



FAMILY STRUCTURE AND DISCIPLINARY BEHAVIOUR AMONG SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THE FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY, ABUJA

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between family structure and disciplinary behaviour among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. A descriptive correlational survey design was adopted, and 381 students were selected through stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Data were collected using two researcher-developed instruments, namely Family Structure Questionnaire (FSQ) and Disciplinary Behaviour Questionnaire (DBQ). Data were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that nuclear and extended family structures had significant positive relationships with disciplinary behaviour, reconstructed family structure had a significant negative relationship, while single-parent family structure showed a weak but significant positive relationship. The study concluded that family structure significantly influenced students' disciplinary behaviour and recommended strengthened parenting practices, effective guidance and counselling services, and enhanced home-school collaboration to promote positive behavioural outcomes.

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INTRODUCTION

Parental involvement continues to play a fundamental role in shaping adolescents' behavioural development, particularly in relation to how students conduct themselves within school environments. During the secondary school stage, the quality of interaction between parents and children significantly influences behavioural regulation, emotional stability, and adherence to school rules (Steinberg, 2001; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). However, beyond parenting approaches, recent perspectives have increasingly highlighted the importance of family structure as a broader contextual factor that shapes adolescents' discipline and behavioural adjustment (Amato, 2005).



Family structure refers to the configuration of the household in which a child is raised, including nuclear, extended, single-parent, and reconstituted family systems. Each of these arrangements provides different levels of supervision, emotional support, and stability, which may influence how adolescents develop self-control and respond to disciplinary expectations in school. In the context of senior secondary school students, these family-based conditions interact with peer influence, academic pressure, and environmental factors to shape behavioural outcomes (McLanahan, Tach, & Schneider, 2013). Within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, students are exposed to a variety of social and academic pressures that may affect their conduct in school settings. Existing literature suggests that stable and supportive family environments tend to encourage responsible behaviour, self-regulation, and respect for authority, while less stable family arrangements may be associated with weaker behavioural control and increased tendencies toward misconduct (Lamb et al., 2022; McLanahan et al., 2013). Research further indicates that the presence or absence of consistent caregiving, emotional stability, and supervision within the family environment plays a crucial role in shaping adolescent discipline. Students who grow up in structured and supportive family systems are more likely to demonstrate compliance with school regulations and exhibit positive behavioural adjustment. In contrast, those from less stable or fragmented family backgrounds may experience challenges in internalizing discipline and maintaining consistent behavioural standards in school (Amato, 2005; Steinberg, 2001).

Despite the growing body of literature on adolescent behaviour, there remains limited empirical evidence focusing specifically on how family structure influences disciplinary behaviour among senior secondary school students in urban Nigerian contexts such as Abuja. This gap is important because family systems in urban areas are increasingly diverse due to socioeconomic changes, migration, and evolving household patterns. This study therefore examines the extent to which family structure predicts disciplinary behaviour among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. By focusing on this relationship, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how home background influences behavioural development and school discipline within contemporary Nigerian society.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Indiscipline among secondary school students remains a persistent challenge within the Nigerian educational system. Behaviours such as truancy, disobedience, aggression, and disregard for school rules continue to disrupt effective teaching and learning processes, particularly in urban centres like Abuja. These behavioural issues negatively affect classroom management, academic performance, and the overall school climate (Okeke & Oladele, 2021). Although various factors contribute to students' behaviour, the family environment, particularly family structure, is widely recognized as an important influence on adolescents' behavioural development. However, there is still limited empirical evidence



examining how different family structures relate to the disciplinary behaviour of senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

