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Deviance and Social Disaffiliation among Ivorian Adolescents

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Abstract: ***This article analyzes the social logics of juvenile deviance in urban Côte d'Ivoire by combining the theories of social disaffiliation (Castel), labeling (Becker), and deviant careers (Lemert, Hughes). It draws on a qualitative study conducted in three Abidjan districts (Adjamé, Yopougon, Abobo), involving 25 adolescents experiencing social marginalization. The research aims to understand how family breakdown, school dropout, institutional stigmatization, and economic hardship contribute to deviant pathways. The methodology includes semi - structured interviews, field observations, and documentary analysis. Findings highlight a strong process of social disaffiliation, where youths progressively detach from traditional institutions (family, school, state) and turn to informal networks seen as sources of recognition, belonging, and survival. In this context, deviance appears less as individual problem than as a social strategy in response to systemic exclusion. The conclusion calls for public policies centered on dignity, inclusion, and youth voice recognition. This study contributes to a contextualized understanding of deviance in postcolonial Africa by examining the combined effects of poverty, institutional fragmentation, and weakened social cohesion.***

Keywords: Juvenile deviance; Social disaffiliation; Urban youth; Marginalization; Institutional exclusion

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a pivotal stage in human development, marked by biological, psychological, and social transformations that profoundly alter one's relationship with the world, the self, and others (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980). This transitional period is generally characterized by identity exploration, a distancing from parental norms, and the pursuit of new forms of self - expression. However, adolescent trajectories are deeply shaped by socioeconomic and cultural contexts, which influence available resources, socialization models, and the capacity to envision a future (Galland, 2001; Le Breton, 2007).

In postcolonial sub - Saharan African countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, young people are socialized within an environment marked by political instability, structural poverty, and rapid, often poorly managed, urbanization. These conditions create specific tensions in the adolescent experience. Cities like Abidjan thus become places of an 'unfinished modernity' (Mbembe, 2005), where globalized aspirations coexist with daily precarity. Far from being a mere backdrop, these factors contribute to an intergenerational crisis of value transmission, accelerated by weakened educational systems, the migration of traditional reference points into digital networks, and the fragmentation of moral authorities (N'Guessan, 2017). This upheaval of traditional socialization structures (family, school, community) gives rise to a phenomenon of social disaffiliation (Castel, 1995), in which many adolescents find themselves deprived of stable anchors. In the absence of coherent normative frameworks, some develop transgressive behaviors, expressed in public spaces, schools, or online platforms. These actions are quickly labeled as "deviant" by social institutions (police, schools, media), although they often reflect strategies of adaptation or protest in response to lived marginalization (Becker, 1963; Hughes, 1996). Far from being merely misconduct, such behaviors should be examined as symptoms of a deeper transformation in the relationship between youth, society, and authority.

Understanding the social genesis of contemporary forms of deviance among Ivorian adolescents (especially in urban settings) requires articulating macro - social dimensions (inequality, exclusion, governance) with micro - social dynamics (identity, stigmatization, resistance). This article thus aims to analyze these tensions through the lens of deviance theories, social disaffiliation, and social trajectory models, to better grasp the rationales behind youth behavior in transforming African societies.

In major Ivorian cities, particularly in Abidjan, the urban space is increasingly marked by visible forms of youth deviance: school violence, gang gatherings such as the so - called "microbes, " psychoactive substance use, and cybercriminal activities. These phenomena, often sensationalized and criminalized by the media, tend to essentialize adolescents as symbols of social danger, while concealing the underlying social mechanisms that drive their behaviors (Kouamé, 2019; N'Guessan, 2017).

This observation raises a fundamental question: how can we understand the rise of juvenile deviance in a context where social bonds are weakening? The increasing complexity of social fabric (characterized by rising inequalities, family precarity, the erosion of communal solidarities, and the crisis of educational institutions) creates an environment in which young people lose reference points and social protections (Durkheim, 1897; Castel, 1995). As such, their deviant behaviors cannot be interpreted solely as individual choices or moral failings but must be recontextualized within a broader dynamic of social disorganization (Shaw & McKay, 1942).

