

**PREDICTORS OF CRIMINAL INTENT AMONG SECONDARY
SCHOOL STUDENTS: THE ROLE OF GENDER
DIFFERENCES, PEER PRESSURE, AND PARENTING STYLES
IN GUMA, BENUE STATE**

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ABSTRACT: This study examined the role of gender differences, peer pressure, and parenting styles as predictors of criminal intent among secondary school students, employing a cross-sectional survey design. The simple random sampling was utilised in the administration of two hundred and seventy-one (271) questionnaires, with their demographic characteristics showing (Male = 194 (71.6%), and Female = 77 (28.4%). The age range was between 11 and 17, with a mean age of 14.1 (SD = 1.8). Participants responded to three standardised self-report questionnaires. Hypotheses were formulated and inferentially tested at the 0.05 level of significance. Results showed no significant difference between males and females on criminal intent behaviours, [t (269) = 1.051; p = .294]. A likely reason is that both males and females in the study were exposed to similar environmental, social, and cultural influences, which shaped their criminal intent behaviours in comparable ways. Also, peer pressure did not predict criminal intent [R=.007, R²=.006, F [1,269] =.015, p>0.05]. One reason could be that other factors, such as family upbringing, personal values, and socioeconomic conditions, had a stronger influence on criminal intent than peer pressure. However, results revealed that parenting styles jointly predicted criminal intent [R = .415; R² = .173; F (3, 267) = 18.556; p < 0.05]. Lastly, the results revealed that gender differences, peer pressure and parenting styles jointly predicted criminal intent [R = .429; R² = .184; F (5, 265) = 11.962; p < 0.05]. These findings highlight the importance of guidance and counselling for parents and adolescents, to help them cope with life challenges and build their social and emotional skills. Additionally, they emphasise the necessity of appointing school psychologists and public health experts to support adolescents in becoming valuable individuals. Additionally, adolescents should be guided in forming good friendships to reduce peer pressure resulting from associating with bad friends.

Keywords: Gender Differences, Peer Pressure, Parenting Styles, Criminal Intent

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a pivotal transitional stage in human development, bridging childhood and adulthood, typically spanning the ages of 10 to 19 years according to the World Health Organization (2024). This period is characterised by profound physical, cognitive, and psychosocial changes that shape how individuals perceive themselves, make decisions, and

interact with their environment. While adolescence represents a critical phase of growth and potential, it is also a stage marked by increased vulnerability to risk-taking behaviours, including involvement in crime. Studies suggest that factors such as greed, anger, revenge, jealousy, or pride can fuel criminal behaviour, and the growing global concern about adolescent crime underscores its impact on families, schools, and society at large (Carlo et al., 2021).

In Nigeria, adolescent involvement in crime has become especially alarming, with rising rates linked to social and economic challenges such as unemployment, school dropout, weakening family roles, and limited recreational opportunities (Ola, 2019). These issues often intersect with the pressures of modernisation, such as unregulated internet access and declining moral education, creating an environment in which young people may be more susceptible to delinquent pathways.

Understanding why adolescents engage in criminal behaviours requires examining the interplay of individual, social, and familial factors. One such factor is criminal intent, which refers to the cognitive patterns that rationalise unlawful behaviour. While many individuals may fleetingly consider crime in times of desperation, persistent criminal intent reflects a mindset that normalises such actions and resists dismissal through reasoning (Okorodudu, 2022). Research further suggests that these patterns may manifest differently across genders. For example, males are often socialised toward aggression and risk-taking, while females may engage in relational or emotional forms of delinquency (Consulting & Bright, 2018; Chesterton, 2020).

Equally important are peer influences and parenting styles, which play a central role in shaping adolescent behaviour. During secondary school years, adolescents often seek acceptance from peers, making them vulnerable to pressure that can either reinforce positive choices or encourage delinquency (Brame et al., 2021). Parenting approaches, whether authoritative, authoritarian, or permissive, also have long-term effects on adolescents' values, coping strategies, and behavioural outcomes (Ogbebor, 2022).

Taken together, gender, peer pressure, and parenting styles form a complex web of influences that can significantly shape the likelihood of criminal intent among in-school adolescents. For instance, boys raised under authoritarian parenting may rebel through delinquent peer groups, while girls from permissive homes may struggle with self-regulation under peer influence. Acknowledging these interrelated factors, this study seeks to contribute to a clearer understanding of adolescent criminal intent within the Nigerian setting.

