



YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES IN OYI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

Youths involve in criminal activities globally. Nigeria as a country is not an exception. Youths involve themselves in criminal activities for several reasons. The problem of youth involvement in crime has become a serious challenge to the society especially in Oyi local government area of Anambra state. The issue affects not just the individuals but also family members and the society at large. The implication is that the youth becomes useless rather than being useful to the society. The society is at risk because it leads to insecurity thereby giving bad image to the community. This is a theoretical work that made use of secondary sources of data like journals, academic sources. The strain theory was the theoretical framework for the work. It explains the rationale for crime among youths. It examined factors influencing youth involvement in criminal activities and possible solutions to the problem. The factors ranges from poverty, unemployment, family size, peer pressure and so on. Recommendations were given such as giving of incentives to youths in entrepreneurship, parents speaking to their children against crime, religious bodies talking about morality and also job creation by the governments for the youths.

Key words: crime, factors, peer pressure, poverty, youths.

Introduction

Crime is inevitable, multidimensional and global phenomenon. Tochukwu (2023). It occurs in every known society however, crime changes in form overtime and the magnitude of occurrence varies from one society to another and it is faced by both the developed and less developed nations (Abrifor, 2015). Crime can be seen as functional parts of social relations and theoretical basis for many sociological enquiries since no society is free from criminality. In most cases, however, crime affects quality of life, socio-economic growth and development (Jiburum, Mba&Ezeamama, 2014). Crime to Tappan (1947) is the intentional act in violation of criminal law, committed without defense or excuse, and penalized by the state either as a felony or misdemeanor. However, the nature and intensity of crime vary across societies, within societies, and forms of human settlement (urban or rural). This solidly underscores the fact that criminal behaviour tend to be compatible with the pattern of social organization and level of economic development of a given society. Abatta (2023), stated that in a report by worldpopulation review, a US based organization that specializes in the delivery of up to date global population data and demographics, Venezuela had the had the highest crime index of 83.76% making the country with the highest crime rate Nigeria was ranked 15th with 64.4%, America and United Kingdom were ranked 55th and 63rd respectively. According to the report, these rates were also influenced by factors ranging from poverty to unemployment (Abatta, 2023). Crime statistics in Nigeria, revealed data on crime as, home theft 71.25%, car stolen 63.01%, dealing drugs 64.43%, property crimes such as vandalism and theft 70.14%, while armed robbery is 85.32% (Numbeo, 2023).



Johnson (2015), in his analysis, where he presented youth offending and youth recidivism in New Zealand, he talked about why youth offend, and are also the drivers of crime in New Zealand. He observed that youth offending is a complex social and political issue in which young immature minds are influenced into engaging in criminal activity. In Africa, Atsem (2014) underscores that electronic media influences the youth to commit crime. He stresses that majority of the youth involved in criminality in Africa learn their skills from the media. Ordhiambor (2015) stated that in Kisumu, a county in Kenya, youths have been involved in several criminal activities like boda-boda crimes which involves the use of bike (okada) to harm people. Their main motive was to get money. In Nigeria, youths have also been found to be involved in criminal activities. It is experiencing a prevalence of rising crime waves, criminal intentions and varying degree of delinquencies.

The nature of these crimes include armed robbery, murder, car theft, burglary, gambling, smuggling, human trafficking, kidnapping, drug trafficking, internet scam, advanced fee fraud (419) and other illegal activities (Adebayo, 2013). A report by the international organization for peace building and social justice (PBSJ) revealed that 70% of Nigeria's youths embrace crime due to lack of economic opportunity and poverty in the country to earn a living, confer status and survive. This has led to so many Nigerians expressing their fear over the safety of the federation (David 2023).

The involvement of youth in criminal activities have been blamed on a number of factors such as parental failure, news media, the lack of self-esteem, poverty, hunger, peer pressure, idleness and unemployment because they believe that involving in criminal activities will give them a sense of belonging (okoroafor 2023). Adebayo (2013) stated that the unemployed youth in Nigeria experience low self-esteem, deprivation, frustration and acute want which now lead youths to criminal activities in the society. This can be seen in the Nigerian situation whereby the unemployment rate has risen from 33% in the previous year and is now 41% in 2023 (National bureau of statistics, 2023). The national bureau of statistics in 2022 stated that 63% or 133 million Nigerians were living in multidimensional poverty. Inflation has pushed more 4 million people into poverty in the first five months of 2023 as said by the World Bank in June (Egboh (2023). Like other states in the South-east, Anambra has witnessed increased attacks by gunmen lately. Some headquarters of local government areas in the state have been attacked by hoodlums in recent times. Aside from the attacks on government facilities, several residents have been killed and others abducted in renewed attacks by gunmen in the state (Ugwu, 2022).