From this perspective, the concept of social disaffiliation, as developed by Robert Castel (1995), offers a particularly

fruitful analytical framework. It helps us understand how the cumulative loss of social anchors) such as employment, family ties, and symbolic recognition (leads to exclusion and a perceived sense of "social uselessness," which weakens individuals and exposes them to marginalization. Among adolescents, this disaffiliation is even more critical as it occurs during a formative phase of identity construction (Erikson, 1968), where the absence of recognition may fuel ruptures, community withdrawal, or recourse to alternative (sometimes transgressive) forms of legitimation (Becker, 1963; Le Breton, 2007).

Therefore, this study examines juvenile deviance through a dual dynamic: on the one hand, the weakening of socialization institutions, and on the other, the trajectories of social disaffiliation among Ivorian adolescents. The aim is to understand how young people, faced with social relegation, reshape their relationship to norms, to peer groups, and to society at large, and to what extent deviance can emerge as a form of expression or to reclaim a degree of social power. This central question drives our analysis: to what extent does social disaffiliation offer a relevant explanatory framework for deviant trajectories among urban Ivorian adolescents?

Contemporary sociological and criminological analyses of deviance have largely moved beyond explanations based solely on individual deficiencies, pathological traits, or psychological predispositions. Beginning in the 1960s, a paradigmatic shift occurred with the emergence of interactionist and constructivist approaches, which repositioned deviant behaviors within their broader social, relational, and institutional contexts (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1951).

From this perspective, deviance is seen as the outcome of a labeling process, whereby certain behaviors or individuals are designated as transgressive, not due to their intrinsic nature, but because they violate norms defined by dominant social groups (Becker, 1963). In this sense, the deviant act does not necessarily precede the social reaction; it is often the latter that confers deviant status onto the behavior. This theoretical framework highlights the central role of social institutions (family, school, police, media) in constructing and reproducing deviant identities.

At the same time, scholars such as Castel (1995) have proposed a more structural reading, conceptualizing social disaffiliation as a rupture with the main mechanisms of integration: stable employment, family networks, and social protection systems. For Castel, the disaffiliated individual is one who no longer benefits from the fundamental anchors necessary for social inclusion. When such disaffiliation is endured rather than chosen, it generates a state of social vulnerability, which can foster the emergence of deviant behaviors, particularly among youth seeking recognition, security, or status.

Recent criminological research (Mucchielli, 2012; Kokoroko, 2019) reinforces this interpretation by emphasizing that the rise in transgressive behaviors among adolescents is less a result of individual pathology than of deteriorating social conditions: mass unemployment, school failure, lack of prospects, urban segregation, and weak institutional frameworks. In postcolonial African contexts (where sociopolitical tensions and structural inequalities remain prevalent) these dynamics take on a particularly acute significance (N'Guessan, 2017; Kouamé, 2019).

In short, current scholarship underscores the importance of situating juvenile deviance within a systemic analysis of exclusion, marginalization, and stigmatization. Our study follows this perspective by drawing on the concept of disaffiliation to better understand the deviant trajectories of Ivorian adolescents.

To understand the deviant pathways of adolescents in urban Ivorian settings, this study is grounded in a theoretical framework that combines three major socio - criminological perspectives: the theory of social disaffiliation (Castel, 1995), labeling theory (Becker, 1963), and the theory of deviant careers (Lemert, 1951; Hughes, 1996). Each of these approaches' sheds light (at different levels) on the processes of marginalization, stigmatization, and identity construction that shape the experiences of youth in situations of social rupture.

The theory of disaffiliation, developed by Castel (1995), provides a key entry point for grasping the structural logic behind juvenile deviance. Castel defines disaffiliation as a dual rupture: with the world of work, which ensures material autonomy, and with social networks, which secure symbolic inclusion within society. Disaffiliated youth are thus those who lack both economic protection and social recognition, exposing them to a form of existential precarity. In African urban contexts, where the main integration structures (education, employment, family) are often failing or unevenly accessible, disaffiliation emerges as a central factor in the development of transgressive behaviors (Kokoroko, 2019; Kouamé, 2019).