Students raised in different family structures may experience varying levels of parental supervision, emotional support, behavioural guidance, and caregiving practices, all of which can influence their disciplinary behaviour in school. The nature of these influences may differ across nuclear, single-parent, extended, and reconstructed family structures. However, the extent to which each family structure is associated with students' disciplinary behaviour has not been sufficiently investigated among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Furthermore, rapid urbanization, economic pressures, and changing family dynamics in Abuja have continued to reshape traditional family arrangements, with possible implications for adolescents' behavioural development and adjustment. Despite these emerging realities, few empirical studies have systematically examined how different family structures relate to students' disciplinary behaviour within secondary schools in the FCT.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is to examine family structure as a determinant of disciplinary behaviour among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. The specific objectives were:

1. To determine the relationship between nuclear family structure and disciplinary behaviour among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.
2. To examine the relationship between single-parent family structure and disciplinary behaviour among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.
3. To investigate the relationship between extended family structure and disciplinary behaviour among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.
4. To determine the relationship between reconstructed (reconstituted) family structure and disciplinary behaviour among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS



The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between nuclear family structure and disciplinary behaviour among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja?
2. What is the relationship between single-parent family structure and disciplinary behaviour among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja?
3. What is the relationship between extended family structure and disciplinary behaviour among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja?
4. What is the relationship between reconstructed (reconstituted) family structure and disciplinary behaviour among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja?

NULL HYPOTHESES

1. There is no statistically significant relationship between nuclear family structure and disciplinary behaviour among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.
2. There is no statistically significant relationship between single-parent family structure and disciplinary behaviour among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.
3. There is no statistically significant relationship between extended family structure and disciplinary behaviour among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.
4. There is no statistically significant relationship between reconstructed (reconstituted) family structure and disciplinary behaviour among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive correlational survey design to investigate the extent to which family structure influences disciplinary behaviour among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. The design was considered appropriate because it allows for the systematic collection and analysis of quantitative data aimed at identifying relationships between naturally occurring variables without any form of experimental manipulation.



The population for the study comprised 48,520 Senior Secondary II (SS II) students enrolled in public and private secondary schools in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, during the 2025/2026 academic session. This group was considered suitable because students at this level are still largely influenced by their home environment while simultaneously exhibiting observable behavioural patterns within the school setting. A total of 381 respondents were selected as the sample size, determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sampling model. To ensure representativeness and reduce sampling bias, a stratified sampling technique was first applied to group students according to school type (public and private) and class level. Within each stratum, simple random sampling was then used to select participants, ensuring that every eligible student had an equal chance of being included in the study.

Data were collected using two researcher-developed questionnaires. Family structure was measured using a Researcher-Developed Family Structure Questionnaire (FSQ) designed based on established classifications of family structure in the literature (Amato, 2005; McLanahan, Tach, & Schneider, 2013). The questionnaire classified respondents into nuclear, single-parent, extended, and reconstructed family structures. Disciplinary behaviour was measured using a Researcher-Developed Disciplinary Behaviour Questionnaire (DBQ) developed from the literature on students' disciplinary behaviour. The questionnaire consisted of items measuring major dimensions of disciplinary behaviour, including obedience to school rules, punctuality, classroom conduct, respect for teachers and fellow students, aggression control, truancy, and compliance with school regulations.

All questionnaire items were measured on a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1). The absence of a neutral response option was intended to encourage respondents to express definite opinions, thereby enhancing the quality and consistency of the responses. The validity of the instruments was established through face and content validation by experts in Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, and Measurement and Evaluation. Their observations and recommendations were incorporated to improve the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the instruments before the final administration. The reliability of the instruments was established through a pilot study involving 40 Senior Secondary II students selected from schools outside the study area. Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.86 were obtained for the Family Structure Questionnaire (FSQ) and 0.83 for the Disciplinary Behaviour Questionnaire (DBQ), indicating high internal consistency and confirming that both instruments were reliable for data collection.

