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# EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IMPACTS THE ASSOCIATION OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND CONDUCT PROBLEMS AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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## ABSTRACT

*Existing studies have consistently documented the beneficial role of parental involvement in reducing conduct problems among adolescents. Yet, studies examining factors that could moderate or strengthen this association are lacking. The present researchers investigated the moderating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between parental involvement and conduct problems among adolescents in Nigeria. Utilizing a cross-sectional design, 600 in-school adolescents aged 12 to 17 years, who were attending public secondary schools in South-Eastern Nigeria (males=360, females=240, mean age=14.64 years, SD=1.31) were conveniently. These participants completed measures of emotional intelligence, parental involvement and conduct problems. Hayes regression-based PROCESS Macro results showed that emotional intelligence moderated the relationship between parental involvement and conduct problems. Specifically, as emotional intelligence rises, the beneficial impact of parental involvement in reducing conduct problems became stronger. Interventions should be tailored towards enhancing emotional intelligence alongside promoting parental involvement to boost the reduction of conduct problems among adolescents.*

**Keywords:** Adolescence, conduct problems, emotional intelligence, moderation, parental involvement.

## INTRODUCTION

Conduct problems, a range of oppositional and antisocial behaviours that violate others' rights and defy social norms (American Psychiatric Association, 2022; Goulter et al., 2024; McMahon & Frick, 2019), has been documented as one of the most prevalent forms of maladjustment that begin in childhood (Erskine et al., 2014; Lichtenstein et al., 2020). They rank among the most common mental health issues that affect children and adolescents (Goulter et al., 2024). According to a meta-analysis, the global prevalence of disruptive behaviours, including conduct problems, is approximately 5.7% (Polanczyk et al., 2015). In Nigeria, the prevalence of conduct problems has also been recorded in several studies, which expose alarming rates of these behaviour problems among adolescents. For instance, 15.82% of secondary school students were found to exhibit conduct problems, with a noticeably higher incidence in males (4:1 ratio), and behaviours such as bullying, poor school attendance, stealing, and low academic performance were frequently seen in this group (Odeyemi et al., 2020). Likewise, Okoro et al. (2018) reported a 14.5% rate of conduct problems among secondary school adolescents, which shows significant gender and school-type differences in the display of these behaviours. When these behaviours become chronic and severe, they may lead to a diagnosis of Conduct Disorder, which is formally classified as a mental health disorder in DSM-5 and ICD-11 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; World Health Organization, 2022). Children and adolescents with Conduct Disorder exhibit recurrent, persistent behaviours that violate social norms (such as truancy or running away from home) or violate the rights of others (such as fighting, bullying, or stealing) (Rivenbark et al., 2018). Estimations have shown that conducts disorder causes 5.75 million years of disability worldwide (Erskine et al., 2014; Goulter et al., 2024; Whiteford et al., 2013).

It is however important to note that conduct problems that start in childhood are distinct from those that start in adolescence. Compared to those that appear during adolescence, childhood-onset is linked to more severe risk factors, a longer course of problematic behaviour,

and adverse outcomes (Fairchild et al., 2013; Goulter et al., 2024; Moffitt, 2018). According to longitudinal studies (see Erskine et al., 2014; Fergusson et al., 2005; Lichtenstein et al., 2020), conduct problems in childhood are associated with externalising behaviours like drug abuse and criminal involvement later in life. If left untreated, conduct problems raise the risk of serious mental and physical health problems, increased use of public services, and a higher likelihood of engaging in violent or criminal behaviour throughout one's life (Bevilacqua et al., 2018; Goulter et al., 2023; Goulter et al., 2024; Odgers et al., 2008; Rivenbark et al., 2018). Focusing on the prevention of early conduct problems is therefore a significant priority for public health and policymaking (Goulter et al., 2024). Thus, examining factors that could lessen conduct problems in adolescents is vital as the findings of this exploration can offer insights into how interventions and health policies could be best tailored to improve positive and pro-social behaviours among adolescents. Identifying these key factors can help mental health practitioners and policymakers to develop more targeted and effective prevention programs that address the root causes of these disruptive behaviours. Based on these insights, also, early intervention can improve the social functioning and resilience of adolescents, assisting them in becoming well-adjusted adults who make valuable contributions to society.

