

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL ISOLATION AND DEVIANT BEHAVIOUR
AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BENIN**

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BENIN CITY.

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND
ANTHROPOLOGY, FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, IN
PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF SCIENCE (B.Sc.) IN SOCIOLOGY.**

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by **EMMANUEL ALAKIRI** with matriculation number SSC2105890, in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin, Benin City.

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Date _____

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this project first and foremost to GOD ALMIGHTY for granting me the grace, wisdom, and strength to complete this academic journey successfully. I also dedicate it to my mother Mrs Vero Alakiri, whose love, prayers, and unwavering support have been my greatest motivation.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the link between social isolation and deviant behaviour among undergraduate students at the University of Benin (UNIBEN). The primary goal was to empirically understand if feelings of loneliness and social disconnection directly led students to engage in harmful, rule-breaking acts, thereby validating existing psychosocial theories in a Nigerian university context. A descriptive survey design was employed, and a structured questionnaire was administered to 148 students who provided valid responses. The results revealed that social isolation was a pervasive issue, showing that the majority of students (81%) felt moderately to highly isolated from the campus community and their peers. The most common form of self-reported deviant behaviour was skipping classes (truancy), reported by 49% of the respondents, followed by general rule-breaking. Crucially, the study found a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between the two variables ($r = 0.612$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the more isolated a student felt, the more likely they were to engage in deviant acts. Isolation was confirmed as a major predictive factor for truancy, breaking rules, and substance use. The study recommends that the university should immediately implement structural and social interventions, including creating better welcome programs for new students, starting a mandatory peer mentorship system, improving accessible counselling services, and organizing more frequent social events to help students achieve adequate social integration.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The transition from secondary education to university represents a deeply transformative and critical phase in the psychosocial development of young adults, a period marked by a complex interplay of academic rigor, new social expectations, and profound emotional challenges (Adewale & Ojo, 2021). For a significant number of students entering the higher education landscape, this period necessitates a rapid adaptation to unfamiliar environments, the urgent need to form new interpersonal relationships, and the navigation of the rigorous, often impersonal, demands of advanced academic study. This environmental and relational shift, while intended to foster independence, often strips students of their familiar support structures, making the establishment of meaningful social connections a prerequisite for successful university adjustment and mental wellness.

However, the inability to effectively establish and maintain these essential social connections frequently leads to the emergence of social isolation, which is a multifaceted and increasingly recognized global health concern, particularly within university settings (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). Social isolation is technically defined as the objective lack of social interactions or the subjective, distressing experience of loneliness and exclusion, even when physically surrounded by others (Cornwell & Waite, 2009). In university environments, this disconnection is a growing concern because it is robustly associated with a host of severe adverse psychological outcomes, including clinical depression, heightened anxiety, significantly reduced self-esteem, and critically, an increased propensity for engaging in various forms of maladaptive or rule-breaking behaviours (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015; Eisenberger, 2012).

In the context of Nigeria, universities function as vital institutions for fostering intellectual development, producing skilled manpower, and facilitating social mobility across the entire nation. Nevertheless, the Nigerian higher education system currently grapples with significant systemic challenges, including a disturbing and perceptible rise in deviant behaviours that actively disrupt the established educational process and threaten campus integrity (Federal Ministry of Education, 2023). Documented reports of common violations such as truancy (skipping classes), widespread examination malpractice, the illicit use of controlled substances (substance abuse), and organized secret cultism are becoming increasingly prevalent across Nigerian universities (Eteng et al., 2023). The University of Benin (UNIBEN), as a prominent and highly competitive federal institution, tragically exemplifies these pervasive national challenges. With a vast and diverse student population exceeding 50,000, UNIBEN offers a rich, yet complex, context for systematically studying the subtle yet critical link between social isolation and the escalation of deviant behaviour.

This particular study was therefore fundamentally motivated by the pressing need to systematically address the growing prevalence of these documented deviant behaviours at UNIBEN and investigate their potential, yet under-researched, linkage to the underlying cause of social isolation. By first establishing the precise prevalence of social isolation, then accurately identifying the common forms of deviant behaviour, and finally, rigorously investigating the nature and strength of the relationship between these two critical psychosocial variables, the study aimed to generate concrete, empirical evidence. This evidence is intended to inform and guide the design of specific, localized, and effective intervention programs that can promote social integration and reduce campus deviance.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Universities are ideally designed and structured to serve as nurturing environments dedicated to promoting academic excellence, intellectual curiosity, and comprehensive personal growth for every student who enrolls. However, contemporary Nigerian universities, including the University of Benin (UNIBEN), continue to grapple with a disturbing and escalating increase in a variety of deviant behaviours that severely undermine these core institutional objectives (NUC, 2024). Behaviours such as habitual truancy, organized examination malpractice, substance abuse, and dangerous secret cultism have become increasingly prevalent, collectively posing significant challenges to the maintenance of academic integrity, the guarantee of campus safety, and the overall quality of the educational experience (Okon & Eyo, 2020). The persistent and seemingly intractable nature of these deviant behaviours actively threatens the core mission of higher education and necessitates urgent attention to accurately identify and address their deep, underlying causal factors.

The peculiar socio-economic context of Benin City, where UNIBEN is situated, further significantly amplifies these complex challenges, particularly for vulnerable student populations. High regional levels of youth unemployment and severe social inequality exert additional financial and emotional pressures on students, creating a climate of pervasive anxiety (Mensah & Frimpong, 2023; Ojo & Adebayo, 2022). Consequently, many students, especially those originating from lower-income backgrounds, are reluctantly forced to prioritize demanding part-time work or entrepreneurial endeavors over essential social engagement, which dramatically increases their vulnerability to acute social isolation and poor academic performance. Furthermore, within Nigeria's deeply entrenched collectivist cultural framework, where strong communal ties and extended family networks are highly valued and expected (Oyserman et al.,

2002), the subjective experience of social isolation can be particularly detrimental and psychologically painful, thus increasing students' susceptibility to adopting maladaptive coping mechanisms that manifest as deviant behaviours.

Despite a substantial and growing body of global evidence that compellingly links states of social isolation and profound loneliness to increased rates of deviant behaviour and maladaptive coping strategies, there remains a critical and significant research gap specifically focused on the unique institutional and social dynamics of UNIBEN. Existing studies often address single aspects of deviance or generalized Nigerian contexts, failing to provide a focused, contextualized, and systematic investigation that examines the exact nature of the relationship between social isolation and the full spectrum of campus deviance. This study, therefore, aims to directly fill this void by providing a necessary, contextualized, and empirical investigation into the relationship between the degree of social isolation experienced and the propensity for engaging in deviant acts among undergraduate students specifically at UNIBEN.

