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Awareness and Prevalence Analysis of Juvenile Delinquency among Secondary School Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

Juvenile delinquency remains an important behavioral and educational concern because repeated misconduct may interfere with school participation, peer relationships and adolescent adjustment. This study examined awareness and perceived prevalence of juvenile delinquency among school-going adolescents and other respondents in selected public secondary schools in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was used within a mixed-methods framework. Of 295 questionnaires administered, 289 (97.97%) were correctly completed and analyzed, while six participants contributed qualitative interview data. Descriptive statistics were used for the quantitative data and thematic analysis for the interviews. Results showed that 96.8% of respondents were either very aware or aware of behaviours considered juvenile delinquency. Delinquent acts were perceived as recurring: 93.8% reported that students engaged in such acts frequently or very frequently. Truancy/absenteeism was identified as the most common manifestation (72.3%), followed by fighting/physical aggression (18.3%). Furthermore, 92.8% regarded juvenile delinquency as serious or very serious. The findings indicate high awareness alongside substantial perceived occurrence, suggesting that awareness alone may be insufficient to prevent delinquent behaviour. Prevention should therefore combine awareness with school attendance monitoring, supportive counselling, parental supervision and constructive youth engagement.

Keywords: Adolescent, Awareness, Behaviour, Juvenile delinquency, Prevalence, School.

1. INTRODUCTION

Parenting is a major socialization process through which children and adolescents acquire values, behavioral expectations, self-regulatory practices and patterns of interaction with others.

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Parenting style describes the broader emotional and behavioral context within which specific parenting practices occur, including the balance between parental responsiveness (warmth) and demanding (control) [1], [2]. Classic typologies distinguish authoritative parenting (high warmth combined with firm but reasoned control), authoritarian parenting (high control with lower warmth), permissive parenting (high warmth with limited control) and neglectful or uninvolved parenting (low warmth and low control) [1], [3]. These patterns have been linked to a wide range of adolescent adjustment outcomes, including externalizing problems and delinquent behaviour.

Juvenile delinquency encompasses behaviours that violate legal, social or institutional expectations among persons below the age of 18. In school settings, common manifestations include truancy, fighting, bullying, theft, substance use, vandalism, examination malpractice and other forms of misconduct [4], [5]. The development of such behaviour is multidimensional and may reflect the interaction of family processes, peer relationships, school experiences and broader socio-economic conditions. Contemporary evidence indicates that parenting dimensions are associated with externalizing and delinquent outcomes. Meta-analytic work has reported consistent associations between negative parenting practices and disruptive behaviour, while longitudinal studies have linked authoritative parenting with lower delinquency and reduced association with delinquent peers [6], [7].

In many Nigerian secondary schools, concerns about increasing levels of juvenile delinquency have been raised in recent years. Reports from different geopolitical zones document patterns of truancy, examination malpractice, classroom defiance, bullying, substance experimentation and, in some contexts, cult-related activities [8], [9]. These behaviours threaten academic progress, peer relationships and community well-being. Although peer pressure, socio-economic background, school environment and media exposure are frequently implicated, family processes-especially the quality of parental supervision, discipline and emotional involvement-remain among the most consistently identified influences on adolescent behavioral outcomes [10], [11].

Anambra State, located in the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria, is widely recognized for its emphasis on education and relatively high literacy indicators. Across communities and secondary schools in the state, stakeholders have identified areas of concern commonly reported in the literature on adolescent behaviour, including examination malpractice, truancy, classroom defiance, bullying and substance experimentation [12], [13]. These patterns reflect the complex pressures that accompany modernizing and urban environments rather than implying a uniform crisis across the state. Awka South Local Government Area, as an urban and educational hub within Anambra State, offers a useful setting for examining how adolescents and adults perceive the visibility and seriousness of delinquent behaviour in everyday school life.