The second perspective mobilized is labeling theory, rooted in symbolic interactionism. According to Becker (1963), deviance does not lie in the act itself, but in the way, society perceives and defines it. In other words, "deviant is the one to whom the label of deviance has been successfully applied. " This labeling process often takes place through the intervention of social institutions (police, judiciary, schools), which identify certain behaviors as transgressive and stigmatize the individuals who exhibit them. Such stigmatization can confine adolescents to negative social roles, limiting their chances of rehabilitation or social reintegration. In Ivorian urban areas, where some youths are prematurely associated with danger (e. g., microbes, vagrants, cyber - offenders), labeling reinforces their marginalization (Mucchielli, 2012; N'Guessan, 2017).

Finally, the theory of deviant careers, formulated by Lemert (1951) and expanded by Hughes (1996), offers a dynamic reading of deviance processes. It distinguishes between two stages: primary deviance, referring to occasional or isolated transgressions, and secondary deviance, which arises from the internalization of a deviant identity because of repeated stigmatization. Individuals faced with ongoing exclusion may come to adopt deviant behavior more permanently, not as a rational choice, but through a socially and psychologically constructed identity. This perspective helps explain how

youth initially facing academic or social difficulties can gradually enter sustained deviant trajectories, particularly within marginalized peer groups.

Though distinct, these three approaches complement one another in illuminating the multiple dimensions of the phenomenon under study. Disaffiliation reveals the structural conditions of marginalization; labeling theory exposes institutional stigmatization processes; and deviant career theory explains the internalization and reproduction of deviant behavior. Together, they move beyond simplistic or moralistic interpretations of juvenile delinquency, by embedding it within an analytical framework that articulates structure, interaction, and subjectivity.
To establish the epistemological foundations of this research, it is necessary to clarify the main concepts mobilized.

The first is the concept of deviance, understood in its sociological sense as any behavior, attitude, or discourse that transgresses the dominant social norms of a given group (Clinard & Meier, 2015; Becker, 1963). These norms (whether legal, moral, or customary) vary across cultural and historical contexts, and their violation typically provokes reactions of rejection or sanction. Deviance therefore does not refer to an intrinsic quality of the individual, but rather to a socially constructed rupture with the established normative order. It is thus less an attribute of the person than a designation resulting from interactions between individuals and institutions (Becker, 1963).

The second central concept is social disaffiliation, developed by Castel (1995), which refers to the process by which an individual becomes gradually excluded from traditional systems of integration such as employment, family, school, or local solidarities. Disaffiliation often results from a combination of economic factors (unemployment, poverty), institutional barriers (school failure, lack of access to public services), and symbolic dimensions (stigmatization, a sense of social uselessness). When applied to adolescents, this concept helps to illuminate the trajectories of young people in situations of rupture, for whom deviance may emerge as a social response to exclusion, or even as a means of identity reclamation and social visibility (Le Breton, 2007; Mucchielli, 2012).

In a context where Ivorian adolescents evolve within an environment marked by social precarity, the erosion of socialization mechanisms, and the rise of stigmatizing representations, this research pursues three main scientific objectives: to identify the social trajectories that lead to deviance; to analyze the institutional and symbolic dynamics associated with deviant practices; and to propose public policy recommendations.

2. Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach aimed at conducting an in - depth analysis of the social trajectories of marginalized youth, with the objective of understanding the social logics underpinning juvenile deviance in the urban context of Abidjan. The methodological protocol was designed to ensure both the empirical relevance and interpretative richness of the collected data.

Fieldwork was conducted between June and January 2024 in three municipalities of Abidjan: Adjamé, Yopougon, and Abobo. These urban areas are characterized by high population density, a significant concentration of youth in precarious situations, and heightened visibility of juvenile deviance phenomena—particularly in connection with youth gangs (microbes), illicit activities, and school dropout. This field selection is grounded in prior findings from sociological research and institutional reports (UNICEF, 2021; N'Guessan, 2017) and allows the study to be anchored in spaces where social tensions are most pronounced.