The present study thus considers parental involvement as a factor that could play a role in lessening conduct problems among adolescents. Parental involvement refers to a broad, complex concept that encompasses parents' demonstration of warmth, concern, and interest in their child, including knowing their child's friends and/or whereabouts, participating in school activities (such as attending PTA meetings or parent-teacher conferences), communicating with the child in a friendly manner, and many other behaviours (Fan & Chen, 2001; Frick, 1991; Grusec, 2011). Prior research (e.g., Baig et al., 2021; Crouter et al., 2005; Ucus et al., 2019) indicates that adolescent risk-taking behaviour ultimately decreases when parental figures are more involved and are knowledgeable about the activities of the adolescents. An intervention program by Webster-Stratton and Reid (2018) demonstrated that parental involvement played a vital role in minimizing conduct problems among U.S young children. Similarly, Ucus et al. (2019) reported that higher parental involvement (particularly parental warmth) was associated with reduced conduct problems among low-income families in elementary schools in the United States. A meta-analysis revealed a longitudinal relationship between higher parental warmth and reduced levels of externalizing problems (Pinquart, 2017). Moreover, Baig et al. (2021) found that parental involvement was associated with less risky behaviour, particularly substance abuse among adolescents in Qatar. In a Nigerian sample of adolescents, Eremie et al. (2019) reported that adolescents who experienced poor parental involvement (e.g., a poor family environment marked by family disputes, poor communication with the father, parental drunkenness, and inadequate management of adolescent conduct) were more likely to engage in delinquent behaviours, whereas, positive parental involvement (e.g., positive family atmospheres) was associated with non-delinquent behaviours.

These studies together prove the beneficial role of parental involvement in curbing conduct problems among adolescents. However, majority of these studies were focused in the western regions with few studies exploring the Sub-Saharan African context, especially Nigeria where conduct problems pose great threat (Amoo et al., 2020; Fenny & Falola, 2020; Oguntayo et al., 2020). The present study aim to explore the Nigerian context of adolescents to comprehensively examine whether there is a differential role of parental involvement in disruptive behaviours, particularly conduct problems among this age-group. Also, this study aim to probe into the potential factor that could strengthen this negative link between parental involvement and conduct problems in this population. The insight emanating from this exploration would be invaluable in developing evidence-based interventions and policy programs that can reduce adolescent conduct problems to the barest minimum, thereby fostering a peaceful society where positive adolescent development is prioritized, and delinquency rates are significantly reduced through targeted family-based interventions. The present researchers therefore consider emotional intelligence as a potential moderator that could strengthen this negative association between parental involvement and conduct problems among adolescents.

