



**Effects Of Adolescents Time Use On Delinquent And Sexual Activities: Counselling  
Implications**

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**Abstract**

Using an integration of social control theory and routine activity perspective, adolescent time use was examined. We examined a wide variety of time use categories, including homework, co-curricular activities, sports time, alone time, paid time, housework, television watching, as well as indices of family time and peer time, for their effects on delinquency and sexual activity. The study employed a representative sample of adolescents (606 in number) and took into account important demographic factors such as gender and age. The most significant predictors of adolescent problem behaviours were family time and peer time. Family time serves as a protective factor against all five issue behaviours, while peer time is a highly significant risk factor for the two problem behaviours.

**Keywords:** Adolescent, Delinquency, Sexual Activity, Time use.

**Introduction**

Adolescence is a developmental period in which an individual changes (over a varying length of time) from childhood into adulthood. This creates confusion about the self because society considers them neither children nor adults. Adolescence is also a period of sexual maturity (maturity of sex organs and the development of sex hormones) and the development of sexual urge. Adolescents have fluctuating moods and are aggressive and anxious. The pattern of thinking is one in which immediate needs tend to have priority over long-term ones. Because they lack the knowledge and skills to make healthy choices, they tend to engage in risky behaviour and try out experiences, which often lead to mistakes and regrets in most adolescents. It marks the beginning of sexual activity. Adolescent sexuality, substance use, or



antisocial behaviour are typically considered as "problem" behaviours. This is regarded as premarital sex, which is frowned upon by religion and society. Pre-marital sex leads to numerous issues like unwanted pregnancies, unwanted babies, single parenthood, disease, secondary infertility, abortion, and even death.

The adolescent period is a time when many young people take the opportunity to assess themselves as well as begin the process of seeking out their own personal identities. Part of this process includes questioning previously accepted beliefs and guidance given in childhood and maintaining a distance from adult influences. Young ones during this period often rely on their peer group for support, approval, and behaviour models (Aribiyi, 2016). Unfortunately, much of the information passed among young people is wrong. They are learnt in an environment where myth and half-truth can lead to risk-taking and irresponsible sexual behaviour. Empirical sources indicated that adolescents' involvement in unguarded and indiscriminate sexual behaviour is on the increase (Okonofua & Kanfua, 2020; Osarenren, 2021) and has led to an increase in unintended and pre-marital pregnancies, high mortality rate (Ojo, 2022), and HIV/AIDS (Emeka, 2023).

Adolescents' use of time is an issue of importance to youth, families, and society as a whole because the amount of time spent in various activities has been linked to the development of adolescent problem behaviours. Occupying time in constructive ways by participating in co-curricular activities and doing homework, for example, is often viewed by parents and community leaders as a means of preventing risky behaviours such as substance abuse, delinquency, and sexual activity. Adolescent time use in shared family and peer experiences may also have profound influences on the development of issue behaviour. Some literature shows that higher levels of family support and cohesion are associated with lower levels of adolescent substance use, delinquency, and other negative outcomes (Barnes and Farrell 2019; Farrell and Barnes, 2019). On the other hand, large amounts of time spent in unsupervised peer context may reinforce or exacerbate adolescent substance use and delinquency. Some theorists see parents and peers as occupying separate domains in the lives of adolescents, with separate impacts on alcohol and other substance misuse Farrell and Barnes, 2019). Hawkins, Caliano and Miller (2021, Bogenschneider, Raffaelli & Tsay, 2020). Thus, large amounts of unsupervised time spent with peers at parties, "hanging out" at malls, dating, and talking on the phone may contribute to a variety of risky behaviours in adolescents (Osgood and



Anderson, 2022). Although there are popular notions and findings about the relationships between selected aspects of adolescent time use and behaviour outcomes. There is relatively little empirical research documenting the actual amount of time adolescents spend on a wide variety of specific activities. How time allocations considered together are related to multiple problem behaviours in adolescence. Furthermore, there is a lack of empirical research examining whether the relationship between time use categories and issue behaviours varies for special population groups, that is, males and females. If certain categories of time use have stronger effects on issue behaviour in certain population subgroups, then prevention effects can be more effectively targeted. Using a general population sample of adolescents, the present study is an examination of the relative effects of various categories of time use on illicit substance use, delinquent behaviours, and sexual activity. It takes into account important factors, namely gender and age.