The sample was constructed using a purposive (or intentional) sampling method, targeting adolescents who met pre - defined sociological criteria. It includes 25 adolescents, 15 boys and 10 girls, aged between 13 and 18, all presenting diverse forms of social vulnerability: youth living on the streets, placed in shelters, or in conflict with the law (i. e., those followed by judicial or educational support systems). This choice allows for the intersection of different forms of social rupture experiences, while preserving a degree of diversity in life paths, which is essential for analyzing the differentiated dynamics of deviance.

Three main methodological tools were used to triangulate the data and enhance interpretive validity:

- Semi - structured interviews: Conducted with the adolescents, these interviews explored their life trajectories, experiences of familial, educational, and institutional rupture, as well as their representations of the social world. The flexible format of the semi - structured interview allowed for the inductive exploration of biographical narratives (Kaufmann, 2016).
- Field observations: Carried out in public spaces (bus stations, markets, working - class neighborhoods) and within partner institutions (shelters, social services), these observations helped document social interactions, survival strategies, peer group dynamics, and institutional responses.
- Documentary analysis: Reports from NGOs, local government studies, as well as media articles and academic publications were consulted to contextualize the empirical data, enrich the analysis, and situate individual narratives within a broader structural framework (UNICEF, 2021; Save the Children, 2020).

3. Results

The analysis of the biographical trajectories collected from the adolescents reveals a pronounced process of social disaffiliation, often initiated very early in childhood. These trajectories are marked by multiple ruptures with the main agents of socialization (namely family, school, and protective institutions) and reflect a gradual weakening of the fundamental bonds of social integration. Through their narratives, the youths express a sense of abandonment, disorientation, and identity - seeking within a social environment that is often hostile. This process of detachment exposes them to dynamics of exclusion and to alternative (sometimes deviant) forms of social belonging, which offer them a sense of affiliation or recognition.

4. Trajectories of Social Disaffiliation

1) Family Breakdowns and Emotional Deficiencies

Most of the adolescents interviewed described life paths deeply shaped by intrafamilial fractures, such as early parental separation, violent conflicts, emotional neglect, or total abandonment by parental figures. These experiences, often repeated or cumulative, are key structuring events in the dynamics of disaffiliation. Far from being anecdotal, they reveal a systemic fragility in child protection mechanisms within certain disadvantaged environments. The family bond, as the primary foundation of socialization, plays a central role in the development of identity, the internalization of norms, and emotional regulation. When this bond is broken or dysfunctional, the adolescent is deprived of a space of symbolic and emotional safety. The lack of recognition, absence of attentive listening, or domestic violence (perceived as forms of rejection) generate deep emotional distress. This suffering, often unspoken yet omnipresent in the narratives, can manifest through risky behaviors: running away, drug use, aggression, or involvement in violent or deviant groups. These ruptures also create a profound sense of isolation. Many youths report emotional loneliness, sometimes dating back to early childhood, that leads to a gradual disengagement from educational and social institutions. To fill this void, some seek belonging and recognition among peer groups, even when those groups promote transgressive practices. As Le Breton (2003) notes, risk - taking behaviors may become forms of expression or identity claims, a way of asserting one's existence in the eyes of others, even though conflict or provocation.

Emotional deprivation is therefore not a mere contextual variable. It constitutes a true matrix of social vulnerability, fostering entry into disaffiliation pathways. By undermining emotional stability, self - esteem, and the ability to internalize normative frameworks, it creates fertile ground for the development of alternative coping strategies, often at odds with dominant social expectations. The adolescents' own words illustrate this:

"*When my father left, I was eight. My mother cried all the time—she stopped talking to me. At home, it was just yelling. I started hanging out in the streets because no one was listening. I felt like I didn't matter to anyone. That's when I met some guys who 'accepted' me.* " (16 - year - old adolescent, school dropout)

"*At home, it was always fought. My stepfather used to hit me, and my mother said nothing. I ran away at 14. At first, I slept at friends' places, then on the street. I just needed someone to love me, to see me. I felt invisible. Even at school, no one paid attention to me.* " (17 - year - old girl, housed in a shelter)

Early emotional neglect and family breakdowns also affect how adolescents relate to school. For many of them, school quickly ceases to be a place of learning or upward mobility; instead, it becomes a site of exclusion, even humiliation. This gradual disengagement is often accompanied by a rejection of educational norms, paving the way for long - term disconnection.

