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# PEER SUPPORT AND ADOLESCENT DEVIANT BEHAVIOR: THE IMPLICATION OF TEACHING LEARNING PROCESS IN MEZAM DIVISION, NORTHWEST REGION OF CAMEROON

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## Abstract

The study was carried out to investigate the influence of peer support on adolescent deviant behavior in some selected secondary schools in Mezam Division, Northwest Region of Cameroon. Through a comprehensive mixed-methods approach utilizing a concurrent nested research design, the researchers gathered data from multiple perspectives, including 533 students, 25 disciplinary masters, and 20 guidance counselors across selected secondary schools. The methodological rigor of the study was enhanced by employing various data collection instruments, including questionnaires, interview guides, and focus group discussions. This triangulation of methods allowed for a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics between peer support and behavioral outcomes. The quantitative analysis, conducted using both descriptive and inferential statistics, provided a systematic examination of the relationships between variables. Specifically, the use of Spearman's rho correlation test was justified by the non-normal distribution of the data, as confirmed by normality assumption testing. The qualitative component of the study, analyzed through thematic analysis, complemented the quantitative findings by providing rich, contextual insights into the phenomenon. The study's findings demonstrated a significant negative correlation between peer support and deviant behavior ( $R\text{-value} = -0.237^{**}$ ,  $p\text{-value} 0.000 < 0.05$ ). This inverse relationship indicates that as peer support increases, there is a corresponding decrease in deviant behavior among adolescents. This finding has important implications for educational practice and policy, suggesting that fostering positive peer relationships and support systems within schools could serve as an effective strategy for reducing behavioral problems among adolescent students.

**Keywords** Peer support, adolescents, deviant behaviour.

## INTRODUCTION

Education remains one of the tools for the transformation of an individual and society at

large. It is one of the most powerful instruments for social change, which plays a crucial role in nation-building. According to Idowu and Esere (2007), education helps to develop people's intellectual and functional capabilities, but some deviant behaviours has made the school not to be effective. The school is a place where students acquire needed competencies for various vocations. The place of the counsellor in schools is important which may help to reduce such ills.

Deviant behaviour refers to behaviour that does not conform to the norms and expectations of a given group of people or society (Oghiabephan & Ikekhua, 2013). Deviant behaviours from time immemorial are attributed mostly to the adolescents and the youths in educational system. However, due to the dynamism of the society, various sorts of deviant behaviours are being exhibited in our present dispensation. In recent times, schools and the society at large have become reservoirs for committing various sorts of deviant behaviours which include theft, rudeness, sexual-harassment, truancy, late coming to school and so on (Oghiabephan & Ikekhua, 2013). Accordingly, these phenomena have become a destructive approach that marred the growth and sustainability of most schools and societal settings today.

Deviant behaviours among secondary school going populations the world over, are of concern to educators, counsellors and psychologists. This is because deviant behaviours at the adolescent stage have the potential to undermine the achievement of both personal and national goals. The danger to achievement of goals stems, largely from the varying control responses that are often elicited with regard to deviant behaviors (Karega, 2013). Deviance describes actions or behaviors that violate social norms, including formally enacted rules as well as informal violations of social norms. The departure of certain types of behavior from

the norms of a particular society at a particular time and violation of certain types of group norms where behavior is in a disapproved direction and of sufficient degree to exceed the tolerance limit of the community (Macious & Gerber, 2010).

peer support is an important aspect that can affect mental health both positively and negatively. The World Health Organization (2019) defines mental health as a state of well-being that enables the individual to know their capabilities and use them effectively and productively in a way that will be useful to them and their communities. Peer support provides physical and psychological advantages for people faced with stressful physical and psychosocial events and helps in reducing psychological distress when faced with stressful events (Harandi, Taghinasab and Nayeri 2017).

