

EMPLOYMENT INEQUALITY AND SOCIAL VICES AMONG YOUTHS IN POST COVID-19 ERA IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated employment inequality and social vices among youths in post covid-19 era in Cross River State, Nigeria. To achieve the purpose of this study, a null hypothesis was formulated. Survey research design was adopted for the study. Multiple sampling approaches were adopted in selecting the local government, wards and four hundred (400) respondents used for the study. A twenty item modified four point Likert scale questionnaire titled “Employment Inequality and Social Vices Questionnaire” (EISVQ) was the instrument used for gathering data for the study. To test the hypothesis formulated for the study, simple linear regression statistical tool was adopted for data analysis. The hypothesis formulated was tested at 0.05 level of significance. The result of the analysis revealed that employment inequality significantly predict social vices among youths in post covid-19 era in Cross River State.

Keywords: employment, inequality, social vices, youths, post covid-19 era, Cross River State, Nigeria.

1 INTRODUCTION

Background to the study

The media, both print and electronic in Cross River State and the entire country are trilled daily with reports of crimes committed by youths. The seeming helplessness of the law enforcement agents especially the police, in curbing the ugly and disturbing trend has made it more worrisome. Crime in Nigeria generally and Cross River State in particular is multidimensional and is capable of undermining our corporate existence as well as efforts towards sustainable development. The Nigeria corporate existence and development may be undermined by a number of factors among which is an escalating and uncontrolled crime. Security and crime have been deeply rooted in the political history of this country, particularly in recent time, which has emerged as a key concept in Nigeria's struggle for good governance, sustainable democracy and development.

According to Federal Bureau of Statistics (2020) between 2000 and 2019, the youth population in Nigeria grew from 30 million to well over 200,176,198 million. If put together, the population of Nigerians above 15 years of age to 35 years comprises 63 per cent of the entire population of the country. In absolute terms, there are more young people in Nigeria today than any other segment of the population, and this comes with its peculiar social and economic implications such as wider inequality gap, increase in poverty rate and crime. The frustrations of majority of the youth population, depending on their parents and relatives

for livelihood because of lack of job opportunities leave them no choice but to be influenced by corrupt individuals or group to get involved (Federal Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

According to Onnoghen, Unimtiang, Ogbaji, Odey, Igwe, Ogban and Onnoghen (2023) the prevalence of social ills in Cross River State and the entire Nigeria today is a cause for serious concern for all and sundry. It undermines the social fabric by eroding the sense of safety and security. Crime impacts on society occur in different ways due to the nature and extent of crime committed. It constitutes a problem when their incidence becomes rampant in the society and poses a threat to the security of persons and property, as well as social order and solidarity. Crime is a threat to the economic, political and social security of Nigeria as a whole and a major factor associated with underdevelopment; because it discourages both local and foreign investments, reduces the quality of life, destroys human and social capital, damages relationship between citizens and the states, thus undermining democracy, rule of law and the ability of the country to promote development.

People occupy different social status which creates a widening gap between the rich and the poor and in turn creates gap which is predominantly among the youth population. In a developing nation such as Nigeria; inequality is present and stares up in every social situation. Social inequality is evident in Cross River State as it is manifested in relationships, especially in the institutions being patronized by members of the society, such as educational institutions, health care facilities, financial institutions, political institutions, means of transportation, and residential accommodation as well as other similar social system.

According to Crutchfield, (2009), the pattern of employment or lack of employment influences the degree of one's criminal involvement; not only because certain marginal employment patterns undermine commitment to legal rules, but also because those same employment patterns create opportunities for participation in the collective processes that underlie most types of criminal activity. The occupational levels of the youths have been observed to be responsible for criminal behaviour. It can, therefore, be described as the conglomerate of youths with a diverse background, willing and able to work, but cannot find any when supply of labour outstrips the demand for labour; thus, it causes joblessness and unemployment. However, the consequences of inequalities are increase in criminality.