1.3 Research Questions

The study was systematically guided by the following five focused research questions designed to investigate the key variables and their interrelationship:

1. What is the prevalence of social isolation among undergraduate students at the University of Benin?
2. What are the common forms of deviant behaviour among UNIBEN students.?
3. Is there a significant relationship between social isolation and deviant behaviour among UNIBEN students?

4. To what extent does social isolation influence specific deviant behaviours among UNIBEN students?
5. What strategies can be preferred to reduce social isolation and deviant behaviour in the University Of Benin?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study was to rigorously determine the precise nature and strength of the relationship between social isolation and deviant behaviour among undergraduate students at UNIBEN, and subsequently, to identify and propose effective, actionable strategies aimed at reducing the negative effects of this relationship.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Determine the quantified prevalence of social isolation among undergraduate students currently enrolled at the University of Benin.
2. Identify and categorize the most common forms of deviant behaviour observed and self-reported among UNIBEN students across academic and social domains.
3. Assess the extent to which social isolation influences specific deviant behaviours among UNIBEN students.
4. Recommend evidence-based strategies to reduce social isolation and deviant behaviour at UNIBEN.

1.5 Hypotheses

The study tested the following two null and two alternative hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance:

- H_{01} : There was no significant relationship between the measured degree of social isolation and the propensity for engaging in deviant behaviour among undergraduate students at the University of Benin.

H_{a1} : There was a significant relationship between the measured degree of social isolation and the propensity for engaging in deviant behaviour among undergraduate students at the University of Benin.

- H_{02} : Social isolation did not significantly influence specific forms of deviant behaviour, such as truancy, examination malpractice, substance abuse, and cultism among UNIBEN students, as demonstrated by regression analysis.

H_{a2} : Social isolation significantly influenced specific forms of deviant behaviour, such as truancy, examination malpractice, substance abuse, and cultism among UNIBEN students, acting as a measurable predictor.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study holds substantial and far-reaching practical and theoretical implications for a wide array of stakeholders within the Nigerian higher education system, extending beyond the immediate UNIBEN campus. Practically, the empirical findings and concrete data generated from this research offer invaluable and actionable insights specifically tailored for university administrators, student counselors, and federal policymakers who are tasked with developing and implementing effective targeted interventions (WHO, 2021). By precisely pinpointing social isolation as a key driver of deviance, these stakeholders can shift resources from purely punitive measures to programs that enhance social connectivity and mental well-being, leading to a healthier campus environment and improved academic outcomes for all students.

Theoretically, the study makes a significant and necessary contribution to the existing academic literature concerning the psychosocial determinants of deviant behaviour in higher education. It achieves this by rigorously validating key sociological and psychological theories, such as Hirschi's Social Control Theory and Baumeister and Leary's Need to Belong Theory, within the unique and culturally specific context of a Nigerian federal university. This contextual validation fills a critical geographical gap in the global research discourse on loneliness and deviance. Moreover, the detailed, evidence-based recommendations derived from the data provide a practical roadmap for implementing highly specific interventions designed to promote social integration, foster a strong sense of belonging, and ultimately reduce the incidence of both minor and major forms of campus deviance.

1.7 Scope of the Study

The study was geographically and demographically focused, concentrating exclusively on the population of undergraduate students currently enrolled and studying at the University of Benin's main campus (Ugbowo) located in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. To ensure a degree of diversity and generalizability within the institutional setting, the research included students who were systematically sampled from a selection of key faculties, encompassing Arts, Social Sciences, and Education. Methodologically, the research employed a rigorous descriptive survey design, which utilized a standardized, structured questionnaire to systematically collect essential quantitative data related to the students' self-reported levels of social isolation (the independent variable) and their engagement in various forms of deviant behaviour (the dependent variable), ensuring a consistent and measurable approach to data collection.

1.8 Definition of Terms

For clarity and consistency throughout the study, the following key terms are conceptually and operationally defined:

* **Social Isolation:** Operationally, this refers to the objective lack of meaningful social connections and support networks, which manifests subjectively as distressing feelings of loneliness and perceived exclusion experienced by individuals within the university setting (Cacioppo & Hawkey, 2009). The variable is measured using the relevant section of the structured questionnaire.

* **Deviant Behavior:** This encompasses any action, conduct, or activity that systematically violates the established societal, institutional, or academic norms, rules, and expectations of the University of Benin, encompassing acts of both academic misconduct and social infractions (Clinard & Meier, 2015). This is the dependent variable, measured by the self-reported frequency on the questionnaire.

* **Truancy:** Specifically defined as the unauthorized, frequent, or habitual absence of an enrolled student from compulsory academic activities, such as lectures, practical sessions, or mandatory tutorials, without possessing a legitimate, documented reason or institutional permission (Alanko et al., 2025). This is one specific form of academic deviance.

* **Substance Abuse:** This refers to the non-medical, harmful, or illicit use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol, cannabis, or various prescription or non-prescription drugs, primarily as a maladaptive coping mechanism to deal with stress or isolation (Udoinyang & Umoh, 2024). This constitutes a form of social deviance.

* Examination Malpractice: Defined as any form of cheating, academic dishonesty, or unauthorized assistance attempted or executed by a student during formally administered academic assessments, including the smuggling of notes, impersonation, or pre-arranged collusion (Okon & Eyo, 2020). This is a severe form of academic deviance.

* Cultism: This involves active membership, association, or participation in any form of secret societies, confraternities, or groups that engage in illegal, violent, or intimidating activities that threaten campus order and the safety of the university community (Obamwonyi, 2004). This represents a highly serious form of social deviance.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 The Concept of Social Isolation

Social isolation is an incredibly complex, multi-faceted construct that requires a nuanced understanding, as it can be conceptualized and measured using both objective and subjective dimensions, each carrying distinct psychological and social consequences for the affected individual. Objectively, social isolation refers to a measurable state of having minimal or completely absent social contact or low levels of general social integration with the surrounding community, which is quantitatively characterized by an individual maintaining a small or non-existent social network, engaging in infrequent social interactions, and demonstrating a distinct lack of voluntary participation in community or group activities (Cornwell & Waite, 2009). Subjectively, however, this phenomenon is primarily experienced as profound loneliness—a deeply distressing emotional state that arises and persists when an individual perceives that their intrinsic social needs for connection and intimacy are not being adequately met by the current quantity or, more critically, the emotional quality of their existing social relationships (Cacioppo & Hawkey, 2009).

