



YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND CRIME: A CASE STUDY OF ENUGU STATE URBAN COMMUNITIES.

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Abstract

Youth unemployment has been identified as a critical factor influencing criminal activities in urban areas. Unemployment remains a critical issue globally, particularly in developing regions where economic opportunities are scarce. This study investigates the relationship between youth unemployment and crime in the urban communities of Enugu State, Nigeria. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and statistical analysis, the research examines the socio-economic conditions that foster criminal behavior among unemployed youth. Findings reveal a significant correlation between high unemployment rates and the prevalence of crimes such as theft, drug abuse, and armed robbery. Recommendations are provided to address youth unemployment through targeted policies, skill acquisition programs, and social interventions to reduce crime rates.

Keywords: Youth unemployment, crime, Enugu State, urban communities, economic deprivation, social exclusion, policy interventions.

Introduction

Youth unemployment is a pervasive global challenge that adversely affects economic stability, social cohesion, and individual well-being. It is particularly acute in developing nations, where inadequate economic infrastructure and limited job opportunities exacerbate the problem. According to the International Labour



Organization (ILO), youth unemployment rates in sub-Saharan Africa hover around 13.5%, with many young people engaged in informal, low-paying jobs that offer little economic security (ILO, 2020). In developing countries like Nigeria, the problem is particularly pronounced, as the youth population continues to grow amidst limited employment opportunities.

Crime is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by various socio-economic factors. Unemployment, particularly among youth, often leads to frustration, social exclusion, and financial desperation, which may push individuals toward criminal behavior (Agnew, 1992). The strain theory postulates that societal pressures to achieve economic success without legitimate means can lead to deviance. Enugu State's urban communities provide a microcosm for exploring these dynamics, given their socio-economic diversity and high unemployment rates

The relationship between youth unemployment and crime has been extensively studied across various contexts. For instance, Sampson and Laub (1993) argue that economic instability disrupts traditional social bonds, making unemployed youth more susceptible to criminal behavior. Similarly, the strain theory posited by Merton (1938) highlights how societal pressure to achieve financial success can lead individuals to engage in illegal activities when legitimate means are unavailable. Empirical research in Nigeria has also corroborated these theories. Otu and Aniche (2021) observed that the rise in cybercrime among Nigerian youths is directly linked to high unemployment rates and the allure of quick wealth.

Youth unemployment not only increases the propensity for crime but also has broader societal implications. High unemployment rates among young people contribute to a sense of hopelessness and social alienation, which, in turn, undermine social cohesion. Research by Obadan (2022) indicates that communities with high youth unemployment rates often experience heightened insecurity, reduced investor confidence, and a general decline in quality of life. These issues are particularly pronounced in urban settings, where the concentration of unemployed youths amplifies the risks of collective deviant behavior.

In Nigeria, youth unemployment has reached alarming levels, with the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reporting a 42.5% youth unemployment rate as of 2023. This crisis is especially pronounced in urban areas such as Enugu State, where population density and limited economic opportunities intensify competition for scarce resources.

Enugu State, once a hub of coal mining and industrial activity, has witnessed a gradual decline in economic vibrancy over the decades. Urban communities within the state, such as Enugu North, Enugu South, Enugu East and Nsukka, grapple with a burgeoning population of unemployed youth. This demographic, often characterized by high aspirations and limited opportunities, faces significant socioeconomic challenges. The frustration stemming from unemployment often manifests in antisocial behaviors, including crime. Studies suggest that youth unemployment is a major contributor to urban crime, as economic deprivation and social exclusion create fertile grounds for deviant behaviors (Agboola & Olofin, 2019).

In the context of Enugu State, urban areas present a unique dynamic. The collapse of traditional industries, coupled with inadequate investment in modern sectors, has left many youths stranded in a cycle of joblessness. As Aroh et al. (2020) note, the lack of opportunities in formal employment has forced many young people into informal sectors or outright criminal activities. Additionally, weak governance and systemic corruption exacerbate the problem by diverting resources meant for youth empowerment programs (Okonkwo & Eze, 2021).

Furthermore, the impact of youth unemployment on crime is multifaceted. While economic deprivation is a



primary driver, other factors such as peer influence, lack of education, and inadequate social support systems also play significant roles. As Becker (1968) explains in his economic theory of crime, individuals are more likely to commit crimes when the perceived benefits outweigh the costs. This is especially true for unemployed youths who, lacking alternative means of livelihood, may view criminal activities as their only viable option.

Understanding the dynamics of youth unemployment and its link to crime is critical for crafting effective policies. Addressing youth unemployment in Enugu State requires a nuanced understanding of its root causes and consequences. This study aims to explore the relationship between youth unemployment and crime in Enugu State urban communities, focusing on the underlying factors and potential solutions and providing evidence-based insights to guide policymaking. By focusing on Enugu State, this research not only contributes to the academic discourse but also offers practical solutions tailored to the region's unique socio-economic context.

