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LOCALITY, PARENTAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND AND MORAL  
BEHAVIOUR AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN SOUTH EAST NIGERIA

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**ABSTRACT**

The study investigated influence of locality and parental socio-economic background on moral behaviour among adolescents in the south eastern Nigeria. 176 adolescents 91 males and 85 females selected from four secondary schools, two from urban and rural areas each. The participants were within the age bracket of 12-17 year with a mean age of 15 years. Ethical moral self inventory fits (1965) was used for data collection. 2x2 factorial design was adopted based on two independent variables locality (urban and rural) and parental socio-economic (low and high) with two levels each. Two way ANOVA statistics was used for data analysis. Finding revealed a significant influence of locality on moral behaviour among adolescences.  $F, (1, 172) = 64.02 P < .01$ ; A significant influence of parental socio-economic background on moral behaviour  $F, (1, 172) = 172.09 P < .01$ . No interaction effect was observed  $F, (1, 172) = 3.73 P > .05$ . Findings were discussed in relation with the literature reviewed and recommendations were also made.

*Keywords:* Adolescents, ANOVA, Poverty, South East Nigeria

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Just as manure is necessary for good yielding vegetation, so is a good moral background to an ideal society. From the above statement, morality seems to be an inevitable quality of an ideal society. Thus, depriving any community access to a good moral reputation is as bad as terminating her entire existence. One of the insidious social illness that threatens the future survival of Nigeria as a developing nation is the continuous declination in morality level of her adolescents. The concept of morality is essential in the understanding of thoughts and behaviours. Thus, morality speaks of a system of behaviour with regards to standard of right and wrong behaviour.

Mundy-Castle and Bundy (2005) perceived morality as a social intelligence that entails reasoning about rightness and wrongness of an action or conduct in accordance with some principles or values. Soetan (1986), sees morality as that which entails the acquisition and comprehension of the society. Rokech (1973), considers morality as what is good, right and wrong and includes components such as laws, rules and moral values and behaviours since

morality describes the principles that governs our behaviours, our society can not survive for long if these principals are not put in place.

In search of a unique social identity for themselves, adolescent are frequently confused about what is right and what is wrong. Numerous research studies have concluded that a complex interaction or combination of factors lead to increased risk of engaging in obnoxious behaviour among adolescent (Onwurah, 2010). These factors includes previous aggressive or violet behaviours, exposure to physical or sexual abuse, drug abuse, fire arm, violet in media and other object and conditions that induces socially restrained behaviours. Also, stressful family socio economic conditions can be another factor that makes adolescents engage in some of the obnoxious behaviour they display.

Hirschi (1967), social control model explains that when young persons experience social rejection and exclusion, they devalue the activities and pro-social behaviours of normal young persons and adopt anti-social values. They also seek out others who have anti-social attitudes like theirs. The group then provides models and reinforcement to the maladjusted person's behaviour. Adolescent's moral behaviour may be moderated by a number of factors such as social economic factors and locality or environmental modifications. One of the variable that moderate moral behaviours of adolescents is the locality or the environment within which the group under study dwell. It has been observed that the degree of morality or immorality of individuals is related to the social-cultural value emphasized by a particular environment (Kalgo & Isyaku, 1993). According to Cole and Scribner (1974), cited in Amazue, (2006), a child's method of perception, Memorization and thinking are inseparably bound to the patterns of activity, communication and social relations of the adult in which the individual is socialized. Thus, the environment in which we are brought up from or reared up has a lot to offer in the explanation of our varied behaviours and attitudes. This in other words, postulates that moral behaviours or immoral behaviours exhibited by adolescents has so much to do more with locality which they were brought up. This view is consistent with Sternberg and Grigoreenko (1997), who argued that styles appears to be largely a function of a person's interaction with the environment, and that they can be developed and socialized.

Differential environmental influence have been suggested to account for the disparity in urban and rural children's performance on varied tasks, as well as other related behaviours among which morality is one. Urban communities are characterized by a heterogeneous population and impersonal secondary relationship, they have a predominantly non-agricultural occupation and a high degree of socialization, resulting in a complete division of labour on the other hand, rural environment is characterized, ignorance and conservatism (Amazue, 2006). More importantly, children from this area seem to be of relatively low socio-economic parents (Ozioko, 1986, cited in Amazue, 2006).