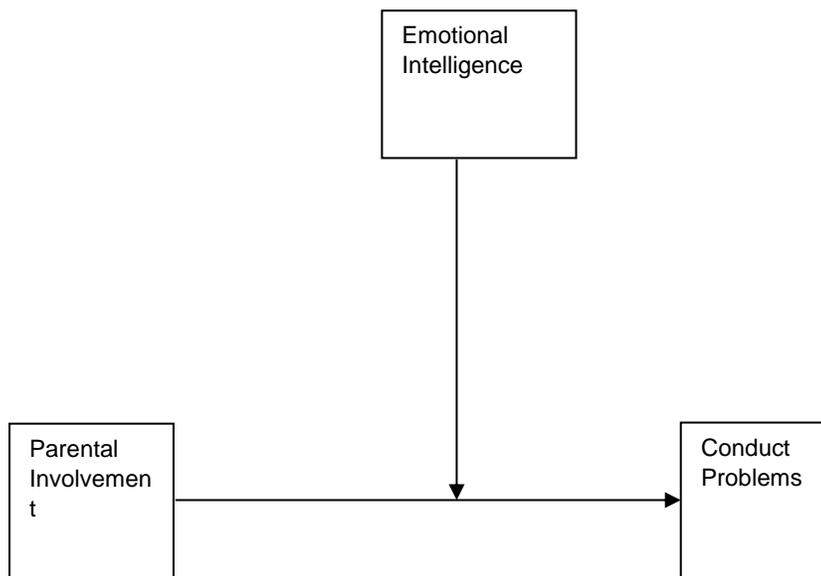
Emotional intelligence is a subset of social intelligence involving the ability to keep track of one's own and other people's feelings and emotions, distinguish between them, and utilize this knowledge to inform one's thoughts and behaviour (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). It encompasses the ability to comprehend complex concepts, adjust to one's surroundings, learn from mistakes, use a variety of reasoning techniques, and overcome challenges by exercising critical thought (Neisser et al., 1996). Adolescents who are better at recognizing other people's emotions can use this knowledge to control their own emotions, demonstrate empathy, and better adjust their behaviour to social situations, which can increase social acceptance and result in more fulfilling relationships with their peers ([Palomera et al., 2012](#); Piqueras et al., 2019; [Mancini et al., 2017](#)). Moreover, children and adolescents who exhibit higher levels of emotional awareness (one of the primary components of emotional intelligence) are more likely to display pro-social and empathic behaviours, experience positive social relationships, and be more popular with their peers (Finlon et al., 2015; Garner, 2010; Piqueras et al., 2019; Von Salisch et al., 2014). Literature has consistently documented the role of emotional intelligence in reducing the exhibition of disruptive behaviours and conduct problems among adolescents. For instance, Castillo-Gualda et al. (2018) found that emotional intelligence played a significant role in reducing physical and verbal aggression among Spanish adolescents. Similarly, Pérez-Fuentes et al. (2019) reported a negative association between emotional intelligence and adolescent aggressive behaviours among high school students in Spain. A systematic review and meta-analysis (Vega et al., 2022), strengthened the findings on the role of emotional intelligence in reducing conduct problems, by revealing that adolescents with higher levels of emotional intelligence were less likely to exhibit aggressive behaviours.

The present study suggests that emotional intelligence may play a moderating role by strengthening the negative association between parental involvement and conduct problems. Moderating variables impact the strength or direction of the relationship between two or more other variables of interest; they fundamentally impact the relationship between the independent/predictor and dependent/outcome variables (Hayes, 2018). The Ecological Systems Theory (EST; Bronfenbrenner, 1979) offers the best framework for explaining the moderating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between parental involvement and conduct problems among adolescents. This theory opines that the behaviour of a person may be affected by various sources, ranging from the immediate family environment (microsystem) to broader society (macrosystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). At the microsystem level, a low level of parental involvement negatively influences the agility of adolescents' lives and their coping mechanisms to difficulties and stresses (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Eccles & Harold, 2013; Şengönül, 2022). The significance of parental involvement in social and educational contexts is further highlighted by the mesosystem, which is where interactions between various microsystems take place. For instance, collaboration between parents and schools can help children develop positive behaviours and discourage disruptive behaviour by forming a network of support (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022; McLoyd, 1998). At the exosystem, elements like parental stress, financial difficulties, and community resources also affect how families function and, in turn, how adolescents behave (Paquette & Ryan, 2009). Excessive parental stress might reduce the quality of parental involvement, which can exacerbate adolescent behavioural issues (Conger et al., 1994; Paquette & Ryan, 2009).

Adolescents with high levels of emotional intelligence can utilize parental supports and guidance in a better manner which leads to better regulation of emotions and better ways of coping (Mestre et al., 2017; Zeidner et al., 2003). As parents become actively involved in their children's upbringing, emotionally intelligent adolescents are more likely to benefit from this involvement, resulting in decreased likelihood of exhibiting disruptive behaviours (De Raeymaecker & Dhar, 2022; Gonzales, 2022; Hirschfield & Gasper, 2011). Additionally, in such environments where parents already have their stressors like financial strains or lack of community resources, adolescents with good emotional intelligence may exhibit resilience, warding off against the adverse effect of these external stressors on their behaviour (Conger et

al., 1994; Nyarko et al., 2020). As a result, the relationship between emotional intelligence, parental involvement, and conduct problems emphasizes how crucial it is to cultivate emotional skills in adolescents to promote healthier behavioural outcomes. This emphasizes the necessity of interventions that build both emotional intelligence and parental engagement.