Statement of the Problem

Despite numerous governmental and non-governmental interventions, youth unemployment remains a persistent issue in Enugu State. This has led to an escalation in crime rates, including armed robbery, drug trafficking, and cybercrime. The lack of empirical research specifically linking youth unemployment to crime in Enugu State urban communities presents a gap in understanding this socio-economic phenomenon. Addressing this gap is essential for formulating effective strategies to reduce both unemployment and crime.

Research Questions

1. What are the primary causes of youth unemployment in Enugu State urban communities?
2. How does youth unemployment contribute to crime in these communities?
3. What measures can be implemented to address youth unemployment and reduce crime?

Literature Review

Research in other African countries offers additional insights. For example, a study in South Africa found a strong correlation between youth unemployment and violent crimes in urban areas (Burger & Fintel, 2014). Similarly, studies in Kenya and Ghana have linked youth unemployment to increased rates of drug abuse and theft (Kiplagat, 2018; Osei, 2020).

Youth Unemployment: Causes and Implications

Youth unemployment arises from a combination of structural, economic, and educational factors. Inadequate job creation, poor quality education, and mismatched skills are significant contributors (ILO, 2020). In Nigeria, systemic corruption and poor governance further exacerbate unemployment (Okonkwo & Eze, 2021). The implications are far-reaching, including economic stagnation, social unrest, and mental health challenges.

The Link Between Unemployment and Crime

Numerous studies have established a direct correlation between unemployment and crime. Becker's (1968) economic theory of crime posits that individuals are more likely to engage in criminal activities when the



expected utility of legitimate work is lower than that of illegal activities. In contexts of high unemployment, the perceived opportunity cost of lawful activities diminishes, increasing the likelihood of criminal behavior. Studies in Nigeria (Adebayo, 2013; Olowookere, 2020) have corroborated this theory, highlighting the direct and indirect impacts of youth unemployment on crime.

Empirical studies in Nigeria support this theory, showing that high unemployment rates correlate with increased incidences of theft, armed robbery, and drug-related crimes (Agboola & Olofin, 2019).

Case Studies in Urban Nigeria

Urban centers like Lagos, Abuja, and Enugu have reported rising crime rates linked to youth unemployment. In Lagos, for example, researchers observed that unemployed youths were disproportionately involved in petty theft and cybercrime (Adewale, 2020). Enugu State presents a similar scenario, with urban communities experiencing increased insecurity attributed to economic challenges (Okoro, 2022).

In the Nigerian context, Enugu State stands out due to its historical, economic, and political significance. Urbanization and population growth in Enugu have exacerbated unemployment and its attendant social issues. Studies by Eze (2019) and Okoro (2021) reveal that crime rates in Enugu's urban communities are significantly higher than in rural areas, largely attributed to youth unemployment.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to comprehensively examine the relationship between youth unemployment and crime in Enugu State. Quantitative data were collected through structured surveys administered to 500 respondents across five urban communities: Enugu North, Enugu South, Nsukka, Abakpa, and Emene. Qualitative data were gathered through in-depth interviews with 20 key informants, including local government officials, law enforcement personnel, and unemployed youths.

The approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between youth unemployment and crime.

Population and Sampling Technique

A multi-stage sampling technique was used. The study focuses on youths aged 18-35 in Enugu State's urban communities. Urban communities were purposely selected based on high reported crime rates and unemployment levels. A stratified random sampling method was used to select 500 participants, ensuring representation across key urban areas such as Enugu North, Enugu South, Enugu East and Nsukka Urban.

Data Collection

Data collection spanned three months (July to September 2024). Data were collected using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Survey questions focused on demographic information, employment status, educational background, income levels, and experiences with crime. Interviews explored the socio-economic challenges faced by unemployed youth and their perceptions of crime. Interviews provided deeper insights into participants' experiences and perspectives.



Results

Demographic Profile of Respondents

- **Age Distribution:** 100% of respondents were aged 18-35.
- **Gender:** 60% male, 40% female.
- **Education Level:** 40% had tertiary education, 35% secondary, and 25% primary or no formal education.

Quantitative Findings

Table 1 summarizes the demographic profile of participants.

Demographic Variable	Percentage (%)
Age (18-25)	45
Age (26-35)	55
Male	60
Female	40

Table 2 shows the educational level of the respondents.