### **Concept of Delinquency**



It has been asserted that normal, stable human societies exist on the basis of certain accepted ethical principles and values. Such norms regulate behaviour and ensure the survival of society over time. Some significant values are even recognized worldwide, for example, fairplay, respect for human persons, prevention of cruelty, philanthropism, and basic human freedoms. Departure from the accepted norm is delinquency. It amounts to a kind of rebellion against time-honoured social control strategies which ensure continuity, stability, coherence, and sameness in human lifestyles and conduct (Achal, 2024).

### **Causes of juvenile delinquency**

Increasing incidence of juvenile delinquency has been documented the world over, and has been attributed, in large part, to the rapid rate of change in society. The greater prevalence of delinquent acts in urban centres relative to rural communities appears to be common knowledge. There is generally greater affluence in the urban environment, where the rich seem to advertise their material fortune, thereby irresistibly tempting the have-nots. The situation in the cities is further compounded by the developments in modern science and technology. Among rural dwellers, the disparity is not so pronounced. In villages, everybody tends to be his or her brother's keeper, and good mental health mostly prevails, while the city is characterized by anonymity, which encourages the erring child by providing him with ready shelter and support. City life lacks social cohesion and community bonding. Besides, city life



is fiercely competitive, and those unable to compete fairly often resort to antisocial and maladjusted practices. In developing countries, the perennial influx of school leavers to the cities aggravates the already tense situations.

Apart from the general societal disintegration, several other factors could precipitate delinquency, such as a direct relationship between home background and the occurrence of delinquent behaviours. Indulgence in drugs, either learnt from observation of drug-taking parents or from inadequate peer socialization, is a serious delinquent act in itself. Another cause of delinquency is linked up with lack of school achievement. It has been found that school drop-outs are 3-5 times more involved in crime than successful and competent students (Achal, 2024).

Factors of personal inadequacies could generate negative self-concept and lead to delinquent acts, such as a lack of meaningful goals in life, a blunted goal, unrealistically high and apparently unattainable goals set for oneself or imposed by parents. These invariably produce feelings of inadequacy. Also, frustration arises from repeated failure to achieve one's objectives, and lack of motivation and encouragement from significant people or parents.

This prevailing atmosphere has given rise to some pondering questions as to what could have been the possible root causes of children, youths, and even adults' involvement in antisocial behaviours. Could parents, who are expected to be the custodians of appropriate behaviour in children, be held accountable for such behaviours as a result of laxity and failure in carrying out their parental responsibilities? Do they, in one way or another, contribute to their children's involvement in antisocial practices?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of adolescents' time-use on delinquent behaviours.

To ascertain the level adolescent's time-use in relation to their sexual activities.

### **Research Questions**

1. How many hours per week do adolescents spend in various activities, including homework, co-curricular activities/hobbies, alone time, housework, television watching, family time and peer time, and do these time allocations vary?



2. Do the relationships between specific time use categories and problem behaviours vary across gender and age?

### Review of related literature

Hirschi's social control theory is based on the assumption that deviant behaviour occurs when the bond of the individual to conventional society (e.g, school-education, parents) is weak or broken. One of the key elements for developing the bond to society is involvement in conventional activities, like adolescents helping their parents in their jobs, businesses, or skill acquisition through vocational training programmes. Also, information technology and the use of computers. Some activities could be getting extra knowledge by engaging the services of classical music teachers, football or sporting activities.