Although, a systematic review (García-Sancho et al., 2014) revealed emotional regulation (an aspect of emotional intelligence) as a moderator in the link between Machiavellianism and deviant conduct, studies examining the moderating role of emotional intelligence in the link between parental involvement and adolescent conduct problems are lacking in literature. To the best of the present researchers's knowledge, this is the first study to explore this association, particularly in a Nigerian sample of adolescents. The study aims to bridge the existing gaps and contribute to the literature by investigating how emotional intelligence may enhance the impacts of parental involvement in reducing conduct problems among adolescents. By exploring this pathway, this study aims to offer invaluable insight into potential protective mechanisms against disruptive behaviours as well as to broaden our understanding of emotional intelligence as a resilience factor in familial and cultural contexts, unique to Nigerian adolescents. Therefore, it is hypothesized that: (a) parental involvement will be negatively associated with conduct problems among adolescents (b) emotional intelligence will be negatively associated with conduct problems among adolescents (c) emotional intelligence will strengthen the negative relationship between parental involvement and conduct problems among adolescents (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1: Conceptual model of the moderating role of emotional intelligence in the link between parental involvement and conduct*

## METHODS

### Participants and Procedure

The sample consisted of 600 adolescents, aged between 12 and 17 years ( $M = 14.64$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ), drawn from public secondary schools in South-Eastern Nigeria, with 60% ( $n=360$ ) identifying as male, while the remaining 40% ( $n=240$ ) identified as females. In terms of religious affiliation, 94% identified as Christian, while 6% belonged to other religious groups. Ethnic distribution indicated that 90% of participants were Igbo, 4% Yoruba, and 6% Hausa.

All study procedures received approval and oversight from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the Department of Psychology, University of Nigeria (Approval Number: D. PSY.UNN/REC/2024-9-011). A multistage sampling method was utilized in this study. Initially, two Local Government Areas (LGAs) were randomly selected: Nsukka and Udenu, from the two educational zones in Enugu North (Nsukka Zone, comprising Igbo-etiti, Nsukka, and Uzouwani

LGAs, and Obollo-afor Zone, comprising Igbo-eze South, Udenu, and Igbo-eze North LGAs). In the second stage, five schools were randomly chosen from each LGA, totaling ten schools: five from Nsukka LGA (Nsukka High School, C.S.S. Ede-Oballa, Urban Boys Secondary School Nsukka, Queen of the Rosary Secondary School, and Community High School Umabor) and five from Udenu LGA (St. Patrick's College Obollo-Etiti, Boys High School Orba, C.S.S. Obollo-afor, C.S.S. Umundu, and C.S.S. Orba). Subsequently, the researchers and two trained assistants administered questionnaires to assenting students after obtaining approval from school principals and securing student assent both orally and in writing. Stratified random sampling was employed to select participants from JS2, SS1, and SS2 classes, while JS1 students were excluded to account for developmental stages, and JS3 and SS3 students were excluded to avoid interference with exam preparations. This approach ensured the final sample was demographically representative. Of the 660 questionnaires distributed, 600 were successfully completed, while 60 were excluded due to incompleteness or mutilation, resulting in a 91% response rate and a minor 9% dropout rate. Notably, a comparative analysis of the students who completed the study and those who did not revealed no significant differences in key demographic variables, such as age, gender, or class level, nor in baseline measures of emotional intelligence, parental involvement, and conduct problems. This consistency suggests that the attrition did not introduce systematic bias or compromise the representativeness of the final sample, thereby supporting the validity and generalizability of the findings.

