

Original Article

Environmental and Emotional Determinants of Student Misbehavior: A Qualitative Study in a Philippine Secondary School

Julie Calumba ^{1,*}, Erika Jean Duay ¹, Carl Vincent Catap ¹,
Gretchen Malasibas ¹, Jerick Tabasen ¹

Received: 26 February 2026; Revised: 25 March 2026;

Accepted: 10 April 2026; Published: 11 April 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.66074/I9O8P7A6S>

Abstract

Student misbehavior continues to persist in secondary education, affecting academic engagement, classroom climate, and adolescent development. Although previous research has highlighted disciplinary management and behavioral control strategies, fewer studies have qualitatively examined how students themselves interpret the environmental and emotional forces shaping their conduct. Grounded in Social Cognitive Theory, this study explored the reciprocal interaction between environmental exposure and personal emotional processes in influencing student misbehavior within a Philippine secondary school context. A qualitative design was employed, involving six students with records of disciplinary actions selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Colaizzi's seven-step phenomenological method to generate meaningful and essential patterns. The findings revealed three interconnected areas: peer influences and social environment; emotional regulation and impulsive anger responses, and moral awareness reinforced by family guidance and reflective thinking. The results suggest that student misbehavior arises not only from external pressures but from the dynamic interplay between social reinforcement, emotional regulation capacities, and internalized moral reasoning. These findings contribute to the fast-growing body of literature emphasizing multidimensional approaches to adolescent behavior and highlight the importance of integrating emotional literacy,

¹ General Aguinaldo
National High School
* julie.calumba@
deped.gov.ph

peer-based interventions, and values education into school policies. Addressing both environmental and intrapersonal determinants may support the development of ethically responsible and emotionally competent learners.

Keywords: adolescence, emotional regulation, moral development, peer influence, qualitative research, student misbehavior

1. Introduction

Student misbehavior continues to be a significant challenge in educational settings globally. Disruptive behaviors including classroom non-cooperation, aggression, bullying, and peer conflict, negatively affect academic outcomes, teacher efficacy, and overall school climate (Dishion & Tipsord, 2011; Robertson et al., 2012). Peer dynamics play a critical role in shaping adolescent conduct, as youth are highly vulnerable to social reinforcement and behavioral modeling within group contexts (Wachs et al., 2020).

Research indicates that adolescents' behavior is significantly shaped by relational and environmental contexts, particularly family dynamics, peer norms, and school climate (Wang & Degol, 2016). A positive school climate has been consistently associated with improved behavioral and psychological outcomes, whereas negative relational environments increase the risk of poorly adapted behaviors. In particular, exposure to adverse peer norms and bullying contexts heightens the likelihood of aggressive and harmful behavioral responses (Chen et al., 2025). Despite the existence of disciplinary policies in many educational institutions, interventions often prioritize punitive control measures rather than addressing the underlying emotional and contextual determinants that contribute to student misbehavior.

Social Cognitive Theory provides a foundational framework for understanding adolescent behavior. Bandura (1991) explains that behavior operates through a system of reciprocal interactions among personal factors, environmental influences, and behavioral patterns which is a process known as triadic reciprocal determinism. Within this framework, individuals do not solely react to environmental stimuli but rather, they actively interpret, regulate, and influence their own actions. Through observational learning, modeling, and reinforcement, adolescents acquire behavioral scripts that are shaped by social feedback and sustained through self-regulatory mechanisms. These self-reflective and regulatory processes determine whether behaviors are maintained, modified, or inhibited over time.

While previous research provides insight into disciplinary strategies and environmental influences on student behavior, few studies have employed qualitative methods to capture students' lived experiences regarding misbehavior. Understanding these perspectives is important because it highlights the cognitive, emotional, and social processes underlying behavioral choices, rather than solely describing

observable actions. This knowledge gap justifies the need for a focused study on the factors influencing student misbehavior from the students' point of view.

While previous studies have identified external patterns and predictors of student misbehavior, they often overlook how students themselves cognitively and emotionally interpret these experiences within their everyday social environments. This creates a critical conceptual gap in understanding the internal meaning-making processes that drive behavioral decisions. In particular, there is limited insight into how adolescents negotiate peer influence, emotional responses, and moral reasoning in real-life contexts. This gap is further pronounced in non-Western settings, such as Philippine secondary schools, where socio-cultural dynamics - including strong peer group affiliation ("barkada") and family-centered values - may shape behavior differently from those described in predominantly Western literature. Addressing this gap is essential to developing more context-sensitive and psychologically grounded interventions for student behavior.

