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# A Sociological Perspective on the Medicalisation of Crime in the Nigerian Justice System

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## Abstract

Medicalisation of crime reflects a shift in contemporary Justice System, where deviant behaviour is interpreted and managed through medical frameworks. Within the Nigerian context, this phenomenon has deep implications, particularly in the treatment of delinquents associated with drug abuse, murder, insurgency, terrorism, and cybercrimes. This paper examines the trend of medicalising crimes within the Nigerian Justice System through the lens of Medical Sociology, justified by the need to interrogate the thin line between criminality and illness, and its importance lies in its capacity to illuminate the intersection between health and justice. Drawing on the theoretical framework such as Conrad's theory of medicalisation, Foucault's concept of the medical gaze, and labelling theory by Howard Becker, this paper explores how criminal behaviour is reframed as a product of mental disorders rather than deliberate aberration. The paper employs a conceptual and interpretive methodology as it does not rely on field data, but engages with ideas, theories, and existing literature. The paper examines selected judicial cases like Faith Isoken v. The State (2018), Edoho v. The State (2016), and Kaza v. The State (2008), as well as the administrative initiative programs like Operation Safe Corridor (2016–date). The analysis reveals that while medicalisation introduces a more humane approach to justice by recognizing offenders as individuals in need of treatment, it also exposes systemic inequalities. The affluent, who can afford psychiatric evaluation and legal representation, often benefit from mitigated judgments, whereas indigent defendants are denied similar consideration due to lack of access to psychiatric expertise. The study finds that this uneven application reproduces social and class disparities within the criminal justice system, thereby reinforcing structural inequality under the guise of therapeutic reform. It concludes that equitable access to forensic psychiatric evaluation and mental health services must be institutionalized within Nigeria's Justice System to ensure justice that is both fair and restorative.

**Keywords:** Medicalisation of crime, Nigerian justice system, forensic psychiatry, mental health, social inequality, rehabilitation

## **Introduction**

Globally, scholars have documented the increasing tendency of States to treat certain categories of crime as medical problems. For example, drug addiction has been reframed from a moral failing to a chronic illness in many western societies (Room, 2003). Correspondingly, felony has often been attributed to psychological disorders, with rehabilitation programs emphasising therapy and counselling over imprisonment (Hirshbein 2021). In terrorism studies, some government have promoted de-radicalisation programs that blend psychiatric interventions with religious counselling, particularly in post-conflict societies (Ashour, 2009). In the U.S., the insanity defence and the use of psychiatric testimony in criminal trials exemplify how medicine penetrates the Justice System (Foucault, 1977).

These examples illustrate a global trend where boundaries between crime and illness are increasingly blurred, producing both opportunities for humane treatment and concerns about expanding social control. Medicalisation involves defining and treating social problem, behaviours, or conditions as medical issues, often shifting responsibility from the legal to the medical realm (Conrad, 2007; Conrad & Bergey, 2014). In the context of crime, this shift entails conceptualising offenders not solely as rational agents who violate the law but as individuals suffering from diagnosable mental or psychological conditions.

In Nigeria, this trend is emerging amidst a troubled Justice System burdened by over-incarceration, inadequate legal infrastructure, and limited rehabilitative services. Mental health issues often undiagnosed, untreated, or misunderstood frequently complicate criminal proceedings, especially in cases involving violent crime, drug-related offences, or acts interpreted as social deviance. For example, since 2016, the Nigerian government through Operation Safe Corridor has implemented a de-radicalisation, rehabilitation, and reintegration (DRR) program for “repentant” Boko Haram insurgents. Participants undergo psychological therapy, vocational training, and religious reorientation rather than prosecution. The program conceptualizes insurgency and violent extremism not primarily as criminal acts, but as outcomes of psychological indoctrination, trauma, and maladaptive cognition treatable through psychosocial interventions. This shift represents a clear case of medicalisation; reframing terrorism (a moral and criminal issue) as a condition amenable to treatment. Critics argue that this therapeutic framing delegitimizes victims’ suffering and undermines justice, while proponents see it as pragmatic rehabilitation (Onuoha, & George, 2023).

Despite the existence of legal provisions such as the Nigerian Criminal Code Act (Sections 28-29), which recognizes insanity as a defence, the country lacks a robust forensic psychiatric infrastructure to adequately assess and manage mentally ill offenders (Ogunlesi & Adeyemi, 2009). Consequently, a significant number of individuals who may require medical care are either criminalised or subjected to prolonged detention without adequate psychiatric evaluation. For instance, a man arrested in 2010 for murder spent about 14 years in Kirikiri prison without a trial. While in custody, he developed a mental disorder. Finally, the Court of Appeal in Lagos freed him, noting the grave mental condition he had developed due to prolonged remand without trial (Punch, 14<sup>th</sup> May 2024).

Drawing on insights from Medical Sociology, this paper explores the implications of this trend within the Nigerian Justice System. Medical Sociology as a subfield investigates how health, illness, and medical institutions are socially constructed and maintained, with particular attention to how medical authority intersects with other forms of institutional power (Cockerham, 2021). Conrad (2007) theory of medicalisation, is relevant here as it highlights how non-medical problems become defined and treated as medical issues. Also the concept of the medical gaze, introduced by Foucault (1973), is relevant here, as it highlights the role of medical expertise in classifying and managing deviant bodies and behaviours, and likewise the framework of labelling theory by Howard Becker (1963), which posits that deviance is not inherent in an act, but is the result of social labelling. As psychiatric evaluations and mental health defences become increasingly prominent in Nigerian courtrooms, questions emerge about the shifting boundaries between law and medicine, and the implications for justice, accountability, and social control.

The paper contends that while the medicalisation of crime in Nigeria may promote more humane approach to offenders through therapy, rehabilitation, and institutional care, it also raises critical concerns. These includes the potential erosion of legal responsibility, the expansion of medical authority into legal domains, and the reproduction of social inequalities through differential access to psychiatric defences (Adebay & Aluko 2022; Nnochiri, 2023; Okorie, 2023; Oyewole, 2024). Using a sociological lens, the paper examines how this trend reflects deeper tension between punitive and therapeutic models of justice.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to examine the concept of medicalisation of crime within the Nigerian justice system. The specific objectives are to:

- (a) Analyse judicial decisions and legal provisions in Nigeria where mental health defences or psychiatric evaluations influenced criminal outcomes, and
- (b) Interrogate the sociological implications of medicalising crime.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

The conceptual foundation of this study is rooted in contemporary sociological interpretations of medicalisation, a process through which human problems and behaviours, once defined as moral, legal, or social, are reclassified as medical conditions requiring clinical diagnosis and treatment rather than punishment. While Conrad's (2007) seminal work remains central to understanding medicalisation as a socio-institutional process, more recent scholars has reconceptualised it in light of shifting global and local contexts (Halpin, 2025; Steel, 2022). These perspectives emphasize that medicalisation is not a singular transfer of authority from law to medicine, but a relational, negotiated process embedded in power dynamics, governance, and inequality. Under this paradigm, the state employs medical and psychiatric categories to manage deviance, transforming criminality into a form of pathology.

In Nigeria, this logic manifests in legal reliance on psychiatric evaluations to determine criminal responsibility, and in the framing of insurgency and violent extremism as symptoms of trauma or brainwashing requiring "healing." Medicalisation thus becomes a mode of therapeutic governance (Rose, 2007), where medical authority extends into the legal and political domains, legitimising state interventions that blur the boundary between care and control. The intersection between medical and legal institutions constitutes what Steel (2022) terms a symbiotic convergence, where both domains cooperate to redefine social deviance. This manifests when courts defer to psychiatric assessments in determining culpability, effectively shifting moral and legal judgment into medical expertise. This study views such convergence as a critical sociological phenomenon, in which medicine becomes a tool for both rehabilitation and social regulation. By drawing on these conceptual lenses, the study situates the medicalisation of crime within broader debates on power, inequality, and the transformation of justice in late modern societies.

Thus, the conceptual framework adopted in this study views the medicalisation of crime as a multidimensional process involving sociological, legal, and political dynamics. On one hand, medicalisation can humanize offenders by recognizing legitimate mental health conditions; on the other, it can obscure structural violence and depoliticize crime by framing it solely as a medical or psychiatric matter. This duality makes the concept analytically useful for

understanding the Nigerian justice system, where insurgency, terrorism, and violent crime are at times reconstructed as matters of rehabilitation, treatment, or de-radicalisation rather than punishment.

### **Literature Review**

The medicalisation of crime has attracted scholarly attention particularly within the field of Sociology. A substantial body of literature has explored how deviant behaviour is increasingly understood and managed through medical discourses. Conrad (2007) highlights the expanding domain of medicalisation, noting that behaviours once treated as moral failings or criminal acts, such as alcoholism, drug use and violence are now subject to psychiatric categorization. This reclassification, according to Conrad (2007) often leads to social control under the guise of care and treatment.

Literature on the medicalisation of crime in Africa is less voluminous. Studies revealed that psychiatric involvement in criminal justice is increasing, although unevenly. In South Africa, Petersen and Lund (2011) documented how mental illness defences are inconsistently applied, especially in marginalized communities. A similar pattern exist in Kenya and Ghana, where forensic psychiatric services are minimal, leading to delays in justice and indefinite detentions of mentally ill suspects (Muga & Jenkins, 2008; Osei Baidoo, & Owusu-Damoah, 2019). These studies highlight a common issue across African systems: underdeveloped forensic infrastructure, poor interagency coordination, and stigmatization of mental illness, which constrain effective use of medical defences. The problem is compounded by colonial legacies that fused western legal systems with customary laws, often ignoring indigenous understanding of illness, deviance, and justice.

### **Judicial Decisions and Legal Provisions in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, crime has historically been framed through legalistic and punitive lenses, yet recent development point to element of medicalisation. Studies on drug abuse (Adelekan, (2010); Obot, (2016) highlight how offenders are increasingly subjected to rehabilitation centres rather than purely panel sanctions. Similarly, counter terrorism efforts against Boko Haram have incorporated rehabilitation and reintegration programs, treating former insurgents as candidates for psychological reprogramming rather than solely criminals (Onuoha, 2014).

The criminal code (Section 28) and penal code (Section 51) of Nigeria recognize the insanity defence, allowing exemption from criminal responsibility when an offender is found to be of

unsound mind. However, researchers argue that implementation is weak, fragmented, and biased. Obioha (2018) identifies a growing reliance on psychiatric evaluations in homicide and violent crime cases, but notes that courts often lack training to assess the validity of psychiatric claims. Moreover, many judges operate with limited understanding of psychiatric terminology, leading to either blind reliance on or outright dismissal of expert testimony.

Onu and Chukwu (2021) argue that social stigma surrounding mental illness often deters genuine use of psychiatric defences. Many defendants fear being labelled “mad” for life, especially when mental illness is still seen in spiritual or supernatural terms in many African communities. This suggests a cultural disparity between Western psychiatric models and local social realities, a point further developed by Akinyemi (2019), who urges for an Afrocentric approach to forensic and indigenous frameworks. Ihejirika (2022) conducted a critical analysis of Nigerian court judgements and found that elite defendants are more likely to invoke and succeed with mental health defences than poorer individuals, this reflects a classed medicalisation, in which psychiatric privilege becomes a tool for evading full legal accountability, a finding that echoes Becker’s (1963) labelling theory and the notion of institutional bias in deviance attribution.

### **The Sociological Implications of Medicalising Crime.**

The framing of crime as medical or psychological condition raises fundamental questions about social control, and deviance. From a sociological lens, it changes the way society defines deviance, moving it from the realm of law and morality into the authority of medical professionals. This reduces individual responsibility and shifts blame to illness or external factors. Conrad (2007) posits that, when offenders are treated as sick, their behaviour is reframed from a moral or legal violation into a medical condition. One of the implications is that legal sovereignty can be eroded, as courts increasingly defer to psychiatric evaluations, reinforcing Foucault’s (1977) argument about medicine as a tool of social control. If serious crimes (e.g., homicide, terrorism, sexual deviance) are reframed as illnesses, victims and society may feel justice is denied. This undermines the deterrent function of punishment, possibly leading to moral outrage and distrust in the legal system. Medicalisation promotes treatment and rehabilitation over retribution. While this may humanize offenders and reduce recidivism, it may also fuel perceptions of leniency. In Nigeria for instance, initiatives like Operation Safe Corridor reflect this dilemma; reintegrating insurgents as “rehabilitated” may be seen as prioritizing medical/social treatment over justice for victims.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study draws on key sociological theories that elucidate how medical authority intersects with legal systems in framing deviance. Central to this analysis is Peter Conrad (2007) theory of medicalisation, which explains how non-medical problems become defined and treated as medical issues, often with clinical language and intervention. Conrad outlines three core dimensions of medicalisation: conceptual (defining a condition as medical), institutional (the role of medical professionals in social institutions), and interactional (the physician-patient dynamic). In the context of crime, these dimensions reveal how the Justice System increasingly defers to psychiatric expertise in defining responsibility. Additionally, Michel Foucault's (1973) concept of the medical gaze is employed to analyse how medical institutions produce knowledge that legitimize their involvement in legal adjudication. Foucault theorizes that the clinical gaze does not merely observe illness but constructs it within systems of power and classification. This is especially relevant in Nigeria courts where psychiatric evaluations may demand sentencing outcomes or absolve criminal culpability.

The framework also draws on the sociological theories of deviance, particularly the labelling theory by Howard Becker (1963), which posits that deviance is not inherent in an act, but is the result of social labelling. In the case of medicalisation, criminal acts are reclassified through psychiatric diagnosis, thereby shifting the label from "criminal" to "patient." This reclassification alters the offender's legal status and redirects the part from punishment to treatment. These theoretical tools allow for a critical interrogation of how the Nigerian Justice System navigates the boundaries of law and medicine, and how this navigation reshapes institutional responses to crime.

## **Methodology**

This study adopted a conceptual and interpretive qualitative research design rooted in the sociological tradition of critical inquiry. The choice of methodology was guided by the three research objectives: to examine the concept of medicalisation of crime within the Nigerian justice system, to analyse judicial decisions and legal provisions in Nigeria where mental health defences or psychiatric evaluations influenced criminal outcomes, and to interrogate the sociological implications of medicalising crime.

The study employed a desk-based analytical approach, drawing upon secondary sources of data, including legal judgments, statutory provisions (especially Section 28 of the Criminal Code Act and Section 270 of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act), government policy

documents, and academic literature on medical sociology, and criminology. Media reports and scholarly articles were also used to illustrate contemporary cases that bridge psychiatry and justice.

## Results

Below is a table of some selected cases where mental-health defences or psychiatric evidence were central to the outcome. Each summary gives the core holding and why it matters for the study.

**Table 1: Nigerian Law Cases and Medicalisation of Crime**

Case	Year	Court	Legal Issue	Holding	Implications for study
Faith Isoken v. The State	2025	Federal High Court, Lagos	woman convicted of drug possession	The court discharged her based on health condition even though she had pleaded guilty.	This is where medical or health condition influenced a legal outcome (leniency rather than full punishment), aligning with medicalisation tendencies.
Edoho v. The State	2016	Supreme Court of Nigeria	Insanity plea based on delusional belief (witchcraft)	Defence accepted that there was evidence of mental abnormality at the time of the offence.	The case demonstrates judiciary's increasing readiness to accept psychological and behavioural evidence as legitimate ground for re diminished responsibility.
Kaza v. the State	2008	Court of Appeal Kaduna Division	Insanity plea based on mental instability	Defence rejected insanity plea, holding that the defence failed to discharge the burden of proof.	The case strictly demonstrates inequity in the medicalisation of crime.
Operation Safe Corridor (administrative program)	2016 – present	Executive/Administrative Program	Rehabilitation of Boko Haram/insurgents	Offenders diverted into de-radicalization, most times avoiding prosecution	Illustrates non-judicial medicalisation, producing inequality in accountability

## Discussion

Faith Isoken v. The State (Tribune Online, 2025). Faith, a woman convicted of drug possession, fell gravely ill while serving her prison term. Moved by her deteriorating health, the Federal High Court in Lagos granted her release on compassionate grounds, citing the constitutional right to dignity and life. At face value, this decision was an act of mercy. But sociologically, it represents something deeper; a shift from punitive justice to therapeutic justice. The court no longer saw Faith merely as a criminal to be punished but as a human being in need of care. In doing so, the court turned medical evidence into a tool of justice. Her illness became a legitimate reason for leniency. This is what sociologists call medicalisation; a process where non-medical problems, like crime, are reframed as health issues that require treatment or compassion rather than punishment (Conrad, 2007). However,

not everyone gets this kind of justice. Those who can prove they are sick or afford medical documentation are more likely to benefit. This means that medicalisation, though humane, can unintentionally create new inequalities in how justice is applied. Faith's case shows the courtroom as a place where medicine and law meet, but also where privilege can quietly determine who deserves "compassion" or "punishment".

In *Okon Nsibehe Edoho v. The State* 2016. (The nation September 17, 2024). Edoho was charged with the murder of his father-in-law. The court faced a troubling question: Can someone who is mentally ill truly be held responsible for murder? Psychiatric evaluations confirmed that Edoho suffered from a mental disorder that impaired his judgment at the time of the act. The Supreme Court accepted this evidence and invoked Section 28 of the Criminal Code, which exempts an individual from full criminal responsibility if proven insane at the time of the offense. Here again, we see the justice system giving power to medical authority. Instead of judging only through moral or legal reasoning, the court leaned on psychiatric science to determine culpability. Sociologically, this case marks the "scientification" of justice, where the courtroom depends increasingly on medical expertise to decide right and wrong. By replacing moral blame with medical diagnosis, the law becomes more compassionate, but also more dependent on expert power."

The case of *Mr. Kaza v. The State* (LLJR-SC-LawGlobal Hub, 2008), Kaza a farmer from a rural community in Adamawa State, was charged with the murder of his wife following a domestic altercation. During trial, the accused displayed erratic behaviour and was alleged by neighbours to have been "mentally unstable" for some time before the incident. However, unlike in high-profile cases, no psychiatric evaluation was conducted because neither the accused nor his family could afford it. The defence counsel made a verbal plea of insanity but failed to provide any medical evidence or expert testimony to support the claim. The Court rejected the insanity plea, holding that the defence failed to discharge the burden of proof required under Section 27 of the Criminal Code (now Section 28). The court stated that mere assertions or community claims of "madness" do not suffice in law. Since there was no psychiatric assessment or credible evidence of mental disease, the court upheld the conviction for murder and affirmed the death sentence. This exposes a subtle form of inequality: only defendants with access to psychiatric evaluation can use such a defence. Poorer offenders, often without mental health support, remain trapped in the traditional punitive system. Consequently, the justice system reproduces class-based disparities, where medical defences

become tools of the privileged rather than justice. The sociological implication is that medicalisation, though presented as a humane reform, creates a two-tier justice system.

Beyond the courtroom, the Nigerian government has also embraced a more medicalised approach through Operation Safe Corridor, a rehabilitation program for former Boko Haram members. Instead of punishing them through long prison terms, the program offers therapy, counselling, vocational training, and spiritual guidance. On paper, it sounds like a bold step toward peace building, it recognizes that many insurgents may themselves be victims of indoctrination, trauma, or mental instability. By treating them as patients in need of healing rather than simply criminals, the state seeks to reform rather than destroy. However, this initiative has divided opinion. Many victims and citizens feel betrayed, arguing that while common criminals receive harsh punishment, insurgents who caused widespread suffering are given therapy and reintegration packages. From a sociological lens, Operation Safe Corridor shows how the state uses therapeutic language to manage conflict and maintain order. It represents what Foucault (1977) called disciplinary power, a subtle form of control that hides behind the language of care. Safe Corridor may heal the body politic, but it also reveals how the state can turn therapy into a tool of control.”

When we place these three examples side by side, a clear pattern emerges. The Nigerian justice system is slowly becoming a space where medicine and law merge. However, the outcomes depend heavily on context, it also raises new concerns: As medical experts, particularly psychiatrists gain more influence in courtrooms, there is a growing expansion of clinical authority into traditionally legal domains. Psychiatric reports are often treated as decisive evidence, particularly in cases involving violent crimes, insanity pleas, or capital punishment. The reliance on medical testimony introduces new form of institutional power, as judges frequently defer to psychiatric recommendations without clear guidelines or consistent regulatory oversight (Ogulesi & Adeyemi, 2009). The process reflects Conrad’s (2007) model of institutional medicalisation, where non-medical institutions adopt medical approaches to managing deviance. However, in Nigeria, the weak forensic psychiatric infrastructure and lack of standardized protocols often result in uneven outcomes. While some defendants benefit from therapeutic diversion, others particularly those without access to legal counsel or psychiatric evaluation remain subject to conventional punitive measures, revealing structural inequalities within the system (Ihejirika, 2022). In today’s Nigeria, the boundary between the criminal and the patient is blurring. Justice is learning to speak the language of care, but care itself has become another face of control.

## **Conclusion**

This paper explored medicalisation of crime in the Nigerian Justice System through a sociological lens, revealing a complex interplay between legal, medical and institutional discourses. Drawing on foundational theories from medical sociology, particularly the works of Conrad, Foucault, and Becker, it has shown how medical narratives are increasingly employed to reframe criminal behaviour, shifting the offender's identity from a moral transgressor to a patient in need of treatment. While this shift may offer opportunities for more humane and rehabilitative responses to crime, it also raises critical concerns about justice, accountability, and institutional power. The expansion of clinical authority into legal domain has created new hierarchies of expertise, often without adequate regulatory oversight. Furthermore, unequal access to medical defences exacerbates social inequality, limiting the benefits of medicalisation to a privileged few. Importantly, the Nigerian context demonstrates both the potential and pitfalls of this phenomenon. The weak mental health infrastructure, absence of standardized forensic protocols, and ethical ambiguity surrounding indefinite psychiatric detention, calls for urgent institutional reforms.