### **Instruments**

*Parental Involvement/Monitoring Subscale of Parenting Practices Scale (Gorman-Smith et al., 1996)*

This subscale consists of 12 items that assess parents' involvement in their child's daily activities and routines, knowledge of the child's whereabouts and activities, as well as the bi-directional communication between parent and child. It is a 5-point rating scale with response options ranging from almost never = 1 to almost always = 5. Sample items included: "When was the last time you talked with a parent about what you are going to do for the coming day? How often does a parent talk to you about what you are going to do for the coming day?" Higher scores indicate higher levels of parent involvement with and monitoring of their children's activities. Ellis et al. (2013) reported internal consistency coefficients of .80 for the scale, while Miller et al. (2009) reported good internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .85$ ). Exploratory factor analysis by Ellis et al. and Miller et al. revealed that the scale can be used unidimensionally. For the current study, parental involvement subscale yielded Cronbach's alpha index of .76 and good construct validity of one factor structure through principal component analysis (PCA) with 32.41% variance explained.

*Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (BEIS; Davies et al., 2010)*

The BEIS is a 10-item scale that assesses behaviours such as an individual's ability to appraise, regulate, and utilise emotions. The scale is scored on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), with a high score indicating high emotional intelligence and a low score indicating low emotional intelligence. It is an adaptation of Schutte et al.'s (1998) 33-item scale, which resulted in a 5-factor solution (1 = appraisal of own emotions, 2 = appraisal of others' emotions, 3 = regulation of own emotions, 4 = regulation of others' emotions, and 5 = utilisation of emotions) and a unidimensional model for the development of a brief measure with particular utility in situations where brevity is required. Examples of items in the BEIS include: "I have control over my emotions," and "I know why my emotions change." PCA revealed that the BEIS items loaded on one factor with 43.38% variance explained, showing strong construct validity. The BEIS yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .74 in the present study.

*Youth Conduct Problem Scale- Rwanda (YCPS-R) Short form version (Ng et al., 2014)*

The 11-item, unidimensional YCPS-R is a measure of conduct problems in adolescents. Responses are rated on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 = "not at all" to 3 = "a lot." An example of the YCPS-R items is "I am unruly/I don't want to be ruled." A minimum score of 0 and

a maximum score of 33 are obtained by summing up all of the positively worded items. High scores indicate serious conduct problems, while low scores indicate less serious conduct problems. YSPS-R yielded a Cronbach's alpha index of .71 for the present study, and principal component analysis (PCA) showed good construct validity of the one-factor structure, with 48.09 variances explained.

### Design/ Statistics

This study employed a survey method through a cross-sectional design. Pearson's correlation analysis was utilised to analyse the relationship between variables, while the Hayes PROCESS Macro approach (Model 1) was employed to evaluate the study's hypotheses. Moderation analysis allows for a more thorough examination of complex interactions within the data, providing vital insights into the underlying mechanisms and external variables that influence outcomes (Hayes, 2018).

### RESULTS

Table 1 shows key correlations. Parental involvement was negatively correlated with conduct problems ( $r = -.77$ ,  $p = .000$ ), indicating that higher levels of parental involvement was linked with lesser conduct problems. Similarly, higher emotional intelligence was correlated with lesser conduct problems ( $r = -.64$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Gender was negatively linked with conduct problems ( $r = -.11$ ,  $p = .009$ ), indicating that adolescent males were less likely to exhibit conduct problems than their female counterparts. Older adolescents were less likely to have conduct problems ( $r = -.11$ ,  $p = .005$ ).

**Table 1: Correlations of Demographics and Study Variables**

S/N	Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1	Gender	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	Age	14.64	1.31	<b>.16***</b>	-	-	-	-
3	Class	-	-	<b>.20***</b>	<b>.78***</b>	-	-	-
4	Parental Involvement	48.88	5.30	.04	.03	-.05	-	-
5	Emotional Intelligence	29.88	7.29	<b>.09*</b>	.07	.02	<b>.53***</b>	-
6	Conduct Problems	9.83	4.33	<b>-.11**</b>	<b>-.11**</b>	-.05	<b>-.77***</b>	<b>-.64***</b>