"A person may be simply too busy doing conventional things to find time to engage in deviant behaviour". Hirshi (2019), this is the "idle hands are the devil's workshop" philosophy of the occurrence of deviant behaviour. Thus, in Hirschi's theory, conventional activities, such as homework and family activities, today could be labeled as protective factors that prevent problem behaviours in adolescence. '

Hirschi acknowledges, however, that involvement in many conventional activities may be unrelated to the commission of delinquent acts. These activities include, according to Hirschi, television, sports (basketball, football), hobbies, and work around the house. He maintained that these activities are not related to the development of conventional "success goals". Furthermore, what Hirschi calls "leisure time" activities, such as time talking with friends, going to beaches, attending parties with the opposite sex without supervision, engaging in politicking and being used as thugs to rig elections, engaging in prostitution all in a bid to belong to the group of "happening babes", riding around in an automobile, are positively related to delinquency in his theoretical schema- or in today's nomenclature, these activities are risk factors for problem behaviour. In Nigerian society, for example, where the craze to get-rich-quick and emphasis on material wealth is highlighted more than hard work, many of our young people tend to see money as the only evidence of one who has made it in life. Regardless of how the wealth is got. Routine activity theory- These theorists extended social control theory by arguing that the trends in increased crime rates are related to a greater dispersion of activities away from families and increasing time spent with peers, particularly in unsupervised activities. Crime is viewed as a byproduct of freedom as manifested in the routine activities of



everyday life. The observed secular decline in the adolescent setting is viewed as evidence of a secular decline in social control of youth exerted by parents (Felson and Gottfredson, 2022). Thus, routine social interaction in the family tends to constrain violation of social norms, whereas any social processes increasing the proportion of time spent with peers would increase the opportunity for delinquency. This situational approach to delinquency is consistent with Hirschi in that it does not focus motivations for delinquency but focuses on opportunities (i.e. time use) for delinquency provided in everyday life, on opportunities (i.e. time use) for delinquency provided in everyday life.

### **Protective time use factors**

According to Hirschi's social theory, school work and school activities serve to strengthen the bond to society and, therefore, should be related to less delinquency. In a longitudinal study of school children followed for ten years, Mahoney (2020) found that participation in school co-curricular activities was related to lower school dropout rates in high school and lower subsequent arrest rates. Zill, Nord & Loomis (2015) conducted secondary analyses of several U.S. databases to address how teenagers spend free time at their disposal. They also tested whether participation in co-curricular activities reduced the chances that the young people would engage in risky behaviours.

According to both social control and routine activity theories, positive shared family time should result in less adolescent problem behaviour. Defining family time as time shared by two parents and two target adolescent siblings in activities across seven days, (Crouter, Head, McHale & Hicker (2021), found that although family time was rare, averaging only about four hours in a seven- day period, parent- child relationships were viewed as warmer and more loving in families with higher levels of family time. The more time families shared at time 1, the less involvement in risky behaviour, including drinking and delinquency, two years later. This relationship held for males and females, regardless of social class. The authors note that this study may be one of the only quantitative studies to focus on "family time", which is spent by parents and adolescents as a group.

In one of the only studies of time use by urban African American youth, Larson, Richard, Sims & Dworkin (2021), reported that 5th - 8th grade African American students in a 'Chicago sample spent significantly more time with their families (including extended families) than a comparison group of Europeans American suburban youth; yet the amount of time spent with



friends was about the same in both samples. The authors concluded that these activities with the family may provide opportunities for positive interactions. However, it was noted that the African American sample spent greater time watching television in the context of the family, which may have negative effects on reading skills, aggressive behaviour, and desensitization to violence.

### **Neutral time use factors**

Based on social control and routine activity theories, there are no prior propositions that certain activities, such as hobbies, sports time, alone time, paid work, housework, or television watching, should be predictive of substance use, delinquency, and sexual activity. One activity that received considerable public debate is television watching among youths. Excessive television watching by adolescents generally has been viewed as developmentally unconstructive, resulting in negative impacts, such as lower school performance, changes in perceptions of sexual norms, and increased aggression (Echebe, 2024).

Another single-time use factor that has received a substantial amount of research and policy attention is paid part-time work among young people. Some argue that part-time work is a good transition to learning responsible adult work roles, especially among older adolescents, while others show that adolescents who work long hours are prone to substance use, delinquency, and an unhealthy lifestyle (Mortimer and Finch, Ryu, Shanahan and Call, 2020).