Sunday (2023) stated that there was the arrest of six suspects involved in kidnapping who have been terrorising the Eziowelle community and it's environ for a long time. Several weapons were recovered such as English pump action rifles and other weapons. In Atani community, there have been arrests of youths involved in criminal activities such as drug abuse and trafficking with drugs Marijuana, Methamphetamine popularly called Mkpulummili, their ages ranging from 18 years to 35 years (Nwaiwu 2023). In Oyi local government area, there have been cases of youth involvement in criminal activities. In Nteje community people have attributed increase in crime as a result of the use of hard drugs, and this has made many productive youths to become useless rather than being productive with their time (Ekene 2022). It is based on this that this research is out to examine the factors influencing youth involvement of youth in criminal activities in Oyi Local Government Area.



Theoretical Anchorage

Strain Theory

The strain theory by Robert K. Merton 1938 was adopted as the theoretical framework for this research work. The theory sees crime as emanating from inability of individuals to achieve success through legitimate means as a result of pressure from society. Expectations for the youth of a community in terms of academics and general societal conduct change daily. Youths also experience regular pressure from their friends and peers. Societies are characterized by both culture and social structure. Culture sets goals while social structures, designs ways to attain goals. In a well-integrated society, people adopt accepted and appropriate strategies to attain societal goals. Here, the goals and means of the society are imbalance. When both goals and means are not balanced, deviance occurs. This imbalance between cultural goals and structurally available means lead individual into crime. In Nigeria, economic success is a goal that everybody strives for. The legitimate means to economic success are education and jobs. The youth and other socially disadvantaged groups do not have equal access to these means because of their socio economic status. The result is structural strain that produces crime. They experience these strains because they aim for the same goals as the rest of society, but their opportunities for success are blocked due to poverty, unemployment and other factors. Thus, they turn to crime and deviance as a way to achieve economic success because the society places much value on success than on the actual means through which it was achieved. After all, the end justifies the means.

Review of relevant literatures

The concept of youth criminality

Osawe (2015) described crime as an illegal act or activity prohibited by law that involves breaking the law. It is also an immoral activity that is considered unacceptable, shameful, unwise and regrettable. Crime according to Tappan (1947) is the intentional act in violation of criminal law, committed without defense or excuse, and penalized by the state either as a felony or misdemeanor. However, the nature and intensity of crime vary across societies, within societies, and forms of human settlement (urban or rural). According to Moffit (2016), a higher proportion of youths have been arrested by their early 20's than in the past.

Youth violence according to WHO (2020), can be defined as the involvement of young people, whether as victims or perpetrators, in incidents involving the threat or use of physical force in the context of interpersonal, inter-communal or other conflict or crime. Crime is an act that is contrary to the law and unacceptable immoral act. To Adebayo (2013), crime is a violation of the rules to be respected by all members of the society, and upon which the rest members of the society mete sanction upon those guilty of the violation. He describes the nature of such crimes to include armed robbery, murder, rape, car theft, burglary, fraud, bribery and corruption, food and drug adulteration, gambling, smuggling, human trafficking, kidnapping, drug trafficking, money laundering, internet scam, advanced fee fraud (419) and other illegal activities. This is the picture of the nature of crime in Nigeria.

Similarly, Sheriff Deputies (2016), in *The Anatomy of Crimes in Nigeria* revealed that 7 out of 10 Nigerians are afraid of becoming the victim of crime. It also revealed that security in the home remained a key challenge as 36% of the robberies occurred in the homes, according to respondents, and another 26% occurred near the home. In addition, the report showed increase in rape, kidnapping, physical assaults, attempted murder, mobile phone theft, and car theft.



Youth criminality has been seen to be related to so many factors such as quest for quick wealth, poverty, broken homes, peer influence etc. Oyelola (2023) youth involvement in criminal activities in the country can be influenced by various factors, including socioeconomic conditions such as poverty, lack of education, access to limited economic opportunities, dysfunctional families, lack of parental supervision, or exposure to violence and substance abuse within the family. Also peer pressure, youths who engage with criminal peers are likely to exhibit some criminal behaviours and thereby leading to involvement in criminal activities, living in a crime invaded community, lack of positive role models and drug and alcohol abuse.