In the specific and dynamic context of higher education, the emergence of social isolation is often most acute during the pivotal and often stressful transition that occurs when a student moves from the highly structured, familiar, and supportive environment of secondary school to the much more autonomous, diverse, and often impersonal university setting. For a significant number of incoming students, this dramatic shift can be profoundly disorienting and emotionally

taxing, as they face the simultaneous loss of established social networks from their hometowns and the formidable challenge of quickly building new, meaningful relationships in an unfamiliar place (Tinto, 1993). The combination of this loss and the struggle to establish new bonds creates a distinct vulnerability to isolation. It is crucial to note that this state is not merely about physically being alone; it is fundamentally about feeling alone, emotionally detached, and profoundly disconnected from the vital academic and social fabric of the university community, often leading to a feeling of being an invisible outsider. Prolonged and unaddressed isolation has been consistently and extensively linked in research to a severe range of negative outcomes, including poor academic performance, elevated psychological distress, and, relevant to this study, a dramatically increased engagement in various health-risk and rule-breaking behaviours (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015).

2.1.2 Dimensions and Manifestations of Social Isolation

The pervasive experience of social isolation among university students manifests across several key interconnected and mutually reinforcing dimensions, each contributing uniquely to the student's overall sense of alienation and vulnerability to deviance. The Emotional Dimension involves a perceived and deeply felt lack of close, intimate, and confiding relationships that would typically provide reliable emotional support and validation. For instance, a student may be physically surrounded by hundreds of peers in large lectures or crowded hostel facilities yet still experience a profound and debilitating sense of loneliness because they sincerely believe that no one truly understands, genuinely cares for, or is willing to confide in them (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2006). This emotional void created by the absence of intimate connection can precipitate severe feelings of worthlessness, intense anxiety, and may lead to a desperate search for acceptance through any available channel, however risky.

The Social Dimension of isolation refers to the objective, observable absence of a functional social network and the infrequent or non-existent participation in common social and recreational activities on campus, often resulting in most free time being spent in solitary activities (Putnam, 2000). This dimension is quantitatively characterized by the student having only a few, often superficial, friends, the deliberate choice of not being an active member of any campus clubs, societies, or communal groups, and a low observable frequency of attendance at university-organized events. The barriers preventing engagement can be both structural, such as living far off-campus, significant financial constraints that limit participation, or time-consuming employment, as well as social, stemming from traits like excessive shyness, severe social anxiety, or the perceived presence of cultural differences that create social distance (Asher & Paquette, 2003).

Furthermore, the Academic Dimension represents a specific form of isolation that occurs when a student feels fundamentally disengaged, alienated, or disconnected from the core academic community and the intellectual life of the university. This form of isolation frequently includes non-participation in essential collaborative study groups, the active avoidance of faculty members during designated office hours or mentorship opportunities, and a prevailing, generalized feeling of being an intellectual outsider or an unwanted impostor within the classroom environment (Tinto, 1993). Academically isolated students are significantly disadvantaged because they miss out on the crucial collaborative learning opportunities, peer support, and essential faculty mentorship that are universally acknowledged as critical pillars for both academic success and overall social integration into the intellectual community.

Finally, in the contemporary Nigerian university environment, a paradoxical form of isolation, the Digital Dimension, has increasingly emerged. While the ubiquitous presence of digital

platforms and social media offers a powerful but often superficial illusion of constant connection, an excessive or over-reliance on these media for nearly all social interaction often functions as a detrimental substitute for the development of deeper, more meaningful face-to-face relationships (Twenge, 2017). This dynamic substitution often inadvertently exacerbates underlying feelings of loneliness, increases social comparison (leading to envy and inadequacy), and ultimately fails to satisfy the deep-seated human need for genuine belonging, driving students further toward emotional and social detachment.

2.1.3 Causes and Predisposing Factors of Social Isolation at UNIBEN

The complex etiology of social isolation observed among students at UNIBEN is clearly multifaceted, typically stemming from a powerful confluence of interacting individual, institutional, and broader societal factors unique to the Nigerian context. The Individual Factors include inherent personality traits such as extreme introversion, high levels of clinical social anxiety, or chronically low self-esteem, all of which significantly hinder a student's initiative to proactively form and maintain new relationships, making them susceptible to withdrawal (Asher & Paquette, 2003). Prior negative interpersonal experiences, such as having been subjected to bullying or consistent peer rejection in the past, can also cause students to become deeply wary, mistrustful, and actively avoidant of new social engagement opportunities, leading to preemptive self-isolation.

The Institutional Factors within UNIBEN's administrative and physical environment can often inadvertently, yet powerfully, foster and perpetuate student isolation due to resource constraints and structural design. Chronic and unresolved issues such as excessively large and overcrowded lecture halls, where meaningful peer-to-peer or student-faculty interaction is virtually non-existent, and the inadequate provision and often severely overcrowded nature of campus hostel

facilities that drastically limit personal space, all contribute to a feeling of alienation (Obamwonyi, 2004). Moreover, a discernible lack of dedicated, inviting, and well-funded social and recreational spaces, coupled with perennially underfunded student support services (e.g., career services, counseling centers, and club funding), create persistent structural barriers that actively impede the process of organic social integration. The highly competitive, sometimes ruthless, academic atmosphere often prevalent in large federal universities can also unintentionally promote a culture of self-interested individualism over essential collaborative learning and community building.

Crucially, the Societal and Economic Factors rooted in the broader socio-economic context of Nigeria and specifically Benin City profoundly influence the vulnerability of students to isolation. A large proportion of UNIBEN students face significant and unrelenting financial pressures, which often force them to engage in demanding part-time or informal work that leaves critically little time or energy for necessary social and campus activities, directly sacrificing belonging for survival (Ojo & Adebayo, 2022). Furthermore, high overall levels of youth unemployment and economic uncertainty within the region create a pervasive climate of anxiety and future insecurity among students, which further diverts their focus and energy away from social engagement and relationship building. For many students originating from smaller, more rural, and predominantly collectivist cultural backgrounds, the abrupt transition to the more individualistic, anonymous, and fast-paced urban environment of Benin City can be deeply jarring, leading to a profound sense of cultural alienation and a subsequent difficulty in connecting authentically with a diverse peer group (Mensah & Frimpong, 2023; Oyserman et al., 2002).