## **Recommendations**

As the Criminal Justice System continues to navigate the blurred boundaries between punishment and treatment, there is a pressing need for a framework that protects both public safety and individual rights. Based on this the following recommendations are made:

- (i) Legal reforms should incorporate sociological insights on deviance, labelling, and social control. This would help policymakers design Justice Systems that avoid over-anthologizing crime while addressing social determinants of deviance.
- (ii) Initiatives like Operation Safe Corridor should include community dialogue, victim restitution, and long-term monitoring to ensure reintegration does not compromise justice.
- (iii) Educational programs should differentiate between genuine psychiatric conditions and criminal deviance, reducing misuse of medical language while promoting public awareness.
- (iv) Mental health services should be integrated into legal aid programmes to ensure that indigent defendants can access psychiatric evaluations and representation when needed.
- (v) Train Legal and Medical Professionals on Interdisciplinary Justice: Legal and medical practitioners should receive interdisciplinary training on mental health laws, psychiatric conditions, and the ethical boundaries of forensic psychiatry to prevent misuse or overreliance on psychiatric evidence.

- (vi) Rather than framing deviance as a medical problem, policymakers should recognize and address structural factors like poverty, unemployment, inequality, political marginalization, and weak institutions that foster crime and insurgency. Crime must be understood within its broader socio-economic context, not only as a medical condition.
- (vii) Justice must also consider victims. Treating offenders only as “patients” risks neglecting victims’ rights and reinforcing perceptions of injustice.

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# Plea Bargain and the Culture of “Loot Plenty and Return Little” in Benue State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

This study assessed the relationship between plea bargaining in Nigeria’s criminal justice system and the culture of “loot plenty and return little” in Benue State Nigeria. The study was anchored on the assumption that the increasing adoption of plea bargaining, though intended to enhance judicial efficiency, may have inadvertently weakened deterrence and accountability in corruption cases. A correlational research design was employed. A sample of 384 respondents was selected using data collected through a structured questionnaire and complemented with in-depth interviews. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for quantitative analysis, while thematic content analysis was applied for qualitative data. Findings revealed a positive and significant relationship between plea bargaining and the persistence of looting culture in Benue State. Respondents agreed that plea bargaining helps offenders escape full punishment ( $\bar{x} = 3.48$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ) and promotes a culture of “loot plenty and return little” ( $\bar{x} = 3.46$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ). The overall mean scores ranged from 3.38 to 3.52, indicating a broad consensus that plea bargaining encourages corruption and undermines accountability. Qualitative data further revealed that the process is perceived as biased toward wealthy and politically connected offenders, eroding public confidence in the justice system. The study concludes that while plea bargaining remains a potentially useful judicial mechanism, its current implementation in Nigeria especially in Benue State, fosters impunity. It recommends stronger statutory guidelines, transparent restitution processes, and public disclosure of plea deals to restore public trust and enhance the integrity of the justice system.

**Keywords:** Corruption; Criminal justice system; Looting culture; Plea bargaining.

## Introduction

Plea bargaining has emerged as a significant instrument in the administration of criminal justice globally (Riya, 2023). It allows an accused person to plead guilty to a lesser offence or return part of the proceeds of crime in exchange for a lighter sentence. The approach, first widely practiced in the United States in the 1970s, was designed to reduce the costs of litigation and ensure swift recovery of stolen assets, particularly in property-related crimes. It also served to balance justice with restitution, ensuring that victims regained stolen assets rather than witnessing offenders punished without compensation. (Olugbile, 2023).

In Nigeria, plea bargaining evolved as a legal innovation primarily utilized in corruption-related cases involving high-profile individuals. Although not originally part of Nigeria's legal system, it gained prominence through judicial reforms and the efforts of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to enhance efficiency, recover stolen assets, and decongest the courts (Olusegun & Nkechi, 2025). However, its introduction has been met with controversy. Critics argue that rather than promoting justice, it often provides an avenue for the wealthy and politically connected to escape full accountability.

Before its adoption, corruption trials in Nigeria were characterized by prolonged delays, procedural manipulation, and lenient verdicts. The plea bargain mechanism was therefore introduced to expedite justice, ensure partial recovery of looted funds, and reduce the burden on the courts. Despite these intentions, civil society organizations and anti-corruption advocates contend that plea bargaining undermines deterrence by allowing offenders to retain a substantial portion of their illicit wealth while receiving minimal punishment.

Section 270 of the *Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA)*, 2015 provides legal backing for plea bargaining in Nigeria. However, this provision has often been exploited by public officials, who use it to legitimize corruption and weaken accountability. Consequently, the practice appears to have entrenched what many describe as the “culture of loot plenty and return little” i.e. a situation where offenders retribute only a fraction of stolen public wealth while retaining the rest under the protection of negotiated settlements.

The persistent rise in corruption despite the existence of plea bargaining raises critical questions. Nigeria's debt profile, which stood at N42.84 trillion (USD 103.31 billion) as of June 2022 (Sulaiman & Olowu, 2022), combined with alarming indicators such as over 20 million out-of-school children (UNESCO, 2022), 23 million unemployed persons, and 76 million adult illiterates (Ibrahim & Abubakar, 2018), underscores the devastating

socioeconomic consequences of looting and weak judicial deterrence. In such a context, acts of corruption and wastefulness should attract strict punishment rather than negotiated leniency.

Despite multiple anti-corruption initiatives, including the establishment of the EFCC and the ICPC, high-profile cases such as the \$2.1 billion arms procurement scandal (“Dasukigate”), and trials involving former governors like James Ibori and Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, reveal a recurring pattern — offenders often secure light sentences, return limited funds, or regain freedom through plea deals. This trend has eroded public confidence in the criminal justice system and contributed to a perception that corruption pays, particularly for the elite. Against this backdrop, this study seeks to assess the relationship between plea bargaining and the culture of “loot plenty and return little” in Benue State, with a focus on understanding how the practice influences accountability and public perception of justice.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Plea Bargain**

A plea bargain is a negotiated agreement between a prosecutor and a criminal defendant whereby the defendant pleads guilty or no contest to a lesser offense or to one of multiple charges in exchange for some concession by the prosecutor, usually a more lenient sentence or a dismissal of the other charges. It is also termed plea agreement, negotiated plea; sentence bargain (Garner, 2014). In other words, plea bargain is entered into for the sake of clemency from an offence(s) which defendant pleads guilty for. In this sense, plea bargain is seen as a leverage to get lesser punishment of an alleged offence. But in Okonkwo & Eke (2019) view, plea bargain is one of the tools employed in the criminal justice system. It helps the court and State to manage caseloads. In other words, Okonkwo & Eke (2019) sees plea bargain as a tool with advantages and benefits to both the state and the courts. Although in the Administration Criminal Justice Act.

### **Looting**

Looting (in the context of corruption) refers to the illegal and unethical act of diverting public resources or wealth for personal gain, typically by those in positions of authority or trust. It involves the misappropriation of state funds, assets, or property for individual or group benefits, often at the expense of public welfare. This definition emphasizes the exploitation of power and resources for personal enrichment (Garner, 2014). According to Ibrahim & Abubakar (2018), looting (in a broader socio-political sense) can also be understood as the

large-scale, systematic theft of public or national resources, often occurring during times of conflict, weak governance, or political instability. This form of looting typically involves the unlawful seizure or destruction of resources, and it can extend beyond individual theft to include widespread exploitation by political or economic elites, often leading to significant social and economic consequences. Empirical findings highlight that looting is prevalent in many parts of Nigeria, with several high-profile cases illustrating its damaging impact.

### **Origin of Plea Bargain**

The origin of the plea bargain can be traced to the American legal system in the eighteenth century. It began by convention but after it was accepted by the Courts, it became entrenched in the Federal and state criminal procedure rules. (Ortman, 2021) The concept of 'plea bargain' achieved its global recognition in 1970 in the landmark case of *Brady v. United States* by the Supreme Court of the United States of America where Brady who pleaded guilty to a kidnapping charge in violation of 18 U.S.C. 1201(a) and whose sentence was 50 years imprisonment, was later reduced to 30 (Transparency International, 2019). This was adopted due to the adversarial nature of the United States' judicial system which places the judges as an umpire, in which they are completely dependent upon the parties to develop the factual record and cannot independently discover information to assess the strength of the case against the Defendant. There are several cases where the US Courts have given full effect to plea bargains and as at today, 95% of criminal cases in the United States of America have been resolved by plea bargains (Transparency International, 2019).

Plea bargain has proven to be quite effective in the prosecution of varieties of cases, for example many successful criminal prosecutions in the United States end up not with jury trials but with plea bargains (Okonkwo & Eke, 2019). According to the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance, the overwhelming majority (90 to 95 percent) of cases result in plea bargaining. It is reported that presently, plea bargaining is an accepted norm in the American legal system such that an average criminal case in America is disposed through plea bargaining. It has been a success story for the United State Government in eliciting conviction in criminal cases and this feat is as a result of the kind of criminal justice system that is operational which is inquisitorial in nature as opposed to that of Nigeria which is adversarial thus making it easier to be practiced (Nwosu & Adefila, 2019).

Undoubtedly, corruption is ubiquitous but the prevalence and pervasive nature of it in developing countries has attracted successive governments and other stakeholders' concern.

Corrupt activity cuts across borders and instances abound globally. In Germany, Siemens corruption came to mind, in Peru, the Fujimori's embezzlement was a reference, Kadyrov's Chechnya bribes, Ben Ali corruption in Tunisia, Victor Yanukovych corruption in Ukraine, Ricardo Martinelli's corrupt activity in Panama Najib Rasak embezzlement in Malaysia, Francisco Correa's corrupt role in Spain, Sani Abacha stupendous theft in Nigeria are few evidence of global nature of corruption (Transparent International, 2019).

In Nigeria, one of the challenges associated with the fight against corruption is the flexibility of the law in sanctioning corrupt public officials. The application and implementation of plea bargain law to seek for clemency for offenders in corruption charges has been a source of concerns to well-meaning and patriotic Nigerians who felt plea bargain law protects corrupt public officials rather than punishing them.

Stolen funds in Nigeria if recovered would have gone a long way in checkmating the fight against intractable insurgents and insecurity that has been on for more than a decade, the funds would have been utilised to stabilize the country's knowledge industry (public universities) where solutions to all societal ills are expected to be proffered but crippled by strike over money related issues. The need to be strict on the fight against corruption and recover looted funds in Benue State becomes quintessentially important going by the increasing looting culture of those occupying public offices and the criminal justice system in the state is at centre of this recovery. Against this backdrop, this study aims to evaluate the phenomenon of loot plenty and return little. It targets at interrogating plea bargain instrument in Nigeria's justice system with focus on the station in Benue state.

### **Effects of Reduced Sentence on Plea Bargain**

Reduced sentences offered as part of a plea bargain can have a significant impact on the prevalence of looting in Nigeria. With the country plagued by high levels of corruption and embezzlement, many individuals involved in looting schemes may be more willing to cooperate with authorities and accept plea bargains in exchange for a reduced sentence. According to Oluwaseun Ayeni, a legal expert in Nigeria, the prospect of a shorter prison term or avoiding jail altogether can incentivize individuals to admit guilt and provide valuable information to law enforcement agencies, ultimately leading to the prosecution of more looters (Abdullahi & Musa, 2018).

Furthermore, plea bargain can expedite the legal process and reduce the backlog of cases related to looting in Nigeria. The lengthy and complex nature of trials often discourages individuals from coming forward with information or cooperating with authorities, as they may face years of legal proceedings and uncertainty. (Adeola, 2021). However, the use of plea bargains in cases of looting in Nigeria also raises concerns about accountability and transparency. Critics argue that lenient sentences offered in plea bargains could undermine the severity of the crime and fail to hold perpetrators fully accountable for their actions. In a country where corruption is rampant, there is a risk that individuals with political connections or resources may negotiate favorable deals, while smaller offenders face harsher penalties. To address these challenges, legal reforms and oversight mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that plea bargains are used judiciously and equitably in cases of looting in Nigeria (Adeola, 2021).

### **Effects of Negotiation in Plea Bargain on Looting in Nigeria**

Negotiations in plea bargains can have a significant impact on addressing looting in Nigeria. The bargaining process allows prosecutors and defendants to reach agreements that may involve providing valuable information about corruption schemes, cooperating with ongoing investigations, or returning stolen assets in exchange for a reduced sentence. This leads to the prosecution of high-profile looters and uncovering of intricate corruption networks that may have otherwise remained hidden. By incentivizing individuals to come forward and assist in rooting out corruption, negotiations in plea bargains can help deter future instances of looting in the country (Garner, 2014).

Moreover, the negotiation process in plea bargains helps streamline the judicial system in Nigeria and alleviate the burden of a backlog of cases related to looting and corruption. By reaching agreements through negotiation rather than proceeding to lengthy trials, prosecutors efficiently resolve cases and allocate resources to investigate and prosecute other instances of corruption. This expeditious handling of cases serves as a deterrent to potential looters, as they may be more likely to face swift consequences for their actions. In a country where corruption has been pervasive, the use of negotiations in plea bargains can enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of law enforcement efforts (Adeola, 2021).

### **Effects of Waiving Right on Looting in Nigeria**

The practice of waiving rights as part of plea bargains can have significant implications for addressing looting in Nigeria. Agreeing to waive certain constitutional rights, such as the

right to a trial by jury or the right to appeal, means individuals involved in corruption and looting cases may expedite the legal process and facilitate quicker resolutions. This leads to the timely prosecution of offenders and the recovery of stolen assets, ultimately serving as a deterrent to future instances of looting. According to legal experts Okonkwo & Eke (2019), the willingness of individuals to waive rights in plea bargains can demonstrate a commitment to cooperating with authorities and providing valuable information that can aid in uncovering corrupt practices.

However, the waiver of rights in plea bargains also raises concerns regarding the protection of individuals' legal entitlements and due process. Critics argue that the pressure to waive rights in exchange for leniency may undermine the fairness and integrity of the judicial system, particularly in cases involving high-level corruption and looting. Given the endemic nature of corruption in Nigeria, there is a risk that individuals facing significant charges may feel compelled to relinquish their rights to expedite the resolution of their cases or secure more favorable outcomes. To mitigate these risks, safeguards should be in place to ensure that individuals fully understand the implications of waiving rights in plea bargains and that their decisions are made voluntarily and with informed consent (Adeola, 2021).

## **Theoretical Consideration**

### **Strain Theory**

The Strain theory, developed by sociologist Robert K. Merton in the mid-20th century, posits that societal structures and institutions can create pressure or strain that may lead individuals to engage in deviant behavior. Merton identified that the root cause of deviance is the disjunction between societal goals, such as financial success and material wealth, and the means available to individuals to achieve these goals. The theory suggests that when individuals are unable to attain success through legitimate channels, they may experience strain and resort to criminal or deviant means to achieve their aspirations (Charlotte, 2025).

One of the key propositions of strain theory is the concept of anomie, or normlessness, which arises from a misalignment between cultural goals and institutionalized means of achieving those goals. Merton identified five modes of adaptation to strain: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion. Conformity involves pursuing societal goals through legitimate means, while innovation involves using illegitimate means to achieve those goals. Ritualism refers to individuals who abandon societal goals but continue to adhere to the means, retreatism involves rejection of both goals and means, and rebellion involves

challenging existing social structures and creating new goals and means (Sulaiman & Olowu, 2022).

In the context of the topic loot plenty and return little: interrogating plea bargain in Nigeria's justice system in Benue state, strain theory can be applied to analyze the underlying motivations behind corruption and looting practices. Nigeria's societal structures, characterized by high levels of poverty, inequality, and limited opportunities for economic advancement, can create significant strain on individuals seeking financial success and material wealth. The discrepancy between the desired goals of prosperity and the limited legitimate means to achieve them may drive individuals to engage in corrupt activities such as embezzlement and looting.

According to strain theory, individuals facing economic strain and pressure to meet societal expectations of wealth and success may resort to innovative means, such as corruption and embezzlement, to attain their goals. The practice of "loot plenty and return little" in plea bargains can be seen as a manifestation of this strain, where individuals may engage in corrupt practices to accumulate wealth quickly but negotiate lenient deals to avoid severe consequences. The discrepancy between the societal goal of accumulating wealth and the limited legitimate avenues for achieving it contributes to the perpetuation of corrupt behavior within the Nigerian justice system in the state.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a correlational research design to examine the relationship between plea bargaining in Nigeria's criminal justice system and the culture of looting in Benue State, Nigeria. A correlational design is suitable for investigating the degree and direction of association between two or more variables without manipulating them. It enables the researcher to identify patterns, trends, and predictive relationships between variables. The target population comprised personnel from three key institutions in the criminal justice system: The Nigeria Police Force, the Judiciary (courts), and the Nigerian Correctional Service, all based in Benue State. A multistage sampling technique was employed to ensure broad representativeness and systematic selection of participants across Benue State's criminal justice institutions. This approach allowed the study to capture variations in perceptions and experiences across geographic, institutional, and professional categories. Stage One: In the first stage, Benue State was stratified into its three constitutionally recognized senatorial districts: Benue North-East Senatorial District, Benue North-West

Senatorial District and Benue South Senatorial District. Stratification at this level ensured that the sample captured geographic diversity and reflected the administrative divisions that influence the distribution of security and justice sector institutions across the state. This first stage also helped minimize sampling bias and allowed the inclusion of institutions spread across wider socio-political and cultural contexts within the state. Stage Two: In the second stage, purposive sampling was used to select major institutions that play central roles in the administration of criminal justice. This method was chosen because these institutions are directly relevant to the research objectives and house personnel with specialized knowledge and operational experience. The following institutions were purposively selected from each senatorial district based on their mandate, size, accessibility, and operational significance: Nigerian Police Force (NPF) – representing law enforcement. Benue State Judiciary (Courts) – representing the adjudication process as well as Nigerian Correctional Service (NCoS) – representing custodial and rehabilitative services.

This stage ensured that the study captured the perspectives of front-line actors across the three pillars of the criminal justice system. Stage Three: In the final stage, proportionate random sampling was employed to select respondents within each institution. This ensured that the number of respondents drawn from each institution reflected its actual size and staff strength, thereby improving representativeness. The study ensured fair representation across the three professional groups — police personnel, judicial officers/court workers, and correctional service staff. It also strengthened the internal validity of the findings by allowing meaningful comparisons across institutions and districts.

Data were collected using both quantitative and qualitative instruments. Data were analysed using frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation were also applied to determine the relationship between plea bargaining practices and the culture of looting in Benue State.

## **Findings**

Findings are presented using frequency tables, cross-tabulations, correlation statistics, and frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation were also applied to determine thematic analysis. The multidimensional evidence is interpreted in light of the study objectives and relevant criminological theories, particularly rational choice theory and institutional strain perspectives.

### Distribution of Respondents by Institution

Institution	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Police	118	39.3
Judiciary/Court Workers	104	34.6
Correctional Service	78	26.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>

The sample composition reflects the tripartite structure of the criminal justice system in Benue State. Police officers constitute the largest group due to their numerical dominance and frontline role in handling corruption investigations. Judicial personnel represent a significant proportion, reflecting their central role in adjudicating plea bargain applications. Correctional service staff constitute the smallest segment but offer unique insights into sentencing outcomes and post-conviction realities.

### Awareness of Plea Bargaining

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Aware	241	80.3
Not aware	59	19.7

High awareness (80.3%) demonstrates that plea bargaining is a familiar concept among justice practitioners in the state. The 19.7% who lacked prior knowledge, although small, suggests gaps in formal training—especially problematic given the legal implications of plea agreements under the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA), 2015.

“Plea bargaining has turned into an escape route for influential defendants who can negotiate freedom.” — Senior Judicial Officer, Makurdi

This confirms the perception of institutional bias and weakens public trust. Participants emphasized that plea bargains enable offenders to return only a small portion of illicit proceeds.

### Sources of Knowledge of Plea Bargaining (Multiple Response)

Source of Knowledge	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Workplace/Professional Experience	182	60.7
Media Reports	129	43.0
Legal Training/Workshops	94	31.3
Colleagues/Peer Discussions	77	25.7
Academic Literature	52	17.3

The workplace is the predominant learning environment, indicating a practice-driven rather than theory-driven understanding of plea bargaining. Media influence (43%) underscores the high visibility of high-profile plea deals, often associated with corruption cases. The relatively low exposure through academic literature suggests a gap between scholarship and practice, likely contributing to misinterpretation or inconsistent application of plea bargaining procedures.

### **Direct Involvement in Cases Involving Plea Bargaining**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	164	54.7
No	136	45.3

More than half (54.7%) had direct involvement, indicating that plea bargaining is not merely theoretical but operational in Benue State’s justice system. Those with no experience often attributed this to institutional opacity and the restricted nature of sensitive corruption cases, which are usually controlled by senior officers or special units.

### **Types of Cases Involving Plea Bargaining (Multiple Response)**

<b>Type of Case</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Corruption/Financial Crimes	142	47.3
Cybercrime	78	26.0
Drug-related Offenses	61	20.3
Violent Crimes	39	13.0
Minor Offenses	24	8.0

Corruption cases (47.3%) form the bulk of plea bargain applications, confirming scholarly arguments that Nigeria’s plea bargaining practice is disproportionately used in high-profile economic crime cases rather than minor offenses. Its relatively low application in violent crimes suggests prosecutorial reluctance to offer concessions where public safety is at stake.

### **Perceived Fairness of Plea Bargaining**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Fair	36	12.0
Not Fair	211	70.3
Not Sure	53	17.7

The overwhelming perception of unfairness (70.3%) reflects the widespread belief that plea bargaining is selectively applied. This aligns with Olowu & Sulaiman (2023), who contend

that plea bargaining in Nigeria tends to shield the elite. The 12% who view the system as fair cited accelerated justice and decongestion of courts as potential benefits.