Another variable that is of great interest in this present study is the socio-economic status of parents. A family's socio-economic status (SES) is based on the family's income, occupation of the parents, and their social status within a given community. However, neighbourhood that are characterized by high residential turnover, poverty and crime rates, and which are perceived by residents to be dangerous affects adolescent's moral behaviour, such as the tendency to have early onset of the sexual intercourse, low use of contraceptives and high adolescents pregnancy rates. (Brewster, 1994, Miller 2002). There is abundant evidence that parent's socio-economic status is related to adolescent's pregnancy. (Miller, 2002)

Several attempts have been made by theorist to explain the development of moral behavior. Jean Piaget and Kolhberg holds that moral development is based primarily on moral reasoning which unfolds in stages. Social learning theory of moral behavior is based on the behaviourist principle in which overt behavior are reinforced and shaped. To Bandura (1977), morality is rooted in self regulation and limitation of moral mode list rather than abstract reasoning. Relationship theory qualifies morality by the type of relationship and the person with

whom the child enters into relationship with. Domain theory of moral development has its core features of moral cognition centered on consideration of the effect which actions have upon the well being of other persons. Psychoanalytic theory focuses on the attachment relationship between the child, parents and the general effect of living within a family. Finally, social control theory postulates that social stability depends on the expectations and obligations we hold towards one another in terms of decency and etiquette, which in turn creates a type of social morality.

Though these theories gave meaningful account on the development of moral behavior, the theory that has a direct link to locality and environmental influence on morality development anchored on social learning theory. This agreed that learning takes place in an environment. Therefore, an individual environment (locality) will have a significant influence on what the person learn. According to this theory, both good and bad behavior are learned. If a child leaves in an environment that promotes moral behavior obviously he/she will grow to learn and become morally inclined unlike one who leaves in a crime prone society.

Above all, most earlier researcher on moral development centered on the role of peer pressure with little or no attention to locality and parental socio-economic background. Chen 2007; Berndt & Keefe 2005; Bukowski & Suppola 2006).

Notwithstanding, some have also attempted to examine the role of locality on moral behaviors stressing on the importance of research in this area, Robert, Skipper and James (2006) investigated differential rates of rural urban delinquency. Official studies indicate that rural areas generate lower rates of delinquency than do urban area. Their study attempted to explain these differential rates by drawing on the social control of Hirschi. Questionnaires were administered to a rural and urban juvenile detention center population to investigate both extent of delinquency involvement and degree of commitment of five institutional order. As hypothesized, rural samples reported significantly less delinquent activity than the urban samples. Another variable that moderate moral behavior of adolescents is their parents socio-economic status or their economic background. Many have attempted to examine the role of socio economic status and moral behaviours. For instance, Vereecken, Maes and De Bacquer, (2004) investigated the association of lifestyle behavior with educational level and social background based on parental occupation in adolescence 12,490 participants from secondary school students participating in Belgian Health were used in gathering data. Survey multiple regression adjusting for age and gender were used to access the effects of parental occupation and students educational level on the selected life style behavior. The result showed that students of lower educational level reported more smoking, less healthy food habits and less teeth brushing. They also reported that students of parents with lower socio economic status (SES) based on the occupation of the head of the household, exhibited behavior mentioned above equally. They conducted that a lower educational levels is associated with higher prevalence of indicators unhealthy lifestyle.

## 2. METHOD AND MATERIALS

### 2.1 Participants

A total of 176 adolescents comprising 91 males and 85 females were used as sample for the study. 88 (50%) of the participants were selected from four secondary schools in Enugu Federal Government College Enugu and city College secondary Enugu while 88 (50%) were selected from community secondary school Agbani and Mea Mythr secondary school Agbani in Nkanu west local government area Enugu state. 72 (40%) of the participants were from high socio-economic background while 104 (60%) were low socio-economic background. The

participant were selected among secondary I and II of the schools. The participants were within the age range of 12-17 years with a mean age of 15 years with a standard deviation of 5 years.

## 2.2 Measures

Ethical moral self inventory (EMSI) Fitt (1965), was used. It is a 28 item inventory designed to measure morality, ethical standard, religiosity and super-ego functioning. The instrument consists of twenty-eight (28) items which are scored on a 5 point likertlike scale of completely false, mostly false, partial false and partly true, mostly true, and completely true. Also, the instrument used is divided into two “section A”, which comprises of the personal data of the participants and “section B” which comprises of the ethical moral self inventory developed by Fitt’s (1965). There is reverse and direct scoring of the items.

## 2.3 Reliability and Validity

The test-retest reliability coefficient obtained for EMSI as subscale are .92 by Fitt’s (1965) and .74 by Ezeilo (1982) while Olukoya (1998) obtained a concurrent validity coefficient of .015 by correlating EMSI with index of self esteem.

## 2.4 Procedure

The process of the field started with approaching the principal of the schools selected for the study. The researchers used simple random sampling to select the schools. After that, an approval was given to the researchers by the principals of the schools to carryout the study after presenting the proposal. The choice of the schools selected was due to target population.

Using the socio-economic background, the students were divided into four strata of low socio-economic background urban, low socio economic background rural, high socio economic background rural, high socio-economic background urban. Sample random sampling technique was used to select participants. A total of 190 participants were selected and administered the questionnaire. The exercise took the researchers a period of six weeks. Finally only 176 copies were correctly filled and returned and were used for data analysis.

## 2.5 Design/Statistic

Based on two independent variables with two levels each locality: urban/rural, socio-economic background: low/high, 2x2 factorial design was adopted while two way ANOVA statistics F-test was used as a statistical tool to test the hypotheses.

