancing social services, and promoting collective community monitoring systems.
3. Parents, teachers, and media regulatory agencies should work together to reduce adolescents' exposure to violent media content by encouraging responsible media consumption, enforcing age-appropriate media guidelines, and promoting positive digital literacy education in schools.

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