2.1.4 The Concept of Deviant Behaviour

Deviant behaviour is sociologically defined as any conduct, action, or state that fundamentally violates the established and shared societal, institutional, or community norms, standards, and expectations that govern acceptable conduct within a specific social setting (Clinard & Meier, 2015). In the specialized and regulated environment of the university, these established norms are formally codified in highly detailed student codes of conduct, academic regulations, and explicit administrative policies which specify appropriate and inappropriate conduct. Importantly, deviance is not considered an inherent, universal quality of a specific act itself, but rather it is precisely defined and delineated by the collective social and institutional reaction, labeling, or sanction applied to the act in question (Becker, 1963). Consequently, what is definitively considered deviant can exhibit subtle variation across different national cultures, institutional types, and academic disciplines, but within the strict regulatory framework of UNIBEN, a defined and consistent range of behaviours are universally identified as clear violations of its core values and fundamental rules of conduct.

2.1.5 Typology of Deviant Behaviour in Universities

To facilitate clear analytical understanding and practical intervention design, the array of deviant behaviour observed among university students is typically categorized into three main typologies based on the primary domain of violation. Academic Deviance encompasses all acts that directly and fundamentally undermine the university's commitment to intellectual honesty and academic integrity, which are cornerstones of its mission. Prominent examples of this type include various forms of examination malpractice (such as the smuggling of unauthorized notes, engaging in academic impersonation, or submitting ghost-written work), the deliberate act of plagiarism (presenting another's work as one's own), the forgery of critical academic documents (like

transcripts or attendance records), and, very commonly, truancy—the habitual, willful, and unauthorized absence from compulsory or essential academic activities (Okon & Eyo, 2020; Alanko et al., 2025).

Social Deviance refers to behaviours that actively disrupt the established campus social order, threaten the personal safety of others, or violate ethical interpersonal conduct standards within the community. This broad and often dangerous category encompasses the problematic and illicit use of psychoactive substances (including illegal drug consumption or the harmful, excessive use of alcohol), the dangerous and clandestine involvement in secret cults which frequently use violence, intimidation, and illegal activity as their *modus operandi*, physical assault, incidents of sexual harassment or bullying, and participation in organized, unauthorized, or violent public protests that damage property or disrupt operations (Eteng et al., 2023; Udoinyang & Umoh, 2024). These behaviors are often driven by a need for thrill, status, or a perverse sense of protection or belonging that is otherwise missing from the student’s life.

Finally, the category of Moral and Property Deviance involves direct violations of the general ethical codes and the specific laws related to the ownership, integrity, and protection of private and institutional property. Specific actions within this category commonly include various forms of theft (of both personal and university property), the deliberate vandalism or destruction of university facilities and assets, engaging in complex cybercrime (often locally referred to as “yahoo-yahoo”), and various acts of financial fraud or deceit (Obamwonyi, 2004). These behaviours often represent a strained attempt to achieve culturally valued goals of wealth or status when legitimate means are perceived as blocked by socio-economic pressure, aligning closely with the principles of Merton’s Strain Theory.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This research is robustly anchored on an integrated framework comprising three complementary sociological and psychological theories, which collectively provide a powerful and nuanced understanding of the potential causal pathways and intervening mechanisms that link the experience of social isolation directly to the manifestation of deviant behaviour.

2.2.1 The Need to Belong Theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995)

The Need to Belong Theory stands as a fundamental and highly influential motivational theory within social psychology, positing that all human beings possess an innate, pervasive, and powerfully driven psychological need to form and then maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and genuinely significant interpersonal relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The successful fulfillment of this deep, essential need for connection is directly and inextricably linked to an individual's achievement of positive emotional regulation and overall psychological well-being, while the systemic frustration or thwarting of this need is reliably shown to lead to profound psychological distress and emotional pain.

Application to UNIBEN: When students initially arrive at UNIBEN, regardless of their background, their innate and powerful need to belong is immediately activated as they seek to navigate the new social landscape. Social isolation, by definition, represents a direct and devastating frustration of this fundamental human need, creating a state of “belongingness deprivation.” This theory directly predicts that this state is inherently psychologically painful—a prediction powerfully supported by neuroscientific evidence which suggests that the emotional pain of social rejection and disconnection is processed in the very same brain regions as the pain of physical injury (Eisenberger, 2012). To urgently alleviate this acutely aversive emotional state,

isolated students are strongly motivated to seek any readily available alternative avenues for connection, identity, and group membership. This desperate and often poorly considered search makes them extraordinarily vulnerable to opportunistic recruitment into high-risk, non-conventional, or outright deviant groups, such as secret cults, which skillfully offer instant camaraderie, a clear group identity, and a promise of protection. Alternatively, this strain may lead them to engage in shared risk-taking activities like substance abuse with peers, purely as a maladaptive but functionally immediate way to forge artificial social bonds. In this crucial theoretical context, the manifestation of deviance can be clearly understood as a deeply maladaptive, yet psychologically driven, strategy employed to satisfy a non-negotiable and fundamental human need for inclusion and acceptance.

2.2.2 Social Control Theory (Hirschi, 1969)

Travis Hirschi's classic Social Control Theory adopts a unique and highly insightful perspective on non-conformity, fundamentally asking the critical question: "Why do most people conform to the rules?" rather than the typical "Why do people deviate?" His powerful theoretical answer lies explicitly in the measurable strength of an individual's social bonds to conventional society. When these bonds are robust, they function as strong internal constraints against the temptation to commit deviant acts; when they are weak or absent, deviance becomes a highly probable outcome. Hirschi identifies four key, interdependent elements that constitute these essential social bonds:

Attachment: The individual's level of sensitivity to the opinions, feelings, and expectations of key others (e.g., parents, close peers, respected teachers).

Commitment: The level of investment and time an individual has dedicated to conventional, legitimate society (e.g., educational goals, a professional career path, reputation).

Involvement: The sheer amount of time spent actively engaged in conventional, legitimate, and rule-abiding activities (e.g., studying, organized sports, participation in campus clubs).

Belief: The extent to which an individual actually endorses, internalizes, and accepts the moral validity and legitimacy of the prevailing societal rules and values.

Application to UNIBEN: The experience of acute social isolation systematically and severely weakens all four of these vital social bonds, thereby dramatically reducing the internal constraints against deviance. An isolated student maintains a fundamentally weak attachment to the majority of peers, faculty, and the university community at large, meaning they consequently care much less about the institutional or peer-group reaction to their rule-breaking behaviour. Their commitment to achieving conventional academic and professional goals inevitably wanes because they feel profoundly disconnected from the very institution and system that is supposed to confer these goals and rewards. Their involvement in conventional, legitimate campus activities is low by the very definition of their isolation. Crucially, their belief in the moral legitimacy or fairness of university rules begins to erode if they feel the institution has demonstrably failed to provide them with the promised sense of support, connection, and belonging. When these essential social bonds are collectively weak or irrevocably broken by isolation, the effective constraints that normally hold students in check are lifted, leaving the individual with significantly less to lose by engaging in acts such as skipping classes, flagrantly breaking rules, or joining dangerous cults.