Social ills perpetrated by youths are predominant in the society today and constitute a threat to peaceful coexistence among members of the society in Cross River State and Nigeria at large. It cut across ethnic nationalities and religious cleavages. Some of the social vices perpetrated by youth population include but not limited to cultism, drug addiction, targeted assassinations, armed robbery, pipe-line vandalism, vandalism of electricity installations, examination malpractice, indecent dressing and prostitution, political thuggery, and cyber crimes. These vices are at variance to social norms and values which include beliefs, attitudes, honesty, hard work, customs and traditions, ideals, skills and taboos which a society cherishes. Social norms are ideals and values of the society that are passed on from one generation to another via formal and non formal education.

Most crimes perpetrated by youths in post covid-19 era are directed toward home, travellers and private sectors entities in Cross River State; seeks financial gain from victims. Residents and visitors have been victims of a wide range of violent crimes involving youths which includes armed robbery, assault, burglary, carjacking, rape, kidnapping, and extortion. The most commonly reported crimes perpetrated by youths are armed robbery, kidnap for ransom, drug trafficking and abuse, cultism, looting, pipeline vandals, thugs, domestic violence, prostitution and internet fraud. Kidnapping, drug abuse, internet frauds and robbery which are more prevalent is a huge concern to all stake holders including parents.

Going by the above observation the researcher ponder in doubt what might be the main predictor variable predicting the increase in crime in Cross River State. Could this be in connection with the wider social inequality prevalent in the State? The purpose of the study was to investigate employment inequality and social vices among youths in post covid-19 era in Cross River State, Nigeria.

1.2 Theoretical framework /Conceptual Framework

The following theories will be adopted to guide the study

1.2.1 Social conflict theory by Max and Engles (1975)

This theory was propounded by Max and Engles in 1975. The theory states that, the root of conflict is social inequality in the society, as the society is always in constant competition, individuals always compete for limited resources (money, leisure, social partners). Social structures and organizations reflect the competition for those resources making some people to have more based on power, influence and use these resources to maintain their positions of power in the society.

Social conflict theory assumes that this competition over scarce resources is at the heart of all social relationships and that competition rather than consensus is a characteristic of human relationship. Where individuals' benefits from a particular structure, he strives to maintain it, change occurs as a result of conflict which is usually abrupt and revolutionary. Social conflict means struggle among segments of society over valued resources. It is routed in Max's view of the division of the society into two classes of capitalist (owners of the means of production) and proletariat (those who provide the labour necessary for the operation of factories and other production enterprises).

This theory is relevant to the study because it x-rays the causes of conflict amongst youths, the government and among the social strata in Cross River State, and Nigeria; and also suggests managerial strategies to promote lasting peace and development. In Cross River State, Nigeria; behaviour like vandalization of pipeline, kidnapping, social unrest, inter and intra communal clashes, arm robbery, farmer and herdsman clashes, banditry, to mention but a few are very common.

To ensure lasting peace and harmony, the government may tend to pay more attention to such anti-social behaviours among the youth population without dealing with the actual problem that has to do with providing the basic essential facilities, infrastructures and the enabling environment that would promote job creation and self-reliance. Government must do more in creating jobs and empowering the youths if lasting peace, security, and socioeconomic development are to be achieved.

1.2.2 Relative deprivation theory (RDT) by Gurr (1970)

Relative deprivation theory (RDT) by Gurr (1970) is fundamentally embedded in the psychological theory of frustration-aggression hypothesis. Retrospectively, early psychological theories of crime believed that the cause of crime lies in the individuals' psychology. They argued that individuals with personality disorder are more likely to commit crimes than those within the borderline of neurotypical personalities. This line of thinking may have influenced the development of the RDT. However, RDT moved beyond the individual psychology to understand collective psychology that aggravates crime and violence.

Relative deprivation theory specifically measures individuals' subjective evaluation of their financial and political position or other measurement of social examination. Relative deprivation is more critical when predicting individuals' conduct, compared with "objective" measures of hardship, such as, poverty and inequality. Scholars contended that individuals will encounter relative deprivation when they need X, or see that comparatively others have X, and feel qualified to have X, and individuals must think it is attainable to get X, while people do not have an awareness of other's expectations for their inability to have X. RDT refers to the disenchantment people feel when they compare their positions to others and realise that others in the group possess something that they do not. When this feeling persists, it may lead to frustration, stress and aggression, which may result to violence and crime.