### Perceived Beneficiaries of Plea Bargaining

Beneficiary Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Rich and politically connected	225	75.0
Middle-income offenders	41	13.7
Poor offenders	8	2.7
The State/Government	26	8.6

The belief that elites are the principal beneficiaries underscores systemic inequality and reinforces the dual-justice hypothesis—where the wealthy negotiate freedom while the poor face the full weight of the law. This is consistent with interview narratives describing plea bargaining as an “escape route for influential defendants.”

“Someone steals billions and returns a few millions. That is not justice.” — Correctional Officer

Justice workers argued that reduced sentences create incentives for criminal behavior.

“If offenders know they can bargain, they take greater risks.” — Police Detective, Anti-Corruption Unit

Interviewees highlighted procedural opacity and inadequate enforcement of ACJA (2015).

“There are no clear guidelines. Everything depends on who is involved.” — Prosecutor, High Court.

### Perceived Relationship between Plea Bargaining and Looting Behaviour

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes, it encourages looting	217	72.3
No	48	16.0
Not sure	35	11.7

A substantial majority believe that plea bargaining fosters looting. Respondents argued that the possibility of negotiating reduced penalties decreases the perceived risks associated with corruption, thereby altering offenders’ cost–benefit calculus—an interpretation consistent with rational choice theory.

### Estimated Percentage of Looted Funds Returned in Plea Deals

Percentage Returned	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Less than 10	92	30.7
10–30	118	39.3
31–50	54	18.0
Above 50	36	12.0

The belief that offenders return only a small fraction of stolen funds (mostly 10–30%) illustrates the empirical reality described in Nigerian corruption case outcomes. This perception directly embodies the culture of “loot plenty and return little,” emphasizing weak restitution frameworks and excessive judicial discretion.

### Cross-Tabulation Analysis

#### Institutional Affiliation and Perception That Plea Bargaining Encourages Looting

Institution	Yes (%)	No (%)	Not Sure (%)
Police	74.6	15.3	10.1
Judiciary	71.2	18.3	10.5
Correctional Service	69.1	17.9	13.0

Across all institutions, the belief that plea bargaining promotes looting is consistently high. The judiciary’s comparatively high percentage is particularly revealing, given its direct responsibility for approving plea deals, and points to internal dissatisfaction with how the system is administered.

### Inferential Statistics

#### Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC)

Variables Compared	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Plea Bargaining × Looting Culture	0.62	0.000	Strong positive and statistically significant relationship

The correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.62$ ) indicates a moderately strong positive relationship, suggesting that the increasing use of plea bargaining is associated with a greater prevalence of looting behavior. This reinforces the theoretical expectation that weak formal sanctions contribute to higher levels of opportunistic corruption.

Plea bargaining is perceived as selectively applied and disproportionately benefiting elites. Restitution rates are perceived as low, reinforcing the culture of returning little after looting much. Plea bargaining significantly weakens deterrence, encouraging repeat corruption. Institutional actors across the justice system share similar negative perceptions, suggesting a systemic pattern rather than isolated bias. A strong positive correlation exists between the prevalence of plea bargaining and entrenched looting culture.

### Discussion

The study examined the relationship between plea bargaining in Nigeria’s criminal justice system and the culture of “loot plenty and return little” in Benue State. Findings from both

the quantitative and qualitative data reveal a significant association between the practice of plea bargaining and the persistence of corruption-related offenses in the state. Statistical analysis using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) indicated a moderate to strong positive correlation between plea bargaining and the perpetuation of looting behavior among public officials. This suggests that as plea bargaining becomes more prevalent in corruption cases, the tendency for offenders to misappropriate public funds without fear of severe consequences increases.

Respondents largely agreed that plea bargaining, in its current form, diminishes deterrence and encourages impunity within the justice system. This aligns with the position of Olowu and Sulaiman (2023), who argued that the selective application of plea bargaining in Nigeria has transformed it into a mechanism for protecting elites rather than promoting justice. The finding also coheres with Adebajo and Aluko (2025), who reported that negotiated settlements in corruption cases often enable offenders to retain a portion of stolen wealth under the guise of legal compromise.

Descriptive analysis revealed that the majority of respondents (over 70%) perceived plea bargaining as unfair and biased toward the rich and politically connected, while only a small fraction viewed it as a legitimate tool for enhancing judicial efficiency. Court officials and correctional service officers expressed concern that plea bargaining often prioritizes speed over justice, resulting in reduced sentences that do not reflect the gravity of financial crimes.

The qualitative interviews corroborated this pattern. A senior judicial officer in Makurdi noted that “plea bargaining, the way it is applied, has turned into an escape route for influential defendants who can negotiate freedom.” Similarly, a police officer observed that “ordinary offenders rarely benefit from plea deals—only those with connections and money can access it.” These narratives reinforce the perception that plea bargaining erodes the principle of equality before the law, thereby fostering public distrust in the justice process.

The findings further show that while plea bargaining was intended to enhance accountability by ensuring partial restitution of looted funds, its implementation gaps have weakened its deterrent potential. Many respondents agreed that the practice has instead created a culture of “soft landing” for offenders, especially in politically sensitive cases. This reflects the argument of Nwosu (2025) that Nigeria’s plea bargaining framework lacks clear guidelines on restitution, leaving room for judicial discretion and manipulation.

Moreover, the study observed that despite the existence of the *Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA)*, 2015, which provides a legal basis for plea bargaining, enforcement mechanisms remain weak. This institutional fragility sustains a cycle in which looters return only a fraction of their illicit gains—validating the notion of “loot plenty and return little.”

The persistence of this culture has broader implications for governance and economic integrity in Benue State and Nigeria at large. Participants emphasized that when high-profile offenders negotiate minimal penalties, it sends a negative moral signal to society, normalizing corruption as a low-risk, high-reward activity. Consequently, genuine deterrence is lost, and citizens’ confidence in the judiciary is further eroded.

The mixed-method results collectively reveal that although plea bargaining may expedite judicial processes, its unequal application and weak restitution framework limit its effectiveness as an anti-corruption strategy. Quantitative correlations confirmed the link between frequent plea bargaining and entrenched looting behavior, while qualitative insights explained *why*—namely, elite manipulation, lack of transparency, and institutional compromise. This triangulated understanding supports earlier studies by Olowu (2023) and Sulaiman & Olowu (2022), who found that without stringent enforcement and public disclosure mechanisms, plea bargaining risks entrenching, rather than eradicating, systemic corruption.

## **Conclusion**

This study assessed the relationship between plea bargaining in Nigeria’s criminal justice system and the prevailing culture of “loot plenty and return little” in Benue State. The findings revealed a strong perception among justice sector stakeholders that the practice of plea bargaining, as currently implemented, weakens deterrence, encourages impunity, and undermines public confidence in the justice system. The quantitative results showed that respondents generally agreed that plea bargaining enables offenders to escape full punishment and promotes partial restitution of looted funds. Qualitative data further revealed that plea deals are often negotiated in favor of politically connected individuals, creating a dual justice system - one for the rich and another for the poor. Although plea bargaining was introduced to enhance judicial efficiency, reduce case backlogs and recover stolen assets, the evidence from this study suggests that it has become a tool for legitimizing corruption rather than curbing it. Its selective application and lack of transparency have eroded its credibility and contributed to the normalization of looting behaviors among public officials. The study

concludes that while plea bargaining remains a potentially effective legal mechanism, its current use in Nigeria, particularly in corruption-related cases, perpetuates the culture of returning little after looting much. Reforming its framework is therefore crucial to restore justice, equity, and deterrence in the Nigerian legal system.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. The National Assembly should review the *Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA)* to establish clear, transparent, and enforceable guidelines for plea bargaining, particularly in corruption-related cases. Such reforms should ensure that plea agreements specify full restitution of looted funds and proportionate punishment.
- ii. Courts should be mandated to publish the details of all plea bargain agreements involving public funds. Transparency in negotiated settlements will deter manipulations and strengthen public trust in the judicial process.
- iii. Plea bargaining should include mandatory full recovery of stolen assets, with offenders required to return 100% of embezzled funds plus penalties. This would discourage future offenders and demonstrate that crime does not pay.
- iv. Training programs should be organized to enhance the capacity of judicial officers and prosecutors to apply plea bargaining ethically and uniformly. Proper understanding of its principles will minimize abuse and selective application.
- v. Civil society organizations should be empowered to monitor plea bargaining outcomes and advocate for justice reforms. This will foster accountability and promote public participation in anti-corruption efforts.
- vi. The criminal justice system should ensure that plea bargaining is not used as a substitute for punishment but as a complementary mechanism that combines restitution with deterrence. Offenders should still face commensurate legal consequences alongside asset recovery.

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# **A Review of the Evolution of Criminology and its Impact on Criminal Justice Administration in Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examined the historical progression of criminology and its impact on the administration of criminal justice in Nigeria, focusing on the challenges and possible solutions to enhance the system. The study utilizes a dialectical review method utilizing qualitative research design, within the Social Disorganization Theory. It delves into early criminological theories, such as the theological explanations, the classical school of thought, biological theories, psychological theories, and crime in primitive societies, tracing their effects on contemporary criminology. The research also addresses the development of criminology in Nigeria, the contributions of criminology to societal advancement, and the obstacles faced by the Nigerian criminal justice framework. The results indicate that criminology has greatly aided society by elucidating human behavior, advocating for justice, and promoting social order. Nonetheless, Nigeria's criminal justice system encounters several issues, including corruption, insufficient recruitment in law enforcement, and a lack of public confidence. To tackle these challenges, the study suggests improving accountability, boosting funding and resources, implementing community-based programs, and reinforcing anti-corruption agencies. By embracing these suggestions, Nigeria's justice system can become fairer and more effective, ultimately fostering justice and safety for its citizens.

**Keywords:** Corruption; Crime, Criminal justice system; Criminology; Restoration.

## **Introduction**

Criminology, as a multidisciplinary field encompassing biology, sociology, psychology, and political science among others, stands at the forefront of understanding crime and criminal behavior. Its evolution mirrors societal changes and intellectual advancements, aiming not only to explain the causes of crime but also to propose effective preventive measures and justice systems worldwide. The roots of criminology are traceable to the 18th century when Cesare Beccaria and Jeremy Bentham pioneered its modern foundations. Beccaria, in his seminal work "On Crimes and Punishments" (1764), advocated for a rational approach to criminal justice. He argued against the use of torture and harsh punishments, suggesting that punishments should be proportional to the crime committed, marking a significant departure from the brutal practices of his time. Bentham, building upon Beccaria's ideas, introduced utilitarianism to criminology, emphasizing the maximization of happiness and reduction of pain in societal conduct and legal systems.

Throughout the Renaissance and into the 20th century, criminology expanded both in scope and theoretical diversity. The classical school, championed by Beccaria and Bentham, focused on individual rationality and free will in committing crimes and its influence paved the way for reforms in criminal law and the establishment of more humane justice systems globally.

In contemporary criminology, diverse perspectives such as biological, psychological, and sociological theories have enriched our understanding of criminal behavior. Biological theories explore genetic and physiological factors influencing criminal tendencies, while psychological theories delve into the impact of individual experiences and mental health on criminal actions. Sociological theories, including strain theory and social disorganization theory, analyze how societal structures and inequalities contribute to criminal behavior. Moreover, criminology has adapted to global challenges such as terrorism, cybercrime, and transnational organized crime. These phenomena necessitate innovative approaches in law enforcement, policy-making, and international cooperation to effectively combat evolving threats to public safety.

In Nigeria, criminology faces unique challenges amidst socio-political complexities. Issues such as corruption within law enforcement agencies, overcrowded prisons, and inadequate judicial systems pose significant obstacles to crime prevention and justice. Scholars and practitioners in Nigerian criminology strive to address these challenges through research,

policy advocacy, and community engagement, aiming to enhance law enforcement capabilities and promote social justice.

This review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the historical evolution of criminology, spanning from its classical roots with Beccaria and Bentham to its modern applications in diverse societal contexts. By synthesizing current research published between 2018 and 2024, the review seeks to highlight contemporary advancements and debates within the field. It aims to underscore the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in understanding and addressing crime, emphasizing the relevance of criminology in shaping effective criminal justice policies and practices globally.

Criminology continues to evolve as a vital discipline, essential for maintaining social order and justice in an increasingly complex world. By examining its historical foundations, theoretical frameworks, and contemporary challenges, this review underscores criminology's role in informing evidence-based policies and interventions. Moving forward, interdisciplinary collaboration and empirical research will remain crucial in advancing our understanding of crime and developing effective strategies to mitigate its impact on societies worldwide.

### **Statement of Problem**

The Nigerian criminal justice system faces several challenges that compromise its effectiveness in combating crime and delivering justice. Although the country has made attempts to reform its criminal justice framework, problems such as corruption, insufficient police recruitment, and a lack of public trust continue to exist (Dambazau, 2006; Onyeozili, 2005). The absence of a thorough understanding of the evolution of criminology and its effects on the Nigerian criminal justice system has obstructed the formulation of effective policies and interventions to tackle these issues. This research aims to fill this knowledge void by investigating the historical development of criminology and its consequences for the administration of criminal justice in Nigeria.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Theories of Crime and Punishment**

Criminological thought has evolved significantly from its origins, where explanations of crime were often rooted in supernatural or religious beliefs, to more contemporary theories that incorporate psychology, biology, and social structures. This review examines early

criminological theories, focusing on theological explanations, the classical school, biological theories, psychological theories, and crime in primitive societies. Each of these frameworks offers insight into the foundational beliefs about crime and punishment, tracing their influence on modern criminology. Drawing on recent scholarly literature, this paper critically evaluates these theories within their historical and cultural contexts, and assesses their relevance today.

During the Middle Ages, theological explanations for crime were dominant. Crime was frequently interpreted as the result of sin, with offenders being seen as possessed by evil spirits or acting under the influence of malevolent forces. Religious traditions such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism viewed crime as an act of disobedience not only to societal norms but also to divine law. Sin, in this context, was synonymous with crime, and punishment was often a reflection of divine justice rather than societal retribution (Cavanaugh & Smith, 2019).

The concept of crime in theological frameworks was intrinsically linked to morality, and the response to crime was typically punitive. The punishment served both as a deterrent and as a method of purging evil from the community. While this perspective is largely outdated in contemporary criminology, echoes of theological reasoning still appear in debates around moral responsibility and the death penalty in religious societies. However, critics argue that such a perspective oversimplifies crime by attributing it solely to spiritual failings rather than complex social, economic, or psychological factors (McWilliams, 2020).

From a modern viewpoint, the strength of theological explanations for crime lies in their capacity to offer a moral framework for understanding criminal behavior and punishment. These explanations highlight the significance of moral accountability and the influence of spirituality on individual actions. Nonetheless, the limitation of this theory is its tendency to oversimplify crime, attributing it solely to spiritual shortcomings without considering the intricate interplay of social, economic, and psychological factors that contribute to criminal conduct.

In contemporary criminology, theological explanations fall short in providing a thorough understanding of crime. Modern theories, such as social learning theory, strain theory, and critical criminology, present more nuanced accounts of crime that consider the many factors influencing criminal behavior.

Additionally, theological explanations can be problematic when they lead to punitive measures that emphasize punishment over rehabilitation and restorative justice. In contrast, modern crime approaches focus on addressing the underlying causes of criminal behavior, promoting rehabilitation, and enhancing community safety and well-being.

Overall, while theological interpretations of crime hold historical importance, their relevance to contemporary criminology is diminished by their oversimplification of crime and their inability to address the multifaceted factors that drive criminal behavior. However, they may inform policy discussions surrounding moral accountability and the impact of spirituality in rehabilitation.

### **The Classical School: Thomas Hobbes and Rational Choice**

The classical school of criminology, emerging in the 18th century, represents a fundamental shift in the understanding of crime. Rooted in the work of Enlightenment thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, Cesare Beccaria, and Jeremy Bentham, this school emphasized rationality and free will. Hobbes' social contract theory posited that humans, in their natural state, act out of self-interest, which can lead to conflict and crime. However, individuals agree to a social contract, sacrificing certain freedoms in exchange for the security provided by the rule of law (Pratt, 2018).

The classical school introduced a key principle: crime is a deliberate act against the law, deserving of punishment proportional to the offense. This idea of proportionality laid the groundwork for modern legal systems, where the severity of the punishment corresponds to the seriousness of the crime. According to this perspective, punishment should serve as a deterrent rather than a form of rehabilitation, with retribution often articulated through the principle of "an eye for an eye" (Beccaria, 1764/2021).

Critics of the classical school point to its limitations, particularly in its treatment of free will as universal and undifferentiated. More recent research has shown that social, economic, and psychological factors significantly influence decision-making, undermining the simplistic view of rational choice (Farrington, 2020). Additionally, the classical theory's focus on punishment rather than rehabilitation has been criticized for contributing to punitive systems that fail to address the root causes of criminal behavior.

Nigeria's criminal justice system primarily emphasizes punishment, with various offenses often resulting in imprisonment and fines. Additionally, Nigerian courts strive to impose

sentences that are proportional to the crime, considering the severity of the offense and the culpability of the offender. Similarly, the country's law enforcement agencies and courts implement deterrence strategies, such as publicizing penalties and enforcing severe sentences, to dissuade potential offenders.

### **Biological Theories of Crime: Cesare Lombroso**

In contrast to the classical school's emphasis on free will, biological theories, particularly those of Cesare Lombroso in the 19th century, suggested that criminal behavior could be inherited. Lombroso, often referred to as the father of modern criminology, argued that criminals could be identified by their physical characteristics, such as large jaws, muscular builds, or certain facial features. According to Lombroso, these traits were signs of a "born criminal" and reflected an earlier stage of human evolution (Gatti & Tremblay, 2019).

Lombroso's theory, while innovative for its time, has been widely discredited due to its deterministic approach and lack of empirical support. Critics have noted that Lombroso's work perpetuated harmful stereotypes, particularly regarding race and class, by suggesting that certain groups were more likely to engage in criminal behavior based on their appearance (Rafter, 2021). Moreover, advances in genetics and neuroscience have shown that while biological factors may play a role in predispositions to certain behaviors, they interact with environmental and social factors in complex ways, making Lombroso's theory overly simplistic.

### **Psychological Theories: Sigmund Freud and the Role of the Unconscious**

Psychological theories of crime, particularly those influenced by Sigmund Freud, shifted the focus from biological determinism to the inner workings of the human mind. Freud's psychoanalytic theory emphasized the role of the unconscious in shaping behavior, including criminal actions. He argued that criminality could result from the failure of the "superego," the part of the personality responsible for moral judgments, to adequately control the "id," which represents primal urges and desires (Freud, 1939/2020).

Key elements of Freud's theory, such as the Oedipus complex, suggested that unresolved childhood conflicts could manifest in deviant behavior. For instance, Freud believed that unconscious sexual desires directed at a parent could lead to aggressive or criminal actions later in life. While Freud's specific ideas have been critiqued for their lack of empirical evidence, his work laid the foundation for modern psychological theories that explore the

relationship between childhood experiences, personality disorders and criminal behavior (Hollin, 2020).

### **Crime in Primitive Societies: Bronislaw Malinowski**

Bronislaw Malinowski, a 19th-century anthropologist, contributed to early criminological thought by examining crime within the context of primitive societies. Malinowski's studies of the Trobriand Islanders revealed that while these societies did not always adhere to formalized laws, social control was maintained through social relations and communal norms (Malinowski, 1926/2021). He noted that anti-social behavior existed in all societies, but the ways in which it was addressed varied depending on cultural context.

Malinowski introduced the concept of restitution, where offenders would compensate victims directly through money or services. This approach contrasts with the more punitive models seen in Western societies, offering an alternative method of resolving conflicts without the need for formal legal systems. Restitution is still relevant today in restorative justice models, which seek to repair harm and reintegrate offenders into society rather than simply punishing them (Walgrave, 2019).

The early theories of crime and punishment—from theological explanations to biological determinism and psychological frameworks—reflect the evolving understanding of human behavior in relation to criminality. While many of these theories have been critiqued and refined over time, they have each contributed to the development of criminology as a discipline. Modern criminology continues to draw on these foundational ideas while incorporating new research on the complex interplay between biology, psychology, and social environments in shaping criminal behavior.

The concept of crime has been a persistent part of human history, with ancient civilizations developing unique laws and punishments based on their societal values. In ancient Mesopotamia (3500 BCE), for instance, the Code of Hammurabi was among the earliest codifications of law, specifying penalties for crimes such as theft, murder, and adultery. This legal system, which emphasized retribution, laid the groundwork for structured criminal justice systems across civilizations. Similarly, in ancient Egypt (3100 BCE), crimes such as tomb robbery or murder were met with severe punishments, including mutilation or death. The societal norms and religious values of these civilizations influenced their approach to crime and punishment (Emsley, 2023).

Ancient Greece (8th century BCE) also had its own judicial systems. The Athenian legal system, for example, dealt with serious crimes like murder, theft, and sacrilege, emphasizing the communal role in maintaining law and order. Ancient Rome (509 BCE) operated under the Twelve Tablets, which established rules regarding property rights, theft, and treason. The Romans, like the Greeks, viewed crime in both legal and moral terms, with punishments varying in severity based on the crime (Shoemaker, 2023).

Ancient China, under the Tang Code (2100 BCE), had its own sophisticated legal system that addressed crimes such as murder, theft, and corruption. This system influenced the development of later legal frameworks across Asia. In both ancient European and African cultures, witchcraft was a serious crime, often punished by death through stoning or other forms of execution (Law, 2024).

During the Middle Ages, the church played a significant role in defining crime and punishment. Crime was often seen as an offense against both God and the community, leading to harsh punishments like corporal penalties or public executions. These acts were meant to serve as deterrents and reinforce social order, with public displays of punishment emphasizing divine justice. The medieval period relied on physical tests (often believed to be divinely guided) to determine guilt or innocence, and punishment was primarily retributive rather than rehabilitative. Ecclesiastical courts had authority over moral offenses like blasphemy and heresy, highlighting the strong religious influence on crime definitions (Bernard, 2024).