## 3. RESULTS

Table 1 shows that rural adolescents from low socio economic background obtained the highest mean of 93.4 followed by their urban counterpart with a mean of 81.3. Rural adolescents from high socio-economic background obtained a mean of 71.1 while those in the urban area from high socio-economic background had a mean score of 51.3. Hence higher mean indicates higher moral behaviour. Thus the mean score for this study is 84.

The results as shown in Table 2 reveals, a statistically significant difference on the influence of locality on moral behaviour among adolescents  $F(1, 172) = 64.02$   $P < .01$ . In addition a statistically significant difference was found to exist on the influence of socio-economic background on moral behaviour among adolescents  $F(1, 172) = 172.09$   $P < .01$ . No

significant interaction effect of locality and socio economic background was observed on moral behaviour among adolescents  $F(1, 172) = 3.73 P < .05$ .

Table 1: Summary table of mean on locality and parental socio-economic background and moral behaviour among adolescents.

		Socio-Economic Background		
		Low	High	
<b>Locality</b>	Rural	$X_{11}=93.4$	$X_{12}=71.1$	$X.1 = 82.3$
	Urban	$X_{21}=81.3$	$X_{22} = 51.3$	$X.2 = 66.5$

Table 2: Summary table of two way ANOVA on the effects of locality and parents socio-economic background on moral behaviour among adolescents

SOURCES OF VARIATION	Sum Of Square	Degree Of Freedom	MEAN SQUARE	F	P
ROWS (LOCALITY) (A)	10176	1	10176.4	64.02	<.01
COLUMN (SOCIO ECONOMIC BACKGROUND) (B)	27353	1	27353.5	172.09	<.01
INTERACTION (locality Vs socio economic background) (AXB)	592.4	1	592.4	3.73	<.05
WITHIN CELLS	27339.12	172	158.95		

#### 4. DISCUSSION

As predicted, the outcome of this study revealed that adolescence who live in the rural area exhibit higher level of moral behaviour than those who live in the urban area. A position that made it clear that locality is a factor in individual behaviour. This showed that irrespective of genetic inheritance, environmental factor plays an importance role in our behaviour. The outcome of this finding may not be far from reality with reference to pattern of life and living in rural and urban area. Mutual relationship exist more in the rural area than urban centers. In the rural area, the spirit of brotherhood and oneness is paramount unlike, in the urban center. Therefore, the tendency that children under this environment (rural) will embrace respect and moral behaviour is very high. However, in urban centers, the segregated pattern of living affect the children who in most cases transfer it to rudeness.

In line with the outcome of this findings, Robert, Skipper and James (2006) observed that locality of a child plays an importance role in the general behaviour of the child. Therefore, a child who grew up in a rural area where respect is supreme, obedience is law and fear of God/gods exist will definitely be more morally inclined than one who grew up in urban center where little or no attention is being giving to some aspects of the child behavior and attitude. Obviously, morality starts with respect and obedience to the elderly, a behaviour that is common to the rural populace than the urban populace (Robert, Skipper & James, 2006).

In addition, one could attribute the reason for higher moral behaviour among rural adolescences to parental behaviour. Most parents in the rural area do spend quality time with

their children than those in the urban areas. This outcome is also in consonance with outcome of previous researchers (Vereecken et.al, 2004; Robert et.al; 2006 Colb & Rohlbery 2007 & Turrel, 2008).

The findings of this study also confirmed the prediction that participants from low parental socio-economic background will show higher level of morality than those from high parental socio-economic background. The results are in line with previous researches (eg, Barduna, 1997; Onwurah, 2010; Tolan, 1988; Vereeckent et.al; 2004) which reported that morality is rooted in self regulation and limitations of a moral mode list rather than abstract reasoning. In line with the present study, most rich parents who serve as models to their children lack moral behaviour due to nature of the job. This in turn has a significant negative influence on their children with reference to moral behaviour.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The result of this study showed that locality as a factor has a significant influence on adolescences moral behavior. It revealed that adolescences from rural area showed higher level of moral behavior than those from urban areas. Adolescence moral behaviour also differ with reference to parental socio-economic background. Adolescences whose parents were classified as low socio-economic background showed higher manifestation of moral behavior than those from high parental socio economic background.

The study showed no interaction effect of locality and parental socio-economic background on moral behavior among adolescences. Conclusively, the researcher attributed the outcome of study to negligence on the part of the parents who pay little or no attention to the behaviours of their children. Considering the social, religious and economic situation of our country "Nigeria, in the recent past it is obvious and very conspicuous that immorality and its twin brother "crime" has become the trend of the day, from the perception of any growing adolescents. Thus, resistance to join the trend of this moving train is considered deviant "Jew person, who does not know what's up". To curb this social menace, parents are hence advised to pay attention to their children and live a life style worthy of emulation. Also, the adolescents need re-orientation on the issue of morality.

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