RESULTS

Hypothesis One



H₀₁: There is no statistically significant relationship between nuclear family structure and disciplinary behaviour among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Nuclear Family Structure and Disciplinary Behaviours (N = 381)

Variable	N	Mean	SD	r	P-value	Decision
Nuclear Family	381	3.47	0.82	0.58	0.000	Significant
Disc. Behaviour	381	3.61	0.78			

Table 1 shows that there is a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between nuclear family structure and the overall disciplinary behaviour of senior secondary school students ($r = 0.58$, $p = 0.000$). This indicates that variations in nuclear family structure are associated with corresponding improvements in students' overall disciplinary behaviour, with the relationship being of moderate strength. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the relationship is statistically significant, and the null hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: There is no statistically significant relationship between single-parent family structure and disciplinary behaviour among senior secondary school students in the FCT, Abuja.

Table 2: Relationship between Single-Parent Family Structure and Disciplinary Behaviour among Senior Secondary School Students in the FCT, Abuja.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	r	P-value	Decision
Single Parent	381	3.28	0.84	0.21	0.000	Significant
Disc. Behaviour	381	3.61	0.78			

Table 2 shows that there is a weak positive and statistically significant relationship between single-parent family structure and the overall disciplinary behaviour of senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja ($r = 0.21$, $p = 0.000$). This indicates that variations in single-parent family structure are associated with corresponding variations in students' overall disciplinary behaviour,



although the strength of the relationship is weak. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the relationship is statistically significant, and the null hypothesis is rejected.

H₀₃: There is no statistically significant relationship between extended family structure and disciplinary behaviour among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Extended Parenting Style and Disciplinary Behaviours (N = 381)

Variable	N	Mean	SD	r	P-value	Decision
Extended Family	381	3.39	0.81	0.45	0.000	Significant
Disc. Behaviour	381	3.61	0.78			

Table 3 shows that there is a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship** between extended family structure and the overall disciplinary behaviour of senior secondary school students ($r = 0.45$, $p = 0.000$). This indicates that variations in extended family structure are associated with corresponding improvements in students' overall disciplinary behaviour, with the relationship being of moderate strength. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the relationship is statistically significant, and the null hypothesis is rejected.

H₀₄: There is no statistically significant relationship between reconstituted family structure and disciplinary behaviour among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Reconstructed family structure and Disciplinary Behaviours (N = 381)

Variable	N	Mean	SD	r	P-value	Decision
Reconst.Family	381	24.86	4.72	-0.52	0.000	Significant
Disc. Behaviour	381	3.61	0.78			

Table 4 shows that there is a moderate negative and statistically significant relationship between reconstructed family structure and the overall disciplinary behaviour of senior secondary school students ($r = -0.52$, $p = 0.000$). This indicates that variations in reconstructed family structure are associated with corresponding decreases in students' overall disciplinary behaviour, with the relationship being of



moderate strength. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the relationship is statistically significant, and the null hypothesis is rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The study examined the relationship between family structure and disciplinary behaviour among senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. The findings across the four family structure categories, namely nuclear, single-parent, extended, and reconstructed families, indicate that family background plays a statistically significant role in shaping students' disciplinary behaviour, although the direction and strength of these relationships vary.

The result on nuclear family structure revealed a moderate positive and significant relationship with disciplinary behaviour. This suggests that students from nuclear family settings are more likely to demonstrate appropriate school conduct, including rule compliance and respect for authority. This finding aligns with the view that nuclear family systems often provide more stable supervision, clearer role expectations, and consistent parental monitoring, which are essential for behavioural regulation during adolescence. Empirical support for this position is found in studies such as Amato (2010) and Lamb et al. (2022), who reported that stable two-parent family environments are associated with better behavioural adjustment and lower levels of externalizing behaviour among adolescents. The implication is that consistency in parenting structure may enhance self-discipline and reduce tendencies toward misconduct in school settings. The results further showed a weak but statistically significant relationship between single-parent family structure and disciplinary behaviour. Although the relationship was positive, its weak magnitude suggests that single-parent family background alone does not strongly determine students' behavioural outcomes. This supports earlier empirical observations by Augustine and Kimbro (2013), who noted that while children in single-parent households may face certain adjustment challenges, behavioural outcomes are largely moderated by parenting quality, socioeconomic stability, and available social support systems. Similarly, McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) emphasized that the effects of single-parenthood are not uniform, as effective caregiving and strong parental involvement can offset potential negative outcomes. In the context of this study, the weak relationship suggests that other environmental and individual factors play a more substantial role in shaping disciplinary behaviour among students.