The **Renaissance** marked a shift in thinking about crime and justice. Scholars began to challenge traditional beliefs, advocating for rational approaches to crime. **Cesare Beccaria**, in his 1764 work *On Crimes and Punishments*, was a key figure in this intellectual movement. He argued for proportionate punishments and rationality over vengeance, laying the groundwork for modern criminological theory. Beccaria's work emphasized deterrence and sought to reform the justice system, moving it towards a more structured and empirical approach to criminal behavior (Shoemaker, 2023).

This shift towards rationality, along with the development of centralized courts and legal codes during the Renaissance, began shaping the legal frameworks that would influence modern societies. The period fostered the idea of fairness in justice, steering away from the excessive brutality that characterized earlier eras, and promoting systematic observation of criminal behavior as a means to understand and prevent crime (Emsley, 2023).

Crime and punishment have evolved significantly across civilizations and eras, from the retributive justice systems of ancient societies to the more structured and empirical

approaches seen during the Renaissance. These developments have paved the way for modern criminology, with historical legal systems influencing contemporary thoughts on justice and legal practice.

The Positivist School of Criminology, emerging in the 19th century, marked a significant shift from the Classical School by focusing on scientific approaches to understanding crime. Unlike the Classical School, which emphasized free will and rationality, the Positivist School argued that criminal behavior could be studied and understood through observation, measurement, and empirical research.

**Key features of the Positivist School include:**

- i. **Determinism:** The belief that behavior is determined by external factors such as biological traits, psychological conditions, or environmental influences. This view counters the Classical notion of free will, suggesting that individuals have limited control over their actions due to factors like brain dysfunction, genetics, and early childhood experiences (Bernard, 2024).
- ii. **Empirical Methods:** Positivists employed systematic research methods, such as qualitative data analysis and statistical modeling, to study criminal behavior scientifically. These methods helped build a body of evidence for understanding crime as a phenomenon influenced by various external forces rather than just personal choice.
- iii. **The Concept of the "Born Criminal":** Introduced by **Cesare Lombroso**, often considered the father of the Positivist School, this idea suggested that certain individuals were biologically predisposed to crime. Lombroso believed that physical characteristics could help distinguish criminals from non-criminals, a theory that has since been discredited but was foundational at the time (Emsley, 2023).

Despite its innovations, the Positivist School faced criticism, notably from scholars like Enrico Ferri and Raffaele Garofalo, who argued that the narrow focus on biological determinism overlooked critical social factors such as poverty and inequality. These critics emphasized the need to consider the broader social context when analyzing criminal behavior. In contrast, the Classical School of Criminology, pioneered by Cesare Beccaria and Jeremy Bentham, emphasized rationality and free will. Beccaria, in his famous work *On Crimes and Punishments* (1764), argued against the use of torture and capital punishment, proposing that punishments should be proportionate to the crime. He also advocated for better prison conditions and supported the "social contract" theory, where the state exists to serve the people, and laws should reflect the general will (Shoemaker, 2023).

Jeremy Bentham, a proponent of utilitarianism, extended Beccaria's ideas by emphasizing that the law should maximize the "greatest happiness for the greatest number." He argued that people are motivated by the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, and that punishment should deter crime without being excessively harsh. Bentham also designed the Panopticon, a model prison based on the principle of constant surveillance to ensure discipline and efficiency (Bernard, 2024). Both schools of thought have left enduring legacies in criminology. The Classical School influenced legal reforms and the development of more humane justice systems, while the Positivist School introduced scientific approaches to understanding crime, laying the foundation for modern criminology.

### **Developments in Criminology during the 20th Century**

The 20th Century experienced significant developments in criminological theory, resulting in various frameworks aimed at elucidating criminal behavior and societal responses to crime. This period signified a transition from conventional perspectives of crime as solely a legal or moral concern to a more nuanced, interdisciplinary comprehension (Beccaria, 2021; Blumberg, 1974).

#### **Principal Theories**

**Strain Theory**, formulated by Robert Merton in 1938, posits that societal pressures to achieve success may result in criminal behavior when individuals cannot reach these goals through legitimate avenues (Dambazau, 2006).

**Social Learning Theory**, developed by Ronald Akers in 1939, asserts that individuals acquire behaviors, including criminal ones, through observation of others, particularly within intimate social circles (Farrington, 2020).

**Howard Becker's Labelling Theory**, articulated in 1963, highlights the impact of societal reactions and labels, such as "criminal," on individuals' adoption of deviant identities (Odekunle, 1998).

**Control Theory** posits that, according to Travis Hirschi (1969), robust social bonds—such as those formed within family, school, and community—serve to deter individuals from criminal behavior. Individuals with weak social ties are more prone to deviance (Walgrave, 2019).

**Rational Choice Theory**, formulated by Ronald Clarke and Derek Cornish in 1986, posits that individuals assess the costs and benefits prior to engaging in criminal behavior, indicating that crime arises from rational decision-making processes (Pratt, 2018).

The Chicago School of Criminology refers to a significant theoretical framework in the study of crime and deviance, emphasizing the role of the social environment in shaping criminal behavior. The Chicago School, which emerged in the early 20th Century, was a transformative force in criminology. It brought to light the profound impact of urban environments on criminal behavior. Pioneering researchers such as Robert Park and Clifford Shaw delved into the social disorganization that was rampant in rapidly expanding urban areas. Their work posited that crime is significantly influenced by variables such as poverty, unemployment, and the lack of social cohesion within communities (Dambazau, 2006; Gatti & Tremblay, 2019).

### **Critical criminology**

Developments in the late 20th Century encompassed the emergence of critical criminology, which challenged conventional crime theories by emphasizing social justice, inequality, and power dynamics. Researchers in this domain examine the disproportionate impact of the criminal justice system on marginalized groups, such as racial minorities and women (Malinowski, 2021; Rafter, 2021).

### **Progress in Methodological Approaches and Technological Innovations**

Criminology adopted a more empirical and scientific methodology. Quantitative methods, including statistical analysis, surveys, and experiments, have gained increased prominence. Technologies such as computerized databases, crime mapping, and surveillance techniques have enabled criminologists to enhance the tracking and analysis of criminal trends, thereby transforming the field (Hollin, 2020; McWilliams, 2020).

Crime is understood as a construct shaped by societal norms and values. The perspective that crime is a social construct indicates that criminal behavior is not intrinsically deviant but is shaped by societal norms and power dynamics. This concept is consistent with labeling theory and conflict theory, which assert that behaviors are designated as "criminal" due to social biases and power dynamics rather than any inherent immorality (Freud, 2020; Walgrave, 2019).

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in social disorganisation theory, which asserts that the breakdown of social institutions and the dilution of social ties can result in a rise in criminal activities and deviant behavior (Sampson & Groves, 1989). The concept, introduced by Clifford Shaw and Henry D. McKay of the Chicago School of Criminology in 1942, argues that an individual's behavioral choices are primarily influenced by their physical and social environment. This theory suggests that elevated levels of social disorganisation within neighborhoods and communities are marked by a lack of social cohesion, fragile social networks, and diminished informal social control (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993). Shaw and McKay noted that areas with high crime rates shared at least three characteristics: physical decay, poverty, and a greater extent of ethnic and cultural diversity. The theory posits that crime and antisocial behaviors are not the result of individual failings, but rather a normal reaction of typical individuals to abnormal conditions.

The Social Disorganization Theory offers a significant framework for understanding the development of criminology and its influence on criminal justice management in Nigeria. This theory suggests that crime and delinquency are more prevalent in regions with feeble social structures, adverse economic conditions, and a lack of community solidarity. Within the Nigerian context, the theory may clarify how social and economic elements impact crime statistics and trends.

## **Methodology**

This research employs a dialectical review approach to explore the evolution of criminology and its influence on criminal justice administration in Nigeria. The study is based on an extensive review of current literature, encompassing academic journals, books, and credible online sources. Utilizing a qualitative research design, the study applies a thematic analysis method to recognize and examine pertinent themes and concepts found in the literature. Data is gathered from a variety of sources, including academic journals, textbooks on criminology, criminal justice, and related disciplines, along with online resources.

The thematic analysis method is utilized to interpret the collected data, which involves:

- a) Identifying relevant themes and concepts in the literature.
- b) Analyzing and interpreting the themes and concepts within the context of the study.
- c) Drawing conclusions based on the analysis.

The limitations of the study include its dependence on existing literature and the possibility of bias in the selection of sources. Nevertheless, the research aims to present a comprehensive and impartial review of the literature to minimize these limitations.

## **Discussion**

### **The Role of Criminology in Societal Development**

Criminology, as a field of study, has made significant contributions to society by:

- (a) Understanding human behaviour through examining the underlying causes of crime through psychological, social, and biological factors (Blumberg, 1974; Dambazau, 2006).
- (b) Criminology plays a crucial role in promoting justice. It does so by advocating for fairness within the legal system, evaluating the justness and equity of laws and judicial processes (Cavanaugh & Smith, 2019). This reassures us that criminology is not just about understanding crime, but also about ensuring justice prevails.
- (c) Social stability helps identify factors that disrupt societal order and facilitates the implementation of preventive measures (Onyeozili, 2005).
- (d) Criminologists are not just interested in understanding crime, they also play a key role in forecasting crime trends. By utilizing research and theoretical frameworks, they can predict crime trends and propose preventive measures (Pratt, 2018). This proactive approach helps us prepare for and potentially prevent future criminal activities. Social change emphasizes the identification of injustices and inequalities, advocating for reforms to tackle systemic issues such as poverty and discrimination (Walgrave, 2019).

The 20th Century established the foundation for contemporary criminology, expanding its scope and integrating multi-disciplinary approaches that have clarified crime and enhanced the criminal justice system.

### **Criminology within the Nigerian Context**

The field of criminology in Nigeria is significantly influenced by the country's distinct cultural, economic, and political context. The underdevelopment, religious diversity, ethnic divisions, and socio-economic challenges in Nigeria have directly impacted the crime landscape (Adekunle, 2010). Nigeria crime rate ranks the country 3<sup>rd</sup> in Africa following South Africa and Angola with crime index of 66.2. The country's crime environment is characterized by political instability, corruption, terrorism (notably the Boko Haram

insurgency), economic crime, and various social issues such as human trafficking and cybercrime (Premium Times, 2018; Odekunle, 1998). The interplay of these factors has hindered law enforcement and the justice system's ability to effectively address crime (Dambazau, 2006).

### **Historical Development of Criminology in Nigeria**

Despite the significant changes brought about by colonialism, the Nigerian criminal justice system has shown resilience. Prior to colonialism, Nigerian societies depended on customary rules administered by traditional authorities, emphasizing reparation above punishment. British colonization (1862–1960) instituted formal English law, leading to the establishment of colonial courts and police forces that predominantly catered to colonial interests rather than community needs (Dambazau, 2006; Onyeozili, 2005).

Following independence, Nigeria preserved a significant portion of the colonial legal framework while incorporating customary rules. The burgeoning academic interest in criminology resulted in its incorporation into higher education curricula. Nigerian institutions such as the University of Ibadan and the University of Lagos emerged as hubs for criminological research, playing a crucial role in understanding and addressing the effects of urbanization, corruption, and other novel criminal activities that surfaced in the late 20th century (Walgrave, 2019; Farrington, 2020).

Criminal studies in Nigeria have concentrated on economic offenses, fraud, corruption, cybercrime, armed robbery, kidnapping, and terrorism, including the Boko Haram insurgency (Odekunle, 1998; Gatti & Tremblay, 2019). The obstacles confronting Nigeria's criminal justice system encompass: Inadequate coordination among law enforcement, judiciary, and correctional facilities leads to inefficiencies and inconsistencies (Cavanaugh & Smith, 2019). Adverse public opinion of law enforcement is exacerbated by pervasive corruption, brutality, and the inability to safeguard individuals (Dambazau, 2006). Prison inefficiencies, characterized by elevated recidivism rates and a significant proportion of inmates awaiting trial, indicate a failure in rehabilitation and deterrence (Blumberg, 1974; Malinowski, 2021).

A significant difficulty is the recruitment process within the Nigerian police force, which is characterized by influence, bribery, and nepotism. Inadequate compensation has compelled numerous police personnel to resort to extortion and other immoral behaviors for survival, thereby further undermining public confidence in law enforcement (Adekunle, 2010).

Notwithstanding these issues, many improvements have been implemented to enhance Nigeria's criminal justice system. Organisations such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) were created to address certain challenges, including financial crimes and corruption (Premium Times, 2018). Criminological research remains essential for comprehending crime patterns and guiding policy recommendations (McWilliams, 2020).

Criminology in Nigeria is continually evolving, influenced by the nation's distinct social, political, and economic circumstances. The evolution of the profession in Nigeria highlights multidisciplinary methodologies, tackling diverse concerns from traditional law to contemporary cybercrime and terrorism (Freud, 2020; Pratt, 2018). Notwithstanding the obstacles confronting the justice system, criminologists and policymakers are actively striving for reforms to enhance crime prevention and justice administration (Rafter, 2021).

### **Criminal Justice Policies in Nigeria**

Nigeria's criminal justice policies aim to combat crime, safeguard human rights, and enhance the legal framework. Administration of Criminal Justice Act, 2015 (ACJA): This Act seeks to optimize the judicial system by facilitating prompt justice delivery, safeguarding defendants' rights, and implementing reforms, including plea bargaining, witness protection, and non-custodial punishment for minor offenses. These measures mitigate prison overcrowding and improve equity in the judicial process (Dambazau, 2006).

**Anti-Corruption Policies:** The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) were created to address corruption through the investigation and prosecution of corrupt persons. These entities seek to recuperate misappropriated public finances and enhance government transparency. Despite its acknowledged presence, corruption continues to be a pervasive problem in Nigeria (Odekunle, 1998; Onyeozili, 2005).

**Criminal Justice changes:** These changes aim to modernize the justice system by establishing specialized courts, automating judicial processes, and implementing training programs for law enforcement personnel and judiciary staff. The revisions seek to rectify delays in the judicial system, which have posed considerable difficulty (Cavanaugh & Smith, 2019).

**Protection of Human Rights:** Policies have been established to safeguard the rights of all Nigerians, encompassing suspects and inmates. Organizations like the Legal Aid Council and human rights units within law enforcement agencies offer assistance to marginalized groups and guarantee equitable treatment within the judicial system (Malinowski, 2021).

**Community Policing:** Community policing has been implemented to enhance cooperation between law enforcement agencies and local communities. This strategy prioritizes trust cultivation and responsiveness to community needs, hence aiding in grassroots crime prevention. This paradigm has shown some success; nonetheless, issues such as corruption, underfunding, and resource deficiencies persistently hinder its efficacy (Pratt, 2018; Walgrave, 2019).

### **Challenges**

Notwithstanding these policies, Nigeria's criminal justice system encounters numerous enduring challenges. Corruption in the police, judiciary, and jail institutions obstructs the administration of justice (Freud, 2020). Numerous prisons in Nigeria are overcrowded, with a substantial number of offenders in pretrial detention, exacerbating the system's strain (Blumberg, 1974; Gatti & Tremblay, 2019). Extended legal proceedings lead to postponed justice, so compromising the efficacy of criminal justice reforms (McWilliams, 2020). Inadequate funding and resources for law enforcement and judicial entities frequently result in substandard working conditions and systemic inefficiencies (Hollin, 2020; Rafter, 2021).

### **Findings**

The development of criminology in Nigeria has been influenced by the country's distinctive historical, cultural, and socio-economic background. The imposition of the British legal system during the colonial period has left a lasting mark on Nigeria's approach to crime and justice (Dambazau, 2006). Furthermore, Nigeria's rich cultural diversity has shaped its perceptions of crime and justice, as various cultures possess unique viewpoints on these matters (Odekunle, 1998). Socio-economic difficulties, such as poverty and inequality, have further complicated the landscape of crime and justice in Nigeria (Adekunle, 2010).

Numerous challenges impede the efficient administration of justice in Nigeria. The police recruitment system often suffers from corruption, favoritism, and nepotism, resulting in the hiring of unqualified individuals (Adekunle, 2010). Corruption is a widespread problem within Nigeria's judicial framework, affecting law enforcement bodies, the judiciary, and

correctional institutions (Odekunle, 1998). Insufficient funding and resource shortages also undermine the efficacy of law enforcement and the justice system (Cavanaugh & Smith, 2019).

A range of reforms have been introduced to tackle these issues. The Administration of Criminal Justice Act (2015) seeks to enhance the justice administration in Nigeria by fostering fairness, efficiency, and efficacy (Dambazau, 2006). Community policing represents another strategy that focuses on collaboration between law enforcement and local communities, fostering trust and enhancing cooperation (Pratt, 2018). Improvements in forensic practices can also bolster the efficiency of law enforcement and strengthen the justice system's capability to deliver appropriate outcomes (Hollin, 2020).

In spite of these reforms, challenges continue to exist. Corruption remains a widespread issue in Nigeria's justice system, eroding public confidence and diminishing the efficacy of law enforcement (Freud, 2020). The police recruitment process continues to be problematic, leading to the hiring of unqualified personnel (Adekunle, 2010). Eroded public trust in the justice system can stem from corruption, inefficiency, and a lack of transparency (Cavanaugh & Smith, 2019). These issues need immediate attention as they are crucial to making the system more effective and efficient.

## **Conclusion**

Criminology has substantially changed, with scientists proposing diverse theories to elucidate crime and criminal behaviour. Nigeria's criminal justice policies include global endeavours to reconcile punishment with rehabilitation, safeguard human rights, and maintain societal order. Nevertheless, Nigeria's system is plagued by corruption, inefficiencies, and resource scarcity, hindering the realisation of the changes and policies implemented. Continuous initiatives are required to enhance accountability, get sufficient resources, and resolve structural challenges to guarantee a more equitable and efficient justice system.

## **Recommendations**

To tackle these issues, the study suggests:

- i. **Improving Accountability:** Boosting accountability can enhance transparency and integrity within the justice system. This can be accomplished through initiatives such

- as equipping police officers with body-worn cameras, conducting regular audits, and carrying out internal investigations.
- ii. **Increasing Funding and Resources:** Augmenting funding and resources can help resolve resource shortages and enhance the efficiency of law enforcement. This might involve investing in infrastructure, equipment, and training for law enforcement officials.
  - iii. **Establishing Community-Based Initiatives:** Community-based programs can foster trust and improve collaboration between law enforcement and local populations. Such initiatives may include community policing, neighborhood watch programs, and other efforts that encourage community involvement.
  - iv. **Bolstering Anti-Corruption Agencies:** Reinforcing anti-corruption agencies can help maintain accountability and integrity within the justice system. This could involve providing sufficient funding and resources, ensuring their independence, and promoting transparency.

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# Persistence of Examination Malpractices as a Reflection of Dysfunctional Social Institutions in Nigeria: Evidence from the Federal University of Technology (FUTA) Akure

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## Abstract

This research was conducted to make empirical findings on the persistence of Examination Malpractices (EMs) among students of higher institutions in Nigeria using the Federal University of Technology, Akure (FUTA) as a point of reference. A total of 466 participants responded to the online structured questionnaire disseminated through the social media platforms of WhatsApp and the Telegram over a period of three months (June- August, 2025). The data were analysed using SPSS package involving the use of chi-square for categorical data. Findings revealed that cheating in examination remains persistence because of systemic abnormalities which include some parents and staff who aid and abet cheating in examination as well as a lack of adequate facilities and unconducive environments for examinations. The study recommends among other things that all stakeholders should be held accountable in issues of examination misconduct and adequate punishment measure be meted out to all perpetrators. It also recommends that the governments at all levels should prioritize improvements in the learning environment as well as ensuring the availability of appropriate facilities.

**Keywords:** Education; Examination malpractices; Social institutions; Systemic abnormalities; Values

## **Introduction**

Education is a potent society tool for development as well as progress while examination remains an integral ladder to promotion and ultimate graduation from the school system. Students enter the school in their formative ages, grow through the system to become adults that will serve the society by relying on the learning processes acquired from it (Adebola, Ewemooje & Adebola, 2024). The school therefore remains a major socialization agent where values, norms and standards of behaviour are inculcated in the students. The success of an educational system largely depends on the efficiency of its examination structure because examination is a fundamental component of the teaching and learning process (Suleman, Gul, Ambrin, & Kamran, 2015). Examinations are arranged to evaluate the academic achievements of students in order to ascertain the extent to which they have achieved an average academic learning and acquired knowledge (Omemu, 2015). Consequently, examination goes beyond the individual student writing it because the school system is interconnected among important stakeholders including parents, teachers/lecturers, non-teaching staff, school administrators and the government.

However, over the past three decades, examination malpractice has emerged as a serious dysfunction within the educational system. It is defined as any deliberate misconduct by a student or group of students which may be in cohort with some other people, carried out in order to cheat in an examination. It is a gross misconduct that is increasingly becoming the norm with profound psychological and ethical implications (Ugobueze, 2024). Okunlola (2024), described examination malpractice as a pervasive problem across all levels of education in Nigeria, which undermines the intensity of academic assessments and pose significant challenges to the education system.

Okoye, Ighodaro, Obainoke, & Ugese (2024) reported from their findings that the rise in examination malpractice in tertiary institutions weakens the social fabric of the Nigerian society, including that of our national identity and norms. In the same vein, Udim, Abubakar, & Esseini, (2018), posited that examination malpractice leads to irreversible loss of credibility, negative consequences on the individual and institutions of learning; moral decadence, corruption as well as a lack of hard work among the students.

Social institutions as defined by Yusuf & Omokore (2015), refer to complex, integrated set of social norms that is designed to meet certain basic needs of the society and support societal survival. The society relies on these social institutions which include, the family, religion,

education, and government among others, to remain functional particularly in upholding the values and accepted standards of behaviour. These institutions collaborate and function well to ensure that the younger generation is raised in the consciousness and continuity of existing norms and values in order that the society will run smoothly (Ezeali & Obeh, 2018).