Awareness of juvenile delinquency refers to the degree to which students, parents, teachers and community members recognize delinquent behaviours, understand their consequences and can identify associated risk factors. Globally and within African contexts, studies show that awareness among adolescents is often high due to public education, digital exposure and school safety campaigns [14], [15]. However, increased awareness does not automatically translate into reduced involvement. Research indicates that adolescents may continue to engage in delinquent acts despite knowing the risks because of peer influence, sensation-seeking tendencies or weak

parental monitoring [16], [17]. In Nigerian secondary schools, prevalence studies have consistently documented high rates of certain deviant behaviours even when students demonstrate knowledge of school rules and social consequences [18], [19].

Truancy, in particular, has been identified as a gateway behaviour that can escalate into more serious forms of delinquency if left unaddressed. Studies conducted in Anambra and other South-East states have highlighted the persistence of absenteeism and its association with peer influence, family factors and school climate [20], [21]. When students repeatedly miss school without legitimate reason, opportunities for constructive engagement decline while exposure to unsupervised peer networks increases. Understanding the perceived prevalence of such behaviours is therefore essential for designing targeted prevention strategies that move beyond information dissemination alone.

This study therefore discussed the level of awareness and perceived prevalence of juvenile delinquency using the field evidence contained in the original study conducted in Awka South Local Government Area. Understanding whether adolescents and adults recognize delinquent behaviour, how frequently it is perceived to occur, and which manifestations are most visible is important for targeting prevention resources. The analysis focused on four interrelated dimensions: awareness of acts considered delinquent, perceived frequency of engagement, the most common forms observed, and the perceived seriousness of the problem within the school community.

2. METHODS

Study Design and Participants

The study adopted a descriptive survey design within a mixed-methods framework. The quantitative component involved senior secondary school learners and other relevant respondents drawn from five communities - Awka, Nibo, Amawbia, Mbaukwu and Isiagu, in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. The qualitative component comprised six purposively selected participants: one male teacher, one female teacher, one male parent, one female parent, one male student and one female student. The original study population across the selected public secondary schools was 1,120 senior secondary school students, and a quantitative sample size of 295 was determined using Taro Yamane's formula. Of the 295 questionnaires administered, 289 (97.97%) were correctly completed and returned and formed the basis of quantitative analysis.

Sampling and Data Collection

A multistage sampling procedure was used for the quantitative strand, while purposive sampling was used for the qualitative strand. The selected schools were Igwebuike Grammar School Awka, Ezike High School Nibo, Community Secondary School Amawbia, Community Secondary School Mbaukwu and Community Secondary School Isiagu. Data were collected with a structured questionnaire developed from the study objectives and relevant literature, together with an in-depth interview guide. The questionnaire covered demographic characteristics, juvenile delinquency, parenting styles, behavioral dispositions and mitigation strategies. Face and content validity were established through expert review by the research supervisor and specialists in sociology and educational research.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics, principally frequencies and percentages. The original study tested its two hypotheses with chi-square statistics at the 0.05 level of significance. For the present objective-specific manuscript, only analyses directly relevant to the stated objective are emphasized. Qualitative interview data were analyzed thematically and used to complement the quantitative findings. Selected participants' responses are presented as illustrative quotations alongside the relevant quantitative results.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary and respondents were informed of the academic purpose of the study and the confidentiality of their responses. Participants were not compelled to answer questions with which they were uncomfortable and were informed of their right to withdraw. Interviews were conducted privately and with participant consent. Particular care was taken because the study involved secondary school students and sensitive issues relating to delinquency and family relationships.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents' Awareness of Juvenile Delinquency

Table 1 presents respondents' awareness of acts considered juvenile delinquency among secondary school students.

Table 1: Respondents' Awareness of Juvenile Delinquency

Responses	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Very aware	101	34.9
Aware	179	61.9
Somewhat aware	6	2.1
Not aware	3	1.0
Total	289	100.0