Statement of the Problem

Many Nigerians have expressed worries over the recent increase in criminal activities, especially the frequency of violent crimes across the country. Nations like Nigeria have been grappling with the rising incidence of homicide, armed robbery, kidnapping, drugs and human trafficking, illegal gun running and a host of others (Abdulraheem et al., 2022). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2021 estimated global homicides at 468,000 in 2021, and more than 36% were estimated to have occurred in Africa, 31% in the Americas, 27% in Asia, 5% in Europe and 1% in the tropical Pacific region. Africa has remained a leading

continent in global crime statistics. The prevalence of violent and non-violent crimes has remained high in Nigeria (Africa Check, 2024).

Despite the plethora of security measures taken to address the daunting challenges of insecurity in Nigeria, government efforts have not yielded the desired positive results, and hence the need to seek solutions to this menace. The conservative or traditional approaches seem to be curative rather than preventive. This, therefore, calls for efforts that examine the root causes of crime, so that we stop treating symptoms rather than addressing the causes. This concerning trend has been a major focus for researchers to determine what truly influences criminal intent among secondary school students. Some argue that the prevalence of criminal behaviour has increased due to environmental factors, while others believe it is genetic, and yet others view it in connection with the individual's personality. Others considered different variables as what determined the criminal intent of a person. However, only limited attention has been given to peer pressure and parenting styles. The researchers are of the opinion that the way secondary school students interact with peers from different backgrounds and home training can influence others, and that the type of parenting styles parents use on their children can also determine a child's criminal intent. It is on this fact that research is aimed at investigating gender differences, peer pressure and parenting styles as predictors of criminal intent among selected secondary school students in Guma, Benue State, Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender Differences and Criminal Intent

A study by Jamie et al. (2019) examined gender differences in the measurement of criminal motives. The study assesses whether the measurement of criminal thinking (via measurement invariance tests of the Criminogenic Cognition Scales and the Criminal Sentiments Scale–Modified) varies between male and female probationers. The results highlight both similarities and differences in the measurement of criminal intent, with 26% of items showing significant variation between genders. Once measurement differences and similarities were taken into account, male and female probationers were just as likely to exhibit antisocial attitudes. Also, Benson and Harbinson (2020) examined gender differences and criminal thinking among individuals convicted of white-collar crimes. The paper utilises the Psychological Inventory of Criminal Thinking Styles (PICTS) to compare women and men convicted of white-collar crimes on eight different thinking styles and three summary scales. The results showed that both women and men convicted of white-collar type crimes had low criminal thinking scores on the PICTS. On some styles, women scored higher than men, but the differences were small. In Nigeria, Oluwadare and Agboola (2021) examined gender disparity in criminal behaviour in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria. To achieve this, a sample of 120 respondents was chosen from among inmates, prison officials, police, and the general public. The findings revealed that preferential treatment only existed in terms of hard labour; that women were not exposed to manual labour as their male counterparts were.

Peer Pressure and Criminal Intent

Onoyase and Ebenuwa (2018) examined the relationship among adolescents' developmental characteristics, peer group influence and their anti-social behaviours. The findings revealed that physical, intellectual, social-emotional characteristics, and peer group influence adolescents' antisocial behaviours. Also, Jinho and Jason (2018) examined the effect of delinquent peers on an individual's criminal activity by leveraging quasi-experimental variation in exposure to peers, separating confounding and causal effects. Results suggest that increasing the proportion of peers who engage in criminal activities by five percent will increase the likelihood that an individual engages in criminal activities by three percentage points. A study by Adebayo (2021) on digital peer networks and the normalization of cybercrime intent among Lagos 380 undergraduates across 3 universities in Lagos. The results showed that students associating with peers involved in cybercrime were 4.3 times more likely to express an intent to engage in Yahoo Yahoo activities (OR = 4.32, 95% CI [2.89, 6.45], $p < 0.001$). Also, peer influence mediated 68% of the relationship between unemployment exposure and cybercrime intent (indirect effect = 0.41, Sobel $z = 5.76$, $p < 0.001$). The prevalence showed that 72% of participants with delinquent peers reported "frequent discussions" about cybercrime as a viable income source.