2) Academic Failure and Educational Disengagement

The empirical data collected reveal a growing disinterest in school, fueled by a sense of symbolic exclusion, repeated experiences of humiliation, and the perception that academic knowledge holds little social value. In the narratives shared by the adolescents, school no longer fulfills its role as a vehicle for social mobility. It is perceived as a distant, elitist institution, incapable of accounting for the social, emotional, and economic realities of students from working - class backgrounds. In this regard, their rejection of school reflects a broader crisis of educational legitimacy, which can be seen as a threat to social cohesion. When the school fails to convey a shared meaning to the rules and content it teaches, it becomes a space of anomie, a place where norms lose their regulatory power. This disengagement is not merely passive. It takes various forms: chronic absenteeism, refusal to participate in class, deliberate provocations toward teachers, verbal or physical violence, or repeated academic failure. These behaviors cannot be reduced to simple disciplinary issues; rather, they express symbolic forms of resistance, a refusal to conform to a school system perceived as unjust, disconnected, or even violent in its silent exclusion of the most vulnerable. Some adolescents report feeling stigmatized or abandoned by the education system, which privileges high - performing students and renders those in difficulty invisible. This experience of exclusion, often internalized, generates a process of identity detachment: young people no longer identify with the role of student or with the expectations of the school. This disengagement may be further reinforced by unequal access to learning resources, the financial exhaustion of families due to school - related costs, and the absence of psychological support within institutions. Far from being a protective or emancipatory space, school thus becomes a factor that aggravates social disaffiliation.

In response to this educational disillusionment, the street and peer groups emerge as alternative spaces for recognition and identity construction. These environments offer what the school no longer seems to provide: a sense of belonging, their own codes and rules, a form of solidarity, however fragile, and sometimes immediate opportunities (money, status, protection) that school fails to deliver. These spaces are not neutral: they may also carry deviant or violent norms, but they respond to a fundamental need of youth, to be seen, heard, and valued.

This observation highlights a central paradox: the school, which is supposed to prevent deviance by transmitting social norms, can, when it fails in its inclusive mission, become a catalyst for disaffiliation and a breeding ground for transgressive behaviors. The issue is thus not only pedagogical, but deeply social and political: it calls for a reexamination of the foundations of the educational function in contexts of urban precarity and the need to envision a more inclusive school, one that is attentive to vulnerability and more grounded in the lived experiences of adolescents.

"*At school, they always said I was 'useless. ' Even when I tried, no one paid attention. The teachers only cared about the top students. I stopped going. Why continue if they already think you're worthless? In the streets, at least I feel free, no one judges me.* " (15 - year - old adolescent, in a situation of street wandering)

"*I dropped out in 8th grade. My parents couldn't afford school anymore, and the teachers didn't understand what I was going through. They told me to shut up and follow along, but I didn't see the point. I started hanging out outside. There, I learned other things, not from books*. " (16 - year - old girl, formerly in school, now in a reintegration center)

The previously analyzed processes of family, school, and institutional disaffiliation do not necessarily lead to complete marginalization. In response to social exclusion, adolescents develop forms of resilience, adaptation, or self - reinvention, which manifest through adherence to alternative logics of action and belonging. These experiences, often labeled as "*deviant*" by institutions, are also attempts at identity recomposition and quests for recognition within parallel symbolic universes.

5. Experiences of Deviance and Identity Reconstruction

Far from being a mere individual drift, the experience of deviance, as expressed in the narratives of the youth interviewed, appears as an active response to forms of social exclusion and symbolic disqualification. It becomes a vehicle for self - reconstruction, a way to exist in public space and reclaim a status, even if one deemed illegitimate by dominant society. Engagement in transgressive practices or groups is thus part of a process of identity reconfiguration, through which the adolescent creates a place for themselves, establishes new reference points, and constructs a social language based on the resources available in their environment.