### **Risky time use factors**

There is a substantial amount of research documenting the relationship between peer delinquency and problem behaviour of adolescents. For example, in two separate samples, (Barnes, Hoffman & Dintcheff, 2021), showed that earlier involvement with delinquent peers predicted later alcohol misuse, other drug use, and delinquency even after controlling for some demographic, individual, and parental socialization factors. Osgood, Wilson, O'Malley, Bachman & Johnston (2019) applied a routine peer activity perspective to the study of deviant behaviour among a U.S. sample of over 1,700 young adults aged 18-26 years old. Their deviant behaviours included criminal behaviours, heavy alcohol use, marijuana use, other illicit drugs, and dangerous driving. They found consistent positive associations between the four unstructured activities and the five deviant behaviours.



**Table 1: Means of adolescents' time use and adolescents' behaviour measured by gender (606)**

Measure	Range	Overall mean	Male	Female
Adolescent age	15-18 years	16.5	16.5	16.6
Co-curricular activities	Homework	0-48	8.4	7.6 9.1 **
	0-60.5	11.7	10.9	12.4
	Relax alone	0-24	3.2	3.5 2.9*
	Housework	0-57	6.7	5.2
TV	0.84	20.0	19.7	20.2
No of delinquent acts of the year	0-553	97.0	104.2	91.0*
Sexual activity for the past year	0.95	11.9	13.2	10.8
No of times of sexual intercourse in the past year	0-50	9.2	9.3	9.2
The number of people who had sexual intercourse with	0-45	2.7	3.8	1.7**

\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01 ; \*\*\*p,.001.



**Time use- gender**

Of the single-time use activities, television watching occupies the greatest proportion of the week among all the age groups in this sample, with an average time of 20 hours per week. Co-curricular activities and hobbies take the second-highest amount of time for a single category of time use, with an average of 11.7h per week. No differences were observed according to gender. Adolescents spend equal time per week on homework(8.4h)

Females spend significantly more time working on homework than males (9.1 vs 7.6 h per week). Time relaxing alone averages 3.2 h per week, and it is somewhat greater for males than for females (3.5 vs 2.9h).

After combining six categories of time use in the family, the family composite score shows only about 10h per week spent in the family. This figure is consistent across gender categories. On the other hand, after combining six single peer time use indicators, the data show that adolescents, in an average week, spend twice as much time in peer activities as in family activities (23.3 vs 10.2 h per week). There are no differences in peer time according to gender.

**Analysis/ Discussion**

Delinquent acts are more frequent among males than females. There are no differences in the overall sexual activity scores for males and females. The item related to the number of sexual



partners, however, does show significantly higher means for males than females.

All the bivariate correlations between the five problem behaviours: delinquency, sexual activities, substance abuse, smoking, and show highly significant moderate to high correlations with each other. The correlations between the five problem behaviours and gender reflect the same relationships as shown earlier in the mean differences. Age is positively related to all problem behaviours except delinquency, reflecting the established pattern that delinquency peaks earlier in adolescence than sexual activity.

The second research question asks whether the relationships between specific time use categories and issue behaviours vary across gender, age, and socioeconomic categories. There is a gender difference for peer time, such that the positive relationship between time spent with peers and sexual activity is stronger for males than for females.

### **Discussion of Findings**

This study integrated social control theory (Hirschi, 2019) and routine activity theory (Hawdon, 2018) to examine the effects of adolescent time use on issue behaviours. One of the key elements for social control is developing the individual's bond to conventional society through involvement in conventional activities (i.e. homework and family activities), resulting in little time for issue behaviours. Routine activity theorists argue that trends in increased crime rates are related to a greater dispersion of daily activities with peers, away from parental supervision, and providing the opportunity for delinquency.

Study findings were largely consistent with these theoretical perspectives. Family time was found to protect adolescents from problem behaviours, whereas peer time places adolescents at risk for these same behaviours. In addition, there was less delinquency when the adolescent spent more time on homework.

In summary, based on social control theory and the routine activity perspective, the results show that family time is a protective factor against issue behaviours, whereas time spent with peers is a risk factor for issue behaviours.

### **Counselling Implications**

These results suggest that increasing positive family time may be a strategy to prevent issue behaviour. Positive time spent with the family may be a means of building family cohesion and supportive relationships between parents and adolescents. Parents should ensure that they



provide enough and adequate time with their adolescents, and those activities that promote protective behaviours should be encouraged.

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