Again, Adesuwa et al. (2023) employed a mixed-methods approach in voices from the streets: a mixed-methods analysis of peer influence pathways to criminal intent among 420 secondary school adolescents students in Ibadan (aged 14–19) result: Correlation Analysis: Revealed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$) between peer pressure susceptibility (measured via the Peer Pressure Inventory) and self-reported criminal intent (assessed using the Criminal Intent Scale). The regression model showed that peer pressure accounted for 46% of the variance in criminal intent ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$), even after controlling for socioeconomic status and family structure. Based on their group differences. Result showed that adolescents with delinquent peers scored 3.2 times higher on criminal intent than those with non-delinquent peer groups ($t = 8.47$, $p < 0.001$). Their research mapped specific mechanisms such as coercion, behavioural modelling, and norm internalization through which delinquent peers exert influence, identifying critical transition points where peer pressure converts attitudes into concrete criminal intent.

Furthermore, Suleiman et al. (2023) investigated the influence of family environment and peer pressure on criminal tendencies among undergraduate students of Federal University of Lafia, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Three hundred and ninety-one participants with ages ranging from 17 to 28 years (Mean = 18.69; SD = 9.52) were selected from different departments of the institution using a simple random sampling technique. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted for the study. Three hypotheses were formulated and tested using simple linear regression and multiple regression analysis. Simple Linear regression and multiple regression indicated that there was a positive relationship between family environment and criminal tendency ($R = 0.793$, $R^2 = 0.542$ ($F(1,390) = 184.184$, $t = 14.260$, $p < .05$). Further analysis revealed that peer pressure significantly influenced criminal tendency ($R = 0.576$, $R^2 = 0.153$ ($F(1,390) = 24.630$, $t = 6.706$, $p < .05$). Also, result of hypothesis three indicated a significant relationship between family environment and peer pressure on criminal tendency ($R = 0.835$, $R^2 = .610$ ($F(2, 389) = 106.487$, $t = -5.087$, $p < .05$). Moreso, Kuah and Mohamad (2021) in a case study on peer influence and peer pressure in juvenile delinquency. The study aims to expand public knowledge by examining adolescents'

perceptions of juvenile delinquency and exploring the ways in which peer influence and peer pressure affect delinquent behaviours. Although peer influences and peer pressures are often viewed similarly, they impact adolescents' involvement in delinquent activity in different ways. The findings indicate that peer influence has a stronger influence on juvenile delinquency compared to peer pressure. The study also highlights several ways in which peer influence and peer pressure contribute to juvenile delinquency, albeit with some contradictory findings. Additionally, some adolescents reported experiencing both peer influence and peer pressure simultaneously.

Furthermore, Gbenemene and Tokunegiye (2019) examined the influence of peer groups on criminality in Rivers State. The study investigated the influence of peer pressure on youth criminality in Rivers State. The study examines 1268 youths who are employed, unemployed and students (secondary and tertiary). The youths included both sexes, male and female, and were selected using the random sampling technique. The selected samples were analysed using both the descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. The five-point Likert average was employed for the analysis of the mean, whereas the chi-square statistics were used for the inferential statistical analysis. Results from the analysis revealed a statistically significant relationship between peer pressure and various social criminal vices in Rivers State, indicating that peer groups have a stronger influence on criminal-related activities in the state. Additionally, it was discovered that the majority of respondents believe peer group pressure influences youths' behaviour in Rivers State, as the computed mean was greater than the criterion mean. Furthermore, the study reveals that peer group pressure is a significant motivator of youths' involvement in criminality in Rivers State. Based on the findings, the study suggested, among other things, that the management of youth (secondary school students) should be the joint responsibility of parents, teachers, school administrators, and society at large.