Contrary to expectation however, research has shown that the systems that are expected to guide and guard against examination malpractice are themselves complicit as the school, family, religious bodies, and government have all failed to mitigate the menace. The persistence of examination despite concerted efforts made at overcoming it, is the outcome of dysfunctional social institutions. For instance, Anakwe, (2010) opined that important stakeholder in education including teachers, parents and even school administrators have all become collaborators in issues of examination misconduct. Indirectly too, the lack of adequate facilities and acute shortage of human resources constitute a major hurdle in examination processes (Mauti, Masagara & Nyakwama, 2025) This study therefore considers the persistence of examination malpractice as a failure that is rather systemic and would be solved only when the latent triggers are addressed and not just during the examination period per se

### **Study Objectives**

The main objective of this research was to determine the persistence of examination malpractice among students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria with a particular focus on the Federal University of Technology Akure (FUTA) as a case study. The specific objectives were to:

Ascertain the reasons why students are involved in examination malpractices

- i. Identify the common types of examination malpractices
- ii. Determine students' core values as correlated against their involvement in examination malpractices
- iii. Identify the institutional deficiencies responsible for examination malpractices

### **Hypotheses:**

- i. There is no significant difference between students' desperation for success and indulgence in examination malpractices
- ii. There is no significant difference between students' core values and their involvement in examination malpractices

- iii. There is no significant difference between institutional deficiencies and examination malpractices

### **Literature Review**

Education is a fundamental human right, the acquisition of knowledge, development of skills, attitude and temperaments that foster a harmonious personality, which positively impacts the society at large. Tertiary Education is a tool that the government expects to harness the workforce that will serve in different capacities and contribute positively to a nation's socio-economic and political development (Olagbemi 2014). An important aspect of education that cannot be overemphasized is writing examination, because it is synonymous to value addition as it is meant to improve the quality or chances of an individual's growth and gradual progress (Suleman, Gul, Ambrin, & Kamran, 2015). It is defined as the formal test of one's knowledge or ability in a particular subject, especially by means of answering questions or practical exercises (Milube, Phiri & Nyirenda, 2022). It is a formal process of determining whether a candidate has reached a certain level of performance, competence and learning that would certify him to be promoted to higher level, or certify him as qualified for certain public and private positions at graduation (Mogapi, 2016). Hence, education for students, ride on the wing of performance at examinations, but it is being undermined by examination malpractice which refers to irregularity or negative act that transpires before, during and after examination (Bibi, Muhammad & Dahiru, 2020).

Examination malpractice can be referred to as any deliberate act of wrongdoing or cheating by a candidate or any group of candidates before, during, or after an examination (Adegbite, 2019). As revealed from several studies across Nigerian higher institutions, examination malpractices manifest majorly as 'giraffing', impersonation, collusion, collaborating with others to cheat or share answers during exam; receiving or offering bribes to influence examination results; theft, stealing examination materials before or after exam, materials such as question papers or answer script; forgery, falsifying examination documents and assistance, receiving unauthorized help from teachers invigilators and others (Abdulkadir, Umar & Ladi, 2021; Ugobueze, 2024). The persistence of examination malpractice despite efforts mitigate it, has become challenging (Omojuwa, & Olukorede, 2025). Even though there are clear cut guidelines for examinations and sanctions against examination misconduct not achieved much in curbing the menace (Okoye, Ighodaro, Obainoke, & Ugese, 2024).

A myriad of studies has shown that students engage in examination misconduct not for themselves per se, but much more because of systemic vulnerabilities. For instance, Udim, Abubakar, & Esseini, (2018) affirmed from their study that the fear of failure or the phenomenon of the “diploma disease” as well as efforts to satisfy parents’ wishes have pushed students into examination malpractice. Other reasons advanced for this awkward situation include financial burdens and parents’ socio-economic circumstances (Agaba, Ambali et al, 2021). Poor remunerations for teaching staff, few numbers of invigilators and a lack of facilities have all been identified as major challenges that lead to ineffective examination processes (Adegbite, 2019; Enebong, Ataide, & Ataudo, 2024).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is guided by Robert K. Merton’s (1938) Strain theory. Merton's theory begins with the proposition that in any society there are a number of important cultural goals which provide a frame of aspirational reference and the most important of these goals is that of worldly material success (Merton, 1938). Merton added that there are defined legitimate institutionalised means for achieving the cultural goals which may include a good education, good job, as well as investment among others. However, he asserted that when an individual has internalized a certain goal, and the legitimate means for achieving such a goal are blocked, the individual is put under pressure which may make him resort to illegitimate means to achieving the goal. This theory explains the reasons why students who want to succeed by all means get involved in different forms of examination misconduct.

Merton’s Strain Theory highlights how societal structures and cultural expectations create pressures that lead individuals to deviant behaviour (Mauti, Masagara, & Nyakwama, 2025). The application of Merton’s Strain Theory to the combined systemic deficiencies driving examination misconducts in Nigerian higher institutions indicates that every society is a reflection of what it permits because the school is a mini society that reflects the values of the wider society. The reasons advanced through the literature review as being responsible for persistence cheating in examinations border more on the quest for success and wealth, which remains a major challenge in all capitalist nations including Nigeria, where wealth is concentrated in the hands of very few people.

### **Methodology**

This study used the cross-sectional research design to collect data from undergraduate students across the 10 schools of the Federal University of Technology, Akure (FUTA),

Nigeria. The order of proceeding booklet for the 36<sup>th</sup> convocation ceremony of FUTA (2025) puts the undergraduates' students' population at about 20,000. Simple random sampling method which gives all respondents an equal opportunity of being selected was used to administer the questionnaire. This was achieved by allocation of each school as a stratum and the online questionnaire were administered using the class representatives of each selected department in the school. The questionnaire was uploaded for a period of three months (June-August, 2025) to gather background information such as socio-demographic characteristics, respondents' exposure to human value education, as well as examination malpractices and factors driving it. Students' consents were sought before the link and the questionnaire was shared with them. Respondents were given the option to stop at any point they feel uncomfortable. Accordingly, the questionnaire was treated with utmost confidentiality.

The sample size for the study was determined using Yamane's (1973) sample calculation formula:

$$n = N/1 + N(e)^2,$$

Where  $n$  = sample size, and,

$N$  is the population size and  $e$  is the marginal error.

The sample size was calculated based on the approximate population of FUTA undergraduate students of 20,000:  $n = (20000)/ (1+20000 (0.05)^2)$ , which yielded 392. To correct for non-responses 19% of the sample size was added which makes a total sample size of 466. Data were harvested at the end of the month of August, 2025, and analysed using the SPSS package involving Chi-square for categorical data

**Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

<b>Socio-demographic Characteristics</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Age group		
Less than 20 years	226	48.5
20 years and above	240	51.5
Gender		
Male	332	71.2
Female	134	28.8
School		
School of Earth & Mineral Sciences	80	17.2
School of Physical Sciences	40	8.6
School of Logistics and Innovation Technology	116	24.9
School of Electrical System Engineering	58	12.4
School of Agriculture and Agricultural Technology	40	8.6
School of Environmental Technology	52	11.2
School of Basic Medical Sciences	18	3.9
School of Computing	62	13.3
Level of Study		
100 Level	162	34.8
200 Level	114	24.5
300 Level	60	12.9
400 Level	64	13.7
500 Level	66	14.2
Place of residence in school		
Hostel	96	20.6
Off-campus	370	79.4
Geopolitical zone of Origin		
North Central	36	7.7
North East	0	0.0
North West	2	0.4
South East	20	4.3
South South	36	7.7
South West	372	79.8
Religion		
Christianity	406	87.1
Others	60	12.9
Family income level in Naira		
Less than 100,000	100	21.5
100,000 - 149,000	76	16.3
150,000 - 199,000	54	11.6
200,000 - 249,000	42	9.0
250,000 and above	194	41.6
Parents'/Guardians' employment		
Self-employed	246	52.8
Civil/Public Servant	164	35.2
Non-governmental Enterprise	56	12.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>466</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source: Field Survey, 2025**

Table 1 represents the socio-demographic indices of the 466 respondents. The analysis revealed that respondents are almost evenly distributed by age, with 51.5% aged 20 years and above and 48.5% less than 20 years, reflecting the typical age composition of undergraduates. Other important indices shown in the result include uneven gender divide, with male dominated respondents in the ratio of 71.2% male compared to 28.8% female. This is because there are more male students in the institution than females. There is also a differential in respondents by school, and across levels of study. A large majority of respondents live off-campus (79.4%), with only 20.6% living in hostels, which could affect exposure to peer influence and supervision. In terms of socio-economic status, 41.6% report family incomes above ₦250,000, while about 21.5% earn less than ₦100,000, showing that the respondents come from diverse economic backgrounds. Parental employment reveals that 52.8% are self-employed, 35.2% are civil/public servants, and 12.0% are in non-governmental enterprises, suggesting that the students' support systems are primarily entrepreneurial or public sector-based.

**Results**

There are various forms of examination misconduct known to students as exemplified in this study with some practices being more prevalent than others. The most widely recognized malpractice type is “giraffing” (looking over at others’ work), identified by 66.1% of respondents, followed closely by the exchange of ideas/scripts in the exam hall (59.7%), entering into the examination hall with prohibited materials (56.2%), and use of electronic devices (52.8%). These results suggest that direct, in-exam strategies of cheating are the most common and visible forms of malpractice. Lateral connections or pre-arranged seating (52.8%) and impersonation (30.5%) also appear as relatively frequent practices. This indicates that beyond spontaneous cheating, there are organized and premeditated strategies being employed by some students. Practices such as writing on body/clothes (29.6%), stealing/buying exam questions beforehand (8.6%), and staff collusion (7.7%) were reported less frequently, but their presence is still concerning. These methods reflect systemic and structural breaches in examination integrity.

**Table 2: Common Types of Examination Malpractice in FUTA**

<b>Known /Common Types of Exam Malpractice</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Stealing/buying of exams questions	40	8.6
Copying materials into the hall	262	56.2
Impersonation	142	30.5
Exchange of ideas/scripts in the Exam Hall	278	59.7
Writing on body/clothes	138	29.6
Parental involvement	20	4.3
Giraffing	308	66.1
Lateral connection (pre-arranged sitting together)	246	52.8
Staff Collusion	36	7.7
Use of electronic devices	246	52.8

**Source: Field Survey, 2025**

The results revealed interesting insights into students' awareness and moral evaluation of parental involvement in examination malpractice. About 41.2% of respondents acknowledged being aware that some parents pay for examination malpractice on behalf of their wards, while 58.8% denied such awareness. This shows that although not the majority, a substantial portion of students recognizes the role of parents in facilitating malpractice, which suggests that the issue is not merely student-driven but can also be family-enabled. Despite this awareness, the overwhelming majority (94.4%) of respondents consider such parental actions to be wrong, while only 5.6% do not see it as a bad thing. This suggests that students generally uphold a strong moral stance against parental facilitation of examination malpractice, even though a notable proportion recognizes its occurrence.

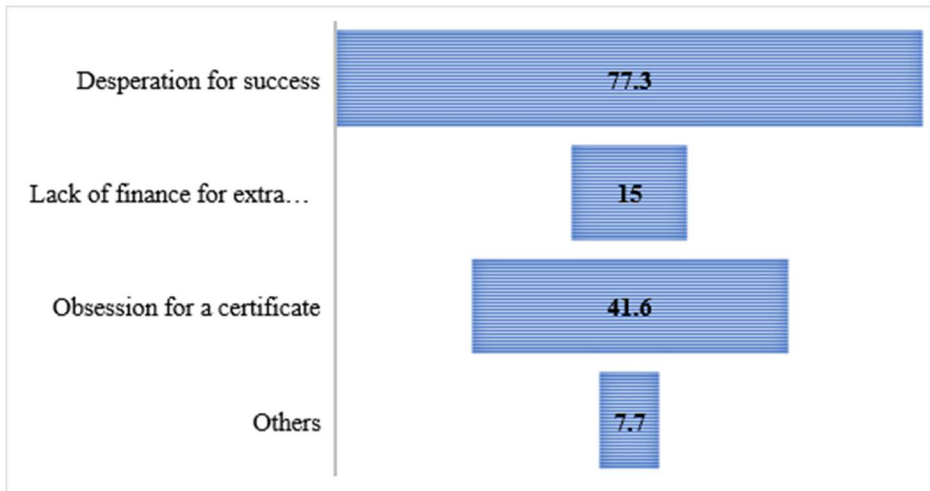
**Table 3: Parents' Involvement in Examination Malpractice**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>
Are you aware that some parents pay for examination malpractice on behalf of their wards?	(274) 58.8%	(192) 41.2%
Do you consider such parents' actions a bad thing?	(26) 5.6%	(440) 94.4%

**Source: Field Survey, 2025**

The results highlighted some perceived reasons why parents may pay for their wards to engage in examination malpractice. The most highlighted reason, with 77.3% of respondents, is desperation for success. This indicates that parents may prioritize academic achievement above ethical considerations, reflecting the high societal pressure to succeed educationally at all costs. A significant proportion (41.6%) believe that parents' obsession with obtaining a certificate drives their involvement. This aligns with the cultural emphasis on formal qualifications as a gateway to employment and social mobility in Nigeria. About 15% of

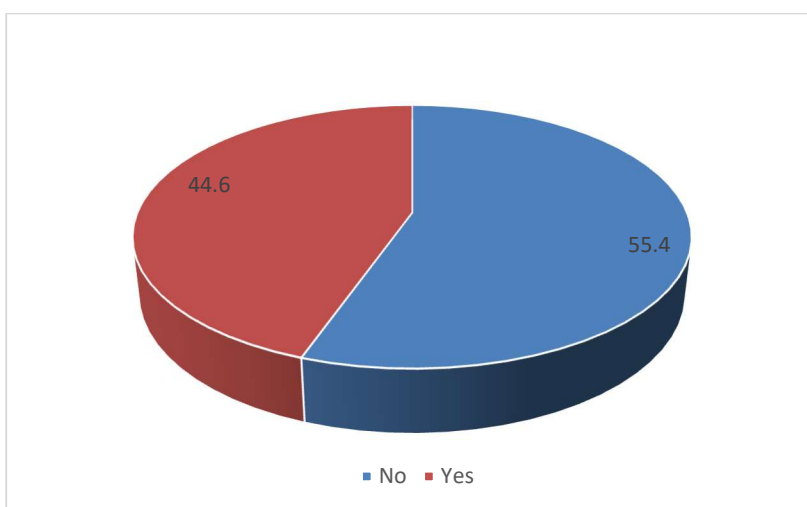
respondents pointed to financial constraints, suggesting that some parents may enable malpractice to avoid the economic burden of their children repeating a year or semester. While a smaller proportion of the respondents (7.7%) mentioned other unspecified factors, which may include fear of stigma, societal comparison, or pressure from extended family/community expectations.



**Figure 1: Reasons for Parents' Involvement in Examination Malpractices**

Respondents as well attested to their awareness of staff collusion in EM as presented in this study, while 258 respondents (55.4%) reported not being aware, the remaining 208 (44.6%) indicated that they were mindful of such collusion. This suggests that nearly half of the respondents perceive staff involvement in examination malpractice, highlighting a significant concern for institutional integrity.

**Fig. 2: Awareness of staff collusion in examination malpractice**



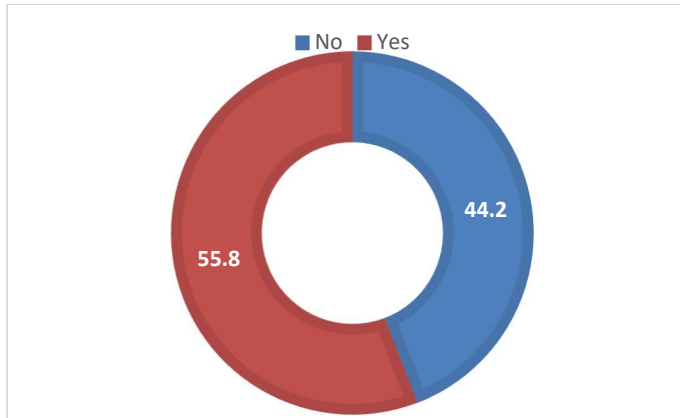
The reasons staff abet EM are multifaceted, the most common however, is financial gain which is about 40.8% in this research. When combined motives are considered, financial gain in combination with other benefits accounts for a significant proportion (10.3% + 9.4% + 18.9% = 38.6%). Purely sexual gain or combined with other minor benefits is relatively low, totaling only 3.4%. Overall, financial incentives, alone or in combination with other benefits, appear to be the primary driver of staff involvement in examination malpractice. The poor pay pack of staff in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria has always stood in the way of honest values as expected.

**Table 4: Reasons staff agree to such misconduct**

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
For financial gain	190	40.8
For other material benefits	80	17.2
For sexual gain	10	2.1
For financial gain and other material benefits	48	10.3
For financial and sexual gains	44	9.4
For sexual gain and other material benefits	6	1.3
For financial gain, sexual gain, and other material benefits	88	18.9

**Source: Field Survey, 2025**

Institutions of learning have been shown to also contribute immensely to examination malpractices. In this study for instance, 55.8% of the respondents affirmed that the school or institution can be blamed for examination malpractice, while 44.2% reported otherwise. This suggests that a majority perceive institutional factors, such as poor supervision, weak policies, or inadequate enforcement, as contributing to examination misconduct. Similar to the findings in this study, a recent study by Tongshinen & Tukur (2025) finds that the school authority is a factor that leads to examination misconduct among students of tertiary institutions, because issues of examination misconducts are not properly handled most of the time. Suleman, Gul, et al, (2015) listed poor invigilation, poor implementation of exam rules, as well as inadequate preparation for exam, as major challenges to conducting quality examination in Nigerian schools.



**Fig. 3: Can we say the school/institution is at fault concerning examination malpractice?**

Infrastructural deficiencies have continued to jeopardize attempts made at ensuring that examinations are fairly conducted. Poor supervision, overcrowded examination halls, and weak punishment systems are widely agreed to promote examination malpractice, with more than 65% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing. Interestingly, a notable proportion of respondents are neutral or disagree regarding invigilators turning a blind eye (36.9% Neutral, 21.9% Disagree/Strongly Disagree), suggesting that staff negligence may be perceived as less pervasive than other institutional factors. This table clearly shows that institutional deficiencies, especially supervision, overcrowding, punishment systems, and ethics education, play a key role in enabling examination malpractice.

**Table 5: Level of agreement on institutional deficiencies.**

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Poor supervision encourages EM	(20) 4.3%	(28) 6.0%	(96) 20.6%	(194) 41.6%	(128) 27.5%
Weak punishment systems encourage offenders to continue doing bad	(22) 4.7%	(46) 9.9%	(104) 22.3%	(174) 37.3%	(120) 25.8
Overcrowded exam halls promote malpractice	(16) 3.4%	(30) 6.4%	(86) 18.5%	(200) 42.9%	(134) 28.8%
Some invigilators turn a blind eye to cheating	(32) 6.9%	(70) 15.0%	(144) 30.9%	(140) 30.0%	(80) 17.2%

**Source: Field Survey, 2025**

### Discussion of Findings

The findings from this study about students' awareness align with earlier findings across other tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Students have always attested to different kinds of examination malpractice being perpetrated during examination and students are

knowledgeable both about the types and the consequences or punishment if caught. Scholars such as Popoola, (2017); Udim, et al (2018); and Enebong, et al (2024) all showed from their research findings that students are involved in different types of examination misconducts. Abdulkadir et al (2021) affirmed that students are no more afraid of getting caught while cheating in examination because of the porosity of the system and weak values system. Appropriately, parents should be responsible for the development of a child through their guidance, encouragement and good parental examples but research has shown otherwise (Popoola, 2017). In the same vein, Omonijo, & Fadugba, (2011) affirmed that parents have been accomplices in their children's examination misdemeanors while examination malpractice has been listed as one major outcome of moral decadence and value crisis because of parents' involvement (Ebradouye, Aminigo, & Osaat, 2024)

It has been shown that some parents encourage their wards to participate in examination malpractice. Agaba, Ambali & Orianwa (2021) in a study among secondary school students in Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria, reported that family type and socio-economic factors play huge roles in parents who collaborate with their wards to cheat because they want their children to succeed by any means whether fair or foul. The report also added that there are even parents who promote cheating by registering their wards during major examination including WAEC and NECO in 'magic' or 'special' centers and pay 'cooperation' fees for supply of cheating materials usually referred to as 'expo'. Similarly, Anakwe (2010) stated that parents usually aid, abet and finance examination malpractice for their children. Previous studies revealed that parents' consensus to examination malpractice even though considered an aberration, happens for many reasons, some of which include the excessive value placed on certificates over actual skills and knowledge, which pits immense pressure on students to obtain certificates by any means (Ugobueze, 2024); as well as high cost of education in Nigeria which places financial strain on families, as well as parents' prestige (Bulchari et al, 2023).

The complicity of staff in issues of academic dishonesty, has been validated over the years in Nigerian higher institutions (Enebong, Ataide, et al, 2024). It is such connivances that made examination misconduct difficult to arrest (Adegbite, 2019; Agaba, Ambali & Orianwa, 2021; Bulchari et al, 2023). Adegbite (2019) cited economic downturn and poor remunerations which makes teachers and lecturers find it difficult to meet up with daily basic needs, as some of the reasons for staff complicity in examination malpractice. Similarly, several studies have related how staff also give questions to students for exchange

of sexual intimacies, though such cases are usually treated as sexual harassment, there have been studies that revealed cooperation between staff and students for such academic fraud (Onoyase, 2019; Aina-Pelemo, Oke, Alade, 2021).

Across most of the public universities in Nigeria, there is deficit of both human and infrastructural facilities which has been linked to poor examination conduct and outcome. Ogunode, Audu & Ahaotu (2020) noted that the problem of poor facilities particularly in Nigerian public universities is enormous and have implication for academic performance of students. Correspondingly, other recent studies identified the same pattern of amenity deficits, adding that academic output would always be poor until maximum attention is given to acute shortage of both human and infrastructural deficits (Ayoko, Peter & Jegede, 2023; Moses & Umar, 2024). Examination halls remain unconducive for both staff and students alike, as they are usually overcrowded and examination facilities at times are shared as against the rule in a proper examination conduct (Maiyeri, Bin, & Liu, 2022).