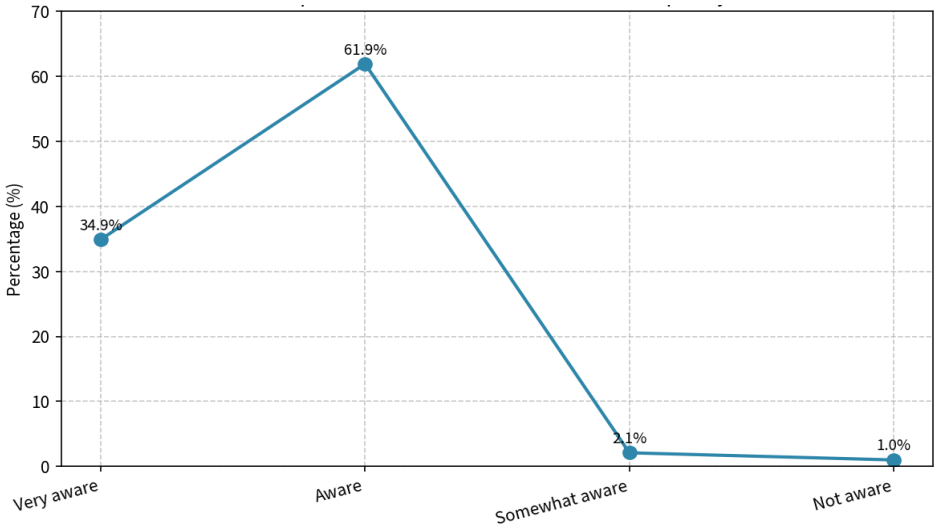


Figure 1: Respondents' Awareness of Juvenile Delinquency.

As shown in Table 1 and illustrated in Figure 1, a total of 280 respondents (96.8%) were either very aware or aware of acts considered juvenile delinquency, whereas only 3 respondents (1.0%) reported that they were not aware. The line graph in Figure 1 highlights the sharp concentration of responses in the "Aware" and "Very aware" categories, with a steep decline toward the lower awareness levels. This pattern indicates that delinquent behaviours are sufficiently visible within the school and community environment to generate widespread knowledge of their occurrence. High awareness is important because it provides a foundation for prevention messaging; however, it does not necessarily mean that adolescents will refrain from delinquent behaviour. The qualitative evidence similarly indicated that delinquent behaviours were visible within school and community settings. One female teacher noted that certain students are repeatedly involved in the same problems despite prior warnings. The distinction between knowledge and behavioral restraint is consistent with the broader literature showing that behavioral outcomes depend on the social context in which young people make decisions, including peer influence and the quality of parental monitoring [14], [16]. Consequently, interventions in Awka South may need to move beyond basic awareness creation towards addressing the structural and relational factors that sustain repeated misconduct. School-based programmes that combine information with practical support for attendance and emotional regulation are therefore warranted. The high recognition rate also suggests that teachers, parents and students already share a common vocabulary for discussing delinquency, which can facilitate coordinated responses.

Perceived Frequency of Delinquent Acts

Table 2 presents respondents' views on the frequency with which students engage in delinquent acts such as fighting, truancy or stealing.

Table 2: Perceived Frequency of Students' Engagement in Delinquent Acts.

Responses	**Frequency**	**Percentage(%)**
Very frequently	47	16.3
Frequently	224	77.5
Sometimes	18	6.2
Total	289	100.0

