

Youth And Urban Violence In Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examined youth and urban violence in Nigeria. The paper posited that urban violence threatens the peace and stability of urban centers and socioeconomic development. The persistent increase in urban violence has caused insecurity and impacted the lives of urban dwellers. Anomie theory was used as an analytical construct. One of the central assumptions of the Anomie theory is that society creates its brand of crime and criminals by defining its goals, standards, and values without providing corresponding opportunities for achieving them. Regrettably, the prescribed goals and means do not permit all members of society to pursue success in legitimate ways. The paper relied on secondary data sources, and the paper noted that militating factors are responsible for the causes of urban violence among the youth, which encumbers peace and stability in the urban centers. The paper recommended, among other things, that the Nigerian Government take pragmatic steps to create and provide youths with job opportunities, provide social amenities in the rural and urban areas, and include youths in crucial decision-making in the urban centers.

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I. Theoretical Framework

The Anomie theory was adopted in this study. It was proposed by Robert Merton (1938) to explain the relationship between youth and urban violence that has ravaged most of Nigeria's urban centers. "Anomie" comes from the French language and means lawlessness (normlessness). During the 20th century, Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) synthesized and conceptualized it as the absence or violation of norms (laws) and the core values that guide human behavior. In 1938, Robert K Merton modified Durkheim's anomie-strain theory to mean-end paradigm.

According to the anomie theory, society defines its goals, standards, and values without providing opportunities to achieve them correspondingly. According to Merton (1938), all societies embody socially approved values and goals and institutionalized means for achieving them. The prescribed goals and means do not permit all members of society to pursue success legitimately. To achieve success goals and values, some segments of society are under undue pressure in a non-conforming (criminal) manner. This happens when the goal of success is over-emphasized more than the acceptable ways of achieving it. The Anomie theory posits that most people strive to achieve culturally recognized goals. When an entire group cannot have access to these goals, anomie develops. The result is deviant behavior characterized by Rebellion, Retreatism, Ritualism, Innovation, and Conformity.

Conversely, Merton acknowledges that not all people are deviants or criminals; this he did by identifying five adaptive ways people tend to respond when under structural strains. Merton's typology of individual adaptations to structural pressures is referred to as the "plus-minus paradigm," namely, Conformity: (+ +) conformity is non-deviants because they accept both the goals and the means of achieving the goals. The other four are guilty of violating either of the cultural expectations: the goals or means., Innovation: (+ -) they reject the means and accept the goals; Ritualism: (- +) they accept means and reject the goal; Retreatism: (- -) they reject the means and the goals; and Rebellion: (± ±) they decided to change both means and goals. The plus (+) sign stands for acceptance, the minus sign (-) represents rejection, plus and minus (± ±) signs signify a rejection of both the institutionalized means and goals and establish their own goals and means (Merton, 1938).

A cursory analysis of the Anomie theory lends credence to many of the heinous crimes witnessed in the urban cities. Youths tend to seek a simple means to the goals set by society, primarily owing to the broad class disparity and harsh economic crisis that exists in the nation, hence the need to innovate alternatives leading to the use of violence to perpetuate crime and earn a living. The theory explains that some youths conform to the culturally acceptable goals of society (+) but reject the means of achieving them (-), which encourages violence and adversely affects peace and stability in the urban centers. The youths adopt illegitimate means to achieve "success" since affluence and wealth are the most critical factors in the urban centers. Merton further posited that the "innovators," in particular, belong to the lower class in the class structure; hence, there is a need to make both ends meet because access to legitimate means is limited, and the "strain towards anomie" is most severe. It,

therefore, means that those in the lower-class structure, especially the youths trying to make both ends meet, find it hard to meet their responsibility as a result of blockage of access; hence, the strain results in frustration, and this frustration is orchestrated through other crimes which include violent crimes witnessed in the urban cities. The theory is relevant to the present study as it clarifies why youths engage in violent crime in urban cities. Also, an analysis has shown that the youths in this category are impoverished, frustrated with goal blockage, and unemployed. The motivation for the acts is subsumed to be embedded in the complex economic means of achieving an acceptable goal and the means, hence the persistent increase in crime in the urban cities. Also, due to the porous value system in the nation, wealth is the criteria for measuring social belonging; hence, the youths have taken to crime as a legitimate means, thereby shunning the societal means and goal. Nnam (2014) further explains that people are frustrated when asked to pursue economic success with goal blockage. The weak value system, accompanied by the struggle to survive, has led many youths to devise many means and goals, and this kind of society helps breed heinous crimes.