### **Conclusion**

The findings from this study confirm the enormity of examination malpractice as a challenge that is persistence because of the interconnectedness of the social institutions driving it. This correlates with the breakdown in law, order and value system of Nigeria. Obviously therefore, the effectiveness of any proposed solution must go beyond the students per se, to comprise other important stakeholders and agents including the family, teachers/lecturers, and significant others like peers and religious places among others. The school system must as a matter of urgency, be revamped to meet up with global standards that take cognizance of the relevance of both human and infrastructural resources. Additionally, value reorientation must be sustained among all segments of society while policies around honest labour and dignity of hard work, as well as the promotion of self-efficacy skills should be encouraged.

### **Recommendations**

Having validated that examination malpractice is becoming the norm, this study recommends stricter measures not against student alone but all perpetrators. It also advocates that society gives more attention to value reorientation in order to address value crisis among young people. Systemic rehabilitation is essential so as to ensure that each institution performs its function appropriately. Essentially too, students should be trained to believe in themselves and give attention to what they can achieve without relying on falsehood and cheating.

## **Ethical clearance**

Participation in this study was based on all respondents giving their informed consent for inclusion. The data were collected in accordance with protocol approved by the committee on ethical issues at the Centre for Research and Development (CERAD) of Federal University of Technology, Akure, Nigeria. The approved ethical number assigned to this project is FUTA/ETH/25/241. Respondents were also made to participate in the survey voluntarily while participants were given the freedom to leave or exit the interview at will.

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# Police Brutality and Human Rights in Shagamu Ogun State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

Police brutality is a global phenomenon. The practice has dire consequences for fundamental human rights. It has far and remote implications for loss of lives and property. The limited literature on the police brutality and human rights prompted this research. The study assessed police brutality and human rights in Shagamu, Ogun State, Nigeria. It adopted mixed research methods and it is descriptive and cross-sectional in nature. It is anchored strain and routine activity theories. Primary data were obtained through the administration of questionnaire on 108 respondents in Shagamu, Ogun State. The Yamane Taro formula was adopted to determine the sample size. Simple and stratified sampling methods were employed. The study hypothesis tested on the significant relationship between police brutality and security of lives and property. The P-value of 0.292 exceeded the level of significance at 0.05, meaning that police brutality leads to loss of lives and property. The study recommends an established criminal justice system for trial and punishment of erring police officers while members of the public should be well-educated on their fundamental human rights as well as limits of police officers.

**Keywords:** Crimes, criminal justice, human rights, police brutality, punishment, security, violence,

## Introduction

The earliest use of the term ‘police brutality’ was in Britain in the mid-19th century. *The Puppet-Show* complaining in September of 1848 that barely a week passes without the police committing disgusting offence (Aborishade and Abileye, 2019). Boys are bruised, women insulted by their ruffianism; and police brutality is becoming one of the most recognized human right violation. The above scenario captures the steep contrast that is in direct violation of contemporary policing, whose origin can be traced back to the 18th century in France (Sylvie, 2020).

Members of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) adopted the same pattern when they beat an African American suspect, Rodney King, during his arrest for drunk driving (Chaney, 2013). Unknown to them, a white civilian videotaped the assault leading to broad media coverage and criminal charges against some of the officers involved. One year and one month after this incident, in April 1992, few hours after the four police officers involved were acquitted at trial, the Los Angeles riots of 1992 commenced and resulted in fifty-three (53) deaths, two thousand, three hundred and eighty-three (2,383) injuries, more than seven thousand (7,000) fires, damage to three thousand, one hundred (3,100) businesses, and nearly one billion dollars (\$1, 000, 000, 000) in financial losses. After facing a federal trial, two of the four police officers were convicted and received 32 months prison sentences (US Census, 2019).

Data released by the US Bureau of Justice Statistics (Census of jails, 2011) revealed that from 2003 to 2009 at least four thousand, eight hundred and thirteen (4,813) people died while being arrested by local police. Unfortunately, not much has changed since then as in the summer of 2014 a young, unarmed, black male named Freddie Gray was shot and killed by a police officer. This event sparked national outrage over police brutality and begged the question as to the depths police brutality was willing to drag the nation. However, that proved to only be a preview of what was to come, considering in 2020 there were serious protests tagged *BlackLivesMatter* representing a decentralized political and social movement protesting against incidents of police brutality (Aborishade and Abileye, 2019).

Police are constitutionally empowered to protect the lives and property of citizens although a police officer is allowed to use minimal force when the situation arises. The Nigeria Police discharges its roles through able men and women. They protect the lives and property of the citizens. This normal order, is the replica of policing in other parts of the world. However,

sometimes, Nigerian police uses excessive and inappropriate force. Police brutality has resulted in loss of lives and property of innocent citizens. In some cases, it sparks off violent protests against police institutions. It has also weakened the cooperation between Nigerian citizens and the police which undermines intelligence gathering in Nigeria. Police brutality in whatever form leads to violation of fundamental human rights.

To arrest police brutality, various measures such as setting up panels of enquiry to probe defaulting officers or suspension or dismissal of guilty officers have been adopted. Despite these measures police brutality has continues unabated. It reached a climax in 2020 when the Special Anti-robbery Squad (SARs) was dismantled. The disbandment of SARs was in response to mass protests against the Unit. There is a need for further academic inquest into police brutality in Nigeria. Therefore, this study investigates police brutality in Shagamu, Ogun State Nigeria and its effect on human rights. Specifically, the study aims to identify acts that constitute police brutality, and the social economic factors responsible for police brutality in Shagamu.

## **Literature Review and Conceptual Clarification**

### **Meaning of Human Rights**

Human rights constitute a set of norms governing the treatment of individuals and groups by state and non-state actor on the basis of ethical principles regarding what society considers fundamental to a decent life. These norms are incorporated into national and international legal systems, which specify mechanisms and procedures to hold the duty-bearers accountable and provide remedy for alleged victims of human rights violations (Waldron, 2018).

According to the United Nations (2013), human rights are good standards or principles that portray certain principles of human conduct, and are regularly secured as lawful rights in a country and globally. These universal rights are inherent in everyone, regardless of sex, nationality, ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or any other status (Agyeman, and Adwoa, 2020).

According to Cohen and Felson (1979), there is hardly any government today that does not, at least, profess human rights. The protection and promotion of human rights have become the fundamental purpose of government. The level of a state's development can be determined by the level at which its citizens enjoy human rights in all ramifications. Peace,

progress and stability are predicated at both national and international levels with respect to human rights.

Human rights have become key apparatuses of peacekeeping to which has been added democracy. The concern for human rights does not, however, dissolve the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs. Rather, breaches of human rights, especially nasty breaches are taken out of domestic jurisdiction (Hayden, 2001).

### **Cases of Human Right Violation**

There are many cases of human right violation in Nigeria. According to McCulley (2013) cases of human rights violations are described as becoming a culture of impunity in the country. These include extra-judicial killings, illegal detention, and destruction of property by security forces etc. Studies by researchers Damiani (2020), established the consequences of extra-judicial killings of Mohammed Yusuf and other Boko Haram leaders for escalating the sectarian violence that nearly consumed the whole of North Eastern Nigeria. Kidnapping for ransom and rituals are also alarming Other forms of human rights abuses in Nigeria include motorists' harassment and extortion by security personnel, political assassinations, undemocratic imposition of candidates in leadership and intimidation of political opponents (Chaney, Cassandra and Ray-Robertson 2013), rape, child abuse, education denial and domestic violence It is against these backgrounds that this paper examined the challenges of human rights abuses in Nigerian democratic governance and suggested the ways out of the menace

### **Human Rights Situation in Nigeria**

The following are some of the human rights situations in Nigeria.

**Press Freedom:** The concept of press freedom has become widely accepted by journalists in developing countries. In Nigeria, for instance, press freedom is the constitutional guarantee that 'every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including the freedom to express opinions, to receive and impart ideas and information without undue interference (Gardner, Mary, 2014). However, studies over the years have shown that there is an array of political restraints and pressure which have crippling effects on the press in many African countries (Damiani, (2020).).

Aside from brutality and massacre of the citizens by security personnel, denial of press freedom in South-West, Nigeria is widespread. Despite the transition from military to civilian

rule in 1999, clampdowns, assault, beatings, unfair arrests and police raid of staff and management of print media have continued unabated (Sunday, 2006:115).

Between June 2002 and September 2003 alone Media Rights' Agenda (MRA), a Lagos-based- Non-Governmental Organization that promotes, press freedom and freedom of expression recorded more than fifty cases of reported abuse of journalists' rights and other violations of freedom of expression. The Media Watchdog Reporters without borders listed the Nigerian Police as the leading 'violation of Journalists' rights, On Sunday, April 24, 2010, Ed-Ugbagwu, a judicial correspondent of The Nation newspaper was murdered in Lagos. All these killings have further raised the question of press freedom in Nigerian democracy. The assault on press' freedom is a fundamental breach of democratic norms (Emesowum, 2016).

Proponents of the free press believe it is uncalled for and reminds Nigerians of the dark days of impunity during the military era. With Nigeria operating a democratic system of government, freedom of expression, including the freedom to hold opinions receive, and impart ideas without interference should be a fundamental right guaranteed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the African Charter 'on People's Rights, (ACHPR), the Constitution .of the Federal Republic 'of Nigeria 1999 and other regional and international treaties to which Nigeria is a party. Moreover Section 39 (1) of the 1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) provides that every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference (Damiani, 2020).

Media owners say that if politics is about development and the ultimate goal of any 'political system is to ensure the improvement of the security and welfare of the citizenry, then the resort to the assault on the media negates fundamental rights and the rule of law. It merely demonstrates impunity and intolerance to alternative views, (1986) Providing the balance between the duty of law enforcement to uphold the laws and the rights, of individuals to be free from security services misconduct, the few circumstances stated above are clear instances of infringement or violation of rights to freedom of expression, human dignity, and freedom from inhuman rights to freedom of expression, human dignity, and freedom 'from inhuman and degrading treatment. Other human right violation includes rape, torture, unwarranted shooting, and invasion, etc.

## **Meaning of Police Brutality**

Police brutality is defined as the intentional use of unwarranted coercion by police, which can take the form of physical attacks, verbal assaults, or psychological intimidation, and is considered abuse and official misconduct. Police brutality is a particularly heinous sort of crime committed by officers who were hired to prevent the crime from occurring in the first place Earl, (Kandiyali, 2014).

According to Kandiyali (2014) police brutality refers to unmerited excessive, and aggressive physical, mental, and emotional abuse, above and beyond the law, including repetitive and unmerited contact upon by an individual or groups of individuals in law enforcement. This definition is critical due to its incorporation of not just physical but also mental and emotional abuse that is often unaccounted for. Police physical abuse can have serious detrimental effects. While police brutality can come in various physical forms, Mitchell (2000) notes that physical injuries may develop from police actions as serious as shootings and baton beatings to something as simple as restraint holds.

The physical abuse of is a proof that occurs in so many places. However, specifically, police brutality is not a strange experience in Nigeria; there are established cases of police brutality in Nigeria. This cumulated into End-SARs Protests (Aborishade and Abileye, 2019). The situation in the country has escalated to the point where a former Inspector-General of Police, Ibrahim Coomasie accused members of the Force of ‘barbaric treatment of Nigerians’ (Reported, 2018). Along the same lines, there were reports from some female ex-detainees of sexual abuse by police officers.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Social Disorganization Theory**

The social disorganization theory by Edwin Sutherland states that when social agencies such as police fails to enforce social control, deviance such as police brutality will be on the increase. Therefore, police that was constitutionally empowered to protect and defend citizens it is the one that abuse the rights of citizens. When this act continues, it may lead to breakdown of law and order in Nigeria.

### **Broken Windows Theory**

The Broken Windows Theory by George Kelly: According to George Kelly, if a minor act of deviance is not controlled in a society it may graduate into major crime that might consume

the whole society. Police brutality is a crime security that might consume the whole society if not properly controlled.

### Methodology

The research applied mixed methods which were quantitative and qualitative in nature. A set of questionnaire was used to obtain information from respondents while textbooks, edited journals constituted the secondary data.

### Results

**Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

S/N	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
1.	<b>Gender</b>		
	Male	31	28.7
	Female	77	71.3
	Total	108	100
2.	<b>Age</b>		
	Below 25 years	71	65.7
	25-30 years	27	25.0
	31-40 years	10	9.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100</b>
3.	<b>Marital Status</b>		
	Single	49	87.0
	Married	14	13.0
	Other(s)	45	42.6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100</b>
4.	<b>Educational Qualification</b>		
	SSCE	35	32.4
	NCE/DIPLOMA/	15	13.9
	HND/ Bachelor	42	38.9
	MSc/MBA	16	14.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100</b>
5.	<b>Work Experience</b>		
	1 – 5 years	97	89.8
	6 – 10 years	5	4.6
	11 – 15 years	6	5.6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Study, 2025**

In table 4.1, one hundred and eight (108) respondents participated in the study. 28.7% of the respondents were male, while 71.3% was female. 65.7% of the respondents were “Below 25 years”, 25.0% were “25-30 years”, and 9.3% of the respondents were “31-40 years”. 87.0% were “single”, 13.0% were “married”. For educational qualification, 32.4% of the respondents were holders of “SSCE”, 13.9% were “NCE/DIPLOMA”, holders 38.9% of the respondents had “HND/Bachelor”, and 14.8% of the respondents were “M.Sc.”. For work

experience, 89.8% of the respondents had working experiences of “1 – 5 years”, 4.6%; “6 – 10 years”; 5.6% of the respondents were “11 – 15 years”.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The study explored police brutality and human rights abuse in Shagamu Ogun State, Nigeria. The study established police brutality undermined human rights in Nigeria. This was in line with finding of Aborishade and Abileye (2019). The Nigeria police force is one of the institutions that enforce human right in Nigerian. The study also established that some members of Nigerian Police Force engage in brutality as a mean of attaining personal interest. The study found out that obstruction of free press was one of the actions that constituted police brutality. This was in line with the study conducted by Idowu (2013).

The study found out different human rights conditions in Nigeria. Freedom of press was the human rights being abused by the Nigeria Police. This was in tandem with the study conducted by Kandiyali (2014). The police do engage in the violation of freedom of expression as a cover-up for the brutality. The study found out that police different dimensions of police brutality. The obstruction of human rights through police brutality could be physical abuse in forms of beating, hitting with objects, killing and denial of access to judicial processes. Emotional brutality were manifested in the areas of raping suspects, subjecting suspects to indelible emotional trauma.

### **Conclusion**

The study found that human equality, public hearing, freedom of expression among many others, has being tremendously violated by the police in the course of ensuring citizen’s right and performing their core duty of crime control and prevention in Shagamu and its environs. The study also found that police brutality has little impact on citizen’s freedom but violated their trust and loyalty to the police. The study discovered that brutality, violence, torture, degradation of arrest in custody have no importance on human right. It cannot be perceived as a predisposing factor of denial or violation of human right of people in the country.

### **Recommendations**

- i. The police authority should control or show emphasize on their personnel and bring those police that violated human right to justice. Also, as an important and strategic policy aimed at increasing citizens trust and loyal in the force should be formulated.

- ii. We recommended that there is an urgent need by the police authority and government to review their existing public policy mainly on violence, brutality, public hearing, human equality and others so that diver's approaches could be used in a cost-effective manner to ensure the citizens enjoy their constitutional rights.

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# Effects of Communal Conflicts on Socio-Economic Activities in Oju Local Government Area of Benue State

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## Abstract

Peace is the foundation upon which every society thrives. However, communal conflicts in Oju Local Government Area disrupt the peace, thereby affecting several livelihood activities. This paper examined the extent to which communal conflicts affect socio-economic activities in Oju Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. The paper adopted a descriptive survey design to assess the disruption of key socio-economic activities, including agriculture, trade, culture, and recreation. A total of 375 respondents were selected using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Data were collected through questionnaires and key informant interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and Pearson Correlation, while qualitative data were unbundled using content analysis. Findings revealed that communal conflicts significantly disrupted major socio-economic activities in the area. Crop farming, was greatly affected by destruction of farmlands and displacement of farmers, leading to food shortages and economic hardship. Trading activities declined due to insecurity, which hindered market operations and supply chains. Religious gatherings and cultural events were disrupted by fear and mistrust, reducing social cohesion and communal unity. Similarly, sports and other recreational activities that previously fostered youth engagement and peace were abandoned, thereby increasing youth involvement in violent activities. The Pearson Correlation result ( $r = 0.074$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ) confirmed a statistically significant relationship between communal conflicts and disruptions in socio-economic activities. It was concluded that communal conflicts erode economic stability, social cohesion, and peace-building opportunities, which exacerbates poverty and deepen divisions among communities. The paper recommends that Local government, extension services, community leaders, and security agents should protect farmlands, grazing and fishing areas, markets, transport routes, recreational centres, cultural and worship centres to avert conflicts and ensure safe access and sustained agricultural and livestock productivity, cultural and recreational events.

**Keywords:** Agriculture; Communal conflict; Cultural disruption; Peace building; Socio-economic activities.

## **Introduction**

Every society needs peace as the basis for stable socio-economic activities. Without peace, production drops, development initiatives stall, and community social cohesion starts to collapse. However, communal conflicts threaten this vital stability in many parts of the world, upsetting livelihoods and impeding economic development. According to Dekera (2019), communal conflicts occurs when two or more communities engage in either violent or non-violent confrontations, over issues like resource control, land ownership, and religious or political differences. Unlike other forms of conflict that may involve state actors, organized armed groups, or ideological movements, communal conflicts are typically localized, occurring among groups with long-standing social, cultural, or kinship ties (Doki & Boh, 2014).

Communal conflicts exist in all communities around the world. In early Europe, The Reformation movement, which involved a severe break in Christendom's unity, sparked a variety of confessional difficulties that provoked and justified communal conflicts especially in countries like Transylvania, Prussia, Lithuania and Poland. These clashes were primarily between Catholics, Orthodox, Calvinists and Lutherans as well as Antitrinitarians (Lisy-Wagner & Murdock, 2015). This violence included verbal insults, the destruction of sacred images, and even a full-fledged massacre.

In Asia, communal conflicts have significantly impacted several countries, including India, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka. In India, for instance, the Gujarat riots in 2002 and the Muzaffarnagar riots in 2013 led to severe disruptions in socio-economic activities (Singh, 2014). The violence and displacement did not only cause humanitarian crises but also severely affected agricultural productivity and trade in the Rakhine State, leading to increased poverty and food insecurity (International Crisis Group, 2020).

In Africa, the 2015 Human Development Report, reveals that over half of the 20 countries with the lowest levels of human development have experienced significant levels of communal conflicts since 1990. According to Bahati (2019) armed conflict has costed Africa over \$18 billion between 1990 and 2018. Driven by ethnic, religious, and political tensions, notable examples of communal conflicts in Africa included the ethnic violence in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide, the ongoing clashes between herders and farmers in Nigeria, and the sectarian violence in South Sudan (Alabi & Famakinwa, 2017). Communal conflicts have crippled economic growth by bringing immediate loss of lives, displacing populations,

destroying infrastructure, and reducing access to markets (Rolandsen & Daly, 2016; Krause, 2020).

In Nigeria, communal conflicts have persisted during the past two decades. Generally, clashes in Nigeria dates back to 1914 when Southern and Northern protectorates were amalgamated (Alubo, 2006). These historical antecedents culminated into the Nigerian civil war between the Hausa and Igbo ethnic groups that lasted for some two and half years (Okafor, 2007). The post-independence Nigeria continued to witness conflicts mainly resulting from boundary disputes between neighbouring communities. Some of these conflicts were the conflict between Ife and Modakeke in the present day Osun State, Aguleri and Umuleri, the Osile and Ogbunike conflicts all in the present day Anambra State, the Tiv and Alago conflict in Nassarawa State, the Tiv and Udam conflicts in Benue and Cross River States, the Tiv and Jukun conflicts in Benue and Taraba States, the Ezza and Ezilo communities in Ebonyi State and a litany of other recorded and unrecorded incidents of conflicts among families, villages, and communities in Nigeria (Dekera, 2019). These conflicts disrupt education, healthcare, and trade, leading to a decline in human capital development and economic opportunities.

The North-Central States of Nigeria consisting of Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, and Plateau as well as the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), have also witnessed frequent communal clashes mostly in the form of herders-farmers clashes with attendant devastating consequences (Aderinto & Achem, 2019) for affected communities. For instance, for over two decades in Plateau State, communal conflict is prevalent, registering over 5,000 deaths and destroying about 200 villages. The conflicts are typically wielded across ethno-religious lines (Schaub, 2014). These conflicts have far-reaching socio-economic effects. For instance, the destruction of farms and markets, hampers economic activities and stifles development. Moreover, displacement of populations due to violence creates a strain on social services and exacerbates poverty in affected regions (Ojelabi, Akinwale & Uyiha, 2021).

There is plethora of other communal conflicts in Benue State too. Some of these conflicts include; the Tiv/Jukun conflict, the Mbakor/Nongov border conflict in Guma and Tarka LGAs, the Mbaivur/Mbasombo communal conflicts in Gwer East Local Government Area, Mbatyav- Mbazerem conflict in Gboko and Konshisha Local Government Areas, Ugaambe/Mbaiase communal conflicts in Gwer East and Konshisha Local Government Areas of Benue (Kachii, 2019; Iornumbe, 2021). These conflicts have claimed lives that

otherwise would be productive, as well as destroyed properties worth millions of Naira (Doki & Boh, 2014). Dekera (2019), also notes that in the North-East district of Benue State, conflicts directly reduced socio-economic activities like farming leading to severe damage to food security.