Gurr (1970) indicates that youth's involvement in violence and crime is normal if the general practices and legislative issues that authorise vicious responses to violence are enormous. In any given society, deprived youths are usually pushed to the edges of society. While, in response to their social, monetary and political deprivations, greater numbers of youth have momentarily entered the world of violence and created a criminal sub-cultures that consequently wreaks destruction on the security of lives and property. Gurr (1970) maintained that the perception of deprivation, marginalisation, and persecution

of the individuals in a given community may lead to frustration and anger. Gurr (1970) argues that people rebel because they were frustrated and angered by the enormity of the socio-economic and structural inequalities, which are inextricably entrenched in the fabrics of societies.

The implication of this theory to the study is seen in a reaction to social marginalisation in Cross River State, Nigeria, area boys (thugs) react to their weaknesses by constructing sub-cultures based around violent conduct and other deviant behaviours, including theft and violence. Relative deprivation theory is relevant to this study for the understanding of youth involvement in social vices in Cross River State in particular and Nigeria in general. The theory gives guide to the dependent variable social vices among youths in Cross River State. It gives the entire society a guide on how any group will react when deprived of their rights. It also give the society the lead on the consequence of the reactions of a group under depression and the way forward on how to solve the issue of inequality in the society.

1.3 Statement of the hypothesis

The following hypothesis was formulated to guide the study:

1. Employment inequality does not significantly predict social vices among youths in post covid-19 era in Cross River State

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Employment inequality and social vices among youths

There seems to be a consensus on the definition of employment inequality. Simply put, unemployment describes the condition of people who are without jobs. The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines the unemployed as the number of the economically active population who is without work but available and seeking work, including people who have lost their jobs and those who have voluntarily left work (World Bank, 2014).

According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2019), the labour force of a country is a set of people or citizens who are willing and are able to make available at any given point in time their efforts for gainful employment, while the unemployed are the individuals with no work, but are looking for work at the time of any study. Various forms of unemployment have been identified by scholars. These include seasonal, frictional, cyclical, and structural unemployment (Adebayo, 2019; Damachi, 2001; Hollister and Goldstein, 2004; Todaro, 2002).

Employment inequality is a global trend but it occurs mostly in the developing countries of the world, with social, economic, political and psychological attendants. Thus massive youth's unemployment in any country is an indication of far more complex problems (Okafor, 2008). The International Labour Organization (2007) report showed that the proportion of world unemployment is steadily increasing and that the number of those without jobs remained at an all time high of more than 195 million or 6.3 percent in 2007. For instance, during the period 2007, the Middle East and North Africa were the regions with the highest unemployment rate in the world at 12.2 percent, followed by Sub-Saharan Africa at nearly 10 percent. East Asia's unemployment rate of 3.6 percent remained the lowest. The report affirmed that population growth especially in South Asia, the Middle East, North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa were putting pressure on job creation. Unemployment inequality as a global concern is of more dire consequence for youth's employment. Global youth's unemployment rate was projected at 12.7 percent in 2012.

This portends immense dangers when understood from the point of view that young people are the next generation of potentially productive economic and social actors. In Africa, youth's unemployment rate has been a major problem giving rise to other criminal tendencies in the youths and threatens the social-economic peace and stability of the continent (Ajufo, 2013).

Youth's unemployment in Nigeria According to National Bureau of Statistics (2020), the national unemployment rates for Nigeria between 2010 and 2019 showed that the number of unemployed persons constituted 13.1% in 2000; 13.6% in 2010; 12.6% in 2012; 14.8% in 2013; 13.4% in 2014; 11.9% in 2015; 13.7% in 2016; 14.6% in 2017; 14.9% in 2018 and 19.4% in 2019. As regards the age group, the report shows that as at March 2019 in Nigeria, for persons between the 18 and 24 years, 41.6% were unemployed;

persons between 25 and 35 years, 17% were unemployed. Put together, for persons between 18 and 35, 53% unemployed more than any other age bracket. Furthermore, for those with only primary education, 14.8% were unemployed, and for those with only secondary education, 23.8% were unemployed; while for those with tertiary education, 21.3% were unemployed. For those who never attended school and those below primary education, 21.0 and 22.3% were unemployed respectively.