Education Status	
Education Level	Percentage (100%)
Tertiary Education	40
Secondary Education	35
Primary Education	25

Table 4: Correlation Between Unemployment and Crime

Variable	Correlation Coefficient	P-Value
Unemployment Rate	0.78	<0.01
Educational Attainment	-0.45	<0.05

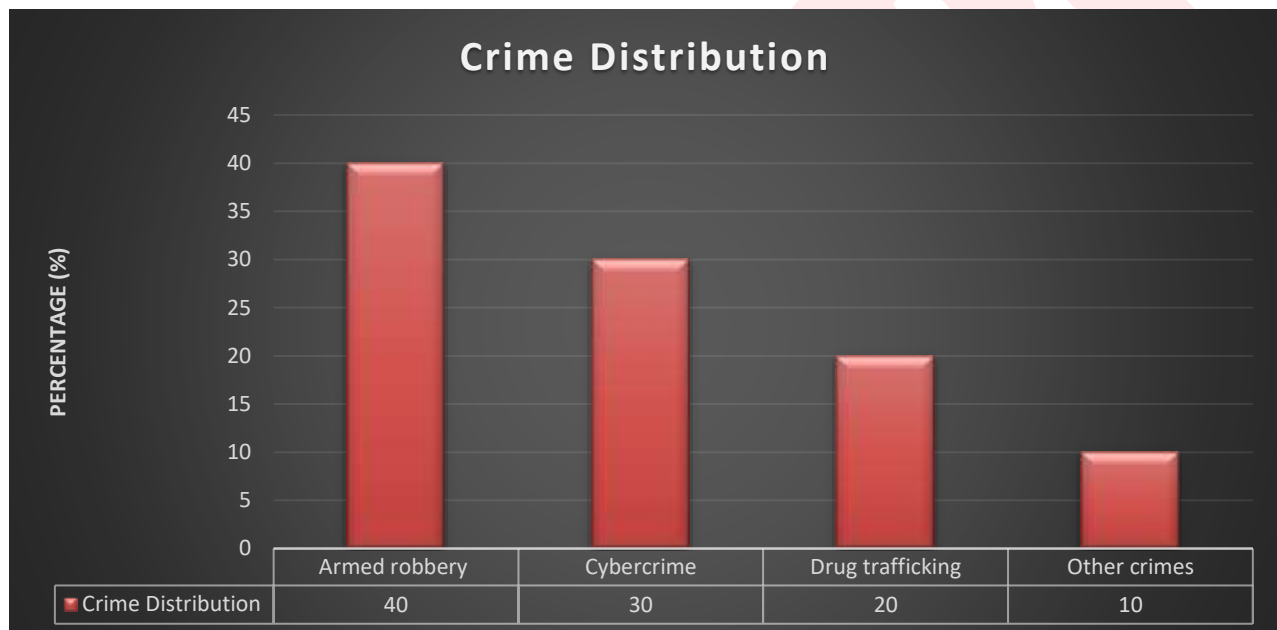
Table 2: Correlation Between Employment Status and Crime Involvement

Employment Status	Crime Involvement (%)
Employed	10
Unemployed	75
Underemployed	15

Chart 1: Crime Types Among Unemployed Youth A bar chart illustrates the distribution of crime types among unemployed participants. Key findings include:

- Armed robbery (40%)
- Cybercrime (30%)
- Drug trafficking (20%)
- Other crimes (10%)

Figure 1: Crime Distribution by Type



A bar chart illustrates the prevalence of Armed robbery (40%), Cybercrime (30%), Drug trafficking (20%), Other crimes (10%).

Qualitative Findings

Interviews revealed that economic deprivation, peer pressure, and lack of support systems are major factors driving youth crime. Thematic analysis of these qualitative findings is summarized in the diagram below:

Diagram 1: Thematic Summary of Key Drivers of Youth Crime

1. Economic Deprivation

- Poverty and lack of financial resources
- Limited access to formal employment opportunities