**Note:** \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; Gender: 0= Males; 1= Females

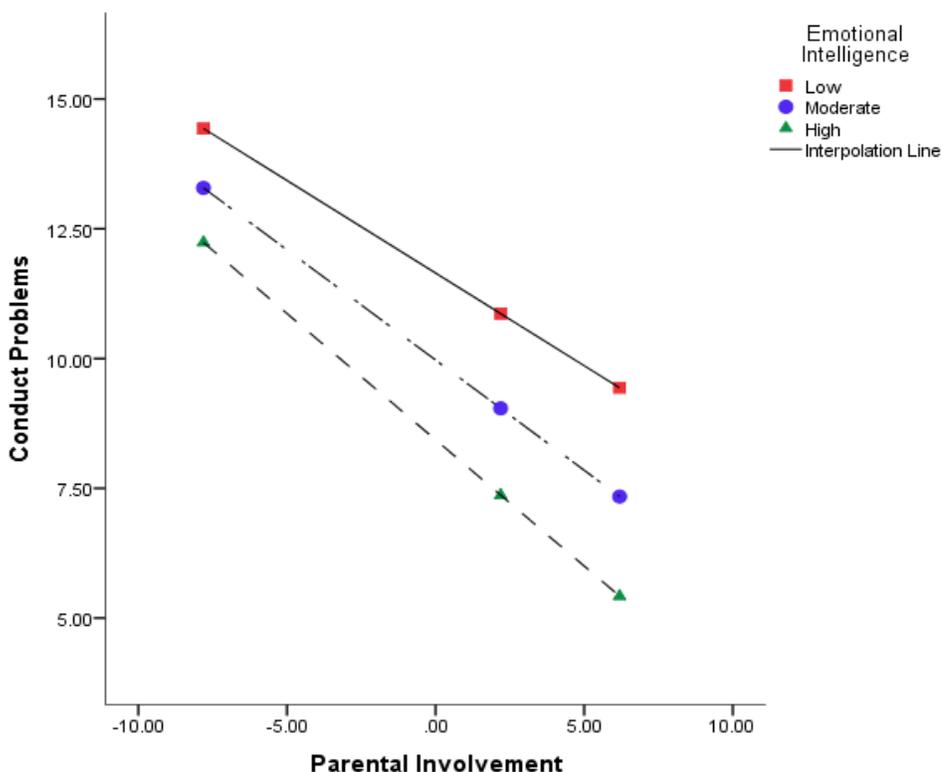
Table 2 displays the moderation models for predicting conduct problems based on parental involvement and emotional intelligence, as well as the interaction between parental involvement and emotional intelligence after controlling for gender and age. Results showed that parental involvement was negatively associated with conduct problems ( $B = -.42$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $t = -21.98$ ,  $p = .000$ ), suggesting that adolescents whose parents were involved in their lives experienced fewer conduct problems. Likewise, adolescents who scored high in emotional intelligence had lower scores in conduct problems ( $B = -.14$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $t = -11.50$ ,  $p = .000$ ), suggesting that adolescents with higher emotional intelligence may be better able to control their emotions, which could lessen their likelihood for conduct problems. Furthermore, the interaction between parental involvement and emotional intelligence was significant ( $B = -.01$ ,  $SE = .002$ ,  $t = 3.25$ ,  $p = .001$ ), indicating that emotional intelligence moderated the relationship between parental involvement and conduct problems among these adolescents.

**Table 2: Hayes' PROCESS macro result predicting conduct problems from participants' parental involvement with emotional intelligence as the moderator**

Variables	B	SE	t	P	LLCI	ULCI	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> Δ	F
Parental Involvement(PI)	-.42	.02	<b>-21.98***</b>	.000	-.46	-.39	.68	.01	<b>247.40 (5,594)***</b>
Emotional Intelligence(EI)	-.14	.01	<b>-11.50***</b>	.000	-.16	-.12			
Int <sub>1</sub> (PI X EI)	-.01	.002	<b>-3.25**</b>	.001	-.01	-.00			
Gender	-.32	.21	-1.51	.132	-.74	.10			
Age	-.19	.08	-2.45	.015	-.35	-.04			

**Note:** B= Coefficient, SE= Standard error, t= Population t value, p= probability level, LLCI= lower level confidence interval, ULCI= Upper level confidence interval; \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001, p<.000.