II. INTRODUCTION

Urban violence is now a constant phenomenon in most cities in Nigeria. Nigeria has witnessed many inter-ethnic confrontations, religious and political intolerance, boundary disputes, youth unemployment, urban poverty, and economic frustration that results from widespread unemployment amongst young people, particularly school leavers and graduates of tertiary institutions. The previous creates a considerable income gap between the rich and the poor, creating the feeling that the rich become richer at the expense of the poor, which means that the rich derive their wealth from the socioeconomic exploitation of the poor. Inadequate housing, poor and inadequate transportation facilities, inadequate public utilities, inadequate social infrastructures, ethnic discrimination, political disagreement, and crisis, refusal of government function and to obey their laws, inequality of citizens before the law, resulting in some offenders going unpunished, refusal of the Government to respect and protect the independent of the judiciary, adoption, and influence of violent foreign culture, especially from mass media has polarised the urban cities.

The World Health Organisation (WHO), in its 2002 global reports on violence (www.who.int), defines violence as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or a group of the community either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychologically harmful development or deprivation. Tamuno (1993) defines violence as the unlawful use or threat of force. In the opinion of Domenach (1988), violence is the use of overt or covert force to wrest from individuals or groups something they are not disposed to give of their own free will.

The urban environment is a breeding ground for various forms of violence. As the hub of political, social, and economic processes, the city is the meeting point for people from diverse cultural, racial, and religious backgrounds. It is often the venue of intense class and social struggle for scarce economic resources and political power, while the daily battle for survival is usually non-confrontational; when the economic-cum-political situation deteriorates, the city streets provide the venue for riots, demonstrations, and even resolution. Because of the relative anonymity of urban life, it is also an attractive place for the more desirable elements in society, thieves, rapists, and murderers, amongst others, who can commit crimes without fear of recognition.

Urban areas are the hotbeds of violence due to the concentration of different civic organizations, as well as the large reserves of violence-prone segments of the population. Trade unions, professional associations, human rights organizations, women's organizations, ethnic associations, student associations, and other civil organizations are located in the cities. Strikes, lockouts, consumer boycotts, rent boycotts, riots, and demonstrations for which many urban areas have become notable are organized by these groups Osaghea (1994). Most militant and terrorist groups are based in urban centers, and their target is usually situated in these centers. Urban areas have a large concentration of poor, homeless, and unemployed people who could be quickly recruited to disrupt the peace of society. They could hijack a peace demonstration and turn it into a violent one. Urban areas tend to have a large population of miscreants prone to violence. They are the instrument of political violence where structural inequalities prevail. Probing the impacts of youth in urban violence is at stake.

Conceptualizing violence and urban violence

The term violence is ambiguous in the definition. The youth has been adjudged as the prominent age group in the use of violence in society. This violence, witnessed in different forms in society, has worsened the security architecture in the society and nation at large. According to Echoes (2004), violence is a term that encompasses threats to people's lives in the communities. Tamuno (1991) defines violence as an unlawful use of threat or force". Dokun (2005) posited that violence is the exertion of physical force to cause injury or abuse people's fundamental rights. Violence manifests in various forms depending on the act or crime to be perpetrated. Domenach (1978) sums violence as the use of force, overt or covert, to invest from individuals or groups something they are not disposed to give of their own free will. Violence involves the infliction of injury or cause of harm to property, persons, or action characterized by causing harm to an individual. The state may use violence