Moreover, this study aims to explore the underlying factors influencing student misbehavior in a Philippine secondary school. By examining students' experiences and reflections, the research investigates how environmental influences, emotional regulation, peer dynamics, and family guidance contribute to behavioral outcomes.

Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research question: What underlying factors influence student misbehavior in a secondary school context?

The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for educators, parents, and school administrators. By understanding the personal and environmental determinants of student behavior, schools can develop evidence-based interventions that promote ethical conduct, emotional regulation, and a more supportive learning environment, ultimately contributing to improved academic and social outcomes.

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the underlying factors influencing student misbehavior in a secondary school context. Qualitative research is appropriate for investigating students' lived experiences and perceptions, providing a detailed understanding of the cognitive, emotional, and social processes that shape their behavior. The study was conducted at General Aguinaldo National High School (GANHS), Libjo, Dinagat Islands, Philippines, during the first semester of the 2025–2026 academic year. This setting was selected because the school reports recurring incidents of student misbehavior, making it suitable for examining personal and environmental influences on adolescent behavior.

This study specifically employed a phenomenological approach to capture and interpret the lived experiences of students regarding misbehavior. Phenomenology is appropriate for examining how individuals make sense of their experiences, particularly in understanding the cognitive, emotional, and social meanings underlying their actions.

The participants were six students from Grades 7 to 12 who had recorded disciplinary incidents in the school's guidance office. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who were most relevant to the research question. Inclusion criteria required students to have a documented record of misbehavior and willingness to participate in semi-structured interviews. Students who did not have guidance records or were absent during the data collection period were excluded. The participants' demographic characteristics, including age, grade level, and gender, were summarized to provide context and ensure representation of different adolescent experiences.

The sample size is consistent with phenomenological research, which emphasizes depth rather than breadth of understanding. Data saturation was achieved when no new themes or meaningful insights emerged from the final interviews, indicating that the collected data were sufficient to capture the essential structure of the phenomenon.

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide, specifically designed to capture students' perspectives on the factors influencing their behavior. The guide included open-ended questions exploring experiences with peer influence, family guidance, emotional regulation, and school environment. Follow-up prompts were used to encourage elaboration and clarification of responses. During interviews, researchers used a cellphone audio recorder to capture participants' responses, and students were allowed to express themselves in their preferred language (English, Filipino, or Bisaya) to facilitate honest and detailed communication. The interview guide was reviewed by the adviser to ensure clarity, appropriateness, and alignment with the research objectives.

Before the interviews, formal permission was obtained from the school head and faculty advisers. Participants were approached individually and informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. The interviews were conducted in a private and safe environment within the school, and all sessions were guided by an observer, the school guidance designate, to ensure adherence to ethical and procedural standards. Participants were encouraged to respond openly, and clarification questions were asked as necessary to elicit detailed narratives.

The study adhered to strict ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from the parents or guardians of participating students, and assent was obtained from the students themselves. All participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and identifying information was coded to prevent disclosure. The research procedures were approved by the school administration and observed by the adviser and school's guidance designate to ensure that participants were protected from harm, and that the data were collected responsibly and ethically.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were employed. Member checking was conducted by allowing participants to review and confirm the accuracy of their responses. Peer debriefing was carried out with the research adviser to validate the emerging themes and interpretations. Additionally, an audit trail was

maintained to document the research process, ensuring transparency and minimizing potential researcher bias. These procedures enhanced the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings.

The collected data were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method, a rigorous seven-step approach for systematically interpreting qualitative data to identify essential themes. The steps included: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts and listening to audio recordings; (2) extraction of significant statements relevant to the research question; (3) formulation of meanings from participants' narratives; (4) clustering these meanings into thematic categories; (5) development of exhaustive descriptions for each emergent theme; (6) validation of themes against the original data to ensure accuracy; and (7) integration of the findings into a coherent narrative that addressed the research objectives. This method ensured the credibility, transparency, and rigor of the qualitative analysis, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the environmental and emotional factors influencing student misbehavior.

3. Results

A total of six students from Grades 7 to 12 participated in this study. All participants had documented disciplinary records in the school guidance office. The sample included three male and three female students, representing diverse experiences with misbehavior within the school setting. All participants completed the semi-structured interviews, yielding a 100% response rate, and no attrition occurred during data collection.