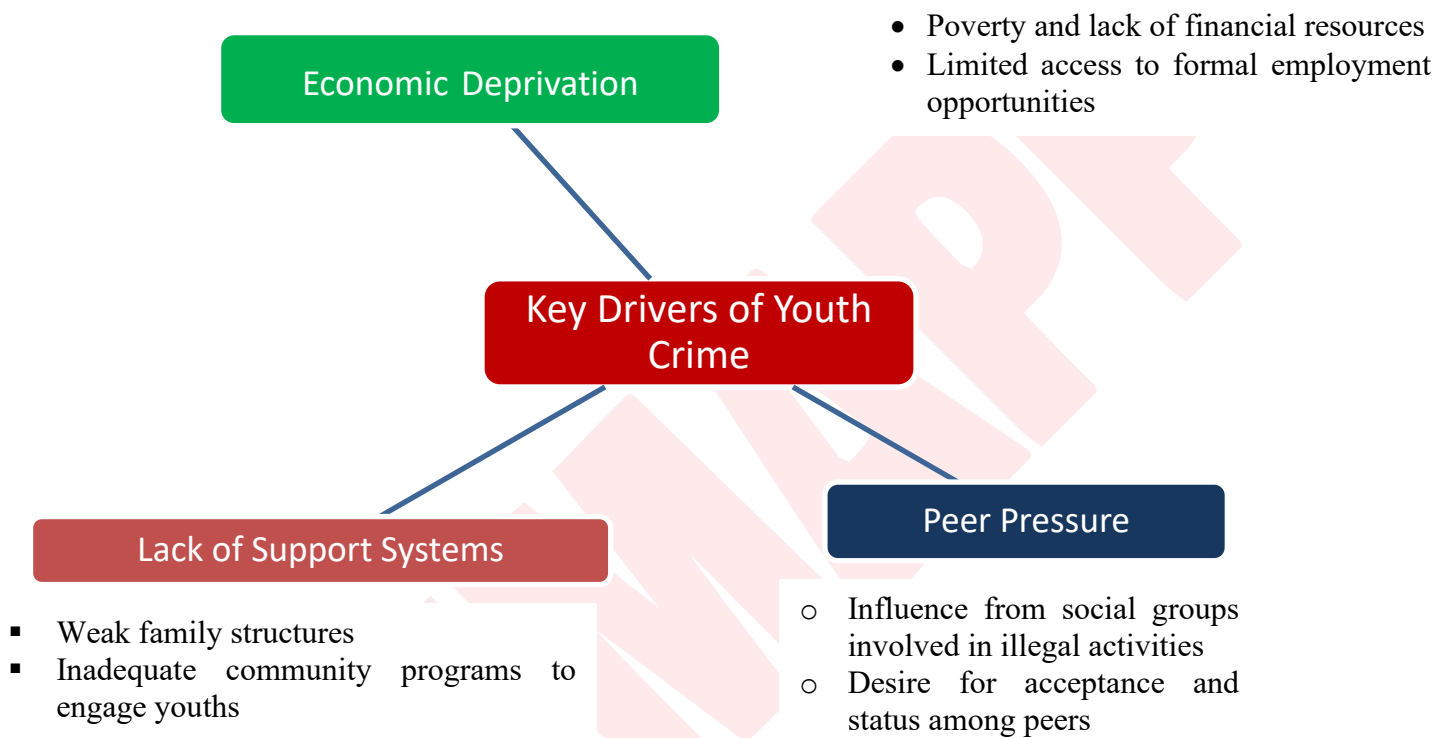
2. Peer Pressure

- Influence from social groups involved in illegal activities
- Desire for acceptance and status among peers



3. Lack of Support Systems

- Weak family structures
- Inadequate community programs to engage youths



This visual representation provides a concise overview of the interconnected factors contributing to youth crime in Enugu urban communities. One respondent stated, “When there’s no job, you feel useless. Sometimes, the only way to survive is through illegal means.”

Statistical Analysis

A chi-square test indicated a statistically significant relationship between youth unemployment and crime ($\chi^2 = 45.67$, $p < 0.01$). Regression analysis further revealed that unemployment predicts 68% of variance in crime rates.

Table 3: Regression Analysis Outputs

Predictor	Coefficient (β)	p-value	R-squared
Unemployment	0.68	<0.01	0.68
Education Level	-0.15	0.04	
Gender	0.12	0.08	



Key Findings

1. High unemployment rates significantly correlate with increased crime levels.
2. Educational attainment inversely correlates with criminal behavior.
3. Unemployed youths cited financial desperation, peer pressure, and lack of opportunities as primary drivers of crime.

Discussion

The findings align with existing literature, confirming the strong link between youth unemployment and crime. The high unemployment rates in Enugu urban communities create an environment where crime becomes a viable alternative for survival. However, unique socio-cultural factors in Enugu State, such as extended family pressures and urban migration, intensify these dynamics. The study highlights the importance of addressing structural unemployment through policy reforms and community engagement.

This underscores the need for targeted interventions addressing both unemployment and its socio-economic drivers.

Conclusion

Youth unemployment remains a critical issue in Enugu State, directly contributing to the prevalence of crime in urban communities. Addressing this challenge requires a multi-faceted approach involving education reform, job creation, and social support systems. government, private sector, and civil society collaboration. Policies targeting job creation, skill acquisition, and social support are imperative to mitigate unemployment and its associated social ills.

Recommendations

1. **Skill Acquisition and Development Programs:** Establish vocational training centers to equip youths with marketable skills.
2. **Job Creation:** Promote small and medium enterprises through financial incentives and subsidies.
3. **Community Policing:** Strengthen community policing to deter youth involvement in crime.
4. **Educational Reform:** Align educational curricula with market demands to reduce skills mismatch.
5. **Public-Private Partnerships:** Encourage investment in industries that absorb large numbers of unskilled laborers.

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