

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF POVERTY ON CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR AMONG YOUTHS: A CASE OF AKPABUYO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at assessing the impact of poverty on criminal behaviours among youths in Cross River State. Research questions were formulated to guide and give direction to the study. Relevant and related literatures were reviewed, using the survey design, 150 respondents made up of adult men and women and youths were selected to participate in the study. The major instrument for data collection was questionnaire. Data collected was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlative Coefficient and presented in simple % tables. The result revealed that poverty significantly influences criminal tendencies among youths. Most youths with low socio-economic background are easily lured into criminal activities. It was recommended that the government, non – governmental agencies and parastatals and the general public must embark on youth empowerment programs that would alleviate poverty at least to the barest minimum while enhancing their young minds and directing them towards better and rewarding activities.

Keywords: *Youths, poverty, criminal behaviours*

1. Introduction

Explanations for crime have taken various dimensions according to different theorists and scholars. Some blame it on defective family structure or arrested personality adjustment. Others emphasize factors such as inequality, environmental influence, poor socialization process (Henslin,2006). In this regards, criminal acts may be induced by many unforeseen factors and circumstances. Crime, according to Taylor (2006) could be seen as a fault of the social system whose institutions do not work equally for all its members. Sociologists look at the social in which individuals find themselves. Could it be that the problem lay not with the individual but in the social condition under which the individual live? The concern here is why people should exhibit behavior that is in violation of established norms, violations that may ultimately result in their being labeled as criminal behavior in terms of social processes.

Mostly, persons known to commit street crimes as reported in the crime index are poor, uneducated, often unemployed and residents of low income neighborhoods (Anasi, 2010). Would a socially and economically sound person turn out to be criminal? In this research work, there is need to understand the socio-economic background of most juvenile and criminals in order to draw correlations or otherwise between low socio-economic status (poverty) and criminal behavior.

1.1 *Objectives of the study*

The objectives of this study include the following:

- i. To give an empirical analysis of the role of poverty on criminal behavior.
- ii. To examine the circumstances that make youths participate in crime.
- iii. To find out why crime participation is high in certain areas and among certain groups in the society.
- iv. To identify some ways in which the society can be able to tackle the problem of crimes.

2. Literature review

2.1 *Poverty*

The concept of poverty have assumed not only local but global trend resulting in many countries administering numerous policies in a bid to curb this menace. Wenger (2007) describes poverty as a living condition in which individuals fail to achieve a minimum standard of living. Haralambos & Holborn (2000) assert that poverty is a situation where a person is unable to acquire the minimum necessities that make for well-being. Poverty is marked by the inability to get good livelihood, have good house to live in, support oneself without depending on others, inability to acquire good healthcare, good educational training etc. Haralambos & Holborn (2000) identifies three (3) kinds of poverty. These are absolute, relative and subjective poverty. They describe absolute poverty as a state where the living condition is really critical and there is difficult in survival. According to them, to determine absolute poverty a yardstick is established against which to measure poverty. Poverty is in this context measured by pricing the basic necessities of life, mapping out the poverty line in terms of the price. The relative poverty according to them, is in terms of adjustment from people of a particular society of what is taken as a reasonable and acceptable standard of living and way of life due to the conditions of the day.

Giddens (2006) says that subjective poverty has to do with whether or not an individual or groups of persons feel they are poor. They explain however that this has a close relationship with relative poverty. Townsend (1970), also argues that individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be poor when they lack the general resources for quality living as approved by the society. To him poverty is synonymous with relative deprivations which is the effect on the mal-distribution of resources. Some writers asserts that poor people grow up in a culture of poverty a sub culture transmitted from generation to generation which soften is the struggle for existence and respect, but which also attract self-defeating behavioral pattern. This school of thought sees poverty as caused by the subculture and that before poverty can be eliminated, the values and behavior pattern of the poor must be changed. The vicious cycles of poverty mean that lifelong handicaps and troubles are passed down from one generation to another. According to Carr & Sloan (2003) these hereditary plagues could include: no school or education, child labour, lack of basic needs, easy transmission of diseases, unemployment and very low income. Danziger & Haveman (2011) added, other plagues associated with poverty to include: a self-destructing habit of alcohol and drug abuse, taken as a means to cope with stress or forget despairs; poor housing and living conditions paving way for different kinds of diseases (water and food – related diseases)

2.2 *Causes of poverty*

Ogwumike (1998) clearly without any prejudice enumerate some of the basic causes of poverty. Accordingly, rural poverty is created and perpetuated by a number of closely inter-linked socio-economic processes, policy induced processes, dualism, population growth resources, management and environment, marginalization of women, cultural and ethical factors, exploitative intermediation, internal political fragmentation and civil strife, international process. Townsend (1970) identified the causes of poverty to have been uncovered in the following factors:

- i. **Lack of employment opportunities:** Empirically, it has been discovered in several studies that the ability to find and maintain employment is a major protagonist of poverty. When jobs become scarce, there is a general increase in poverty rates.
- ii. **Low level of education:** The relationship between education and income is a familiar one. Education is essential for national development; hence, it should not be a luxury for the privileged few. Formal education not only enhances the quality of one's life but it also play greater role in material reward. Those with little education are disadvantaged in the labour market. Apart from enhancing the employment opportunities of people, education also serves to break the culture of poverty by reducing ignorance and innocent misdemeanor.
- iii. **Large family size** is also known to contribute immensely to poverty rate in most communities. Most community members do not appreciate the importance of family planning as means of reducing poverty. High fertility and child mortality rates are also one of the major causes of poverty in terms of education. In effect, if one has too many children, it becomes harder to afford the education for all of them. Secondly, it is pretty hard to feed and provide adequately for all.
- iv. **Widespread corruption:** The problem is when the phenomenon becomes widespread and entrenched as a normal social practice. Corruption then generates large failures in the system, preventing the implementation of laws themselves, and takes a seat at the core of the causes of poverty.
- v. **Ethnic division, conflicts and discrimination:** Plenty of economic research indicates that social tensions stemming from religious, ethnic, and racial divisions are frequent causes of poverty too.

2.3 *Poverty and crime: a correlation*

In the U.S, crime is often perceived as a problem amid areas with high levels of poverty (Urdang 2012), however, many other factors such as population density, minority population, locality, unemployment are correlated with poverty and affect crime as well. In countries where social discrimination factor is high scholars have opined that less education meant more criminal activities ranging from casual theft to drug related offenses. Anasi (2010) stated that there are huge consequences of this kind of situation for public policy which needs to be fine-tuned to have a positive impact of keeping children in school on a bid to reducing poverty. Statistically, countries with higher poverty level especially poorer areas and ghettos have usually much higher crime rates than other areas made up of middle or high class individuals. (Danziger & Haveman, 2001). Adding to this point, Ludwig (2000) opined that people resort to crime only if they perceive that potential benefits outweigh the cost of committing a particular crime. As Ludwig (2000) puts it “if legal ways of obtaining finances cannot support one, then illegal ways are resorted to in order to survive”. Crime offers a way in which impoverished people can obtain goods and services that they cannot get to or achieve through legitimate means.

The degree of unemployment also correlates with poverty. Higher unemployment level would increase poverty and at the same time engenders crime activities due to depression associated with being unemployed (Short, 2007). In their perspective, Chukuezi (2009) and Oruh (2004) attributed poverty to individual behavioral characteristics and choices such as alcohol and substance abuse, rape, theft etc. they suggest that the problem of poverty is within the control of the poor themselves and therefore policies and programs need to influence those choices through incentives and prohibitions.

2.4 *Poverty alleviation measures: a case of Nigeria*

Over the years, various successive governments have embarked on series of poverty programs in order to reduce if not eradicate the menace called poverty. Many of these programs and varied impact on poverty alleviation. For example:

1. The establishment of Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) was not only a radical departure from the previous programs, but also recognized the complementary associated with basic needs such as food, shelter, potable water etc. DFRRI had tremendous impact on the rural areas. For instance, between the time of inception in 1986 and 1993, DFRRI had completed over 278,526km or roads. Over 5,000 rural communities benefited from its rural electrification programs. This integrated approach to rural development, no doubt, provided for the necessary basic infrastructures that can stimulates the growth of agro-allied small-scale enterprises in rural areas. Furthermore, DFRRI impacted positively on food production. For instance, there was a steady and significant rise in agricultural outputs as shown by the index of agricultural production between 1986 – 1993 (CBN, Statistical Bulletin, December 1998). However, DFRRI could not be achieve many of its objectives due to many factors which include lack of standards for project harmonization and effective mechanisms for coordination among the three tiers of government and between DFRRI and the levels of government (CBN Bauchi Zone; and Enugu zone, 1998). Hence with time DFRRI could not sustain the tempo with which it started and it ended up living up to expectation and become defunct (National Planning Commission, 1994).

2. The National Directorate of Employment (NDE) was the main organ for employment creation during this period. The objectives of NDE include: to design and implement programs to combat mass unemployment; and articulate policies aimed at developing work programs with labour intensive potentials. Given that poverty manifests itself in the form of unemployment and underemployment, the schemes/programs of NDE could be said to have poverty alleviation focus.

3. The Better Life Programs (BLP) was set up to enhance the quality of life of rural women among other objectives. Poverty in Nigeria is a rural phenomenon and the rural women are worst hit by the dreadful malady of poverty; thus is due to lack of basic skills and education necessary for gainful employment. The targeting of women reduce significantly aggregate level of poverty in the country. The BLP, therefore tried to harness the potentials of rural women and thereby impacted positively on their economic activities and incomes. The BLP improved the quality of life of many women through the distribution of various inputs granting of easy credits, and the establishment of various educational /enlightenment programs. Based on available evidence, Ogwumike (1988) concluded that the BLP made tremendous impacts with regards to poverty alleviation. However, the success of the program was not hijacked by position – seeking individuals but the resources set for the program were diverted and used for personal enrichment.