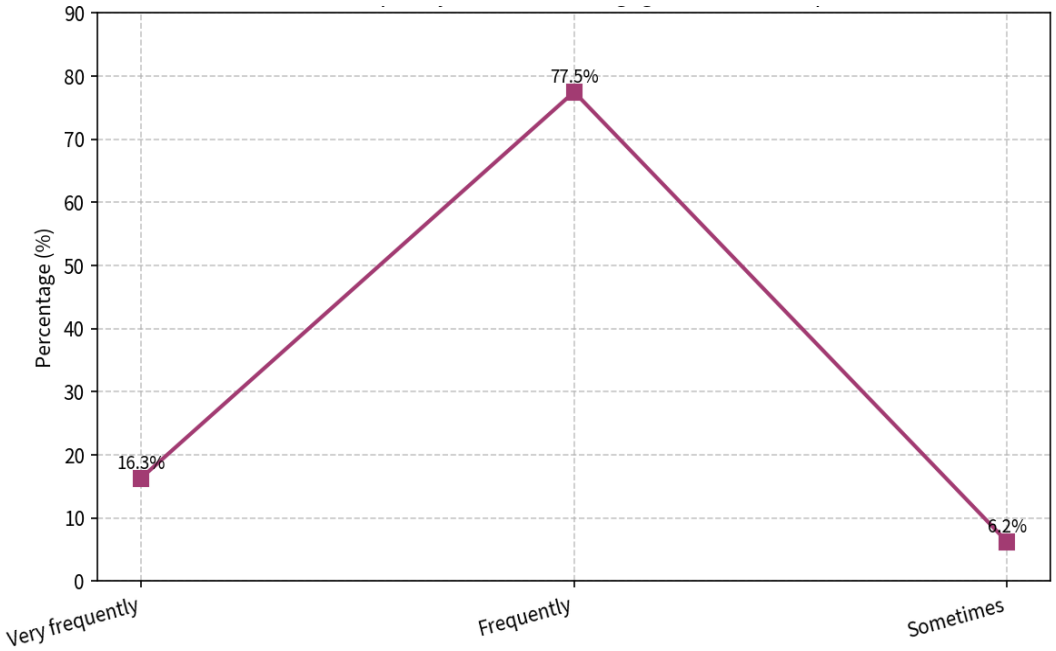


Figure 2: Perceived Frequency of Students' Engagement in Delinquent Acts.

Table 2 and Figure 2 showed that 93.8% of respondents selected either "frequently" or "very frequently," indicating that juvenile delinquency was perceived as a recurring rather than occasional problem. The line graph in Figure 2 rises sharply from "Very frequently" to peak at "Frequently" before falling to the lower "Sometimes" category, visually confirming the concentration of responses around regular occurrence. Interview participants described repeated incidents of truancy, staying away from school and recurring misconduct. A female teacher observed that some students are dealt with repeatedly for the same problem, while a male parent noted that behaviour often starts with missing school or staying out late and then becomes habitual. The pattern suggests that prevention should address repeated exposure and reinforcement of misconduct rather than relying solely on one-time awareness campaigns. When delinquent acts are perceived as frequent, the risk of normalization increases, especially among younger students who observe older peers. This finding aligns with studies that identify truancy and related behaviours as persistent challenges in Nigerian secondary schools [18], [20]. Schools therefore need early-warning systems that flag repeated absenteeism and classroom defiance before patterns become entrenched. Parental monitoring and consistent school follow-up can interrupt the cycle of repeated involvement. Overall, the high perceived frequency underscores the urgency of multi-level interventions that target both individual behaviour and the environmental conditions that sustain it.

Most Common Forms of Juvenile Delinquency

Table 3 presents respondents' views on the most common form of juvenile delinquency among students.

Table 3: Most Common Form of Juvenile Delinquency among Students

Responses	Frequency	Percent(%)
Fighting/physical aggression	53	18.3
Truancy/absenteeism	209	72.3
Vandalism or theft	6	2.1
Use of drugs/alcohol	18	6.2
Cyber-related delinquency	3	1.0
Total	289	100.0