Over the past decade, Oju LGA has been plagued by over 15 incidences of communal conflicts, largely stemming from land disputes and ethnic tensions between the Tiv communities of Bonta in Konshisha LGA and Igede communities of Oju LGA (Okoh & Egere, 2020). Several other communal conflicts have also been recorded including those that occurred among Igede communities of Ibilla, Uwokwu and Ukpa communities. According to Ochi (2024), these conflicts have resulted in the deaths of over 200 people, with thousands more injured as well as significant displacement, with an estimated 5,000 to 7,000 people fleeing their homes during periods of intense violence.

Despite interventions by the Benue State government in collaboration with the Oju Local Government Traditional council to curb communal conflicts by holding meetings, setting up peace committees and employing the traditional conflict resolution processes, communal conflicts in Oju still persists with attendant effects on socio-economic activities like agriculture, trade, as well as events like weddings, burial ceremonies and other cultural activities.

It is worrisome that communal conflicts prevail, yet, little scholarly work demonstrate the effect of these conflicts on various socio-economic activities in Oju. Tsuwa and Adorowa (2023) only investigated the impact of communal conflicts on economic development of Bonta/Ukpute-Ainu communities. However, the scope of their study was limited to only two communities which is too limited to understand the nature, extent and effect of communal conflicts on socio-economic activities in the area. Similarly, **Okoh and Egere (2020)** conducted a study on the impact of communal conflicts on agriculture, revealing the causes of the over decades-packed conflicts between communities in Oju and Konshisha. Again, the study limited its analysis only on agricultural activities which is only one out of the many socio-economic activities in Oju. This paper presents the major socio-economic activities and also the extent to which communal conflicts affect these socio-economic activities in Oju Local Government Area. The paper hypothesized that there is no significant association between the communal conflicts and socio-economic activities in Oju Local Government Area of Benue State.

## **Conceptual clarification**

### **Communal Conflict**

Communal conflict is made up of two axiomatic words “communal” and “conflict”. While conflict has been conceptualized, communal is derived from a Latin word “communis” which means “common”. Communal relates particularly to groups, and it involves things commonly used, shared or experienced by a group in a society. Such things can be resources or conflict. Communal conflict is a social conflict that relates to a group or groups in a society. When it occurs within a group, it is known as intra-communal conflict and inter-communal conflict when it occurs between groups (Alimba, 2014). Communal conflict was considered by Azuonwu (2002) as a conflict that occurs between two or more communities. Oboh and Hyande (2006) described communal conflict as involving two or more communities engaging themselves in disagreement or act of violence over issues such as claims for land ownership, religious and political difference leading to loss of lives and destruction of properties. Dzurgba (2006) was of the opinion that communistic violence is that which occurs between two or more communities over territorial land, farmland and territorial water for fishing. From the foregoing, it is understood that communal conflict arises when two distinct groups in a community disagree over jointly shared resources due to the possibility of inequitable distribution or the problem of domination by a group. The development of this kind of conflict in any society has attachment to commonly shared or used resources or elements which can be tangible or intangible. This understanding forms the basis of conceptualisation of communal conflict in this study.

### **Socio-Economic Activities**

Socio-economic activities refer to the various actions and interactions that individuals, households, communities, and institutions undertake within a society to produce, distribute, exchange, and consumer goods and services, as well as to pursue social and cultural endeavors. These activities are influenced by social, cultural, political, and economic factors and play a crucial role in shaping the overall development and functioning of societies. Medvedskaya (2011), defines social activity as the intensity of the development of potential opportunities provided by society for decent life and human participation in the development of society, personally mediated by a system of motives, motives and conditions associated with the achievement of socially significant goals.

Additionally, socio-economic activities encompass a wide array of behaviours and practices that reflect the interactions between individuals, households, communities, and institutions in the pursuit of economic and social objectives. According to the World Bank (n.d.), these activities include but are not limited to economic production in various sectors such as agriculture, industry, and services; trade and exchange of goods and services in markets; consumption and utilization of resources; employment and labor participation; investment in human capital and infrastructure; and engagement in social and cultural practices such as family dynamics, religious ceremonies, and community events.

### **Effects of Communal Conflicts on Socio-Economic Activities**

Communal conflicts have far-reaching effects on socio-economic activities, including production, distribution, culture, and recreation. Agricultural production is severely undermined as conflicts destroy farmlands, crops, and infrastructure. In Langtang North, Plateau State, Nigeria, communal crises caused significant declines in crop quantity and value (Kughur, Daudu, & Iornenege, 2017). Similarly, Bolarinwa, Saghir, and Oyekunle (2009) observed reductions in crop and livestock production in rainforest and savannah regions, with many farmers losing access to productive land. Conflicts also disrupt farm operations and labour availability; fear, displacement, and curfews prevent timely planting, weeding, and harvesting, leading to decreased productivity. In Benue and Adamawa States, these disruptions resulted in declines in yam output and overall crop production (Oriko, Ismaila, & Ogbaini, 2022; Silas, Gambo, & Hassan, 2023). Displacement carries additional economic, fiscal, and social costs, pushing households into poverty and food insecurity (Verwimp & Van Bavel, 2013).

Input supply and investment in conflict-prone areas are also affected. Access to seeds, fertilizers, machinery, and extension services is limited due to insecurity or damaged infrastructure, reducing agricultural efficiency and innovation (Effiong & Owolabi, 2021). Livestock production is similarly disrupted; grazing, water access, and animal health suffer, leading to reduced yields and loss of draught power, manure, and income diversification (Addah & Zezebi, 2008; Cameroon study, 2024). Conflicts increase risk aversion, prompting farmers to cultivate smaller areas or lower-risk crops and avoid long-term investments, ultimately reducing income and livelihoods (Kwaghtser, 2019).

Distribution networks are heavily impacted as transport infrastructure is damaged or rendered unsafe, causing delays, higher costs, and spoilage of perishable goods (ProjectClue, 2012).

Disruption of market information and extension services impairs planning and coordination, discouraging trade and investment (Adzenga, Umar, Olaleye, Ajayi & Onyenkazi, 2019). Displacement further disrupts supply chains, leaving abandoned farms, storage, and transport assets, which exacerbates food insecurity and lowers dietary diversity (Olanrewaju & Balana, 2023).

Cultural and recreational activities are also compromised. Conflicts lead to cancellation or scaling down of festivals, rituals, and ceremonies due to insecurity or loss of venues, threatening intergenerational transmission and continuity of cultural practices (Okonkwo, Udegbunam, & Chris, 2023). Participation declines as fear, displacement, and trauma reduce community engagement (Nwangbo, Ukeje, Njoku, & Ololo, 2023). Cultural events may be politicized, commodified, or simplified, altering their original meaning and reducing inclusivity (Suleiman, Wunti, Adamu, & Yahaya, 2023). Communal conflict also erodes social cohesion and trust, discouraging participation in recreational and community development activities, as observed among the Ogoni people (Deekor & Kpurunee, 2021).

Overall, communal conflicts not only destroy physical and economic assets but also disrupt livelihoods, reduce production and income, limit access to markets and inputs, undermine cultural identity, and weaken social cohesion. Their cumulative effect hampers sustainable development, increases poverty and food insecurity, and alters the social and cultural fabric of affected communities.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study adopts the Randall Collins's Social Conflict theory to explain the effects of communal conflicts on socio-economic activities. Rooted in Marx's ideas, the theory emphasizes struggles over power and resources, but Collins focuses on micro-level social interactions as the basis for broader conflicts. Through his concepts of interaction ritual chains and emotional energy, Collins explains how shared activities and cultural practices generate group loyalty while fostering hostility toward outsiders. In communal conflicts, these dynamics intensify aggression and reinforce "in-group" versus "out-group" divisions, often escalating into cycles of violence or conflict chains. Such tensions disrupt socio-economic activities by damaging infrastructure, displacing communities, and halting agricultural, trade, and investment activities. Negative emotional energy erodes social capital like trust, cooperation, and cohesion and undermines collaborative efforts in farming, trade,

and local enterprises. Consequently, communal conflicts reduce productivity, income, and economic stability, perpetuating poverty, food insecurity, and long-term socio-economic stagnation in affected areas.

### **Methodology**

Descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. This research design allowed for the description of features, behaviours, attitudes, and opinions on the extent of the effect of communal conflicts on socio-economic activities within Oju Local Government Area. Oju is located in the southern part of Benue State Nigeria. The area lies between latitude 6<sup>o</sup> 45 north and longitude 8<sup>o</sup> 30 east. Created in 1976, Oju shares a common boundary with Obi local government and Cross River State in the south and in the East and west with Konshisha and Ado local government areas respectively (Orpin, Manyi, Bem, & Mzungu, 2016). The 2006 Nigeria Population Census puts the population of Oju local government area at 168,491 and at 2.3% annual growth rate, the population was projected to be 243,300 in 2022 (NPC, NBS, 2022). The area has a total of 11 council wards namely; Adokpa, Ibilla, Idelle, Iyeche, Oboru-Oye, Oju, Okpokpo, Okudu, Owo, Ukpa/Ainu-Ette, and Ainu council wards. Igede is the dominant ethnic group in the local government and the people speak the Igede dialect.

This study captured both the male and female population between 18 years and above living in Oju Local government area. A sample size of 375 respondents was drawn from a total population of 243,300 people from Oju Local Government Area using the Taro Yemane's formula for the determination of sample size for known population. The study utilized both purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Purposive sampling technique was used to select council wards that had overtime experienced communal conflicts. The reason for this technique was to limit data collection to areas with people who had adequate knowledge on the subject matter. This allowed for a focused data collection and guarantee reliability of findings. Therefore, out of the 11, only five council wards including Ibilla, Ukpa/Ainu-Ette, Oju, Adokpa and Oboru-Oye were selected. Simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents. Prior to visiting the sampled areas, the researcher drafted codes "Yes" and "No" on separate pieces of papers in equal numbers, squeezed accordingly and mixed into a single basket. After this, the researcher visited the sampled areas and presented each respondent with the codes in the basket and asked them to pick one piece at a time and those that picked the "Yes" code were selected to participate in the study.

A semi-structured questionnaire was designed by the researchers and used to obtain quantitative data. The questionnaire was validated by two senior research fellows who made minor observations before it was corrected and administered by the researchers by hand. Similarly, a semi-structured Key Informant Interview (KII) guide was used to collect qualitative data. KII was adopted to ensure that only people who possessed the in-depth knowledge of communal conflicts and were part of security briefings in the area like traditional rulers, security agents, women leaders and youth leaders qualified to be part of the interview. To select informants, a formal written consent was drafted and submitted to the heads of the five sampled council wards during a preliminary visit to the area where informants were identified. From there, the researcher arranged for the date, time and venue of the interview. In each of the sampled council ward, one key informant was selected making a total of five informants. The researchers conducted five interview sessions through the face-to-face method and each session lasted between 30 – 45 minutes. Mobile telephones as well as writing materials were used to record discussions.

Data obtained through questionnaire were analysed quantitatively through the application of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, v.25) with statistical tools comprising descriptive statistics like percentages and frequencies distribution. To test hypothesis, Pearson Correlation and Chi-Square was used. On the other hand, data collected through key informant interviews was analyzed qualitatively through content analysis because this method allowed the data to be coded into themes and these themes represented the objectives of the study. Quantitative data was presented in tables with a follow-up analysis, while qualitative data was presented in thematic narratives and indented accordingly.

## Results and Discussion

### Socio-demographic Attributes of Respondents

Table 1: Socio-demographic Attributes of Respondents

Attributes	Categories	Frequency (N = 375)	Percentage (% = 100)
<b>Gender</b>	Male	274	73
	Female	101	27
<b>Age (in years)</b>	18-35	138	37
	36-64	157	42
	65 +	80	21
<b>Marital Status</b>	Single	95	25
	Married	221	59
	Divorced/Separated	29	8
	Widowed	30	8
<b>Highest Educational Qualification</b>	No formal education	18	5

<b>Occupation</b>	Primary education	40	11
	Secondary education	260	69
	Tertiary Education	57	15
	Farming	258	69
	Civil/Public service	48	13
	Trading	55	15
	Others	14	3

**Source:Field Survey, 2025**

The data on Table 1 shows that 274 (73%) of the respondents were males, while 101 (27%) of them were females. This implied that males participated more actively in the study. This was possible because in most African societies, including the Igede culture, men are spokespersons on community-related issues, thereby increasing their response rates. On the other hand, women, are more restricted to domestic affairs which limits their level of participation in the study. The age of respondents showed that 138 (37%) of the respondents were between the ages of 18-35 years; 157 (42%) of them were between 36-64 years; and 80 (21%) were between 66 years and above. The middle-age category dominated the study. This category of respondents obviously has greater responsibilities for livelihoods, businesses, and family sustenance, making them prone to respond to questions on issues relating to communal conflicts, compared to the younger or elderly people. The result on the marital status of the respondents revealed that 95 (25%) of the respondents were single; 221 (59%) were married; 29 (8%) were either divorced or separated; while 30 (8%) were widowed. This indicates that the married respondents were more available for the study. Married respondents dominated the study because they were more directly affected by disruptions in livelihood, security, and family welfare. Communal conflicts often lead to displacement, economic instability, and loss of income, affecting married people responsible for household sustenance. On the educational level of the respondents, the study showed that 18 (5%) of the respondents had no formal education; 40 (11%) attained the primary level of education; 260 (69%) had secondary education; while 57 (15%) had attended tertiary education. This result indicates that most of the respondents were educated. This means they were literate enough to understand the questionnaire. The occupation of the respondents revealed that 258 (69%) respondents were farmers; 48 (13%) were civil/public servants; 55 (15%) were traders; and 14 (3%) belonged to other occupations. There were more farmers in the study areas because agriculture is the primary livelihood occupation in many rural communities affected by communal conflicts. Farmers were directly affected through land disputes, displacement, and restricted access to farmlands.

## Major Socio-Economic Activities in Oju Local Government Area of Benue State

Table 2: Respondents' opinions on the major socio-economic activities in Oju LGA

Socio-economic activities	Categories	Frequency (N=375)	Percentage (%=100)	Remark
<b>Production</b>	Crop farming	172	46	1 <sup>st</sup>
	Livestock rearing	76	20	2 <sup>nd</sup>
	Fishing/Hunting	33	9	5 <sup>th</sup>
	Handicraft	57	15	3 <sup>rd</sup>
	Agro-processing	37	10	4 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Distribution</b>	Trading	218	58	1 <sup>st</sup>
	Transportation services	99	26	2 <sup>nd</sup>
	Storage and Warehousing	58	16	3 <sup>rd</sup>
<b>Cultural</b>	Religious gatherings	141	38	1 <sup>st</sup>
	Traditional festivals	114	30	2 <sup>nd</sup>
	Meetings/Get togethers	74	20	3 <sup>rd</sup>
	Rites of passage	46	12	4 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Recreational</b>	Sports	150	40	1 <sup>st</sup>
	Dance/Entertainment	121	32	2 <sup>nd</sup>
	Traditional games	44	12	4 <sup>th</sup>
	Hiking/Adventures	60	16	3 <sup>rd</sup>

**Source:Field Survey, 2025**

Table 2 categorises four socio-economic activities carried out by people in Oju LGA. From the data shown, out of the five production activities, crop farming was revealed to be the most activity with 172 (46%) of the respondents agreeing to this opinion. This was followed by livestock rearing (goats, sheep, rabbits, cows) [76 (20%)], handicraft (pottery moulding/clay works, wood carving, rope weaving, brooms and basket weaving, masquerade masks) [57 (15%)], agro-processing activities (palm oil production, rice milling, gari production) [37 (10%)] and lastly, fishing/hunting [33 (9%)]. This shows that crop farming is the major production activity in Oju local government area. Crops cultivated by people from Oju include guineacorn (sorghum), soybeans, beniseed (sesame), millet, maize, yam, rice, cassava, groundnut, and plantain and palm plantations.

In terms of distribution activities, results showed that 218 (58%) of the respondents said the major activity in this category was trading of both processed and unprocessed goods; followed by transportation services [99 (26%)] and then storage/warehousing (including crops like guineacorn (sorghum), soybeans, beniseed (sesame), millet, maize, yam, rice, cassava, groundnut, as well as processed palm oil) [58 (16%)]. From the results, trading of goods was the major activity under distribution activities. Trading unusually involved the use of trucks for both intra and inter State delivery of agricultural produce.

Regarding cultural activities, 141 (38%) of the respondents were of the opinion that the major activity here was religious gatherings like church services, mosque congregational prayers and inter-faith meetings. In order of ranking, the second major activity was traditional festivals (the Igede Agba yam festival) [114 (30%)], meetings/get togethers (family meetings, birthdays, youth associations gatherings, old students' meetings, elders' meetings, women associations meetings, political meetings) was ranked third [74 (20%)] and rites of passage ceremonies (naming ceremony, burials, marriages, taboo enforcement events) [46 (12%)]. The result indicated that religious gatherings was the most cultural activity among people in Oju local government area.

Concerning recreational activities, sports (football, track and field, volleyball, basketball, tennis) was ranked first [150 (40%)], followed by dance and entertainment (adiya, ogirinye, abekpa, aje, and otopo dances, masquerade performances, beauty contests, folk performances, storytelling events) [121 (32%)], hiking/adventures (visiting tourist sites like mountains, rivers, forests) [60 (16%)] and traditional games (seed-and-hole board games, informal wrestling) [44 (12%)]. The result on recreational activities indicated that sport activities were most practiced in Oju local government area.

Responses from key informants further relates the major socio-economic activities in Oju LGA, centring on production, distribution, cultural and recreational aspects. A 35 year old female security agent in Oju said thus:

The socio-economic activities here revolve around agriculture, particularly crop farming, which remains the backbone of the local economy. Production focuses on crops like yams, rice, plantations, and cassava among others, while distribution occurs through local markets and traders (KII, 2025).

In Ibilla Council Ward, a 65 year old male community leader had this to say about the socio-economic activities in the area:

Our primary socio-economic activity is crop farming, but also distribution mainly occurs within the village, but we also trade with nearby towns. Cultural activities such as drumming, dances, and festivals are also practiced, where elders pass on traditions to the younger generation. We also have recreational activities like sports, especially football, to keep the youths engaged and reduce social tensions (KII, 2025).

**From the above analyses, it is clear that though there were other socio-economic activities in Oju LGA, the major ones were crop farming, trading, religious gatherings, and sports. Crop farming served as the primary source of livelihood, ensuring food security and**

income generation for households. **Trading** facilitated economic exchange, connecting farmers and consumers while boosting local commerce. **Religious gatherings** played a crucial role in fostering social cohesion, moral guidance, and community support. **Sports activities** promoted youth engagement, physical well-being, and unity. This finding relates to Usman, Ahmed & Obodumu (2015), on livelihood activities among rural dwellers in Otukpo LGA, Benue State, which revealed that agriculture remains the primary occupation, with over half of the respondents engaged in farming. Other significant activities included weaving and various forms of trading. These occupations provided income and employment, fostering economic stability and community development.

### Effects of Communal Conflicts on Socio-Economic Activities in Oju Local Government Area of Benue State

**Table 3: Extent of Effects of Communal Conflicts on Socio-Economic Activities**

<b>Main Activities</b>	<b>Specific activities affected</b>	<b>Extent of the effect</b>	<b>Frequency (N) = 375</b>	<b>Percentage (%) = 100</b>
<b>Production</b>	<b>Crop Farming</b>	Reduction in cultivated area	35	9.3
		Decline in crop yield/output	120	32.0
		Limited access/unsafe farmlands	220	58.7
	<b>Livestock Rearing</b>	Reduction in herd size/loss of animals	115	30.7
		Restricted access to grazing routes	100	26.7
		Increased livestock theft/mortality	160	42.6
	<b>Fishing/Hunting</b>	Decline in catch volume	130	34.7
		Insecurity/restrictions to fishing/hunting grounds	120	32.0
		Loss/damage of fishing/hunting gear	125	33.3
	<b>Handicraft</b>	Reduction in items produced	125	33.3
		Difficulty accessing raw materials	105	28.0
		Loss of tools/workspace	145	38.7
	<b>Agro-processing</b>	Reduced processing capacity	140	37.3
		Shortage of raw materials	130	34.7
		Damage/loss of processing equipment	105	28.0
<b>Distribution</b>	<b>Trading</b>	Reduced market access & sales	140	37.3
		Loss or damage of goods	110	29.3
		Increased transportation/transaction costs	125	33.3
	<b>Transportation Services</b>	Reduced trips and service coverage	135	36.0
		Road insecurity, blockades, or restrictions	140	37.3
	<b>Storage &amp; Warehousing</b>	Higher operational costs	100	26.7
		Damage/theft of stored goods	128	34.1
		Reduced storage capacity/utilization	130	34.7

<b>Main Activities</b>	<b>Specific activities affected</b>	<b>Extent of the effect</b>	<b>Frequency (N) = 375</b>	<b>Percentage (%) = 100</b>	
<b>Cultural</b>		Fear/insecurity around storage facilities	117	31.2	
	<b>Religious Gatherings</b>		Decline in attendance	140	37.3
			Closure or disruption of worship activities	104	27.7
			Fear of assembling for worship	131	35.0
	<b>Traditional Festivals</b>		Cancellation or postponement of festivals	120	32.0
			Low participation turnout	105	28.0
	<b>Meetings/Get-togethers</b>		Disruption of cultural performances/rituals	150	40.0
			Reduced community participation	135	36.0
			Change/relocation of meeting venues	100	26.7
	<b>Rites of Passage</b>		Decline in social cohesion/interactions	140	37.3
			Postponement/cancellation of ceremonies	150	40.0
			Decline in attendance/participation	107	28.5
			Limitation on ritual activities	118	31.5
<b>Recreational</b>	<b>Sports</b>	Cancellation of sports events	140	37.3	
		Reduced participation levels	102	27.2	
		Fear of gathering for sports	133	35.5	
	<b>Dance/Entertainment</b>	Event cancellations	150	40.0	
		Reduced audience turnout	107	28.5	
	<b>Traditional Games</b>	Decline in performers/performances	118	31.5	
		Lower participation in games	140	37.3	
		Loss of play grounds/game spaces	93	24.8	
	<b>Hiking/Adventures</b>	Fear/insecurity affecting outdoor play	142	37.9	
		Reduced access to natural sites	140	37.3	
		Fear of attacks during adventures	100	26.7	
		Decline/abandonment of outdoor adventures	135	36.0	

**Source: Field Survey, 2025**

The extent of the effects of communal conflicts on socio-economic activities in Oju Local Government Area is presented in Table 3. Results on Table 3, showed that the communal conflicts had a profound effect on crop farming. Limited access to farmland was reported by 220 respondents (58.7%), indicating that more than half of the farmers experienced restricted or unsafe farmland usage. Moderate reductions in crop yield were reported by 120 respondents (32%), while only 35 respondents (9.3%) reported very low effects. This

suggests that crop production is highly vulnerable to conflict, primarily due to land disputes, fear of attacks, or abandonment of farms.