A study conducted by Kring et al. (2017) investigated the influence of parenting styles and peer pressure on delinquent behaviours among Senior Secondary School Students in Kaduna metropolis. Results of the finding revealed that there is a significant correlation between parenting style and delinquent behaviour, which implies that children from homes where a democratic parenting style is used are less likely to be delinquents. Autocratic parenting style and delinquent behaviour among students strongly and positively correlate, thereby strongly suggesting that children from homes where autocratic and laissez-faire parenting styles are practised are strongly likely to be delinquents. Peer pressure was also found to encourage delinquent behaviour among students strongly. On the relationship between parenting styles and crime among the youths living in Hananasif slum in Dar-es-Salaam, Musyoki (2017), in his study, which aimed at assessing parenting styles and whether they influence crime among youths in slums, reported that laissez-faire parenting styles and the age factor could predict involvement of youths in petty crimes within the slum area. Furthermore, the result indicated that authoritarian single parents either rarely involve themselves in petty crimes or never. However, it is clearly noted that the overall authoritarian parenting style effectively nurtures the respondents, thereby helping them become good citizens. As further revealed, 18.9% of the respondents from authoritative parenting style and who are single, are involved in petty crimes. However, 14.3% respondents from the same parenting style and who are married get involved in petty crimes. It is clearly indicated that the level of petty crime is much higher among single parents. Similarly, in a study conducted by Irene et al. (2022).

The result showed that peer pressure has a significant influence on criminal thinking among secondary school students in Abuja Municipal Area Council AMAC $R = .325$, $R^2 = .106$, $F(1,348) = 41.200$, $P < .01$. The result further reveals that peer pressure accounts for 10.6% of the dispersion observed on Criminal thinking among secondary school students in AMAC.

Parenting Styles and Criminal Intent

Ashrafa et al. (2019) in their study on the role of parenting and peer pressure in the development of Juvenile delinquent behaviour among higher secondary school children indicated that peer pressure and parenting styles jointly predict delinquency among secondary school children. Furthermore, Ilesanmi (2020) investigated the influence of parenting styles and peer pressure on delinquent behaviour among senior secondary school students in Kaduna Metropolis. Also, a correlational design was adopted, and data were collected from 320 students (male = 164 (51.2%); female = 156 (48.8%)), aged 14 – 19 years, drawn from the ten purposively selected schools with a population of 2256 in the Kaduna metropolis. The results revealed a significant negative correlation, $r = -.188$; $p < .001$, between the authoritative parenting style and delinquent behaviour. Authoritarian parenting style and delinquent behaviour among students strongly and positively correlate, $r = .504$; $p < .000$ and laissez-faire parenting style and delinquent behaviour $r = .662$; $p < .000$. Again, Aquamsha and Pragyana (2022), examined the impact of parenting style and peer pressure on criminal propensity among male and female young adults. The study consisted of 150 young adults, comprising 83 males and 67 females, aged 17 to 24 years, residing in Lucknow City. The results reveal that an authoritarian parenting style is significantly associated with high criminal propensity, and peer pressure had no significant effect on the criminal propensity of young adults. However, none of the variables predicted criminal propensity. The study found no significant gender difference in criminal propensity, parenting style or peer pressure.

Furthermore, Evans et al. (2021) investigated the influence of parenting style on male juvenile delinquency at the Kamiti Youth Correction and Training Centre (KYCTC), Kiambu County, Kenya. The study employed a purposive sampling method and a simple random technique to select a sample of 68 males aged between 15 and 18 years from a target population of 120 delinquent youths at the KYCTC. The study used the ex post facto design. In this design, data were collected through interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and a self-administered questionnaire. Quantitative data collected through questionnaires were analysed through descriptive statistics with the help of SPSS version 25.0, and qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were analysed through thematic analysis. The findings of the study indicated that authoritarian parenting style (42%) and permissive parenting style (29.4%) posed the greatest danger to the development of juvenile delinquency. On the other hand, authoritative parenting style (8.8%) posed the least danger to the development of juvenile delinquency. Presentation of data was done through tables, graphs and thematic descriptions of respondents' statements.

Additionally, Humphrey et al. (2022) investigated the impact of negative parental influences and Criminal thinking on juvenile offending behaviours. Previous research has established that juveniles who experience negative parental influence are more likely to engage in problem and offending behaviour. Less attention has been given to the possibility that Criminal thinking styles

might partially explain this relationship. The study examined the negative parental influences and criminal thinking styles of 1,354 juvenile offenders to establish that both negative parental influences and Criminal thinking are significantly associated with juvenile problems and offending behaviour. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that juvenile Criminal thinking (proactive, reactive, and general) may mediate the relationship between negative parental influences and problem behaviour.