Using Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step phenomenological method, the data were systematically analyzed to identify recurring patterns in students' experiences and perceptions. Three main themes emerged, each with corresponding subthemes. Table 1 presents a summary of the identified themes and subthemes.

Table 1. Themes and subthemes of student misbehavior.

Theme	Subtheme
Peer Influences and Social Environment	Barkada Pressure and Misguided Loyalty; Bullying and Social Conflict
Emotional Regulation and Impulsive Anger Management	Impulsivity and Uncontrolled Management; Regret and Desire for Change
Moral Awareness and Personal Growth	Ethical Reflection and Decision-Making; Influence of Family and Maturity

Theme 1: Peer Influences and Social Environment

This theme captures how students' behaviors were shaped by social and peer dynamics within the school. Participants frequently reported incidents of peer

pressure, misguided loyalty to friends, and social conflicts, including bullying. Representative statements include:

“Tung-una sa barkada nako, mao to ila diay gigamit ang ahong messenger account sa gara-gara maong na guidance ko.”

“At first with my friends, they used my messenger account for nonsense, that’s why I was sent to the guidance office.”

Usahay, mosunod ra ko sa uban, maapektuhan ko sa akong mga kauban sa klase.”

“Sometimes I tend to imitate, I get influenced by my classmates.”

“Lisod kaayo magtuon kay daghan mga bully ug negatibong impluwensya gikan sa mga amego nako nga wala nagskwela”

“It is difficult to study because there are many bullies and negative societal influences from my out-of-school friends.”

Taken together, these narratives reveal that peer influence is not merely an external pressure but an internalized social experience shaped by the students’ need for belonging and acceptance. Participants described a subtle but powerful tension between their awareness of appropriate behavior and their desire to maintain group affiliation. This suggests that misbehavior is often a negotiated outcome, where social identity and peer loyalty override individual judgment. In this context, the concept of “barkada” operates not only as a social group but as a defining influence on decision-making and behavior.

Theme 2: Emotional Regulation and Impulsive Anger Management

Participants reported difficulty in regulating emotions, particularly anger, which contributed to disciplinary incidents. Subthemes identified were impulsivity and desire for change. Representative statements include:

“Sa una, dili ko makontrol ang akong kasuko ug nabungkag nako ang lingkuranan.”

“Back then, I couldn’t control my anger and I broke the chair.”

“Usahay mawala ko sa akong hunahuna, sama sa panahon nga wala koy buhaton.”

“Sometimes I get lost in my mind, like when I have nothing to do.”

“Magpraktis ko nga dili masuko ug makontrol ang akong kaugalingon.”

“I will practice not getting angry and controlling myself.”

Collectively, the participants' accounts highlight that emotional dysregulation is experienced as a loss of internal control rather than a deliberate intention to misbehave. Feelings of anger and mental disorientation were described as overwhelming, often leading to impulsive actions that were later regretted. This indicates that misbehavior, in this case, is closely tied to the students' limited capacity to process and regulate intense emotions. At the same time, the expressed desire for self-improvement reflects an emerging awareness of personal responsibility and the need for emotional control.

Theme 3: Moral Awareness and Personal Growth

Despite previous behavioral challenges, participants demonstrated awareness of ethical behavior and a desire for personal growth. Subthemes included ethical reflection and the influence of family and maturity. Representative statements include:

“Sa wala pa ka nagbuhat ug butang, kinahanglan una nimo hunahunaon aron malikayan ang di maayong mahitabo.”

“Before you do something, you need to think about it to avoid any incidents.”

“Nasayud ko nga sayop ang akong gibuhad pero pasalamat rapud ko kay wala man nako gidaot ang uban.”

“I knew that I did something wrong but I am thankful because I did not hurt other people.”

Tungod kay gidisiplina nako sa ako parents, dili nako mu cutting classes
“Because my parents disciplined me, I no longer cut classes.”

These accounts suggest that moral awareness develops through reflective thinking and socialization processes, particularly within the family context. Students demonstrated the ability to evaluate their actions and recognize their consequences, indicating an ongoing process of moral development. The influence of parental discipline appears to function as both a corrective and guiding force, shaping students' behavioral choices. This reflects an internalization of values, where students begin to regulate their actions based on ethical considerations rather than external enforcement alone.

4. Discussion

This study explored the underlying factors influencing student misbehavior in a Philippine secondary school. The analysis revealed three major themes: peer influences and social environment; emotional regulation and impulsive anger; and moral awareness and personal growth. Peer pressure, bullying, and misguided loyalty

were primary environmental factors shaping student behavior. Emotional dysregulation, particularly impulsiveness and difficulty controlling anger, contributed to disciplinary incidents, while family guidance and ethical reflection facilitated personal growth and behavioral improvement.