to enforce law and order through the state-established apparatus or security agencies. In this situation, the state exercises the monopoly use of power, which must be in the state's interest. This was echoed by Thomas Hobbes (1962), who said that the essence of a state is to "guarantee the security of lives and property and ensure law and order through its political sovereignty and monopoly of violence." Here, the state has power through its organ or apparatus to use violence to ensure the security of lives and property and the protection of its sovereignty. This situation has been witnessed in using the various security agencies in the nation to enforce law and order. The use of violence is exclusively reserved for the state; however, all other individuals could apply minimal violence as permissible by the law depending on the situation, circumstances, and occasion defined by the law. The state uses violence through the security apparatus in cases like riots, strikes, demonstrations, localized rebellions, conspiracies that are highly organized with limited participation, assassination, coup d'état and small-scale guerilla wars, and internal wars that are highly organized with mass involvement designed to mastermind the peace and stability, overthrow a regime or the state at large. Osaghae (1994) took a divergent view concerning the morality and legality of violence in society. Muehlenhard & Kimes (1999) examine urban violence "as a socially constructed, have developed over time, and reflect prevailing understandings, interest, and power distributions." Urban violence results from rapid urbanization, internal disorder, political unrest, and government instability, accompanied by mass misery and frustration. Urban Violence includes murder and attempted murder of state officials, politicians, their relatives, children, young people, or other members of the public. The features of violence are enormous, and this includes riots, public protests, demonstrations, mass action, armed robbery, assassinations, street fighting, and terrorism, amongst others.

Urban Violence

Urban Violence has persistently increased in the nation with the increase of unemployment, harsh economic crisis, and perceived injustice in resource allocation, amongst others. Albert (1994) posited that urban violence is a problem of urbanization. Albert (1994) summarised urban violence as "acts of violence produced by characteristics of (or attaining their watermark in) the cities as a result of their social, political, and economic importance. Urban violence is the negative response of the individual in society because of the frustration produced by urbanization. These responses are produced because of the effects and impacts of the social, economic, and cultural activities in the society and the nation. Stren (1992) explained that one visible disheartening characteristic of poor cities of the developing world today is the gross decline in infrastructural base. The rise in urban populations results in the decline of resources, and infrastructures are overused to the extent to which cities lose their capacity to operate as productive entities. Urban cities need proper functioning infrastructures, social amenities, educational institutions, and power supply for effectiveness. Urban violence persists because all the sectors in the urban demand access to the collective material conditions of daily life, and the state, in keeping with the demands, tries to ameliorate the contradictions ensuring these conflicting demands. Osaghae (1994) explained the causes of rapid population in urban cities. Osaghae maintained that "it serves as the fulcrum of social, economic and political processes and the city provides an enabling environment for conflict and violence; Urban policies and planning create conditions that make violence endemic to cities and the rise of slum areas where deviant sub-culture prevails, acute shortage housing that encourages overcrowding and informal settlement, insufficient policing, lack of recreational facilities and neglect of the peripheries of cities in the provision of essential services."

The persistent increase in the number of large numbers of homeless, unemployed youths, and, most of the time, unmarried urban dwellers are prone to violence and could be organized by political groups. Osaghae (1994) explained that the increase in divorce rate and break up of families, weakness of cultural and traditional control mechanisms, individual personality, and changes in urban life, amongst others, contribute to the increase in urban violence. In addition, the rural dwellers who migrated to urban cities searching for greener pastures often witnessed goal blockage and got frustrated. This frustration is a result of the inability of the urban city to provide employment, accommodations, increased wages, and an affordable educational system for children, which makes some of the dwellers engage in violence, thereby distorting the peace and tranquility of the urban city. Moreso, this frustration could be orchestrated through violence. Urban cities have been adjudged as the hotbeds of violence because of the presence of different groups and organizations. These groups and organizations, like Trade unions, human rights organizations, women's organizations, ethnic associations, student organizations, and other civic organizations, are located in the cities; strikes, lockouts, consumer boycotts, rent boycotts, riots, and demonstrations make urban areas have become notable are organized by these groups, (Osaghae, 1994). Some of the militant and terrorist groups have their targets and operation centers in urban cities. Class disparity and structural inequalities aggravate the urban violence in the nation. Other militating factors that could trigger urban violence include; military or civilian coups, bloody ethnic militias, religious fundamentalism and conflicts, terrorism, arm robbery, suicide, riots, demonstrations, rape, hooliganism, child battling, police brutality, partisan center violence, and civil wars.