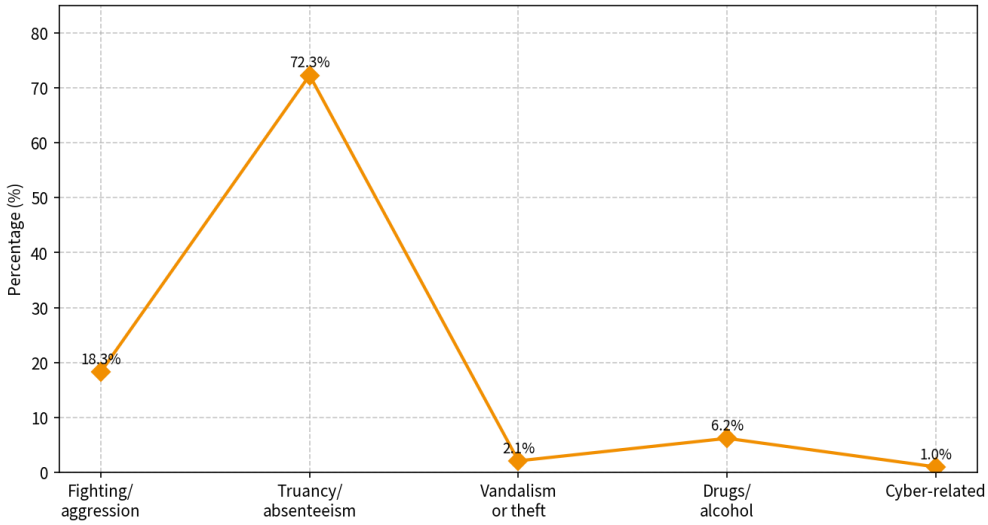


Figure 3: The most common forms of juvenile delinquency among students.

Table 3 and Figure 3 revealed that truancy/absenteeism was the dominant response at 72.3%, while fighting/physical aggression accounted for 18.3%. Drug/alcohol use, vandalism or theft, and cyber-related delinquency were reported less often. The line graph in Figure 3 shows a pronounced peak at truancy/absenteeism, followed by a sharp decline across the remaining categories, underscoring the relative prominence of school disengagement. The qualitative data supported this ranking. A female teacher described students leaving home in uniform but not arriving at school, while a male student observed that some peers simply do not feel like attending class, especially when friends are also absent. The prominence of truancy indicates that school disengagement is a particularly visible manifestation in the study population and should form a concrete target for prevention. Truancy has been linked in the literature to subsequent academic under performance, association with deviant peers and escalation into more serious misconduct [20], [21]. Attendance monitoring systems, early identification of at-risk students and coordinated home-school communication are therefore essential. The smaller proportions associated with substance use and cyber-related delinquency should not be ignored; they indicate that the problem extends beyond absenteeism and requires a broad behavioral health approach. Overall, the distribution of responses in Table 3 and Figure 3 provides a clear

empirical basis for prioritizing attendance support while remaining attentive to aggression and other emerging forms of delinquency.

Perceived Seriousness of Juvenile Delinquency

Table 4 presents respondents' views on the seriousness of juvenile delinquency in their school community.

Table 4: Respondents' Views on the Seriousness of Juvenile Delinquency

Responses	Frequency	Percent(%)
Very serious	99	34.3
Serious	169	58.5
Moderately serious	21	7.3
Total	289	100.0

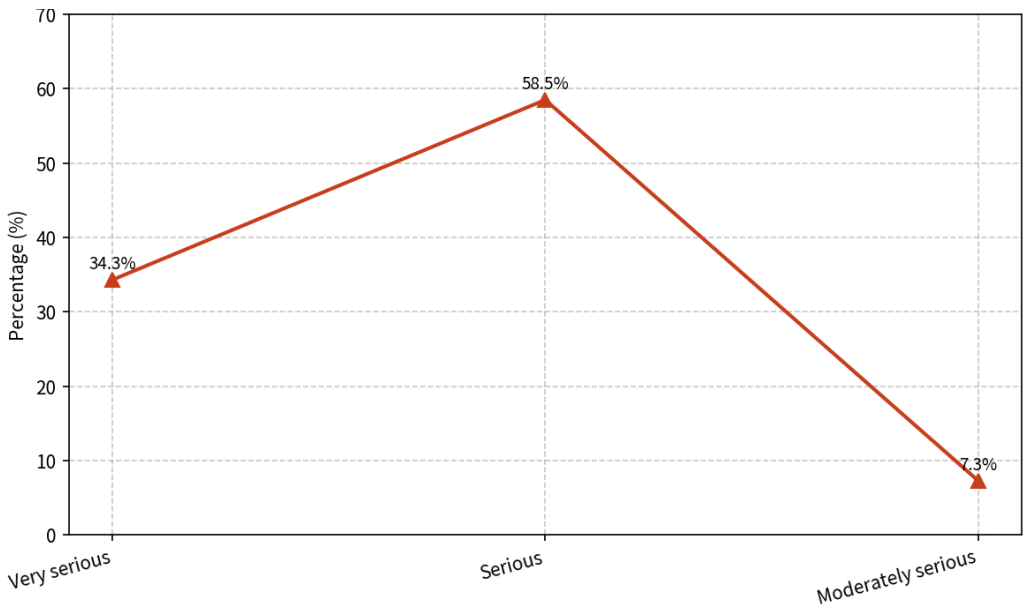


Figure 4: Perceived seriousness of juvenile delinquency.