Using the Hayes PROCESS statistical software, the researchers performed a simple slope analysis to understand better, how emotional intelligence moderated the relationship between conduct problems and parental involvement. Specifically, it was aimed to determine if the moderation implies a strengthening or weakening of the relationship. The moderator's role and the interaction effects across multiple predictors can be thoroughly understood through a simple slope analysis, where low, medium, and high levels of the moderator (s) and predictor (s) are represented by one standard deviation above and below the mean (Field, 2013). The interaction slope in Figure 2 revealed that parental involvement and conduct problems were consistently negatively associated across different levels of emotional intelligence (*Low*: B = -.36, SE =.02, t = -14.71, p =.000, CI= -.40, -.31; *moderate*: B = -.43, SE =.02, t = -21.90, p =.000, CI= -.46, -.39; *high*: B = -.49, SE =.03, t = -15.82, p =.000, CI= -.55, -.43), indicating that in the presence of emotional intelligence, adolescents whose parents were involved in their lives, experienced fewer conduct problems. Particularly, the conditional effect coefficients revealed that the negative association between parental involvement and conduct problems was strong at low levels of emotional intelligence (*low* [-11.363]; B = -.43), at moderate levels of emotional intelligence, the negative association became stronger (*moderate* [0.000]; B = -.43), and at high emotional intelligence levels, the negative association persisted, and this time, became strongest (*high* [11.363]; B = -.49). This suggests that emotional intelligence amplifies the effectiveness of parental involvement in reducing conduct problems, with the strongest negative relationship observed at high levels of emotional intelligence. Thus, emotional intelligence strengthened the impacts of parental involvement in reducing conduct problems among these adolescents.



**Figure 2:** The interaction slope showing the moderating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between parental involvement and conduct problems.

## DISCUSSION

The major aim of this study was to investigate whether emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between parental involvement and conduct problems among adolescents. Specifically, the study aimed to examine whether the moderating role of emotional intelligence in this relationship is that of strengthening or weakening. In line with previous research findings (e.g., Baig et al., 2021, Eremie et al., 2019; Pinquart, 2017, Webster-Stratton and Reid, 2018), the researchers found that higher parental involvement was linked with lesser conduct problems. Thus, the hypothesis that parental involvement would be negatively associated with conduct problems among adolescents was confirmed. This finding suggests that parental involvement may guard against conduct problems by creating a supportive environment that lessens the likelihood of behavioural problems in adolescents. Engaged parents are more likely to keep an eye on their children's activities, set clear expectations, and encourage a sense of responsibility, all of which are associated with fewer instances of antisocial and disruptive behaviour (da Fonseca et al., 2024; Mutuku et al., 2024; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2018). By facilitating early detection and intervention when harmful behaviours arise, parental involvement may help adolescents build constructive coping mechanisms to deal with conflicts (Aazami et al., 2023).

Furthermore, findings revealed that adolescents who possess higher levels of emotional intelligence were less likely to experience conduct problems, confirming the hypothesis that emotional intelligence would be negatively associated with conduct problems among adolescents. This finding is in agreement with prior study findings (examples: Castillo-Gualda et al., 2018; Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2019; Vega et al., 2022) which reported the significant role of emotional intelligence in reducing aggressive behaviours among adolescents. The finding suggests that adolescents who possess higher levels of emotional intelligence might be better able to identify, comprehend, and control their emotions in ways that prevent behavioural problems from getting worse. Additionally, their ability to manage social interactions more skilfully, minimising impulsive emotions, and encouraging healthy coping techniques in response to peer pressure or dissatisfaction, is probably made possible by their emotional intelligence. Thus, adolescents with high emotional intelligence may be better at utilising adaptive skills to lessen unpleasant reactions, which in turn may lessen their propensity for disruptive behaviours.