### **Review of related literature**

The role played by peers in adolescent deviant behavior has been examined from two contrasting perspectives: the social bonding perspective and the social interaction perspective. The social bonding perspective lay emphasis on the bright side of friendship and stresses that peers contribute positively to adolescent's emotional, cognitive, academic and behavioral functioning. In contrast the perspective of social integration focuses on the dark side of peer group particularly with regards to risk taking and antisocial behaviour. This approach examines peer's behaviour styles and peer's interaction to explain how peers may have a negative impact on adolescent's adjustments (Vitaro, Boivin and Bukowski, 2009). Experience with peers is commonly assumed to make numerous contributions to a student's behavior. Having peers that have antisocial behaviour and friends that are depressed has a negative effect on the wellbeing of adolescents (Hartup, 1993).

According to Aissenson and others (2007) adolescents feel freer to talk about their problems

with their peers rather than their parents as such peers play a great role in the formation of adolescent behavior. The influence peers and friends have on adolescents is both positive and negative. The need for acceptance is very strong among adolescents, and their desire to belong to a particular social network may have an undesirable price to pay. When a child has friends that influences them negatively (for example friends that do drugs, are brutal, rude and aggressive) has a negative effect on the child's personality because friends as sources of social support play a part in shaping the personality of their fellow friends, social relations, social interaction and their overall wellbeing (Connor, 2012). In recent years, social support has been a frequent research focus because it is considered to be an important external mechanism of protection against possible obstacles by which an individual can cope with the changes inside and outside the family environment (Gonçalves et al., 2011). The presence of positive peer support can make adolescent to be honest, avoid drugs, avoid alcohol and be respectful. The feeling of not fitting in or not being good enough to belong within a particular group of friends may lead to depression and distorting psychosocial wellbeing of adolescents (Hagen et al., 2023).

According to Hay (2005), peers are very important source of social support as it is assumed that peers are important factors in adolescent behaviour. During the adolescence stage, children seek attention outside the home especially when relationships with family members are less influential because the child is considered to be big to handle certain issues on their own; friends at this level become a strong support system. According to Youniss and Smollar (1985) peer relations have an important role to play in enabling social integration within a social group and for better socialization in their environment. Adolescent peers, especially those that are emotionally strong, are more than a socializing

force for the child, they provide an important context for learning, socialization and integration within a social network.

Research shows that adolescents with positive feelings toward their school are less likely to be deviant (Dornbusch, Erickson, Laird, and Wong 2001). When parents do not have a strong bond with their child and do not teach them pro-social values, the adolescent has difficulties in school. These difficulties lead to rejection by conventional peers, and they drift into association with deviant peers. This form of participation in deviance is a direct affect from deviant peers (Simons et al 1991). Now that the adolescent is relatively unrestrained from the opinions of parents, teachers, and conventional peers, their new deviant friends encourage and reinforce them to participate in deviant behaviors. Deviant friends are accepting of each other and their deviant actions.

According to Connor and Davidson (2003), Peer support has been seen as a great source of adolescences resilience that is significantly and positively associated with self-esteem and pro-social behavior. The interaction effect of peer support and resilience was significantly positively associated with self-esteem. Simple slope analysis revealed that when peer support and self-esteem are stronger the adolescent becomes resilient at a higher level than adolescents with lower levels of social support from peers. Lan and Wang (2019) state that when adolescents are positively supported by their friends and peers, they turn to be resilient and develop a positive self-esteem leading to healthy psychosocial wellbeing. On the other hand, adolescents that does not belong to a social network that they are loved and accepted, their self-esteem is low and went faced with life challenges, it is easy for them to give up on life because they do not have a confidant to push and support them and make them know that they are

able to handle the challenges life throws at them thus negatively affecting their psychosocial behavior.

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### **METHODOLOGY**

The research does adopt mixed methods with a concurrent nested research design. That is because the data collected were both quantitative and qualitative at the same time or parallel within the same study. The accessible population was made up of 36 guidance counsellors, 50 discipline masters/mistress and 16540 students from 5 Subdivisions in Mezam Division. The sample of this study was made up of 20 guidance counsellors, 25 disciplinary masters/mistress and 533 students selected from Form three, Four and lower sixth of 16 secondary schools in 5 Subdivision in Mezam Division.

Purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the different school types (confessional, lay-private, and public schools and classes (form

three, form four and lower sixth). These classes were purposively selected for the study because they are transitional classes where most of the adolescents were found.