The findings support Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1991), which posits that behavior arises from the reciprocal interaction of personal, environmental, and behavioral factors. Students' misbehavior emerged as a product of dynamic interactions between peer influence, emotional responses, and internalized moral reasoning. Observing and interacting with peers who engage in negative behaviors reinforced similar actions, while family guidance and reflective practices moderated these influences.

Beyond supporting Social Cognitive Theory, the findings of this study provide important contextual insights into how adolescent behavior is shaped within the Philippine secondary school setting. In particular, the role of peer groups, commonly referred to as "barkada," reflects a culturally embedded form of social influence that intensifies conformity and group loyalty. Unlike Western contexts where individual autonomy is often emphasized, the participants' experiences suggest that collective belonging and relational identity play a more dominant role in shaping behavior. This highlights the need to contextualize existing behavioral theories within local socio-cultural realities.

Furthermore, the findings extend existing literature by illustrating how emotional regulation and moral reasoning are not isolated processes but are deeply interconnected with students' social environments. The participants' experiences demonstrate that misbehavior emerges from the dynamic interplay between external influences and internal emotional struggles, rather than from a single causal factor. This nuanced understanding contributes to a more holistic view of adolescent behavior.

This perspective moves beyond a purely descriptive understanding of student misbehavior and instead positions it as a contextually embedded and psychologically mediated phenomenon.

These results align with prior studies that emphasized the role of peers in shaping adolescent behavior. Dishion and Tipsord (2011) highlighted that peer contagion can spread both positive and negative behaviors among adolescents, consistent with participants' reports of following peer norms despite knowing the consequences. Similarly, research on school climate and peer relationships demonstrates that negative school environments and peer victimization are linked to higher rates of problematic behavior, whereas positive climate supports prosocial engagement (Li et al., 2021; Luo et al., 2023).

Emotional regulation appeared as a central factor, echoing the findings of Robertson et al. (2012), who found that adolescents with difficulty managing anger are more likely to engage in impulsive and disruptive behavior. Participants in this study acknowledged past misbehavior and expressed a desire for self-improvement, demonstrating that awareness of emotional triggers can facilitate positive behavioral

change. This finding underscores the importance of incorporating emotional literacy and self-regulation programs in school interventions.

Moral awareness and personal growth were also evident in participants' narratives. Research indicates that adolescents' moral decision-making and behavioral development are shaped by early family and peer contexts that influence socialization, coping, and behavioral adaptation (Zhang et al., 2025). Furthermore, emotional intelligence and social skills are associated with reduced peer harassment and improved behavioral outcomes (Trigueros et al., 2020). These findings indicate that misbehavior is not merely a product of environmental exposure but is moderated by internalized values and self-regulatory development.

The study has practical implications for educators, parents, and policymakers. Schools should implement peer mentoring programs, values-based education, and emotional regulation training to address both environmental and personal determinants of student behavior. Teachers can incorporate ethical reflection exercises into the curriculum, while parents can strengthen guidance and monitoring to promote moral development. These interventions could foster a more supportive and productive learning environment, reducing incidents of misbehavior.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study employed a small purposive sample ($n = 6$) from a single school, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Responses relied on self-report during interviews, which may introduce social desirability bias. Future studies should include larger and more diverse samples, employ longitudinal designs to assess behavioral changes over time, and explore interventions that integrate peer influence, emotional regulation, and family engagement.

Thus, student misbehavior is influenced by the interplay of environmental factors, emotional regulation, and moral awareness. Peer dynamics and social environment contribute to negative behaviors, while family support and ethical reflection facilitate personal growth and positive decision-making. Understanding these factors provides a foundation for developing targeted interventions and policies aimed at fostering ethical, responsible, and emotionally competent students. This study contributes to the broader literature on adolescent behavior by highlighting the complex interactions between personal and environmental determinants in shaping school conduct.

5. Conclusion

This study sought to answer the research question: What underlying factors influence student misbehavior in a secondary school context? The findings demonstrated that student misbehavior is shaped by the dynamic interaction of peer influences, emotional regulation challenges, and moral awareness. Environmental factors such as peer pressure and bullying contributed to negative behavioral patterns, while personal factors including impulsivity and difficulty managing anger intensified

these behaviors. At the same time, family guidance and ethical reflection support behavioral improvement and personal growth.