Two major dynamics emerge from the data analysis: first, the adoption of survival strategies rooted in informal or illegal economies within alternative social networks; second, the valorization of marginal identities that invert traditional codes of social recognition to create new frameworks of legitimacy.

1) Survival Strategies and Informal Sociability

Deprived of stable resources, institutional support, and prospects for integration into formal circuits (educational, professional, or social), many of the adolescents interviewed turn to alternative networks of interdependence that fulfill crucial functions, both material and symbolic. These networks, ranging from gnambros (informal transport actors), neighborhood gangs, groups of street children, or so - called self - defense collectives, constitute true parallel social systems, structured around their own codes, roles, and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. In these micro - societies, social order does not disappear, it is reconfigured. Implicit hierarchies are established, roles are assigned, and relationships often rely on logics of loyalty, respect, and at times symbolic or physical violence. These groups allow young people to reconstruct a sense of belonging, to play an active role, and to escape the status of "socially useless" individuals in which dominant society tends to confine them. The roles assumed within these groups are far from marginal in the eyes of the youth: neighborhood guards, go - betweens at bus stations, lookouts for informal activities, collectors of illegal levies, and more. This distribution of tasks replicates a quasi - professional organization in which each member is valued for their utility and commitment. The street economy thus becomes an economy of connection, where deviance is not perceived as failure but as a bottom - up form of integration, offering a degree of economic security and social status, even if temporary.

In this context, deviance is no longer marginality becomes normative, governed by internal rules (often orally transmitted) and regulated through community - based sanctions. These young people do not perceive themselves as deviant, but as full - fledged actors in a parallel world that grants them visibility, recognition, and power. Their logic is not necessarily criminal, but primarily functional and existential: it is about surviving, belonging, and being part of a group that sees and values them.

"*They say we're thugs, but we organize transport. I'm a collector, I take the passengers' money for the line chief. It's a job. If you don't follow the rules, you get replaced. Here, you've got to be fast, loyal, and never betrayed. That's how you earn respect.* " (16 - year - old boy, member of a gnambro network)

"*I dropped out of school; nobody noticed me there. An older guy said, 'come with us, you'll watch the shops at night. ' I sleep there; I earn a bit. When someone gives you a chance on the street, you don't betray them. In the neighborhood, now they respect me, they call me 'little chief.* '" (15 - year - old adolescent, former student turned informal night watchman)

While informal networks provide youth with a framework for recognition and relative stability, they do not operate entirely outside institutional systems. Rather, the relationship is ambivalent marked by mistrust, rejection, or open defiance. This tension stems from repeated experiences of stigmatization, misunderstanding, and symbolic disqualification in their interactions with schools, the police, and social support systems.

2) Ambivalence toward Institutions

The adolescents interviewed in this study maintain a deeply ambivalent relationship with institutions, marked by mistrust, defiance, and, at times, disappointed expectations. This critical attitude does not stem from arbitrary rejection or systematic opposition to social order, but rather from lived experiences of disqualification, symbolic violence, and inequality in access to services and social recognition.

School, first and foremost, is often described as a selective institution focused on academic performance, one that favors students already endowed with supportive social and cultural capital. Vulnerable youth experience repeated failures, misunderstanding, and even forms of social humiliation within the school system, leading to their gradual disengagement. Far from being an inclusive space, school becomes a site of silent expulsion, where social difficulties are rarely acknowledged, and the label of a "failing" student becomes a lasting stigma. Reintegration centers, though well - intentioned, are not perceived as spaces of recovery, but as mechanisms of control in which individual freedom is restricted and the voices of youth are undervalued. Supervisory methods are often experienced as authoritarian, infantilizing, or disconnected from the daily realities of young people. This disconnect generates latent frustration and a

desire to break away, wherein the autonomy offered by the street or peer groups appears more attractive than institutional supervision. The police, finally, concentrate much of the resentment. Many youths report being arbitrarily stopped, beaten, or extorted, often without any evidence of wrongdoing. These repeated experiences of power abuse fuel a deep sense of injustice, whereby the institution charged with ensuring safety becomes itself a source of threat. Young people are frequently presumed guilty based on their appearance, neighborhood, or affiliation with socially stigmatized groups. This over - policing of working - class areas intensifies their marginalization and contributes to the external imposition of a deviant identity.