The instrument use for data collection were questionnaire and open group discussion for students while interview guide was used to collect information from the discipline masters/mistress and guidance counsellors. The instrument for data collection was validated considering the construct, content and face validity, and the reliability. A pilot study was carried out on 20 adolescents in Bamenda to check the reliability and suitability of the instruments. Statistical reliability results showed that internal consistency for the students was satisfactory with the coefficient value of 0.819 above the recommended threshold.

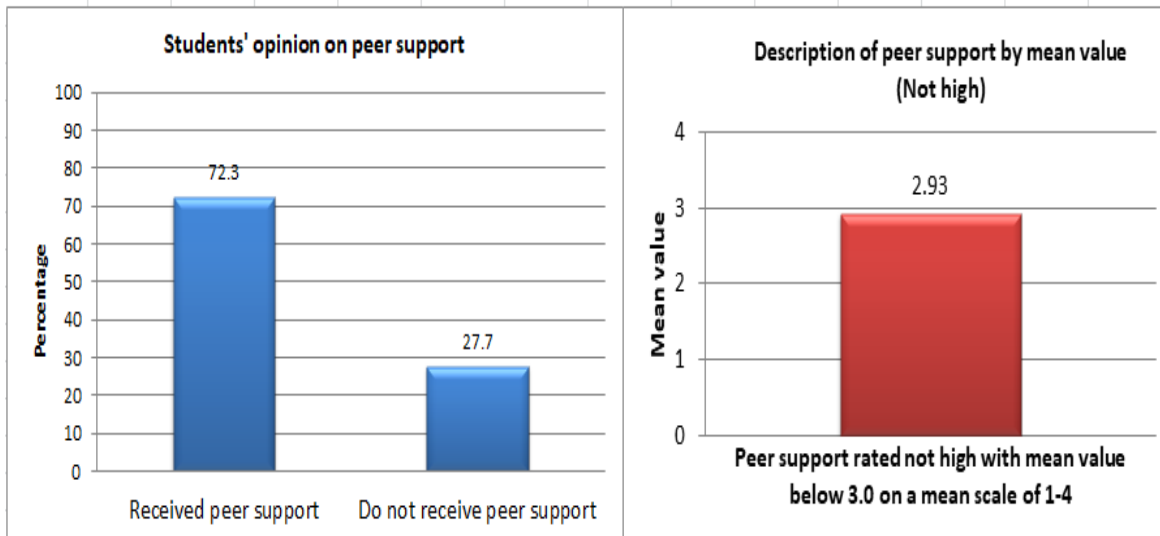
The quantitative data were analyzed using the descriptive and inferential statistical tools. The descriptive statistical tools used are frequency count, percentages, mean, standard deviation and multiple responses set which aimed at calculating the summary of findings for each variable for a quick comprehension of the overall findings. To test the hypotheses of the study, the Spearman's rho test was used because the data for the variables were not approximately normally distributed based on the statistics of the test of normality assumption trend of the data.

On the other hand, qualitative data were analyzed using the thematic analysis approach with the aid of themes, and quotations. The themes refer to umbrella words which capture the main idea of the participants' statements, and the quotations are the direct words from the participants while quotations are the direct words from the participants.

### **FINDINGS**

Figure 1:

Peer support from the perspective of students



In overall, 72.3% of students accepted to receive peer support in different ways while 27.7% do not. The overall mean value of 2.93 on a scale of 1-4 below 3.0 implies that peer support receive by the

students is not high. Furthermore, the relatively low standard deviation value of 0.979 signifies that the students do not differ that much in their responses by demographic data.

Table 1:

Comparing students' peer support by demographic information

Demographic variables			Peer support		Total based on total response	Test (Cramer's V)
			Strongly Agree and Agree	Disagree/ Strongly disagree		
Gender	Male	N	1113	497	1610	Cramer's V = 0.065 p-value= 0.265
		%	69.1%	30.9%		
	Female	N	2742	978	3720	
		%	73.7%	26.3%		
Age range	12-14	N	1655	605	2260	Cramer's V = 0.011 p-value= 0.381
		%	73.2%	26.8%		
	15-17	N	1794	726	2520	
		%	71.2%	28.8%		
18-20	N	406	144	550		
	%	73.8%	26.2%			
Religion	Christians	N	3510	1370	4880	Cramer's V = 0.041 p-value= 0.388
		%	71.9%	28.1%		
	Muslim	N	333	97	430	
	%	77.4%	22.6%			
	Others	N	12	8	20	
	%	60.0%	40.0%			
Class	Form four	N	2604	956	3560	Cramer's V = 0.009 p-value= 0.709
		%	73.1%	26.9%		
	Form five	N	752	308	1060	
		%	70.9%	29.1%		
Lower sixth	N	499	211	710		