III. YOUTHS AND URBAN VIOLENCE

As witnessed in urban cities in Nigeria, urbanization and growth of cities have weakened the social and cultural structures that bind people together. The persistent inflow of people into urban areas in search of greener pastures motivated the political, social, and economic organizations in the metropolitan cities. Communalism is an old story; relationships are strictly superficial and individualistic. Urban communities are densely populated with various diversities of problems, such as ethnicity, religious indifference, society and safety needs, poverty, and homelessness, amongst others.

The term youth defies any precise definition, but it may be defined as a man's life span duration when one is young. This could be between childhood and maturity or the early period of existence in terms of growth and development. The youthful stage may be the adolescent years, teenage period, or being young. Nevertheless, the definition of youth should not be a priority, but the impact of youth in the urban city is. Youth in urban cities learn and develop often develop a sense of belonging and identity in their environment. The surroundings allow social, cultural, and ethnic diversity interplay than the rural environments. The interactions of youths in the urban environment impact the socialization rate with the surroundings, thereby exposing youths to many influences as they develop and practice such attitudes in society. Hence, violence happens in every community across the nation, affects people in every community across the country, and affects people of all ages; few individuals and families experience violence as an isolated incident. More often than not, youths experience domestic violence, child abuse, sexual violence, and suicidal behavior, most especially at home. Violence can be cyclical in nature because violence at the micro level can later be macro in nature when measures are unchecked. Violence in homes or communities often affects youth behavior and societal performance, and its connection should be considered within and outside specific environmental settings.

Youths' involvement in violence has been on the increase owing to the lack of job opportunities, the proliferation of arms and ammunition, and economic hardship, amongst others, in the urban city. These have impacted security and made the urban city a hideout for various criminal activities in Nigeria. Okunola et al. (2020) maintained that youth violence is representative of the negative relationship between the socio-cultural and socioeconomic factors in society. It is disheartening that adolescents are part and parcel of the perpetrators of the urban violence. In addition, the mass media and social networks have polluted society with violent pictures, videos, and recordings, which could influence the youth's behavior and encourage them to violence. The urban violence witnessed in the majority of the city is perpetrated by youths who are comprised of teenagers. The profane and uncontrolled censorship of information from the mass media, Internet, and social networks, amongst others, has aggravated the impacts. Youth are fast learners and could learn various crimes through different associations and those on the internet. Okunola et al. (2020) maintained that lack of parental control, substance abuse or criminality, joblessness, peer influence, poverty, and governance, amongst others, are some of the contributing factors to youth violence in the urban city. Factors facilitating urban violence are enormous. Some violent behaviors exhibited by youths in urban cities are the result of peer influences, substance abuse, and unemployment. The youths orchestrate urban violence as a result of illicit consumption of substances of abuse, criminality from parents, and bad governance. Major cities in Nigeria witnessing urban violence like kidnapping are associated with bad governance and leadership failure. The youth have taken kidnapping to reduce the impacts of the harsh economic crisis in the country. Booth & Shaw (2020) explained that the parental role helps reduce the push factor and aggressive involvement of youth in urban violence. The parental role in the upbringing of a child cannot be overemphasized. When children are adequately trained, and parents inculcate the cultural and societal norms, they will live with it. It is disheartening that parents motivate youths into violence. Most parents push their children into illicit acts like secret cult activities, secret organizations, and internet fraud, amongst others.

In the opinion of Guerra and Smith (2006), culture and ethnicity negatively impact youth taken to violence in the urban city. The relationship between personality traits and environment has shown the impacts. The environment affects the lives of youths and has made them commit crimes in urban areas. An environment characterized by crimes and social vices will promote a culture of violence. These have increased the rate of rape, assaults, arson, and break and entry in some of the city centers in Nigeria. Okunala et al. (2020) posited that culture could be a risk factor and a protective factor in youth involvement in violence. Inyang & Abraham (2013) maintained that when youths are re-integrated, political leaders and decision-makers are transparent, poverty alleviation programs are instituted, slums and shanties are upgraded, effective policing amongst others, and the urban center will be a haven.