Factors That Influence Youth Involvement in Criminal Activity

There are so many reasons as to why youths involved themselves in criminal activities. some of these factors includes poverty, family size/structure, education, peer influence/pressure, drug/substance abuse, etc.

Poverty

Wabunечи (2018) stressed that poverty causes social distress as persons who are impoverished have a higher probability to engage in crime such as kidnapping, drug abuse and other forms of criminal activities. Ojo (2012) posits that poverty and low education attainment are some of the causes of youth involvement in criminal activity. kostadis (2017) posited that individuals are more likely to be involved in criminal activity when they experience a negative income shock. Deteriorating economic conditions may favour criminal activity as people see it as an alternative source of income. According to Uche (2014), children from parent with adequate income, good occupation and high status are likely provided with good quality education from nursery up to university level, given this opportunity, it is possible that such child will be less delinquent than their counterpart from lower socioeconomic background.

Family size

Viswanath (2015), large family size makes it difficult for parents to monitor movement of their ward which sometimes leads the youth into criminal activities. Geographical analysis suggests that countries with more urbanized populations have higher registered crime rates than do those with strong rural lifestyles and communities (Nwachukwui, 2018). This may be attributable to the differences in social control and social cohesion. Rural groupings rely mainly on family and community control as a means of dealing with antisocial behavior and exhibit markedly lower crime rates. According to Oyelola (2022) there seem to be neglect of duty by parents who are supposed to be role models to their children. Parents now focus more on the search for a greener pasture thereby leaving their parental duties to outsiders who might influence these youths negatively. Most parents do not have time for their kids.

Unemployment

Kazeem (2016) revealed that Nigerian tertiary education institutions produce up to 500,000 graduates every year besides Nigerian graduates who study abroad and return home to compete for jobs. Unemployment describes the condition of people who are without jobs (Okafor,2011). The frustration and desperation that daily torments the unemployed creates a fertile ground for crime to thrive. In recent times, there have been notable adverse social, economic and political developments in Nigeria, a consequence of youth unemployment and underemployment, particularly exemplified by increasing militancy, violent crimes, kidnapping, restiveness and political instability (Ajufo,2013).Pettinger (2017) stated that “a low rate of economic growth



can cause higher unemployment”. When there is inflation, mismanagement of funds and misappropriation of funds in a country, there is bound to be financial crisis. According to Onuba (2019), “the labour statistics report released by the National Bureau of Statistics showed that the number of Nigerians unemployed rose from 11.92 million in the first quarter of 2017 to 13.58 million and 15.99 million in the second and third quarters respectively”. Most Nigerians are depending solely on either the government or oil companies for employment. The dependency rate on government and few oil companies is raising a lot of agitations which is detrimental to the wellbeing of the nation.

Peer pressure/ influence

Some youths get into problems due to peer pressure and rebellion against parental authority. Eke (2018) points out that at particularly hard times when parents are busy trying to make out a living; there is hardly time for interaction with their children. In such cases, youths turn out to their peers for lesson on rules and regulations which govern conducts in the society. Such actions may lead to contacts which do not conform to the societal norms and the wish of their parents. According to Larsen (2015), peer pressure is a factor that contributes to criminal activities, because most youths have an irresistible pressure to conform to group norms.

Ekpenyong and Mathias (2019) did a study on Urban Slums and Youth Criminality in Bayelsa State Nigeria. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted on the study. Data for the study depends on both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were garnered with the aid of a self-design structured questionnaire while secondary sources of data depended on the reviews of empirical literature of scholars. Furthermore, sample of 150 respondents were drawn using both purposive and simple random techniques. Data garnered were analyzed with frequency distribution table coupled with simple percentages. Chi-square statistical tool was used to test the hypothesis. By and large, the study established that crime rate among youths in Bayelsa state slums is alarming. The percentage of (63%) showed that slum gives a breeding ground for criminals. Certain factors such as poverty (60%), unemployment (54%) and government continued neglect of slums (52%) were considered by respondents to be some of the reasons influencing youth involvement in crime.

Adeel, Gillani, and Manzoor (2022) did a study On Factors Affecting the Criminal Behaviour among Pakistani Youth. The study adopted a survey design. Data were gotten through the use of questionnaire. The study adopted a multistage random sampling technique and was used for data collection. The study made use of 300 respondents from the place of study. Data collected by the use of the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS 25 version. The study showed that 21 to 25 years involved in crime were married. Chi-square was used to test two hypotheses formulated. The findings also revealed that poverty (54%), unemployment (35%), poor socialization (24%), peer pressure (34%) were major causes of crime. Other factors included media influence, family size. The study recommended that government and NGO's should collaborate so as to enhance youth empowerment.