Theoretical Review

Social Learning Theory

This study adopts the social learning theory (Sutherland, 1949; Akers & Lee, 1996). The social learning theory posits that criminal behaviour is learned through the process of interaction within primary groups, particularly peer groups. They argue that the learning involves learning or imbibing criminal codes and habits. In the process, if more criminal codes are learned than conforming codes, then such individuals are most likely to deviate from the approved social norms or laws of the society. They will eventually adopt criminal behaviour as the normative conduct. In their association with nonconformist peers, they have heard and learnt more definitions favourable to deviant behaviour rather than unfavourable definitions. Such interactions produce shared understandings, norms, values, and beliefs, based on which, in most cases, individuals act contrary to the values and expectations of the larger society. In addition, members of non-conforming peer groups not only learn criminal codes but also learn the techniques of committing crime, some of which are sometimes very complicated and sometimes simple.

Research Hypotheses

This study aims to explore how gender differences, peer pressure, and parenting styles contribute to criminal intent among secondary school students in Guma, Benue State. Specifically, the following hypotheses were formulated for this study:

- i. There will be a significant difference between males and females in criminal intent among selected secondary school students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria
- ii. Peer pressure will significantly predict criminal intent among selected secondary school students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria
- iii. Parenting styles (permissive, authoritarian and authoritative/flexible) will jointly predict criminal intent among selected secondary school students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria
- iv. There will be a significant combined influence of gender differences, peer pressure and parenting styles as predictors of criminal intent among selected secondary school students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria

METHODS

Research Design

The study adopted the cross-sectional survey design. A cross-sectional approach is ideal for examining predictors of criminal intent in adolescents because it allows researchers to capture a snapshot of the prevalence and correlates of criminal intent at a specific point in time, providing insight into the complex relationships between various factors. This approach enables the identification of potential risk factors and predictors of criminal intent among adolescents, informing the development of effective prevention and intervention strategies.

Setting

The study was conducted in the Guma Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria.

Population, Sample and Sampling Technique

The target population for this study comprised 271 male and female students from selected secondary schools within the Guma Local Government Area of Benue State. Participants were selected from both Government and Private secondary schools in the four major communities in the Local Government. One school was selected in each of the major communities to represent the subset. Gbajimba: Government Science and Technical College (GSTC) (268), Daudu: Mbawa Community Secondary School Daudu (321). Abinsi: Wisdom Model Secondary School Abinsi (137) and Agasha: Government Secondary School (GSS) (276), totalling 413 students. A total number of 286 was adopted according to the Yamanne sample size formula. However, after distributing the questionnaires to the adolescent students, only 271 copies were returned and were deemed valid for analysis. This study employed the simple random sampling technique to collect data from the respondents.

Instruments

Peer Pressure Questionnaire (PPQ): The instruments were adopted from the Peer Pressure and Popularity Scale developed by Palani and Mani (2016), which consists of 30 items. The scale is scored using a 5-point scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree). The total responses are summed up to produce the total score, which reflects the participants' level of peer pressure. This scale has a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of .94. Hence, the perceived peer pressure scale is found to be valid for application. The pilot study conducted in Abuja, Nigeria, by Ambrose et al. (2022) using 350 secondary school students in Abuja yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .778 for the scale items. This means that the scale is reliable for use on the population of secondary school students. It was also validated using 283 secondary school students in Benue State, Nigeria (Aji, 2023). The scale showed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.803.

Parental Authority Questionnaire: Developed by John and Buri (1991). For each of the following statements, circle the number of the 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The PAQ is designed to measure parental authority, or disciplinary practices, from the point of view of

the child (of any age). The PAQ has three subscales: Permissive (P: items 1, 6, 10, 13, 14, 17, 19, 21, 24 and 28), Authoritarian (A: items 2, 3, 7, 9, 12, 16, 18, 25, 26 and 29), and Authoritative/flexible (F: items 4, 5, 8, 11, 15, 20, 22, 23, 27, and 30). It has a reliability of 0.89. The instrument was validated in Nigeria among 187 adolescents in a study by Omoluabi (2022), which obtained a concurrent validity coefficient of 0.73 with an internal consistency reliability estimate, as indicated by an alpha coefficient of 0.86.

Criminal Thinking Scale: This scale was originally developed by Walters (1998) to measure the thinking patterns of criminals. The original scale consisted of 36 items with response categories ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The original scale reported a Cronbach's reliability coefficient of 0.78. Scoring: Items shown below from this assessment are re-grouped by scale, and response categories range from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Scores for each scale are calculated as follows (and no more than half of the items for any scale can be missing). It was piloted and validated in Nigeria by Ambrose et al. (2022). The result of the Pilot study yielded a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .85. This high Cronbach's alpha was deemed useful for the study.