IV. FACTORS ENCOURAGING YOUTH IN URBAN VIOLENCE

Urban youth unemployment

The unemployment rate in urban cities has increased the rate of urban violence in the city. Youth unemployment has been adjudged to make violence economical and beneficial by providing youths with resources derived from different violence as a means of sustenance or livelihood to cater to their needs. The youths have

been envisaged as tools in religious and political leader's hands. Inyang (2009) has described youth unemployment as the driving factor encouraging kidnapping, just like the maxim "an idle mind is the devil's workshop." Bello & Jamilu (2017) explained that unemployment among youths and adolescents is playing a pivotal role in the consistent increase in kidnapping. The lack of jobs has motivated youths into various violence in the urban city. Unemployment makes them seek alternatives for survival, which include robbery, pocket-picking, stealing, assault, and burglary, among others.

Moral decadence: The moral and cultural decadence has spurred the increase in urban violence. The weak moral and cultural value system in urban areas has necessitated the youths to venture into various forms of urban violence. Similarly, Onovo (2009) corroborated the persistent increase in crimes in Nigeria due to the celebration of fraudsters by leaders. Onovo reiterated that the increase in crimes is caused by the quest for materialism and loss of societal values; people are ready to go the extra length to get wealth or material possessions at all costs, irrespective of whose horse is gored a case of society's loss of norms and values. Urban areas have significantly impacted society's cultural values to the extent that urban dwellers see nothing wrong with immorality and internet fraudsters. Urban dwellers lack traditional and cultural principles of maintaining peace, stability, and coexistence.

In addition, the educational system in urban areas is gradually deteriorating, and there is an increased number of school leavers and many unemployed youths. This has also impacted the urban city. This chunk of school leavers, graduates not gainfully employed, engage in various violence to make ends meet. This is visible in the availability of multiple crimes in different nooks and crannies of urban areas. The degrading educational system and unemployment have made the youth the prime perpetrators of urban violence.

Political instrumentalism and leadership failure

Youth have been used in urban areas to play significant roles in political violence and agitations. They have been used to actualize many movements in the urban city and carry out heinous crimes like rape, assassination, murder, riots, and repression, amongst others. Bello & Jamilu (2017) buttress that political leaders engage in kidnapping due to corruption in politics, where kidnapping was used to further the political aim of a particular group or movement. In this case, ransom are usually paid to fund their movement. The political leaders use the youth to engage in so many social vices which threaten the peace and security of the nation. The leadership failure has aggravated the crime rate, as youth take into crime, justifying the political leaders as mentors.

Domestic and family violence. The increase in domestic violence in many homes is a facilitating factor in youth violence. Much of the violence orchestrated in the urban town is learned in the home. The family is an indispensable tool in socialization. It is in the family that the child acquires most of the personality traits. Giddens (1998) explained further that "family violence is a sort of domestic and physical abuse directed by one member of the family against another member or other members of the family." This violence comes in the form of aggressive behavior towards members of the family, children, wives, husbands, and relatives. Many Youths have abandoned their homes, taking refuge in motor parks or under bridges in urban centers. Youths from different homes connive together to commit a heinous crime and unleash mayhem in the urban centers. Some of these youths are traumatized as a result of domestic violence witnessed in the home, loneliness, betrayal, parental failure, and abuse of substances, amongst others. This negative role learned in the family negatively impacts their life, and the ripple effect is felt in urban violence.