		%	70.3%	29.7%		
School type	Lay private	N	1223	477	1700	Cramer's V = 0.008 p-value= 0.711
		%	71.9%	28.1%		
	Public	N	1926	694	2620	
		%	73.5%	26.5%		
	Confessional	N	706	304	1010	
		%	69.9%	30.1%		

Comparing students' peer support by demographic information, findings showed that the students do not significantly differ by demographic information by gender, age range, class, religion and school type (p-values > 0.05). In other words, irrespective of gender, age range, class, religion

and school type, an almost equal proportion of students do receive peer support although some noticeable difference was observed with gender and religion. By gender, female receive slightly more than male, and by religion, Muslim receives peer support more, followed by Christians and lastly others.

**Table 2:**

*Focus group discussion with students on peer support*

Questions	Themes	Quotations
Are your peer(s) supportive toward your wellbeing?	Support well-being	"Yes"
	No support for well-being	"No"
Are your friends making you to be free from punishment or they are instead making you to be punished? How and why?	Involve in trouble	"They do put me in trouble"
		"They always make noise in class and I sometimes join them"
	Dress better	"They do put me in trouble"
		"They help me to dress better in school"
	Academic assistance	"They help me to dress better in school"
		"They always tech me".
		"They sometimes teach me"
		"Help me do assignments"
	Guidance	"They assist me always in my assignments to avoid being into trouble"
		"No they instead help me when I am wrong"
"They always make sure I stay in the right track"		
"No they instead help me when I am wrong"		
Seriousness with study	"They always remind me to do assignments"	
	"I always study to avoid punishment"	
Avoid punishment	"They always remind me to do assignments"	
	"They make me to be free from punishments"	
	"We always try as much as possible to avoid punishments"	
	"We always try as much as possible to avoid punishments"	
	"My friends help me stay away from punishments"	
	"My friends help me stay away from punishments"	
	"Yes, they do help me to be free from punishment"	
	"They tell me to stop making noise when I am in class"	
"They make me to be free from punishments"		
What are some of the things that your friends use to do to prevent you from falling	Study together	"We always learn together and share ideas"
		"We always learn together and share ideas"
		"We often study together"
		"Studying together and helping one another in areas of difficulties"

into problems	Advising	“They make sure we effectively study together”. “They help me with important advises” “Help me stay away from punishment” “Advising me” “By making me stay away from bad advice” “They help me with good advice”. “They teach me to properly use my time” “They help me with important advises” “We avoid the wearing of short skirts and improper dressing We always avoid making noise in class”
	Time management	“They teach me to properly use my time” “They advise me not to waste my time” “They help me to better manage my time” “Time management is one of the things my friends has helped me”
	Enhance study focus	“They make me feel occupied with studies” “They make me feel occupied with studies”
	Academic assistance	“They help me with assignments” “Teaching me” “They guide me in my assignments” “They teach me when I have academic difficulties”
	Punctuality	“They help tell me to come to school early” “They make sure I regularly attend classes” “They remind me constantly on the need to come to school early”.
	Respecting rules	“We always respect the school rules and regulations” “They help me to make sure I respect the schools rules and regulations” “They guide me to always respect school rules”

In addition to the quantitative data from the students, focus group discussion with them also showed that some of them have friends who are supportive to their well-being while some do not. It was equally realized that some of them students reported to have friends that instead makes them to fall into troubles as depicted in the statements “They always make noise in class and I sometimes join them”, “They do put me in trouble”. On the other hand, some of the students said their friends instead help them to avoid punishment as depicted “We always try as much as possible to avoid punishments”, “We always try as much as possible to avoid punishments”.