RESULT

Questionnaire Distribution, Collection Statistics and Sociodemographic Data

A total of 286 copies of the questionnaire were distributed, representing 100% of the sample size for this study. Out of the 286 copies administered, 271, representing 94.76%, were returned and valid for analysis. The data indicate that respondents' ages ranged from 11 to 17 years, with a mean age of 14.8 years and a standard deviation of 1.8 years. Regarding gender distribution, 194 participants (71.6%) identified as male, while 77 participants (28.4%) identified as female.

Hypothesis Testing

The first hypothesis posited that there would be a significant difference in criminal intent between males and females among selected secondary school students in the Guma Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria.

Table 1: Summary of Independent t-test Showing Gender Difference on Criminal Intent

DV	Gender	N	Mean	SD	SE	t	df	p
Criminal Intent	Male	194	71.3557	7.37186	.52927	1.051	269	.294
	Female	77	70.2987	7.70691	.87828			

The results in Table 1 above show that there was no significant gender difference in criminal intent behaviours [$t(269) = 1.051$; $p = .294$]. Based on this result, hypothesis one was therefore not supported. This indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in criminal intent between males and females in the dataset. Gender does not appear to have a meaningful impact on the criminal intent scores within this sample.

The second hypothesis stated that peer pressure will significantly predict criminal intent among selected secondary school students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State.

Table 2: Simple linear regression analysis showing the influence of peer pressure as a predictor of criminal intent

Variable	R	R ²	df	F	β	t	Sig.
Constant	.007	.006	1,269	.015		24.714	.000
Peer Pressure					.007	.122	.903

Dependent Variable: Criminal Intent

The result presented in Table 2 above revealed no significant influence of peer pressure as a predictor of criminal intent among selected secondary school students in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State [$R=.007$, $R^2=.006$, $F[1,269]=.015$, $p>.05$]. Based on this result, hypothesis two was not accepted. This implies that peer pressure does not appear to be a significant predictor of criminal intent in this particular analysis.

The third hypothesis posits that parenting styles (permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative/flexible) will jointly predict criminal intent among selected secondary school students in the Guma Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria.

Table 3: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Showing the influence of parenting styles as predictors of criminal intent

DV	Predictor(s)	R	R ²	F	df	β	t	p
Criminal Intent	Constant	.415	.173	18.556**	3, 267		16.107	.000
	Permissive					.218	3.387	.001
	Authoritarian					.191	2.890	.004
	Authoritative					.116	1.867	.063

**** $p < 0.005$**

The results in Table 3 above revealed that parenting styles (permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative) jointly predicted criminal intent [$R = .415$; $R^2 = .173$; $F(3, 267) = 18.556$; $p < 0.05$]. The hypothesis was accepted. Furthermore, the coefficient of determination indicates that the three parenting styles can explain 17.3% of the variance in criminal intent. This implies that the secondary school students raised in these parenting environments might be more likely to develop criminal intent patterns.

On an independent basis, the results show that a permissive parenting style [$\beta = .218$, $t = 3.387$; $p < .001$]. This implies that permissive parenting could lead to an absence of discipline, boundaries, and structure, which may contribute to deviant behaviour and criminal intent. The results of the authoritarian parenting style revealed that [$\beta = .191$, $t = 2.890$; $p < .004$]. This result suggests that authoritarian parenting, characterised by greater rigidity, may lead to resentment, rebellion, and

poor decision-making, which could also contribute to the development of criminal intent. Lastly, regarding authoritative parenting, the results showed that [$\beta = .116, t = 1.867; p > 0.05$]. Although it shows a trend toward significance, it does not appear to have a strong enough relationship with criminal intent in this specific study, likely due to its relatively more balanced and positive approach to parenting.

The fourth hypothesis posits that there will be a significant joint influence of gender differences, peer pressure, and parenting styles in predicting criminal intent among selected secondary school students in the Guma Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria.