Consequences of Youth Involvement in Criminal Activities

Effects on the individual

The criminal may lose his or her freedom while being incarcerated or placed on probation. The high levels of involvement of young people with the criminal justice can have lasting negative consequences for their development because acquiring a criminal record as a youth depresses lifetime family incomes, effects of labeling youth as “criminals;” interruption of connections to school, family, and work; and surveillance through probation supervision (Jannetta & Cameron, 2017)

Unsecured Environment

Jore (2019) referred to physical security as “the feeling of being safe and secure, the lack of threats and the management of future risks”. He identified security threats to include theft, vandalism, organized crime, sabotage, kidnappings, hackings, terrorism, espionage, and political crises. Security, to Wolfers (Baldwin, 1997) refers to “the absence of threats to acquire values”. According to Ajaegbu (2012) “neither homes, nor markets are safe in Nigeria because of frequent occurrences of armed robbery incidents”. Private homes, churches, establishments and public places are not left behind by buglers and robbers. The negative psychological effects of being abducted include depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress (PTSD) may last for life (Uzochukwu, 2019). The United States Department of State Travel Advisory based on Nigeria security report as at 28th April, 2020 indicated that travelers should reconsider travel to Nigeria due to crime, terrorism, civil unrest, kidnapping, marine crime such as kidnapping, hijacking, boarding, and theft (Country Security Report, 2020).

Ebele, Kelechi and Ejike (2015) carried out a research and examined implications of youth unemployment and violent crimes on the economic growth of Nigeria. A sample of 272 persons was selected using simple random sampling. SPSS-20 was used for analysis using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to analyze the data and compare different population of mean existing within the groups and between the groups at five point-likert scale. The study concluded that youth unemployment affects negatively economic growth in Nigeria due to high increase in violent crime such as, kidnapping, robbery, thuggery and terrorism which hinders business investment and economic growth.

Measures to ameliorate the involvement of youth in criminal activities

Mohammed (2013), stressed that, family should have a positive attitude towards life and society. Parents, elders, and siblings should show positive values, norms and standards of society, in this way, the children will be able to show the right behaviour to society. Igbo and Ikpa (2013), noted that youth criminality can be curbed through skill acquisition, enlightenment and counseling programmes. These skill acquisition programmes includes Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (sure-p) and Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWIN).

Michael, Inyang and Ojeka (2016), carried out a study on Entrepreneurship Skills Education: A Catholicon for Youth Criminality in Nigeria. The roles of entrepreneurship skills education in curbing youth criminality such as providing youth with the risk-taking ability and innovative capabilities to set up an enterprise rather than waiting to be employed, managerial skills necessary for self-reliance, which will help in reducing unemployment and poverty and keep them off crime, were discussed. The study recommends amongst others: that there is urgent



need to reactivate entrepreneurship skills education in all our institutions of learning. Our school curriculum should be design in such a way that entrepreneurship skills education will be practical-orientated. Government and non-governmental organizations should embark on enlightenment campaign to sensitize youths on the need to shun all forms of criminality.

Conclusion

Youth involvement in criminal activity is a serious problem in the society especially in Oyi Local Government Area of Anambra state. The issue has serious implications on not just the individuals but also the society at large because it portends a great danger to human existence. It affects the individual, such that they are not able to contribute meaningfully in achieving societal goals. On the society it brings bad image to family members and then insecurity whereby freedom of movement is being restricted. This issue has to be tackled if not the future of the society is at risk. The issue of unemployment as one of the factors needs to be tackled. Therefore, all hands must be on deck to salvage the situation.

Recommendations

Due to the negative implications of youth involvement in criminal activities, the society at large is at risk. It therefore implies that a concerted effort be made by all and sundry to salvage the society from its menace.

The following recommendations needs to be put in place

1. First of all, the family needs to sensitise youths about the negative implications of youth involvement in criminal activities to both themselves and the society.
2. The government should do well to play its own part by providing job opportunities for youths.
3. There should also be support of entrepreneurs like giving of incentives by the government to help the business of youths.
4. There should also be punishment for offenders which will serve as deterrent to intending offenders.
5. Faith based organisations should do well to curtail the message on prosperity and do more talks on morality.

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