2.2 Empirical studies

2.21 Studies of Employment inequality and social vices among youths

The study of Olofinbiyi and Singh (2020) on poverty, education and unemployment implications for youth crimes in Nigeria. Their research focussed on the correlation between education, occupation and criminality among the youth has grown both in length, and complexity in the last two decades. Using a mixed-method analysis, this study concurs that educational and occupational variables are significant determinants of criminal propensities but maintains two sides of the same coin by contending that the level of educational attainment of the youth does not grossly influence their involvement in criminal activities, whereas it draws on occupational attainment as a strong factor for the pervasive involvement of youth in criminality. Taking evidence from Nigeria, the study recommends policies that will review and implement youth entrepreneurial development, educational re-orientation and creation of more job opportunities, as a life-changing instrument against crime.

Chukwunyere, Uba, Ukamaka and Chigozirim (2020) research work is aimed at answering the questions of why the increasing inequality, crime rate and poverty in Nigeria. Two models were formulated addressing the dependent variables inequality and crime rate. It employed the ordinary least square (OLS) method approach to analyse the variables of interest. The results indicate that human development index increased inequality by 6.522725 units, reduced crime rate by 0.137081 units respectively while crime rate and poverty reduced inequality by 2.919025 and 1.218252 units respectively. Also it is found that human development index, poverty and inequality all reduced crime rate by 0.37081 units, 0.161007 units and 0.098731 units respectively. It is therefore evident from the study that government should therefore tame corruption and increase palliatives that reduces unemployment hence poverty.

A 2007 UNDP survey on poverty and extreme deprivation of 108 countries ranked Nigeria at the 80th position, giving it a Human Poverty Index of 37.3 “among the lowest for the entire continent. For a country that earns an estimated \$2.2 million in daily petrodollar revenue, these figures reflect an impudent malaise that has invaded every aspect of Nigerian life (Osalar, 2010). It must be noted that though the above figures may not have captured the totality of youth’s unemployment in Nigeria, it however points to the reality of youth unemployment when compared with any other age bracket, which portends great danger for the country’s stability and national development as unemployment has the potential of raising an army of criminals; as it is often said that an idle hand is the devil’s workshop (Ajufo, 2013).

According to a survey carried out as part of its membership operational audit in January 2010 by the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN) in Adebayo (2013), the 837 figure represents the cumulative aggregate of firms that have shut down operations in 2019 across the country. The MAN survey usually covers five manufacturing enclaves into which the country is divided in terms of manufacturing activities. These include the Lagos, northern, southeast, southwest and south-south areas. The report of the survey showed that in 2019, a total number of 176 firms became terminally ill and collapsed in the northern area, comprising the Kano and Kaduna manufacturing axis. In the southeast area, which comprises Anambra, Enugu, Imo and Abia states, a total number of 178 companies closed shops during the period. While in the south-south area, which comprises Rivers, cross River and Akwa Ibom states, 46 companies shut down operations before December 2019. According to the survey in Adebayo (2013), the southwest area, which comprises Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, Kogi and Kwara states, lost 225 companies during the year. It said that the Lagos area covering Ikeja, Apapa, Ikorodu and other industrial divisions in the state, followed closely with 214 manufacturing firms closing shop before the end of 2019 (Maiyak, 2010; Okafor, 2008; Okafor, 2011).

From theoretical and empirical literatures reviewed this far, social inequality has brought about poor public policies in Nigeria thereby hampering poverty reduction thus there is increasing disparities in assessing financial services thereby slowing down financial dependence. It is of note here unequal societies are less likely to the trust government hence social and civic duties participation is also less likely making them unhappy people.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, from all available research done on employment inequality, there is none that have been able to specifically link the above variables with social vices (illegal migration, kidnapping, robbery, internet fraud, human trafficking, cultism, drug trafficking, political violence, indecent dressing, prostitution and others) in Cross River State. This forms the gap this study is intended to fill by investigating the prediction of employment inequality on social vices among youths in Cross River State, Nigeria.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this study is survey research design. This design was adopted because the researcher had no control of the independent variables inequality as well as the dependent variable which is social vices.