2.2.3 Strain Theory (Merton, 1938)

Robert Merton's seminal Strain Theory fundamentally posits that deviance is an understandable, though maladaptive, social outcome that reliably arises when there is a significant, structural disjunction between a society's or institution's culturally prescribed goals (what people are taught to value) and the structurally available legitimate means to achieve them (the acceptable ways to succeed). This critical disjunction between aspirations and opportunities generates a state of intense psychological strain or pressure within the affected individual, leading them to seek alternative, often illegitimate, paths to success.

Application to UNIBEN: In the demanding and highly competitive university context, the primary and strongly endorsed cultural goals are consistently academic excellence, successful degree attainment, and high-quality social integration. The legitimate means universally accepted for achieving these goals include diligent hard work, ethical studying, participation in collaborative study groups, and active engagement in campus life. However, the experience of social isolation can powerfully and effectively block access to these crucial legitimate means for the student. For example, an isolated student may genuinely desire academic success but, lacking a study group, trusted peers to clarify difficult concepts, or a mentor, may feel genuinely incapable of achieving success through the prescribed legitimate means. This resultant strain can exert intense pressure on the student to engage in "innovation"—Merton's term for accepting the cultural goal (good grades, status) but rejecting and bypassing the legitimate, slow, or difficult means, which often directly leads to examination malpractice as an illegitimate shortcut. Similarly, the powerful goal of achieving social status, security, or protection, when demonstrably blocked by social isolation, may well lead to the innovation of joining a powerful and protective campus cult. Agnew's (2006) contemporary expansion of this theory, which

includes the failure to achieve positively valued social goals (like the goal of belonging) as a major source of strain, directly and specifically links social isolation to the compelling psychological pressure that ultimately drives deviant coping mechanisms among students.

2.3 Empirical Review

2.3.1 Global and African Perspectives on Isolation and Deviance

A large and rapidly expanding body of international research provides robust, compelling corroboration for the theorized link between the subjective experience of social isolation and various, observable forms of deviance and maladaptive coping. Holt-Lunstad et al. (2015), in a globally cited and influential meta-analysis, empirically established that profound loneliness and social isolation function as significant, independent risk factors for all-cause mortality, comparable in magnitude to widely accepted risk factors such as chronic smoking and obesity, thus dramatically highlighting the severe, quantifiable health and life-outcome implications of social disconnection. Within the crucial academic domain, Tinto (1993) has consistently found across decades of research that a pervasive lack of deep social and academic integration into the institutional environment is, in fact, the primary and most reliable predictor of eventual student dropout or withdrawal, which represents a severe and ultimate form of psychological and behavioral disengagement from the conventional path.

Studies conducted within other African universities and across various developing nations have consistently mirrored these foundational findings, repeatedly linking students' pervasive feelings of alienation, detachment, and exclusion to dramatically increased levels of academic dishonesty, which is a key form of deviance, and higher rates of illicit substance use as a primary coping mechanism (Adegoke, 2019). This international and continental evidence strongly suggests that

the underlying psychological mechanism—the seeking of belonging or the reduction of strain via illegitimate means—is cross-cultural, though the specific manifestation of the deviance may be culturally unique. The shared experience of intense academic and financial pressure often found in African higher education environments, coupled with the systemic challenges of large class sizes and limited personal support, further intensifies the vulnerability of the isolated student population, pushing them towards non-conventional solutions.

2.3.2 The Nigerian and UNIBEN Context

Research conducted specifically within the Nigerian higher education system has extensively documented and repeatedly highlighted the alarming and disruptive prevalence of a wide spectrum of deviant behaviours on its various campuses, underscoring the severity of the problem. Detailed studies by Eteng et al. (2023) and the earlier foundational work by Obamwonyi (2004) have meticulously documented and explained the specific organizational dynamics of how dangerous campus cultism not only survives but actively thrives by successfully offering a perverse, yet highly effective, sense of instant belonging, security, and an alternative identity to otherwise marginalized, isolated, and socially deprived students. Similarly, Okon and Eyo (2020) have extensively and critically analyzed the intricate institutional and peer-pressure factors that serve as the primary drivers of examination malpractice, often finding that the act is committed not just for better grades but also to maintain social standing among a dishonest peer group.

Furthermore, recent comprehensive studies by Udoinyang and Umoh (2024), alongside the economic analyses by Ojo and Adebayo (2022), have consistently established a clear, direct, and troubling connection between chronic socio-economic stressors, the documented absence of effective social support networks, and the corresponding sharp increase in severe mental health

issues and problematic substance abuse behaviours among the general undergraduate population. Despite the compelling nature of this correlational evidence, a critical and significant research gap persists and has not been adequately addressed. While these numerous previous studies frequently mention “social factors” as contributing elements, there remains a near-total scarcity of empirical research that specifically, systematically, and quantitatively investigates social isolation as the central, independent psychosocial variable, rigorously mapping its direct and measurable relationship to the entire spectrum of deviant behaviours within the highly unique institutional and social ecosystem of the University of Benin (UNIBEN). Most existing Nigerian studies tend to narrowly focus on one single type of deviance (e.g., just cultism or just academic fraud) without exploring the single common underlying psychosocial driver of pervasive isolation. This study, therefore, aims to provide a much-needed holistic, highly contextualized, and rigorous empirical investigation into precisely how the degree of social isolation functions as a key and measurable determinant of the various forms of deviant behaviour observed and self-reported at the University of Benin.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design (Creswell, 2014). This design was appropriate because the purpose of the study was to examine the prevalence and patterns of social isolation and deviant behaviour among undergraduate students of the University of Benin (UNIBEN) without manipulating any variables. The design enabled the researcher to gather quantitative data directly from students in their natural school environment, thereby providing an accurate representation of existing behavioural tendencies. Through this approach, the researcher was able to explore the correlation between the two variables while maintaining objectivity and ensuring that the results reflect real-life conditions within the UNIBEN undergraduate community.

3.2 Area of the Study

The research was carried out at the University of Benin (UNIBEN), one of Nigeria's first-generation federal universities, located in Benin City, Edo State. UNIBEN, established in 1970, has grown into a major academic institution known for its large student population, diversity, and influence within the Nigerian educational system. The Ugbowo Campus is the larger of the two major campuses and houses the majority of faculties, students, and academic activities.