The objectives of the study were achieved by identifying and analyzing the key personal and environmental determinants of student misbehavior through qualitative inquiry. The findings reinforce the relevance of Social Cognitive Theory, confirming that adolescent behavior emerges from reciprocal interactions between environmental exposure and internal cognitive-emotional processes.

This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing localized qualitative evidence from a Philippine secondary school context. While many studies focus on disciplinary strategies, this study emphasized the students' lived experiences and perceptions, offering a deeper understanding of behavioral development. The findings hold practical value for educators, school administrators, and policymakers by highlighting the importance of emotional regulation programs, peer mentorship initiatives, and values-based education.

Based on the evidence, schools are encouraged to implement structured interventions that integrate emotional literacy training, family engagement strategies, and peer support systems. Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples, incorporate longitudinal designs to examine behavioral changes over time, and evaluate the effectiveness of targeted intervention programs.

In conclusion, student misbehavior cannot be viewed solely as a disciplinary issue but must be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by social, emotional, and moral factors. Addressing these interconnected influences is essential for fostering responsible, ethical, and emotionally competent learners.

Acknowledgment

The authors express sincere gratitude to the administration of General Aguinaldo National High School for granting permission to conduct the study. Appreciation is extended to the faculty advisers and school's guidance designate who provided guidance and technical support throughout the research process. The authors also acknowledge the participating students for their time, honesty, and cooperation during the interviews. This research received no external funding. The study was conducted independently, and no funding agency had any role in the design, data collection, analysis, or interpretation of the findings.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there are no financial or non-financial conflicts of interest related to this study. The authors have no affiliations, financial involvement, or personal relationships that could have influenced the outcomes of the research.

References

- Bandura, A. (1991). Social cognitive theory of self-regulation. *Organizational behavior and human decision processes*, 50(2), 248-287. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978\(91\)90022-L](https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90022-L)
- Chen, J., Xiong, Y., Yang, L., Liang, Y., & Ren, P. (2025). Bullying victimization and self-harm in adolescents: The roles of emotion regulation and bullying peer norms. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 160, 107199. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2024.107199>
- Colaizzi, P. F. (1978). Psychological research as the phenomenologist views it. <https://philpapers.org/rec/COLPRA-5>
- Dishion, T. J., & Tipsord, J. M. (2011). Peer contagion in child and adolescent social and emotional development. *Annual review of psychology*, 62(1), 189-214. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.093008.100412>
- Li, Z., Yu, C., & Nie, Y. (2021). The association between school climate and aggression: a moderated mediation model. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 18(16), 8709. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18168709>
- Luo, Y., Ma, T., & Deng, Y. (2023). School climate and adolescents' prosocial behavior: the mediating role of perceived social support and resilience. *Frontiers in psychology*, 14, 1095566. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1095566>
- Roberton, T., Daffern, M., & Bucks, R. S. (2012). Emotion regulation and aggression. *Aggression and violent behavior*, 17(1), 72-82. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2011.09.006>
- Trigueros, R., Sanchez-Sanchez, E., Mercader, I., Aguilar-Parra, J. M., López-Liria, R., Morales-Gázquez, M. J., ... & Rocamora, P. (2020). Relationship between emotional intelligence, social skills and peer harassment. A study with high school students. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 17(12), 4208. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17124208>
- Wachs, S., Görzig, A., Wright, M. F., Schubarth, W., & Bilz, L. (2020). Associations among adolescents' relationships with parents, peers, and teachers, self-efficacy, and willingness to intervene in bullying: A social cognitive approach. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 17(2), 420. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17020420>
- Wang, M. T., & Degol, J. L. (2016). School climate: A review of the construct, measurement, and impact on student outcomes. *Educational psychology review*, 28(2), 315-352. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-015-9319-1>
- Zhang, X., Zhang, Z., Zhao, Y., Shen, F., Zhang, Q., Lin, R., & Zhang, X. (2025). From victims to aggressors: the link between childhood family abuse and adolescent peer bullying. *BMC psychology*, 13(1), 1079. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-025-03407-3>
-

Authors' Contributions: Calumba, J.; Study design, methodology conception, data collection, data analysis, manuscript writing, manuscript editing, literature review, manuscript proofreading, supervision. Duay, E.J.; Data collection, data validation, visualization, critical review, literature review support. Catap, C.V.; Data collection support, participant coordination, transcription, coding. Malasibas, G.; Data collection

support, thematic analysis, literature review support. Tabasen, J.; Ethical compliance, literature review support.