As expected, emotional intelligence moderated the relationship between parental involvement and conduct problems by, particularly, strengthening this link among adolescents. The hypothesis which stated that emotional intelligence would strengthen the negative relationship between parental involvement and conduct problems among adolescents was therefore confirmed. This finding partly aligns with García-Sancho et al.'s (2014) systematic review which revealed emotional regulation (an aspect of emotional intelligence) as a significant moderator in the link between Machiavellianism and deviant conduct. However, this study, being the first to explore emotional intelligence as a moderator in parental involvement-conduct problems link, provided nuanced insights into how emotional intelligence strengthens this link, particularly among adolescents who are more prone to experiencing conduct problems. Our findings suggest that adolescents with high emotional intelligence are better skilled in interpreting and responding to parental involvement in a manner that effectively prevents conduct problems. Emotionally adept adolescents might use their skills in emotional regulation and social awareness to absorb the positive impacts of parental involvement and communicate it to better behavioural outcomes. This clearly shows that not only does emotional intelligence contribute to one being more skilful in individual coping strategies but it also makes the protective factors wielded by parental involvement more powerful (Rivers et al., 2013; Brackett et al., 2011), thereby fulfilling its role of promoting healthier behaviour among adolescents. These insights underscore the necessity of incorporating the development of emotional intelligence skills in parenting programs and interventions for adolescents, given that improvement of emotional competencies can contribute substantially to reducing behavioural problems.

The researchers urges educators, mental health practitioners, and policymakers to ensure that emotional intelligence is integrated into educational curricula and intervention programs

directed toward adolescents. The school environment can become safe, respectful, and fun when emotional intelligence is built in the students, thus enhancing academic performance and social relations (Baumsteiger et al., 2022; Carlos Torrego-Seijo et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021). Also, mental health professionals should collaborate with these institutions to create specific programs for adolescents and parents that indicate the high role of the latter in the development of emotional skills. Initiatives of this nature might comprise parental workshops on communication and emotional support mechanisms, thereby connecting school and home environments (Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2019; Castillo-Gualda et al., 2018). Policymakers who are in charge of designing policies and distributing resources should also pay attention to these findings to make sure that the development of emotional intelligence is the main component of adolescent programs aimed at reducing the incidence of conduct-related problems in the community.

While this study is invaluable, it cannot be said that it is entirely flawless. For instance, there might be a confounding interference of participants' socially desirable reports or the reliable response bias, hence the results could reveal inaccurate self-assessment, since it utilized self-report measures. Furthermore, because this study is conducted through a cross-sectional design, the researchers is unable to establish a cause-effect relationship because it captures only one phase of a lifecycle rather than successive phases. Additionally, the results may not be considered applicable to all adolescents since participants were drawn from public secondary schools in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria. Future research may do well to address these limitations through experimental and longitudinal studies. Various contexts of adolescents should be considered, to make the results more representative of the population. It would also be exciting to find out what other possible processes could moderate this relationship and to check whether it is a fixed connection or a subject of change across time frames, by utilizing both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this research offers priceless insights into how the most effective interventions might be designed to lessen conduct problems in adolescents by improving their general wellbeing, resulting in a more peaceful society where adolescents can interact constructively with their families and peers, which will ultimately improve social cohesion and lessen conflict in society. In line with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory (EST), our results highlight how parental involvement and emotional intelligence interact to greatly impact adolescents' behavioural issues across a variety of contextual layers, such as the family (microsystem) and the cooperation between parents and educational institutions (mesosystem).

## **Conclusion**

This study emphasises how important emotional intelligence is in enhancing the impact of parental involvement on adolescent conduct problems. Our findings show that emotional intelligence acts as a strong moderator, strengthening the impact of parental involvement in lowering conduct problems in this population. These observations highlight the need to provide adolescents with emotional competences and support the integration of emotional intelligence training in parenting programs and educational curricula, so as to improve the behavioural outcome of this group and foster healthier connections, which will ultimately lead to a more peaceful community. Future research should consider experimental and longitudinal studies, and look into broader contexts and methodologies to enrich understanding in this area.

### **Ethics declarations**

#### **Ethics Approval**

*All study procedures received approval and oversight from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the Department of Psychology, University of Nigeria (Approval Number: D. PSY.UNN/REC/2024-9-011).*

#### **Data availability statement**

*Data for this study are with the author and can be made available upon request.*

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