The population of Cross River State for household members for all age brackets is 4,351,017 (National Population Commission, 2020) while the youths population for household members age 18-35, is 1,824,580 which is approximately 41.9% of the entire population. Out of this population 882,212 are male and 942,368 are female (See table 1).

The research adopted several sampling techniques. Cross River State is made up of three Educational zones namely Calabar Zone, Ikom Zone and Ogoja Zone. Educational zone was therefore, the basis for stratification. Each Educational Zone has unequal number Local Government Areas.

Simple random sampling technique was used to select 50% of the local government areas from each zone that participated in the study. To do this, names of local government areas in each education zones (stratum) were written each in piece of paper, folded and put in a container and properly shuffle together. Accidental sampling technique was used to administer the instruments to the number of subjects used as sample in each Local Government Area and Education Zones (See table 1). The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's formula (1973). This formula is use to generate sample size for large population. (See Appendix I).

The sample of this study was made up of four hundred (400) respondents randomly selected from ten (10) LGA's in Cross River State. A breakdown of the figure shows that forty (40) respondents which consist of twenty (20) male and twenty (20) female were randomly selected from each of the ten (10) LGA's chosen for the study.

The instrument used for data collection was a survey questionnaire called "Inequality and Social Vices Questionnaire (ISVQ). The questionnaire consisted of two sections A and B. Section A, focused on the personal data of the students such as sex, age, local government area, educational qualification and name of the ward while section B is a twenty (20) items drawn based on a modified four-point Likert scale of strongly agree (SA) Agree (A) Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D) designed to elicit information on Inequality and Social Vices. Five (5) items were drawn to measure each of the sub variables of the independent variables (education and employment) while 10 items were drawn to measure the dependent variables "Social Vices" (See Appendix I).

TABLE 1

Population Distribution of respondents

S/N	Education zone	No. of LGA's	Population Male	Population of Female	50% LGA's sampled per zones	No. of respondent sampled per zone	%
1.	Calabar	7	346,612	389,111	4	160	40
2.	Ikom	6	327,321	374,521	3	120	30
3.	Ogoja	5	201,804	185,211	3	120	30
	Total	18	875,737	948,843	10	400	100

Source: Cross River State Ministry of Youths and Sports Development

The researcher visited the study area which were urban and semi-urban areas and seek for permission from Community Heads to carry out the study. The validated questionnaire was administered by the researcher and three (3) trained research assistants. During data collection, a verbal informed consent was sought from respondents, stating clearly about the confidentiality of their responses and protection, including their voluntary participation in the study and freedom to withdraw from the study at any time. The research assistants were trained on how to use questionnaire to gather important information by carefully explaining the meaning of each item in local dialect to the respondents. Four hundred (400) copies of questionnaire were administered, properly filled and returned.

The researcher with help of research assistance collected the questionnaire. Codes/scores were assigned to each item. For ease of data preparation, a coding schedule was prepared by developing a key for each of the constructs in the instrument in a tabular form.

The positively worded items were assigned numbers in an increasing order of Strongly Agree - 4 points, Agree - 3 points, Disagree - 2 points and Strongly Disagree - 1 point, while the negative worded items were in decreasing order of Strongly Agree - 1 point, Agree - 2 points, Disagree - 3 Points and Strongly Disagree - 4 points.

4 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Hypothesis

Employment inequality does not significantly predict social vices among youths in post covid-19 era in Cross River State. The independent (predictor) variable in this hypothesis is employment inequality while the dependent variable is social vices. Simple linear regression statistical tool was used for data analysis. The result of this analysis is presented in Table 2.