Table 4: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Showing the joint influence of parenting styles as predictors of criminal intent

DV	Predictor(s)	R	R ²	F	df	β	t	p
Criminal Intent	Constant	.429	.184	11.962**	5, 265		14.161	.000
	Gender					-.057	-1.031	.304
	Peer Pressure					-.093	-1.623	.106
	Permissive					.224	3.488	.001
	Authoritarian					.197	2.990	.003
	Authoritative					.132	2.103	.036

**** $p < 0.005$**

The results in Table 4 above revealed that gender differences, peer pressure, and parenting styles (permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative) jointly predicted criminal intent [$R = 0.429, R^2 = 0.184, F(5, 265) = 11.962, p < 0.05$]. Based on this result, the hypothesis is accepted. The findings imply that both permissive and authoritarian parenting styles significantly predict higher levels of criminal intent, while peer pressure emerges as a negative predictor as well. Gender does not appear to play a significant role in influencing these outcomes within this sample. The R^2 value [0.184] indicated that only 18.4% of the total variance in criminal intent is explained by the combination of gender, peer pressure, and parenting styles.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study present an interesting picture of the predictors of criminal intent among secondary school students in Guma, Benue State, Nigeria. While some results align with existing literature, others diverge significantly, warranting deeper contextual analysis.

Contrary to much of the existing literature, this study found no significant gender differences in criminal intent. This finding diverges from previous research by Jamie et al. (2019), who identified significant variations in 26% of items measuring criminal intent between genders. Similarly, it contradicts Benson and Harbinson's (2020) findings that women scored higher than men on certain criminal thinking styles related to white-collar crimes, as well as Oluwadare and Agboola's (2021) study in Nigeria, which highlighted male criminality as the predominant focus in crime discussions. Several contextual factors within the Nigerian setting may explain this unexpected finding. First, the similar environmental, social, and cultural influences experienced by both male

and female students in Guma may have shaped their criminal intent behaviours in comparable ways. In many Nigerian communities, particularly in Benue State, both genders face similar socioeconomic challenges, exposure to violence, and limited opportunities that may contribute to criminal intent. Additionally, the changing gender dynamics in Nigerian society, with increasing female participation in activities traditionally dominated by males, may be narrowing gender differences in risk behaviours. This finding challenges the conventional wisdom that males are inherently more prone to criminal intent and suggests that in certain contexts, gender may not be as significant a factor as previously assumed. It underscores the importance of considering local contextual factors when examining criminal behaviour rather than relying solely on findings from Western contexts.

Perhaps the most unexpected finding of this study was that peer pressure did not significantly predict criminal intent. This result stands in stark contrast to numerous previous studies, including Onoyase and Eбенуwa (2018), who found that peer group influence significantly affects adolescents' antisocial behaviours, and Suleiman et al. (2023), who reported that peer pressure significantly influences criminal tendencies. Similarly, it contradicts Jinho and Jason's (2018) finding that increasing the proportion of criminal peers increases an individual's likelihood of engaging in criminal activity, as well as Adebayo's (2021) study, which shows that students associating with cybercrime-involved peers were 4.3 times more likely to express an intent to engage in such activities. Several cultural and social dynamics specific to the Nigerian settings may explain this divergence. First, the strong family structure and parental authority prevalent in many Nigerian communities, including Benue State, may buffer against peer influence. Nigerian adolescents often maintain strong ties to their families even as they develop peer relationships, with family values and expectations potentially overriding peer influences. Second, the collectivist nature of Nigerian society may create different peer dynamics compared to more individualistic Western societies, where much of the research on peer pressure has been conducted. Additionally, the specific measurement of peer pressure in this study may not have captured the nuanced ways peer influence operates in Guma, Benue State. Peer influence in Nigerian secondary schools may operate through different mechanisms than those captured by standardised instruments developed in the Western world. This finding challenges the social learning theory adopted in this study, which posits that criminal behaviour is learned through interaction with peer groups. The results suggest that, in certain cultural contexts, other factors, such as family upbringing, personal values, and socioeconomic conditions, may have a stronger influence on criminal intent than peer pressure.

Consistent with previous research, this study found that parenting styles (permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative) jointly predicted criminal intent. This finding aligns with Ashrafa et al.'s (2019) study, which indicates that parenting styles predict delinquency among secondary school children, and Ilesanmi's (2020) research, showing significant correlations between parenting styles and delinquent behaviour. Specifically, both permissive and authoritarian parenting styles were significant predictors of criminal intent, while authoritative parenting showed a trend toward significance but did not reach statistical significance. These findings support Ilesanmi's (2020) conclusion that children from homes where authoritarian and permissive parenting styles are practised are more likely to exhibit delinquent behaviours, while authoritative parenting may serve as a protective factor. The significant influence of parenting styles using Nigerian samples may reflect the continued importance of family structures and parental authority in Nigerian society.