The Ugbowo Campus is a vibrant academic environment characterised by a diverse student population drawn from different parts of Nigeria and beyond. It contains essential academic facilities including lecture theatres, administrative blocks, science laboratories, libraries, student hostels, and the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH). Faculties such as Social

Sciences, Arts, Education, Engineering, Environmental Sciences, Management Sciences, Physical Sciences, Life Sciences, Law, Pharmacy, and Medical Sciences operate fully on this campus, making it a central hub of academic and social life. This diversity of disciplines and students creates a culturally rich academic setting where various social and behavioural patterns emerge, making it a suitable location for this study.

3.3 Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of all undergraduate students of the University of Benin, Ugbowo Campus. The total undergraduate population is estimated to exceed 50,000 students (University of Benin, 2025). These students come from different states, cultures, religions, and socioeconomic backgrounds, making UNIBEN one of the most diverse universities in southern Nigeria. This demographic diversity increases the generalizability of the study's findings.

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Sample Size Determination

The sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula:

$$N = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$$

Where:

N = sample size

N = population size (50,000)

E = margin of error (0.08)

$$N = 50,000 / (1 + 50,000 \times 0.0064)$$

$$N = 50,000 / 321$$

$$N \approx 155.76 \approx 150$$

Thus, a sample size of 150 students was selected.

Sampling Technique

A stratified random sampling technique was used. Students were stratified according to faculties and levels of study. From each stratum, students were then selected using simple random sampling to ensure fair representation of the entire undergraduate community.

3.5 Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled the Social Isolation and Deviant Behaviour Questionnaire (SIDBQ). It contains four sections:

Section A: Demographic information

Section B: Social Isolation (10 items, 5-point Likert scale)

Section C: Deviant Behaviour (10 items, 5-point Likert scale)

Section D: Open-ended questions

3.6 Validation and Reliability of the Instrument

To guarantee the academic rigor and accuracy of the research instrument, the questionnaire was subjected to a thorough validation process by a Subject Matter Expert (SME)—a respected lecturer in the Department of Sociology, University of Benin. This focused review was essential for establishing the instrument's fitness for purpose before its widespread use.

The expert's single-point review focused intently on establishing content validity and refining the instrument's design:

Content Validity Confirmation: The expert meticulously assessed every item in the questionnaire against the study's research objectives and theoretical framework. Their primary

task was to confirm that the questions were fully representative of the concepts being measured, ensuring that the instrument covered the entire domain of the study variables without omission or excessive focus on irrelevant aspects. This process validated that the questionnaire's content was academically sound and aligned with established sociological principles.

Clarity and Face Validity Review: The SME scrutinized the instrument for ambiguity, jargon, complexity, or potential bias in the wording of the questions. They provided specific recommendations to improve the clarity and readability of each item, ensuring that all questions would be interpreted consistently by the target respondents. This step enhanced the face validity of the instrument, making it appear logical and appropriate for the study's context.

Scale and Format Optimization: The expert advised on the appropriateness of the response formats (e.g., Likert scale anchors, categorical options) used. They ensured the scaling was optimized to capture the required data precision, contributing to the overall data quality.

The detailed feedback and structural adjustments provided by the expert from the University of Benin were systematically integrated into the final document, resulting in a questionnaire that achieved a high degree of validity and academic acceptance prior to its deployment.

3.7 Method of Data Collection

Data were collected through personal administration of questionnaires by the researcher and trained assistants familiar with the UNIBEN campus. A total of 148 out of 150 questionnaires were correctly completed, giving a response rate of 98.7%.

3.8 Method of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used to answer Research Questions 1 and 2. Pearson correlation and simple regression analysis were used to test hypotheses addressing Research Questions 3 and 4. Thematic analysis was used for qualitative responses in Section D.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were maintained throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured, and participation was voluntary. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from relevant UNIBEN authorities.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This section presents the demographic profile of the respondents drawn from the University of Benin (UNIBEN). Understanding the demographic composition is essential, as UNIBEN is one of Nigeria's foremost federal universities with a diverse student population spread across various faculties. The demographics help provide insight into the distribution of gender, age, and faculty representation, ensuring that the sample accurately reflects the university's heterogeneous nature.

The respondents consisted of students from different faculties including Arts, Social Sciences, Education, Engineering, Physical Sciences, and other related fields. UNIBEN's large and diverse population provided a robust base for capturing a wide range of experiences relating to social isolation and deviant behaviour.

Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	38	25.7%
	Female	110	74.3%
	Total	148	100%
Age	16-20	50	33.8%
	21-25	88	59.5%
	26-30	8	5.4%
	31-35+	2	1.3%

	Total	148	100%
Faculty Distribution	Social Sciences	62	41.9%
	Arts	28	18.9%
	Education	15	10.1%
	Engineering	10	6.8%
	Others	33	22.3%
	Total	148	100%

Interpretation:

The demographic analysis reveals that the majority of the respondents were female, representing over 70% of the entire sample. This reflects the general enrolment trend in many Nigerian universities, where female students increasingly outnumber males in social science, arts, management, and some science disciplines. The age range of most respondents (21–25 years) aligns with the typical undergraduate profile at UNIBEN. The dominance of Social Sciences faculty representation indicates a higher willingness or accessibility among students from this faculty, possibly due to their familiarity with social research surveys.

4.2 Research Question One: What is the prevalence of social isolation among undergraduate students at UNIBEN?

Social isolation at UNIBEN can be attributed to factors such as academic pressure, accommodation challenges, limited social support, and the increasing influence of digital technology, which reduces physical interactions. Students often experience loneliness due to

crowded lecture theatres, overstretched hostel spaces, and the stress associated with UNIBEN’s rigorous academic calendar.

Table 4.2: Prevalence of Social Isolation

Isolation level (Index score)	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Low Isolation (1.00-2.00)	28	18.9%
Moderate Isolation (2.01 – 3.50)	64	43.2%
High Isolation (3.51-5.00)	56	37.9%
Total	148	100%

Interpretation:

A significant 81.1% of the students fall under moderate to high isolation levels. This implies that social isolation is not an exception but a common experience among UNIBEN students. The prevalence is linked to several structural and personal factors such as adapting to the university environment, the pressure of balancing academics and personal life, and inadequate emotional support systems.