In this context, institutions appear both inaccessible and threatening: they embody an authority that judges, represses, or excludes, rather than one that protects or empowers. This crisis of institutional trust does not reflect indifference to social order on the part of youth; rather, it expresses disillusionment with a model of integration that they perceive as inoperative, or even hostile. Institutional rupture thus becomes a form of symbolic survival: a way of resisting the humiliation experienced and asserting a form of dignity within exclusion.

"*The center felt like a prison. They yelled at us, treated us like criminals. But we came there to get help. You can't change if people talk to you like you're a thief. I preferred to leave. On the streets, at least there's no hypocrisy, everyone knows where they stand.*" (17 - year - old adolescent, former resident of a shelter)

"*When the police see you, they don't ask questions. They hit first, accuse later. I was just sitting with my friends, they took us in. Even if you've done nothing, you must pay to get out. So why trust a system that already sees you as a thug*?" (16 - year - old youth, repeatedly arrested by police)

The narratives above reveal that juvenile deviance, far from being a mere individual transgression, constitutes a response to social and institutional exclusion. In the context of disaffiliation, young people invest in alternative spaces where they redefine their identity and social role. Deviance thus becomes both a survival strategy and a means of recognition, positioned at the intersection of resistance and adaptation. It reflects a negotiation with normative systems, requiring an analytical approach that bridges structural and interactionist dimensions of their trajectories.

6. Discussion

The findings of this qualitative research provide deeper insight into the social, emotional, and identity - based logics underlying deviant trajectories among Ivorian adolescents in urban settings (specifically Abidjan). Far from being purely pathological, deviant practices appear here as coherent responses to situations of social disaffiliation, institutional rupture, and lack of symbolic recognition. Deviance thus emerges as a mode of existence within an environment where traditional forms of integration fail to fulfill their protective function. The adolescents studied experience multiple cumulative ruptures, early emotional detachment, school dropout, and persistent economic marginality. Their life paths are shaped by experiences of abandonment, stigmatization, and rejection by educational, social, and security institutions. In this context, deviance becomes simultaneously a resource, a refuge, and a response, a means of reconstructing a place in a social world that has excluded them. These trajectories reflect the logic of progressive disaffiliation as theorized by Castel (1995), namely a silent exit from traditional spheres of integration. These youths evolve in a "*grey zone*" between inclusion and exclusion, where normative frameworks collapse without being replaced. In the void left by these broken structures, the peer group takes on a structuring function: it becomes the main space of recognition, learning, protection, and even regulation (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1951). Deviance, in this configuration, functions as an identity language, a strategy for adapting to social anomie.

These results align with several contemporary studies. Mucchielli (2012) and Dédou (2024) has demonstrated that youth deviance in urban environments is less the result of individual anomie than a crisis of recognition in unequal societies. Similarly, Chauvenet et al. (1994) have highlighted the existence of self - organization and structured forms of sociality among so - called "disconnected" youth, often evolving in margins ignored by institutions. In contrast to classical Anglo - American theories such as Hirschi's (1969), which emphasize the lack of familial attachment as the root of deviance, this study shows that even weakened family ties can remain symbolically significant. Many of the adolescents interviewed do not entirely reject the family but rather express a need for reconciliation with it sign of enduring structural attachment, albeit fragile.

The results of this research call for a contextualized African reading of deviance theories. Rather than a mere transplantation of Northern models, it is necessary to integrate the specific historical, political, and postcolonial cultural contexts, particularly the effects of deinstitutionalization, neoliberal governance, and the fragmentation of community solidarities. This implies understanding deviance as the product of a fragmented social environment, not merely as a deviation from a universal norm.