Despite modernisation and globalisation, Nigerian families generally maintain strong hierarchical structures, and parental influence remains substantial throughout adolescence. This finding highlights the crucial role of family environments in shaping adolescent behaviour in the Nigerian context.

The study also found that gender differences, peer pressure, and parenting styles jointly predicted criminal intent. However, the relatively low value indicates that these factors collectively explain only 18.4% of the variance in criminal intent, suggesting that other unexamined factors play significant roles in influencing criminal intent among secondary school students in Guma.

The findings imply that both permissive and authoritarian parenting styles significantly predict higher levels of criminal intent. At the same time, peer pressure also emerges as a strong predictor. Independently, Gender does not appear to play a significant role in influencing these outcomes within this setting.

Conclusion

This study examined the predictors of criminal intent among secondary school students in Guma, Benue State, Nigeria, with a focus on gender differences, peer pressure, and parenting styles. The findings revealed that while gender differences and peer pressure individually did not significantly predict criminal intent, parenting styles (particularly permissive and authoritarian) were significant predictors. Moreover, the combination of all these factors jointly predicted criminal intent, though they explained only a modest portion of the variance. The findings have important implications for social learning theory, which was adopted in this study. The lack of significant peer influence on criminal intent challenges the theory's emphasis on peer learning as a primary mechanism for developing criminal behaviours. Instead, the results suggest that in the Nigerian settings, family factors, specifically parenting styles, may play a more crucial role in shaping criminal intent than peer influences. This indicates that social learning theory may need to be contextualised or expanded to account for cultural variations in the relative influence of different socialisation agents. Additionally, the finding of no gender differences in criminal intent contradicts the general assumption in criminological literature that males are more prone to criminal intent than females. This suggests that theoretical frameworks examining criminal behaviour should consider contextual factors that may moderate gender differences across different cultural settings.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made by the researcher:

- i. Since there were no gender differences in predicting criminal intent behaviours, peer pressure did not appear to be a significant predictor of criminal intent. It was recommended that further research may be necessary to investigate other factors that influence criminal intent, such as socioeconomic background or community engagement.
- ii. Parenting styles were found to predict the criminal intent of the secondary school students. It was recommended that intervention programs focus on educating parents

about the impact of different parenting styles and encourage authoritative practices that are balanced with warmth and discipline.

- iii. However, the hypothesis that parenting styles predict criminal intent is supported, particularly by permissive and authoritarian parenting styles, which have a significant positive relationship with criminal intent. It was recommended that interventions aiming to reduce criminal intent in adolescents could benefit from promoting parenting styles that combine appropriate levels of control with warmth and support (i.e., authoritative parenting).

Implications

The findings have several practical implications for parents, educators, policymakers and future research in Nigeria:

1. Given the significant influence of parenting styles on criminal intent, there is a clear need for parenting education programs that promote authoritative parenting practices characterised by appropriate levels of control combined with warmth and support. Such programs could help reduce the prevalence of permissive and authoritarian parenting styles that were found to predict higher levels of criminal intent.
2. Schools should consider implementing guidance and counselling programs that address not only academic issues but also social and emotional development. The appointment of school psychologists, as recommended in the study, could provide valuable support to students at risk of developing criminal intent.
3. Strengthening partnerships between families and schools could create a more supportive environment for adolescents, potentially mitigating the development of criminal intent. Such partnerships could facilitate consistent messaging and expectations across home and school settings.
4. Policymakers should consider developing and implementing policies that support positive parenting practices and provide resources for families struggling with effective child-rearing approaches. Additionally, policies that address the broader socioeconomic challenges facing Nigerian youth could help reduce the underlying factors contributing to criminal intent.
5. Future studies should explore more deeply the cultural factors that may explain the lack of gender differences and peer influence on criminal intent in the Nigerian context. Qualitative research methods could provide richer insights into these dynamics.
6. The unexpected findings regarding peer pressure suggest the need for culturally appropriate measures of peer influence that capture the specific ways peer dynamics operate in Nigerian contexts.

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