Furthermore, some said their friends remind them to dress well in the right school outfits as narrated “They help me to dress better in school”. Also, some of the students said their friends offer them academic assistance as narrated “Help me do assignments”, “They assist me always in my

assignments to avoid being into trouble”. Furthermore, some of the students opined that their friends help them to take their study serious as narrated “They always remind me to do assignments”. Furthermore, some students said they do receive guidance and advice from their friends as narrated in the statements “They always make sure I stay in the right track”, “No they instead help me when I am wrong”, “They help me with important advises”. In addition, some of the students said they have friends which they study together and share ideas as narrated in the statements “We always learn together and share ideas” “Studying together and helping one another in areas of difficulties”.

To elucidate, some of the students said their friends have help them to properly manage their time as narrated “Time management is one of the things my friends has helped me”. Also, some said their friends have enhanced their focus on study as depicted in the statement “They make me feel

occupied with studies". Finally, some of the students opined that their friends has helped them to respect school rules and regulations and coming to school regularly as narrated in the statements

"They help me to make sure I respect the schools rules and regulations", "They remind me constantly on the need to come to school early".

**Table 3:** *Influence of peer support on adolescent deviant behaviour*

		Peer support	Adolescent deviant behaviour
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient (R-value)	1	-.237**
	Sig. (p-value)	.	.000
	N	533	533

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Statistically, findings showed that peers support do have a significant influence on adolescent deviant behaviour (R-value = -0.237\*\*, p-value 0.000 < 0.05). The negativity of the correlation value implies that adequate corrective peer support will help reduce deviant behaviours whereas; inadequate peer support will not help.

**DISCUSSION**

Findings showed that peer support significantly influences adolescent deviant behaviour. This in congruence with Harris (2002) and Rowe (1994) as they maintained that peer groups have an even stronger influence than that of parents in adolescent's deviant behaviour, although the peer group serves as a barometer for children examining themselves and their feelings about self and family. The peer group also influences developments of students' socializing skills in school. They learn from peers how to cooperate and socialize according to group norms and group-sanctioned modes of behavioural extreme position has been refuted by other researchers (Berk, 2005). As such, they learn from peers how to cooperate and socialize according to group norms and group-sanctioned modes of behaviour.

Findings from students revealed that their friends always encourage them in school making them not to involve in deviant behaviour. Students opined that their friends always support them in conflict management and help them to obey school rules and regulations. This is like Warburton and Highfield (2012) as they argued that having a peer group is very important as they can support in decision making and conflict resolution. According to them having a group of friends will help individuals to feel belong, have increased self-worth, and feel more secure.

Findings revealed that friends always encourage them to stay away from sexual relationships. Some of the students said their friends instead help them to avoid punishment. This is in line with Harris, (1998) who argued that peer group can influence on campus influences what the students' values, knows, wears, eats, and learns. The extent of this influence, however, depends on other situational constraints, such as the age and personality of children and the nature of the group. Some of the students reported that their friends make them to have positive feeling toward school and make them not to fall into troubles such noise making and late coming to school. This is similar to the research of



Dornbusch, Erickson, Laird, and Wong (2001) which shows that adolescents with positive feelings toward their school are less likely to be deviant. When parents do not have a strong bond with their child and do not teach them pro-social values, the adolescent has difficulties in school. These difficulties lead to rejection by conventional peers, and they drift into association with deviant peers.

### **CONCLUSION**

The findings of the study indicated that students enjoy adequate peer support which prevent them from some deviant behaviours. Further analysis showed that peer support has a significant influence on adolescent deviant behaviour in Mezam Division, Northwest Region of Cameroon. This inverse relationship indicates that as peer support increases, there is a corresponding decrease in deviant behavior among adolescents. This finding has important implications for educational practice and policy, suggesting that fostering positive peer relationships and support systems within schools could serve as an effective strategy for reducing behavioral problems among adolescent students.

The findings highlight the crucial role that peer relationships play in shaping adolescent behavior within the educational context. The findings emphasize the importance of creating and maintaining supportive peer environments in secondary schools as a preventive measure against deviant behavior. This understanding can inform the development of targeted interventions and programs that leverage peer support systems to promote positive behavioral outcomes among adolescent students.

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