4. The People’s Bank of Nigeria (PBN) was set up to encourage savings and provide credit facilities for the underprivileged in both urban and rural areas. Also, Community Banks (CB) were established to provide banking facilities for rural dwellers as well as to support micro-enterprises in urban area (Oladeji and Abiola, 1998). These two banking schemes were established in recognition of the indispensable role of finance in poverty alleviation.

5. The Family Support Program (FSP) was set up to provide healthcare delivery, child welfare, youth development and improved nutritional status to families in rural areas. Also, the Family Economic Advancement Program (FEAP) was established to provide credit facilities to cooperative societies to support the establishment to cottage industries in both rural and urban areas. The program was also designed to create employment opportunities at ward levels, encourage the design and manufacture of appropriate plants, machinery and equipment’s and provide opportunities for the training of ward-based business operators, (Oladeji and Abiola, 1998). In a nutshell, both FSP and FEAP were designed and set up to improve the quality of life of rural dwellers. Although poverty reduction in the 2001 budget seems to focus on that aspect of the budget allocated for the program, however, many other aspects of the budget in terms of projects even though not deliberately designed to tackle poverty, could have tremendous impact on poverty reduction if properly implemented. The major reasons for the failure of poverty reduction related programs in Nigeria include program inconsistency, poor implementation, corruption of government officials and public servants, poor targeting mechanisms and failure to focus directly on the poor (Ogwumike 1998; and Egware, 1997).

3. Methodology

The study adopted survey method to aid collection of data to obtain reasonable data to investigate how and why criminal behavior is linked with impoverished youths in Akpabuyo Local Government Area. A sample of 150 adults and youths both male and female respondents were selected using a combination of cluster and purposive sampling techniques. Cluster sampling was used in selecting five communities from a total of 10 council wards/communities in Akpabuyo, thereafter; purposive technique was adopted to extract actual respondents (150) for study. The researchers administered structured questionnaires consisting 25 close - ended statements requiring “strongly agreed, agreed, strongly disagreed and disagreed’ answers.

4. Results

Table 1 shows the responses of respondents 62 (41.31%) strongly agree that poverty is among the chief contribution to youths violating law and order. 50 (33.33%) agreed, 26 (17.33%) disagreed while 12 respondents representing 8% strongly disagreed. Again, in questionnaire item 22, 58 respondents representing 36.66% strongly agreed to the fact that youths in Akpabuyo are impoverished due to unemployment and therefore are prone to criminality in the area, 42 (28%) agreed, 22 (14.67%) strongly disagreed to the fact. Specifically, there was a positive and significant influence between poverty and crime among youths. This result is indicative of the fact that poverty can lead to high levels of stress that in turn leads individuals to commit theft, robbery or other criminal acts (Short, 2007).

Hypothesis H₀: There is no significant relationship between criminal behaviours and poverty among youth in Akpabuyo Local Government Area. To test for this hypothesis, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficiency analytical tool was employed and presented in the table 2.

The result in table 2 revealed that the calculated r –value of 0.36 was found to be greater than the critical r –value of 0.088 needed for significance at 0.05 alpha level of significance with 148 degrees of freedom. With this result the null hypothesis is rejected. It therefore implies that poverty significantly influence criminal behaviour among youths. Further results from the analysis revealed that for many impoverished youths, the prize or gain that crime yields may outweigh the risk of being punished and so care less of that and plunge head long into diverse negative activities.

5. Recommendation and Conclusion

Having established an understanding of effect of poverty on the behaviour of youths, it can be concluded from the findings of this study that poverty influences criminality among members of impoverished communities making especially the youth to become vulnerable to crime activities. Low income, unemployment tend to spur property – related crimes. E.g. (burglary, substance abuse). On the basis of findings of the study, the following recommendations were presented to curb the menace of both crime and poverty:-

- The creation and empowerment efforts and activities that will enable all citizens express their potentials and participate in the development of the society.
- Since low or poor level of education pave way for unemployment, literacy level of most rural dwellers can be improved by introducing free and compulsory education for the youth including vocational and training programs.
- Implementation of community oriented development projects and participatory approach in restoring issues and problems in the region.

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Table 1: Distribution of respondents showing responses for hypothesis

QUESTION 21	SA	A	SD	D	TOTAL
Poverty is a chief contributor to violation of law and order	62 (41.33%)	50 (33.33)	12 (8%)	26 (17.33%)	150 100
QUESTION 22					
Youths in the areas are mostly unemployed and highly prone to exhibit criminal behaviours.	58 (36.66%)	42 (28%)	22 (14.67%)	28 (18.66%)	150 100

Source: Field survey 2013

TABLE 2: Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between poverty and criminal behaviour among youths.

VARIABLES	Mean	S.D	r -cal
Poverty & criminal behaviour	13.47 14.58	2.35 2.48	0.36

$P < 0.05$ df = 148 Critical ≤ 0.088