The result of analysis presented in Table 2 showed that the predictor or independent variable (employment inequality) significantly predict the predicted variable (social vices). The predictor variable

accounted for 5.8% of the variance in social vices among youths in post covid-19 era in Cross River State. This showed a very strong relationship between the predictor and predicted variables. Furthermore, the regression ANOVA revealed there was a weak positive significant influence of employment inequality on social vices among youths' $F(1, 674) = 24.436$; $p > .05$. It was on this note that the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate hypothesis was upheld. Based on this result, it was revealed that if government provide jobs in an unbiased manner and frequently in the study area, youths may not engage themselves on criminal activities. This further stipulated that the more there is employment inequality, the more the social vices involving youths' in the study area.

TABLE 2

Simple linear regression analysis of the prediction of employment inequality on social vices among youths' in post covid-19 era in Cross River State.

(N = 400)					
Model	R	R ²	Adj.R ²	Std error of estimate	
1	.241	.058	.055	2.08818	
Source of variance	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig
Regression	106.555	1	106.555	24.436	.000
Residual	1735.485	398	4.361		
Total	1842.040	399			

Significant at 0.05 level. $df = 1$ and 398; critical F-value of 2.26

5 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result of hypothesis revealed that employment inequality significantly predicts social vices among youths in post covid-19 era in the research area. The finding of this hypothesis is in line with the view of Olofinbiyi and Singh (2020) whose study on poverty, education and unemployment implications for youth crimes in Nigeria. Using a mixed-method analysis, this study concurs that educational and occupational variables are significant determinants of criminal propensities but maintains two sides of the same coin by contending that the level of educational attainment of the youth does not grossly influence their involvement in criminal activities, whereas it draws on occupational attainment as a strong factor for the pervasive involvement of youth in criminality. Taking evidence from Nigeria, the study recommends policies that will review and implement youth entrepreneurial development, educational re-orientation and creation of more job opportunities, as a life-changing instrument against crime. The findings of this hypothesis is also in support of the view of Kambewa, Phillips and Collins (2001) whose study conducted in Zambia, Malawi, and South Africa, showed that community leaders and the youth complained that the major reasons for increase in criminal activities among the youth is as a result of the educational system, needed to equip youth with adequate skills, to be able to compete in the labour force. Neither does the educational sector prepare students to go into self-employment enterprise activities.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study aimed at investigating employment inequality and Social vices among youths in post covid-19 era in Cross River State. Based on the findings of this study the researchers concluded that there is a significant relationship between employment inequality and social vices among youths in post covid-19 era in the study area. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that the government and all stake holders should ensure that vital resources are distributed equally to every zone of the state without bias. Stakeholders responsible for employment should ensure that employment is given to all qualified youths without prejudice or discrimination.

7 LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER STUDIES

One of the problems encountered while carrying out this research is that the researchers were always present in every occasions to enhance positive collection of data from the respondents. More so, in order to get accurate data, the researcher had to plead with the respondents to be honest in their response. This makes the researchers to always go an extra mile to pacify them. However, it is imperative to mention that an encountered limitation does not distort the validity of the finding, because the limitations were overcome. Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions are made for further studies:

- 1 A similar study should be conducted to cover other variables not investigated by this study.
- 2 The use of larger sample to widen the scope of the study should be encourage as to investigate further analysis, generalization and expansion of the frontiers of the subject of investigation.
- 3 A replication of this study should be carried out again covering the entire State.

AUTHOR DECLARATIONS

Our paper, employment inequality and social vices among youths in post covid-19 era in Cross River State, Nigeria, is unique and has never been published, we certify. Every piece of information is true, responsibly gathered, and properly cited from outside sources. The text guarantees participant confidentiality by adhering to ethical requirements. We promise not to post it anywhere without editorial permission if it is accepted. We are grateful for the assistance we had during the study. This contribution demonstrates our dedication to openness and academic honesty.

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APPENDIX I

Taro Yamane's formula (For generation of sample from large population size)

Where n = sample size, N = population size (1,824,580) and
 e = sampling error assumed (0.05).

Sample size, $= 399.999 \approx 400$. The study sample will consists of 400 male and female respondents drawn from the study area. (See 3.5).