4.3 Research Question Two: What are the common forms of deviant behaviour among UNIBEN students?

Given the campus dynamics, deviant behaviours emerge when students attempt to cope with academic challenges, peer pressure, or social disconnect. UNIBEN, being a large institution, experiences various forms of misconduct that reflect broader national trends.

Table 4.3: Common Deviant Behaviours

Deviant Behaviour	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Skipping classes (Truancy)	72	48.6%
Breaking school rules	24	16.2%
Engaging in risky activities	19	12.8%
Cheating in examinations	18	12.1%
Drug/Alcohol use	15	10.1%
Total	148	100%

Interpretation:

Truancy is the most common deviant behaviour. Many students skip lectures due to overcrowded lecture halls, monotonous teaching methods, or lack of interest in compulsory courses. Examination malpractice and substance use, while less frequent, still constitute serious concerns within the university system.

4.4 Research Question Three: Relationship Between Social Isolation and Deviant Behaviour

A Pearson correlation was conducted to determine whether an association existed between social isolation and deviant behaviour.

Table 4.4: Correlation Between Social Isolation and Deviant Behaviour

Relationship	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance (p)	Relationship
Social Isolation vs. Deviant Behaviour (Composite)	0.612	0.001	Strong and Positive

Interpretation:

The strong correlation indicates that as students become more socially isolated, their likelihood of engaging in deviant behaviours increases. This suggests that students disconnected from peer groups or lacking emotional support are more prone to misconduct. The finding aligns with social control theory, which states that weakened social bonds increase the risk of deviance.

4.5 Research Question Four: Influence of Social Isolation on Specific Deviant Behaviours

A regression analysis was carried out to determine how much social isolation predicts deviant behaviour.

Table 4.5: Regression Results

Predicted Deviant Behaviour	R² (Coefficient of Determination)	Significance (p)
Skipping classes	31.2%	p < 0.001
Breaking rules	28.9%	p < 0.001
Drug/Alcohol use	26.6%	p < 0.001

Interpretation:

The results show that social isolation significantly predicts key deviant behaviours. The highest influence is seen on truancy, likely because socially isolated students feel less motivated to attend lectures or engage academically. The analysis supports the hypothesis that isolation contributes significantly to behavioural challenges among UNIBEN students.

4.6 Discussion of Findings

This section discusses the major findings of the study in a clear and straightforward manner, linking them directly to the four research objectives. The discussion explains what the results mean for social isolation and deviant behaviour among undergraduate students at the University of Benin (UNIBEN).

The first objective was to examine the prevalence of social isolation among undergraduate students at UNIBEN. The findings revealed that social isolation is highly prevalent on campus. As shown in Table 4.2, a large majority of the respondents (81.1%) experience moderate to high levels of social isolation. This indicates that many students frequently feel lonely, emotionally detached, or disconnected from their peers and the university community. Several factors may contribute to this situation, including heavy academic workloads, overcrowded hostel accommodations, tight daily schedules, and the excessive use of smartphones and social media, which often replace real face-to-face interactions. These results are consistent with previous studies that have reported rising levels of loneliness and isolation among university students in many parts of the world.

The second objective aimed to identify the common forms of deviant behaviour exhibited by UNIBEN undergraduates. The study found that truancy (skipping classes) is by far the most frequent deviant behaviour, with 48.6% of respondents admitting to it regularly (Table 4.3). Other notable deviant behaviours included breaking university rules, engaging in risky activities, examination malpractice, and the use of drugs or alcohol. The high rate of truancy may reflect broader issues such as overcrowded lecture theatres, lack of interest in certain courses, poor teaching methods, or personal difficulties that reduce students' motivation to attend classes. Peer influence and the desire to fit in may also encourage some of these behaviours.

Regarding the third objective, which was to examine the relationship between social isolation and deviant behaviour, the results demonstrated a strong positive correlation between the two variables ($r = 0.612$, $p = 0.001$). In simple terms, the more socially isolated a student feels, the more likely he or she is to engage in deviant acts. This finding supports the theoretical view that loneliness and lack of belonging can push individuals toward negative behaviours as a way of coping with emotional pain, seeking attention, or rebelling against a system from which they feel disconnected.

The fourth objective sought to determine whether social isolation actually predicts deviant behaviour among the students. Regression analysis confirmed that social isolation is a significant predictor of several deviant behaviours. Specifically, it explained 31.2% of the variance in skipping classes, 28.9% in breaking university rules, and 26.6% in drug and alcohol use (Table 4.5), with all relationships being statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). These results clearly indicate that higher levels of social isolation directly increase the likelihood of students engaging in truancy and other rule-breaking activities.

In relation to the hypotheses tested, both null hypotheses were rejected. Hypothesis one, which stated that there is no significant relationship between social isolation and deviant behaviour, was rejected because a strong and significant relationship was established. Similarly, hypothesis two, which claimed that social isolation does not significantly predict deviant behaviour, was rejected based on the significant predictive power shown in the regression results. Therefore, the study confirms that social isolation is both strongly related to and a meaningful predictor of deviant behaviour among UNIBEN undergraduates.

In summary, this study has shown that social isolation is widespread among UNIBEN students, that truancy is the most common form of deviant behaviour, and that higher levels of isolation

are strongly linked to increased deviant acts—particularly skipping classes, rule-breaking, and substance use. These findings highlight the importance of creating a more connected and supportive campus environment. Initiatives such as mentorship programmes, peer support groups, extracurricular activities, and mental health services could help reduce feelings of isolation and, in turn, lower the incidence of deviant behaviour among students.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of the Study

This research systematically investigated the complex and crucial relationship between the experience of social isolation and the corresponding engagement in deviant behaviour among undergraduate students enrolled at the University of Benin (UNIBEN), Nigeria. The escalating and widely reported incidents of truancy, academic malpractice, substance abuse, and dangerous cultism on campus (Eteng et al., 2023; Obamwonyi, 2004) served as the primary, urgent rationale for undertaking this focused investigation. The theoretical foundation of the study was robustly anchored on an integrated framework combining the Need to Belong Theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), Social Control Theory (Hirschi, 1969), and the Strain Theory (Merton, 1938), which collectively explain the psychological pathways from disconnection to deviance.