Table 4 and Figure 4 showed that a combined 92.8% of respondents considered juvenile delinquency either serious or very serious. The line graph in Figure 4 peaks at the "Serious" category and remains elevated at "Very serious," with only a small proportion selecting "Moderately serious." This level of concern indicates that respondents viewed the issue as more than a minor disciplinary matter. Qualitative responses linked repeated absence and misconduct with possible deterioration in school participation and peer relationships. A female teacher emphasized that uncorrected behaviour can become part of the child's pattern, while a male student noted the risk of other students copying unchecked misconduct. The high seriousness rating reinforces the need for coordinated school, family and community responses. When stakeholders perceive a problem as serious, the political and organizational will to invest in prevention is more likely to be mobilized. The finding is consistent with broader Nigerian

evidence that frames juvenile delinquency as a threat to educational attainment and community safety [8], [9]. Schools should therefore treat repeated truancy and aggression as priority indicators requiring structured intervention rather than ad-hoc punishment. Parental engagement programmes and community youth activities can complement school-level discipline by addressing the relational and environmental drivers of the behaviour. In sum, the convergence of high awareness, high perceived frequency, the dominance of truancy and high seriousness ratings provides a coherent empirical platform for multi-level prevention strategies in Awka South Local Government Area.

4. CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates high awareness of juvenile delinquency alongside a high perceived frequency of occurrence among secondary school students in Awka South Local Government Area. Specifically, 96.8% of respondents were either very aware or aware of behaviours considered delinquent, while 93.8% reported that students engaged in such acts frequently or very frequently. Truancy/absenteeism emerged as the most prominent form identified (72.3%), followed by fighting/physical aggression (18.3%), with smaller proportions reporting substance use, vandalism or theft, and cyber-related delinquency. An overwhelming majority (92.8%) considered delinquency serious or very serious within their school community. These results indicate that delinquent behaviour is both widely recognized and regarded as a recurring and consequential problem rather than an occasional or minor disciplinary issue.

The evidence indicates that prevention requires more than awareness creation. Because knowledge of delinquent acts is already high, programmes should incorporate practical school attendance support, consistent parental supervision, counselling for students who exhibit repeated misconduct, and constructive opportunities for adolescents. Schools can prioritize early-warning systems for absenteeism, structured mentorship and firm yet supportive enforcement of rules. Parents can strengthen monitoring of after-school activities and peer associations while maintaining open communication. Community organizations and local authorities can expand youth engagement and recreational programmes that reduce unsupervised time. Students themselves retain responsibility for practising self-discipline and avoiding negative peer influence.

In theoretical terms, the findings are consistent with perspectives that emphasis the role of social learning and social bonds in the development of adolescent behaviour. When parental monitoring is weak and opportunities for unsupervised peer interaction increase, the likelihood of repeated misconduct rises. Conversely, environments that combine clear expectations with supportive relationships can promote more adaptive behavioral dispositions. The present results therefore support integrated interventions that strengthen family–school collaboration, improve attendance monitoring and provide adolescents with positive developmental pathways.

Overall, the study concludes that juvenile delinquency among school-going adolescents in Awka South is best addressed through a multi-level approach that moves from recognition of the problem to sustained behavioral support. The high levels of awareness, perceived frequency and seriousness documented here provide a clear empirical foundation for such action. Future research should track the impact of targeted interventions over time and examine whether

reductions in truancy are accompanied by improvements in academic engagement and peer relationships. By combining school, family and community resources, stakeholders can reduce the conditions that allow delinquent patterns to become entrenched and thereby promote more positive developmental outcomes for secondary school students.

5. DECLARATIONS

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Use of AI and AI-Assisted Technologies: AI tools were used for structural formatting and language refinement of the manuscript.
Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.
Copyright Permissions: All tables and figures in this manuscript are derived from the author's original field-survey.

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