The result on extended family structure indicated a moderate positive and significant relationship with disciplinary behaviour. This finding suggests that students raised within extended family systems tend to exhibit relatively better behavioural adjustment when adequate supervision and emotional support are present. Extended family systems often provide additional caregiving figures, shared responsibility for child upbringing, and broader social monitoring, which can contribute to behavioural control. This supports the perspective of Nsamenang (2000), who argued that African extended family systems can



serve as strong socialization agents when effectively coordinated. Similarly, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory emphasizes the role of multiple caregivers within the microsystem in shaping child development, including behavioural outcomes. However, variability within extended families may explain why the relationship, although significant, is not overwhelmingly strong.

In contrast, the findings on reconstructed family structure revealed a moderate negative and significant relationship with disciplinary behaviour. This implies that students from reconstructed or blended family systems may experience greater behavioural challenges compared to their counterparts from more stable family arrangements. This outcome may be linked to adjustment difficulties, role ambiguity, inconsistent disciplinary practices, and emotional stress associated with stepfamily integration. Empirical studies by Hetherington and Kelly (2002) and more recent work by Coleman and Ganong (2014) similarly reported that children in blended families may initially experience higher levels of behavioural and emotional adjustment difficulties, particularly where family integration is weak or conflictual. However, these scholars also emphasize that such outcomes are not inevitable, as well-structured and supportive stepfamily environments can foster resilience and positive adjustment over time. Therefore, the findings of this study suggest that family structure is a significant but not exclusive determinant of disciplinary behaviour among secondary school students. While nuclear and well-functioning extended family systems tend to support positive behavioural outcomes, single-parent and reconstructed family structures may present varying levels of risk depending on the quality of caregiving, emotional support, and household stability. This underscores the position of ecological and family systems theories, which emphasize that child behaviour is shaped by the interaction of multiple environmental influences rather than family structure alone.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that disciplinary behaviour among students in the FCT, Abuja is influenced by variations in family structure, but the strength of this influence is moderated by parenting quality, socioeconomic conditions, and broader environmental factors. These findings highlight the need for school-based counselling interventions and collaborative home-school partnerships to support students from diverse family backgrounds in achieving positive behavioural adjustment.

CONCLUSION

The study found that family structure significantly influences the disciplinary behaviour of senior secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. Nuclear and extended family structures positively influenced students' disciplinary behaviour, whereas reconstructed family structure had a negative influence. Although single-parent family structure was also significant, its effect was relatively weak. The study concludes that improving students' disciplinary behaviour requires effective



parenting, strong home-school collaboration, and adequate school-based guidance and counselling services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Parents should sustain consistent supervision, clearly communicate behavioural expectations, and provide continuous emotional support to reinforce positive disciplinary behaviour among their children.
2. Parents should participate in parenting education and counselling programmes, maintain coordinated and consistent disciplinary practices, establish stable emotional environments, and minimize household conflict to promote positive behavioural adjustment, particularly in single-parent, extended, and reconstructed family settings.
3. Schools should strengthen regular parent-teacher interactions and structured school-home collaboration programmes to ensure continuity between home and school discipline systems.
4. Schools should provide targeted guidance, counselling, and psychological support services for students from single-parent and reconstructed family backgrounds to facilitate positive behavioural adjustment.
5. Schools should recognize and actively involve parents, guardians, and extended family members in school engagement programmes aimed at monitoring students' behaviour and supporting their overall disciplinary development.

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