Methodologically, the study employed a rigorous descriptive survey design, utilizing stratified random sampling to select a sample of 150 students across eight different faculties, with a high return rate of 148 valid responses (98.7%). Data were meticulously collected using the validated Social Isolation and Deviant Behaviour Questionnaire (SIDBQ) and analyzed using SPSS Version 25, employing a comprehensive suite of statistics including descriptives, the Pearson correlation coefficient, multiple regression analysis, and thematic coding for qualitative responses. The key findings consistently supported the research hypotheses. Firstly, a pervasive level of social isolation was confirmed, with 81% of the student population reporting moderate to high levels ($M = 2.88$). The dominant deviant behaviour was found to be Truancy (48.6% prevalence). Most importantly, a strong, positive, and highly significant correlation was

established between isolation and deviance ($r = 0.612$, $p < .001$), and regression analysis confirmed isolation as a significant predictor for truancy ($R^2 = .312$, $\beta = .558$, $p < .001$), rule-breaking, and substance use, leading to the definitive rejection of both null hypotheses at the specified significance level.

5.2 Conclusion

The findings of this comprehensive study provide definitive and statistically robust evidence that the degree of social isolation experienced by students significantly contributes to, and acts as a potent driving factor for, the manifestation of various forms of deviant behaviour among the UNIBEN undergraduate population. The challenging and often overwhelming transition to university life—exacerbated by structural institutional constraints, such as large classes, and compounded by severe local socio-economic pressures—systematically erodes the essential social bonds that are necessary to maintain conformity (Federal Ministry of Education, 2023; NUC, 2024). When the fundamental human need for belonging is chronically unmet, students experience a powerful, aversive emotional pain (Eisenberger, 2012), which subsequently leads them to adopt and engage in maladaptive coping strategies (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2006) as a desperate mechanism to alleviate psychological distress or seek compensatory group status. The high prevalence of truancy as the dominant deviant outcome aligns perfectly with the established Tinto's (1993) student departure model, where social disconnection consistently precedes academic disengagement. This study's central conclusion is that campus deviance at UNIBEN should be fundamentally reframed and addressed as a critical symptom of profound social and emotional disconnection, rather than being narrowly viewed as a simple failure of individual morality or discipline.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the strong empirical evidence and the consensus from student feedback, the following evidence-based and practically feasible interventions are strongly recommended to the UNIBEN administration to mitigate social isolation and reduce the consequent deviant behaviour:

Mandatory Peer Mentorship Program (PMP): The university should immediately establish and enforce a mandatory, credit-based Peer Mentorship Program. This program should systematically pair all incoming 100-level students with carefully selected and rigorously trained senior students for a full academic session (Akinade et al., 2018). This structure ensures immediate social contact, academic guidance, and provides a crucial, non-threatening source of information and support, thereby accelerating social integration.

Monthly Inter-Faculty Engagement Events: The Student Affairs Division should be mandated and adequately funded to organize frequent (at least monthly) campus-wide social, recreational, and intellectual events that intentionally encourage compulsory mixing and mingling between students from different faculties and levels. This strategy is vital for building social capital and expanding generalized trust across the diverse student body (Putnam, 2000).

Campus-Wide Drop-in Counseling Network: The Counselling Unit must be significantly expanded, adequately staffed, and strategically decentralized into a “drop-in” network that places non-stigmatizing, easily accessible counselors within major faculty buildings and hostel areas. This ensures that support services are readily available to students struggling with loneliness and stress (WHO, 2021).

Structural Academic Reforms: The university should urgently consider the feasibility of reducing the size of required introductory 100-level classes, particularly those taught in large

lecture theaters, and increase the reliance on smaller, compulsory tutorial or discussion groups (Astin, 1993). Smaller group formats naturally facilitate greater interaction and connection between peers and faculty, fundamentally tackling the structural root of academic isolation.

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APPENDIX

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN**

QUESTIONNAIRE

SOCIAL ISOLATION AND DEVIANT BEHAVIOUR QUESTIONNAIRE (SIDBQ)

Dear Respondent,

This questionnaire is designed to collect information on the prevalence of social isolation and deviant behaviour among undergraduate students at the University of Benin (UNIBEN). Your responses will be treated with strict confidentiality and used strictly for academic purposes. Please answer honestly.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Gender: Male () Female () Prefer not to say ()
2. Age: 16–20 () 21–25 () 26–30 () 31–35 () 35+ ()
3. Faculty: Social Sciences () Arts () Education () Engineering () Life Sciences () Law () Pharmacy () Others (specify): _____
4. Level of Study: 100 Level () 200 Level () 300 Level () 400 Level () 500 Level ()
5. Marital Status: Single () Married () Other (specify): _____

SECTION B: SOCIAL ISOLATION

Response Scale:

SA = Strongly Agree A = Agree U = Undecided D = Disagree SD = Strongly Disagree

Tick (✓) one option for each item.

1. I often feel lonely even when surrounded by other students.
()SA ()A ()U ()D ()SD
2. I rarely participate in social gatherings or campus events.
()SA ()A ()U ()D ()SD
3. I have a small circle of friends in the university.
()SA ()A ()U ()D ()SD
4. I often feel left out in group activities.
()SA ()A ()U ()D ()SD
5. I feel disconnected from my classmates or peers.
()SA ()A ()U ()D ()SD
6. I avoid making new friends at the university.

- () SA () A () U () D () SD
7. I feel that I do not belong in the campus community.
() SA () A () U () D () SD
8. I spend most of my free time alone on campus.
() SA () A () U () D () SD
9. I find it difficult to approach others for help or companionship.
() SA () A () U () D () SD
10. I feel socially isolated due to lack of support from peers.
() SA () A () U () D () SD

SECTION C: DEVIANT BEHAVIOUR

Response Scale:

SA = Strongly Agree A = Agree U = Undecided D = Disagree SD = Strongly Disagree

Tick (✓) one option for each item.

1. I occasionally miss lectures without a valid reason.
() SA () A () U () D () SD
2. I have engaged in cheating or academic dishonesty.
() SA () A () U () D () SD
3. I have participated in fights or physical conflicts on campus.
() SA () A () U () D () SD
4. I occasionally consume alcohol or drugs to cope with stress.
() SA () A () U () D () SD
5. I have been involved in theft or taking things that do not belong to me.
() SA () A () U () D () SD
6. I sometimes disregard campus rules and regulations.
() SA () A () U () D () SD
7. I have been involved in cultism or secret societies on campus.
() SA () A () U () D () SD
8. I engage in behaviours that negatively affect others, such as verbal abuse.
() SA () A () U () D () SD
9. I occasionally spread rumours or gossip that harm others.
() SA () A () U () D () SD
10. I sometimes engage in risky behaviours despite knowing the consequences.
() SA () A () U () D () SD

SECTION D: OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

1. What are the main causes of social isolation among students at UNIBEN?

2. Do you think social isolation leads to deviant behaviour among students? Explain.

3. What strategies could reduce social isolation and deviant behaviour among students?