Management of youths and urban Violence

The significant factors promoting urban violence and increasing insecurity in the urban centers are poverty and economic hardship embedded in unemployment. The frustration faced by youth in making ends meet strains them into violence. The lack of job opportunities to employ youths in the urban centers has worsened this. Moreover, the class disparity in the urban centers, where the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer in society, has also spurred the youths to violence. Obatero (1994) lends credence that the exhibitions of affluence and wealth by the rich in public places and media, and the exposition of youths to a good life in the urban centers has caused strain on youths and spurred the youths to violence, which has caused insecurity and affected the peace and stability. Therefore, to ameliorate the effects of urban violence and maintain peace and stability in the urban centers, the government and political leaders need to create job opportunities by building industries and partnerships with local and foreign companies. Programs should be geared towards alleviating poverty and cushioning the economic hardship.

Furthermore, it promotes urban productivity through policies and roadmaps for long- and short-term economic development aimed at improving the standard of living, bridging the gap between the poor and rich, and increasing wages in urban centers. De Noronha (1991) explained that "global strategies aimed at urban productivity.. and eradication of poverty in the urban centers are sine qua non to peace and stability in the society". These factors are the pull factors in the urban centers, and they spur the youths to various crimes that cause violence. A good roadmap by the Government and relevant stakeholders reassures the masses of the commitment

to their welfare. Obatero (1994) explained that "enhanced functional efficiency and productivity are the mechanisms for raising the population's living standards, and consequently promote happiness. This involves programs geared towards reducing the socioeconomic disparity between the rich and the poor, allocating physical and socioeconomic amenities, and creating a conducive environment for all to thrive at equal opportunities. The increasing population in the urban centers causes a reduction and degradation in the available resources, infrastructures, and amenities. Infrastructures, social amenities, industries, and employment opportunities should be implemented in rural areas to reduce rural-urban migration. In addition, decentralizing the urban resources will help reduce youth violence in the urban cities. This includes equitable employment opportunities, social amenities, housing allocation, transportation system, and others that increase the spate of violence in the urban centers. While contending with urban violence, there is a need to improve urban centers' degenerated facilities, structures, and social amenities. The epileptic power supply, abandoned health centers, bad road networks, and poor wages, amongst others, could help cushion youths' involvement in urban violence. The need for programs aimed at engaging the youths and empowering them with skills will ameliorate urban violence. Moreso, an egalitarian society void of ethnic and religious indifference and human rights will rekindle hope in the urban cities and help cushion violence.

Urban centers have hideouts for most of the criminal activity orchestrated in the city. Policies and strategies should be implemented to flush the city's bad spots used for violence and mayhem. Law enforcement should regularly patrol and flush out this miscreant in the various bad spots like motor parks, under bridges, uncompleted buildings, and abandoned warehouses. They could also be rehabilitated and engaged with vocational skills.

The need to develop rural areas to address urban-rural migration remains a sine qua non to stop urban violence. Social amenities, good road networks, industries, security, and relevant amenities should be provided for conducive and harmonious living in rural areas. Most of the youths that cause violence in the urban cities migrate from the rural areas. Frustration sets in when expectations are unmet, and the alternative is crime. Programs should empower youth and women through job opportunities, politics, and societal decision-making. Alienation of youths in critical decision-making in society has also been adjudged as one of the key factors encouraging youths to violence.

Finally, the security agencies should live up to their responsibility. They should embark on aggressive patrol, surveillance, simulation, and enforcement of rules and orders, which will rekindle peace and stability in the society and urban areas.

V. CONCLUSION

The persistent increase of urban violence in the urban centers is alarming. The youths are at the frontline in this violence, spurred by economic hardship and unemployment. The political leaders and government appointees have been adjudged to be perpetrators by using the youths as a tool of violence to gain political positions, cause mayhem, and orchestrate their will. The government has tried to maintain peace and stability in urban centers by the use of violence through national security agencies to enforce law and order. However, urban violence tends to increase with a large population of rural-urban migration. Amongst the facilitating factors of urban violence are the strains in means and goal, hence the resort to violent crimes like kidnapping, rape, robbery, burglary, and stealing, amongst others.

To curb violence in the urban cities, the study recommends that the Government create job opportunities, provide social amenities in the rural and urban centers, provide good governance and leadership, and involve the youths in the critical decision-making process in the nation. It will help to reassure the youth that the government and leaders have their interests and that the security agencies should live up to their mandates.

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