Considering these findings, several avenues for public policy action can be considered:

- Strengthening family policies, through parenting support, family mediation, and child protection mechanisms.
- Promoting inclusive education, through differentiated pedagogies, remedial programs, and attention to socio - educational inequalities.
- Training social and educational professionals in non - stigmatizing approaches based on listening, empathy, and recognition of the life trajectories of marginalized youth.

This study also presents certain limitations. It is based on a small and localized sample, which limits the generalizability of the results. Furthermore, it does not directly incorporate the perspectives of institutional actors (teachers, police officers, educators), whose insights could have enriched the analysis. Lastly, the absence of longitudinal data prevents us from tracking the evolution of trajectories over time.

In view of these findings, several research perspectives deserve exploration to deepen the understanding of deviant

youth trajectories in African urban contexts. First, comparative studies in other Ivorian cities or African capitals could highlight both convergences in youth disaffiliation and local specificities. Second, longitudinal approaches would be a valuable methodological addition, enabling researchers to follow adolescents over several years to identify turning points, processes of desistance, or, conversely, entrenchment in marginal identities. Third, incorporating the voices of professionals (police officers, educators, magistrates, social workers) is essential for grasping institutional logics of categorization, stigmatization, or support, often absent from young people's narratives. These cross - perspectives could enrich the analysis, illuminate the tensions between institutional practices and youth experiences, and help design more just and appropriate responses to the needs of adolescents in rupture.

Juvenile deviance in Côte d'Ivoire cannot, therefore, be understood merely as individual transgression: it reflects a social system in flux, in which former mechanisms of integration are collapsing without being replaced. In response to this institutional and symbolic vacuum, young people invest in alternative forms of socialization, sometimes deviant, yet socially structured and identity laden. Recognizing the voices of youth, acting upstream of social breakdowns, and designing policies grounded in dignity and inclusion emerge as major social and political imperatives.

7. Conclusion

This research, situated at the intersection of the sociology of deviance and Ivorian social realities, offers a renewed perspective on adolescent behaviors that deviate from established norms. Far from being mere individual transgressions or moral failings, these behaviors emerge as visible manifestations of structural social disengagement, in a context marked by precarity, the collapse of socialization mechanisms, and growing urban inequalities. Social disaffiliation (Castel, 1995) emerges as the central thread running through the trajectories of many of the adolescents interviewed. This concept helps to grasp the gradual process of rupture with traditional spheres of integration (family, school, and work) and to understand its effects on identity construction. In an environment where institutions no longer fulfill their roles of protection or recognition, adolescents develop adaptive strategies based on alternative affiliations, often labeled as deviant—that nevertheless provide them with spaces of sociality, visibility, and self - worth. The analysis also highlights the ambivalent role of institutions (educational, police, social), which, rather than mitigating tensions, sometimes exacerbate them through processes of stigmatization and exclusion. This institutional crisis of trust reflects a broader dynamic of imbalance between control and support, in which youth (perceived more as a threat than as full - fledged social subjects) struggle to find their place in social order.

Understanding juvenile deviance in the Ivorian context therefore means recognizing that it is not the result of individual dysfunction, but a logic of adjustment to conditions of social injustice, non - recognition, and fragmented solidarities. In this sense, deviance can be read as a social language (Le Breton, 2003), a means by which youth express their place, or lack thereof, in society. Thus, crafting coherent public policy requires moving beyond security - driven or moralistic approaches. It involves reconstructing the conditions for genuine social inclusion by addressing the structural causes of disaffiliation: poverty, educational injustice, the absence of credible alternatives to life on the street, and institutional violence that fuels youth resentment. It also demands active listening to their stories and aspirations, a necessary condition for any effective prevention strategy.

Ultimately, this study calls for a rethinking of the role of youth in society. Recognizing the voices of young people, too often ignored or criminalized, must be placed at the heart of strategies for social cohesion. In the face of trajectories marked by rupture, the hope for a more just, inclusive, and united future lies in the reconstruction of social bonds, investment in education, and the legitimization of lived experience.

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