Livestock activities were similarly affected. Increased livestock theft and mortality were reported by 160 respondents (42.6%), highlighting the vulnerability of animals to raiding and theft during communal clashes. Reduction in herd size was reported by 115 respondents (30.7%), and 100 respondents (26.7%) experienced restricted access to grazing routes. This result shows that communal conflicts in Oju LGA directly threaten both the assets (livestock) and the grazing resources necessary for sustainable livestock rearing.

Fishing and hunting activities showed substantial disruption. A decline in catch volume was reported by 130 respondents (34.7%), while 120 respondents (32%) experienced restrictions to fishing and hunting grounds. Loss or damage of fishing/hunting gear also affected 125 respondents (33.3%). The near-equal distribution of these frequencies indicates that both access to resources and actual productivity of fishing and hunting activities are significantly affected by communal conflicts in Oju LGA.

In handicraft production, 145 respondents (38.7%) reported loss of tools or workspace, 125 respondents (33.3%) revealed reductions in items produced, and 105 respondents (28%) experienced difficulties in accessing raw materials. This shows that in Oju LGA, artisanal and small-scale manufacturing are vulnerable to communal conflicts, which disrupt both the production process and material supply chains.

Agro-processing was also affected through reduced processing capacity (140 respondents, 37.3%), shortage of raw materials (130 respondents, 34.7%), and damage or loss of equipment (105 respondents, 28%). This result demonstrates that in Oju LGA, communal conflicts do not only affect primary production but also hinder value addition processes that are crucial for income generation. Production activities are largely dependent on stable access to land, resources, and equipment. The high frequencies and percentages in the “moderate” and “high effect” categories confirm that communal conflicts undermine agricultural productivity, food security, and rural livelihoods.

Table 3 also produced results on the effect of communal conflicts on distribution activities. Under this category, trading was heavily affected, with 140 respondents (37.3%) reporting reduced market access and sales, 125 respondents (33.3%) indicating increased transportation

or transaction costs, and 110 respondents (29.3%) experiencing loss or damage of goods. The high impact underscores the vulnerability of traders to insecurity and market disruptions.

Transportation services also experienced disruption in operational coverage (135 respondents, 36%), road insecurity or blockades (140 respondents, 37.3%), and higher operational costs (100 respondents, 26.7%). These disruptions usually hinder movement of goods and people, reflecting a direct economic loss and increased cost of doing business.

Storage facilities were similarly affected by damage/theft of stored goods (128 respondents, 34.1%), reduced utilization (130 respondents, 34.7%), and fear or insecurity surrounding storage locations (117 respondents, 31.2%). This indicates that communal conflicts reduce the safety and effectiveness of warehousing infrastructure, which is critical for supply chain stability. The high percentages in the “moderate” and “high effect” categories across distribution activities illustrate that conflicts severely affect logistics, trade continuity, and the flow of goods. These disruptions cascade into reduced incomes, higher costs, and economic instability in affected areas.

The effect of communal conflicts on cultural activities was also reported in Table 3. Here, a decline in attendance at religious events was reported by 140 respondents (37.3%), closure or disruption of worship activities affected 104 respondents (27.7%), and fear of assembling for worship affected 131 respondents (35%). Religious practices are central to community cohesion, and these disruptions indicate both social and psychological impacts of conflicts. The results also revealed cancellations or postponements of festivals as it affected 120 respondents (32%). There was low participation turnout that involved 105 respondents (28%), and disruption of cultural performances that affected 150 respondents (40%). This indicates that communal conflicts threaten the preservation and continuity of cultural heritage.

Communal conflicts were also reported to affect meetings as results indicated reduced community participation as was reported by 135 respondents (36%), relocation of meeting venues reported by 100 respondents (26.7%), and decline in social cohesion or interactions by 140 respondents (37.3%). These results highlight the social fragmentation caused by conflicts. Communal conflicts caused the postponement or cancellation of rites of passage ceremonies as reported by 150 respondents (40%). Meanwhile a decline in attendance was reported by 107 respondents (28.5%), and limitations on ritual activities affected 118

respondents (31.5%). Cultural rites are crucial for identity and social structure; disruptions can have long-term societal implications. The high levels of disruption in cultural activities reflect the social consequences of communal conflicts, including weakened social cohesion, reduced cultural participation, and loss of traditional knowledge.

Regarding recreational activities, results in Table 3 revealed that there was cancellation of sports events as reported by 140 respondents (37.3%), reduced participation by 102 respondents (27.2%), and fear of gathering for sports by 133 respondents (35.5%). Regarding dance and entertainment, results showed that there were cancellations of events due to communal conflicts which affected 150 respondents (40%), there was reduced audience turnout as reported by 107 respondents (28.5%), and a decline in performers or performances as reported by 118 respondents (31.5%). Traditional games were also affected. There was lower participation in games as reported by 140 respondents (37.3%), loss of play grounds by 93 respondents (24.8%), and fear or insecurity affecting outdoor play by 142 respondents (37.9%). There were reports of reduced access to natural sites by 140 respondents (37.3%), fear of attacks by 100 respondents (26.7%), and abandonment of outdoor adventures by 135 respondents (36%). Recreational activities are essential for physical health, social interaction, and community cohesion. From the results, it is clear that communal conflicts significantly reduce participation and access to recreational spaces, indicating both physical and psychological impacts on communities.

Corroborating the above responses, KII results indicated that communal conflicts served as a cankerworm to socio-economic development in Oju LGA. In the words of a 59 year old male security agent from Adopka council ward:

Communal conflicts in this area have severely affected production activities, especially farming. Many farmers have abandoned their farmlands due to fear of attacks, leading to reduced food production. Insecurity prevented people from accessing their crops, and this caused serious food shortages. When conflicts escalated, entire farming communities were displaced, leaving their crops to wither (KII, 2025).

A 33 year old male youth leader from AINU-ETTE council ward was of the following assertion:

Communal conflicts greatly affected farming which has reduced crop production, leading to food shortages. The distribution of farm produce was also affected, as traders no longer felt safe traveling to the affected areas. Culturally, our traditional festivals were affected because people feared gatherings may turn violent. Recreational activities, especially football matches, declined because conflicts created divisions among the youth. These

issues weakened our community bonds, making it difficult for us to progress as a people.

From the above results, it has been observed that in Oju LGA, communal conflicts significantly disrupted major socio-economic activities like crop farming, trading, religious gatherings, and sports. Crop farming, the primary occupation, was affected due to land disputes, destruction of farmlands, and displacement of farmers, leading to food shortages and economic hardship. Trading declined as insecurity hindered market operations and supply chains. Religious gatherings were affected as fear and tension discouraged attendance. Similarly, sports activities that promoted youth engagement and community bonding were disrupted. The effects weakened economic stability, social cohesion, and overall socio-economic development. This is also similar to Nwakamma, Oketa, Oginyi & Edeh (2023), who found that conflicts in certain areas in Ebonyi State resulted in the abandonment of development projects and hindered the growth of small-scale businesses. The instability caused by these conflicts disrupted economic activities, leading to reduced income and development in the affected communities.

### Hypothesis

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant association between communal conflicts and disruption in socio-economic activities in Oju Local Government Area of Benue State

**Table 4: Pearson Correlation coefficient showing the relationship between the natures of communal conflicts and increase in socio-economic in Oju LGA of Benue State**

Variables	Nature of Communal Conflicts	Socio-Economic Activities
Nature of Communal Conflicts	1	.074
Socio-Economic Activities	.074	1

Note: N=375, p=0.03

Source: SPSS, v. 25

**Analysis:** Table 4 presents a Pearson Correlation that was conducted to test the association between the nature of communal conflicts and socio-economic activities in Oju LGA. The Pearson coefficient showed an extremely weak positive association between the two variables ( $r=0.074$ ). The value is close to 0, suggesting almost no linear relationship. Thus, the strength of this correlation is negligible. However, the correlation is statistically significant ( $p = 0.03$ ). Since  $p > 0.05$ , there is strong evidence that the association observed in the sample exists in the population.

**Interpretation:** Since the correlation is statistically significant, we conclude that there is a meaningful association between the two variables. This means that the observed correlation is unlikely to be due to random chance but of real effect.

**Decision:** Since  $p = 0.03 < 0.05$ , we reject the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) and accept the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ). This means that the nature of communal conflicts affects socio-economic activities in Oju Local Government Area. Communal conflicts in Oju LGA severely disrupted key socio-economic activities such as farming, trading, religious gatherings, and sports. Farmland destruction, insecurity, and displacement reduced food production and market operations, while fear and tension limited social interactions, thereby weakening economic stability, social cohesion, and overall community development.

### **Conclusion**

The objective of this paper was to ascertain the extent to which communal conflicts affect socio-economic activities in Oju Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. It is obvious that communal conflicts significantly disrupt socio-economic activities, affecting production, distribution, cultural, and recreational sectors. The paper concludes that the conflicts erode economic stability, social cohesion, and peace-building opportunities, which exacerbate poverty and deepen divisions among communities in Oju Local Government Area of Benue State.

### **Recommendations**

- i. Local government, extension services, community leaders, and security agents should protect farmlands, grazing, and fishing areas to ensure safe access and sustain agricultural and livestock productivity.
- ii. Ministry of Trade, transport unions, warehouse operators, and law enforcement should secure markets, transport routes, and storage facilities to protect goods, reduce theft, and maintain trade continuity.
- iii. Religious leaders, traditional rulers, community associations, and local government committees should mediate conflicts and create safe, structured events to maintain participation and preserve social cohesion.
- iv. Ministry of Youth and Sports, youth organizations, and security outfits should establish monitored recreational zones and supervised activities to reduce fear and ensure safe sports and outdoor participation.

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# Experiences of Gender-Based Violence among girls in IDPs camps in Northeast Nigeria

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## Abstract

This study is a desk review which seeks to assess gender-based violence (GBV) experiences among girls living in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in North-Eastern Nigeria. Building on previous findings and existing literature, institutional and policy reports published between 2014 and 2024, the study examines the nature, causes, consequences, and gaps in responses related to gender-based violence in these humanitarian contexts. The study draws on existing empirical literature to highlight recurring patterns of vulnerability and structural inequality shaping the experiences of displaced girls. It further employs a sociological theoretical framework to explain how power relations and systemic deprivation reinforce these patterns of violence. Findings of the study reveal consistent sexual exploitation, forced or early marriage, violent physical treatment and trauma as the prevailing types of violence confronting girls in displaced camps. Factors contributing to this menace are deprived economic access, weaknesses in the protective institutions, prevailing patriarchal norms, and depletion in traditional protection system. The study also captures devastating mental, social, physical and economic implications for survivors. For the fact that there have been both humanitarian and government responses such as health services and legal framework, there remains gaps in the areas of funding, access, coordination and accountability. The study recommends improved services for survivors and upgrading the centres, legal re-enforcement, promoting equitable gender norms and investing in long-term protection systems to ensure the rights and dignity of displaced girls are upheld.

**Keywords:** Conflict; Coping strategies; Displacement; Gender-based violence; IDP camps.

## **Introduction**

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive and devastating consequence of armed conflict and displacement globally. It encompasses physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse rooted in gender inequality and power imbalance (United Nations Women, 2022). Armed conflicts disrupt social and legal structures, create insecurity, and displace populations, thereby heightening the vulnerability of women and girls to violence (Isihor, Adebayo, & Etuk, 2021). In humanitarian settings, such as refugee and IDP camps, the risks of GBV are significantly amplified due to overcrowding, lack of privacy, weak law enforcement, and limited access to justice (United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2023; Bashir, Geidam, & Galadima, 2020).

In Nigeria, the protracted Boko Haram insurgency and recurring communal conflicts, especially in the North-East, have resulted in the displacement of over 2.2 million people (UNHCR, 2023). These conflicts have devastated communities and weakened institutional capacities, leaving millions in need of humanitarian assistance. A large proportion of those displaced are women and girls, who face heightened risks of GBV due to disrupted family structures, poverty, and the breakdown of community protection mechanisms (Ugwu, 2021).

IDP camps, which are intended as safe havens for displaced populations, often become breeding grounds for GBV. Reports from Human Rights Watch (2018) and Amnesty International (2018) document alarming instances of sexual exploitation, coerced survival sex, forced marriages, and abuse by camp officials, security personnel, and even humanitarian workers (Bashir et al., 2020; Isihor et al., 2021). The normalization of gender-based violence in such settings reflects broader societal gender inequalities and impunity for perpetrators.

This desk review aims to assess existing literature, reports, and policy documents to explore the nature, causes, and consequences of GBV experienced by girls in Nigeria's IDP camps. By examining these dynamics, the review seeks to contribute to evidence-based advocacy, policy formulation, and programmatic interventions aimed at protecting the rights and dignity of displaced girls.

## **Literature Review**

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) refers to harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender or socially ascribed roles. It includes physical, sexual, psychological, and economic forms of abuse driven largely by entrenched gender inequalities and patriarchal norms that

position women and girls as subordinate within society (UN Women, 2022; Tadesse, Andualem, Rtbey, Nakie, Takelle, Molla, Abate, Kibralew, Kelebie, Fentahun, & Tinsae, 2024). Gender-based violence (GBV) represents one of the most pervasive human rights violations globally, especially within contexts affected by conflict and displacement (Kunnuji, Okocha, Adeleke, Nwanna, & Eshiet, 2024). In humanitarian settings, particularly in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, the risks of GBV are significantly heightened due to instability, weakened institutions, and the erosion of community protection structures that ordinarily offer some degree of safety for vulnerable individuals (Olojede, & Brand-Jacobson, 2025).

The concept of IDPs refers to individuals forced to flee their homes due to violence or disasters but who remain within national borders (Sinha, 2022). In Nigeria's North-East, the Boko Haram insurgency and communal conflicts have contributed to the displacement of millions, with women and girls forming a disproportionately large share of those affected.

The causes of GBV in IDP camps are deeply interconnected. Displacement disrupts social networks and family structures that traditionally safeguard girls, leaving them exposed to exploitation by individuals who wield power, including camp officials, security personnel, and sometimes humanitarian actors (Olojede, & Brand-Jacobson, 2024). Poverty and scarcity of basic resources further exacerbate vulnerability, often compelling girls into survival strategies such as transactional sex or exposing them to coercive demands in exchange for food, shelter, or protection (Gidado, Musa, Ba'aba, Okeke, Nguku, Hadejia, Hassan, Bande, Onuoha, Ugbenyo, 2023). Cultural norms that perpetuate male dominance and female subordination also contribute to the normalization of violence, while inadequate security, overcrowding, and lack of privacy within camps create opportunities for abuse (Human Rights Watch, 2018). The consequences of GBV for displaced girls are severe and far-reaching. Physically, many face injuries, unwanted pregnancies, and exposure to sexually transmitted infections (Amnesty International, 2018). Psychologically, survivors often experience trauma, anxiety, and long-term emotional distress. Socially and economically, stigmatization, educational disruption, and diminished future opportunities limit their development (Koris, Steven, Akika, Puls, Okoro, Bitrus, Seff, Deitch, & Stark, 2022). The literature consistently shows that GBV in IDP camps is not an accidental outcome but a predictable result of structural inequalities intensified by conflict and displacement.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study employs the Feminist theoretical perspectives which argue that GBV originates from unequal power relations between men and women, embedded in patriarchal systems. These power imbalances are heightened in conflict and displacement contexts, where institutional oversight is weak (Connell, 1987). The experiences of GBV among girls in IDP camps can be interpreted through Gender Power Theory, which offers a deeper understanding of the structural and situational forces shaping vulnerability. Gender Power Theory, rooted in feminist scholarship, argues that GBV stems from unequal power relations that privilege men and subordinate women. These inequalities become more pronounced during conflict and displacement, where institutional oversight weakens and male-controlled structures dominate decision making. In IDP camps in Northeast Nigeria, men typically hold leadership and security roles, which grant them authority over resource distribution and protection mechanisms. This imbalance increases girls' dependency and reduces their ability to negotiate safety, thereby reinforcing cycles of domination and exploitation.

## **Methodology**

This study adopted a qualitative desk review methodology involving a systematic collection, evaluation, and a blend of existing literature related to gender-based violence (GBV) among girls in Nigeria's internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. The review focused on publications between 2014 and 2024 to ensure both relevance and currency, covering peer-reviewed academic journals, grey literature, and reports by international and national organizations.

Primary data sources included academic databases such as JSTOR, PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar, where relevant scholarly articles on GBV, displacement, and humanitarian response in Nigeria were retrieved. Key search terms included "gender-based violence," "IDP camps in Nigeria," "conflict and displacement," "girls and sexual violence," and "humanitarian crises and GBV." Boolean operators (AND, OR) were employed to broaden or narrow searches.

In addition to academic sources, the review incorporated reports and assessments by credible organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Human Rights Watch, International Organization for Migration (IOM), Amnesty International, and Oxfam. National reports from Nigeria's National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and National Human Rights

Commission (NHRC) were also considered. Documents were selected based on their methodological rigor, credibility, relevance to the Nigerian context, and focus on gender-specific vulnerabilities.

Data were analysed thematically, identifying key patterns and trends related to forms of GBV, contributing factors, health and psychosocial impacts, and response mechanisms within IDP camps. Ethical considerations were maintained by relying solely on publicly available data and ensuring that all sources were accurately cited using APA 7th edition referencing.

This method enabled the collation of diverse insights and perspectives across humanitarian, legal, sociological, and psychological dimensions, thereby providing a holistic understanding of the challenges faced by displaced girls in conflict zones in Nigeria.

## **Findings**

Findings of this review covers the forms, causes, consequences and responses on gender-based violence. From the various documents reviewed, sources reveal multiple forms of GBV experienced by girls within Nigeria's IDP camps.

### **Forms of Gender-based violence in IDPs**

Sexual violence is the most prevalent form of GBV in IDP camps. Reports indicate that girls are frequently subjected to rape, gang rape, and coerced transactional sex (Marlow, Kunnuji, Esiet, Bukoye, & Izugbara, 2022). According to Amnesty International (2018), some girls are forced to engage in sex-for-food or sex-for-shelter exchanges due to the absence of adequate humanitarian supplies. The United Nations Population Fund (2023) noted that over 60% of GBV cases reported in Nigerian camps involved sexual exploitation and abuse by persons in authority, including security forces and camp officials (Imoh Dongurum, Bolaji-Adegbola, Envuladu, Magaji, Osagbemi, & Imoh, 2025).

Girls are also subjected to physical abuses such as beatings, forced labour, and corporal punishment, particularly within households or in forced or early marriages. Oxfam Nigeria (2021) reported that physical violence often serves as a tool for controlling girls' mobility and enforcing compliance with traditional gender roles.

Emotional and psychological abuse: Studies also show emotional and psychological abuse girls in IDPs camp go through. These include intimidations, verbal threats, isolation, and constant surveillance. United Nations High Commission for Refugees (2023), reports show

that survivors often suffer from anxiety and depression which are rarely addressed due to inadequate mental health services in camp settings. Sheikh, Mohammed, Esegbe and Adekeye (2023) and Envuladu, Massar & Wit (2023) further corroborate these findings, showing that displaced adolescents experience extreme psychological distress, insomnia, and trauma due to repeated exposure to violence.

The practice of early marriage is widespread in displacement settings as families perceive it as a strategy for protecting their daughters or alleviating economic hardship. Human Rights Watch (2018) and Ugwu (2021) highlighted numerous cases where girls as young as 13 were married off to much older men, exposing them to lifelong cycles of abuse and social isolation. The lack of accountability and ineffective justice systems mean that perpetrators frequently go unpunished, while survivors are left to cope with physical and emotional trauma.

### **Drivers of Gender-based violence**

Acute poverty among displaced populations is one of the most significant drivers of GBV. IDPs often lose their homes, means of livelihood, and social networks, leaving them entirely dependent on humanitarian assistance (Bashir et al., 2020). In such situations, transactional sex becomes a survival strategy, particularly for adolescent girls and female-headed households. According to Amnesty International (2018), numerous cases have been documented where girls exchanged sex for food, security, and sanitary items due to inadequate relief supplies. This dynamic of economic desperation and resource control creates exploitative power asymmetries, especially in resource-scarce environments.

Girls who would typically rely on extended kinship support are left vulnerable (Bashir et al., 2020). In the camp setting, the absence of designated guardians, overcrowded living conditions, and the breakdown of communal oversight significantly heighten the risk of abuse (Oxfam, 2021). Additionally, the erosion of customary social sanctions against GBV during crises reduces accountability within displaced communities.

Deeply entrenched gender norms continue to frame women and girls as subordinate and property-like, which normalizes violence against them. In many cultures within northern Nigeria, early marriage is both a coping mechanism and a cultural practice. Displaced families may marry off young daughters to reduce household burden or secure temporary

protection, exposing girls to marital rape, domestic violence, and premature motherhood (Human Rights Watch, 2018; UN Women, 2022).

IDP camps often lack basic safety infrastructure such as sufficient lighting, secure shelters, and gender-separated sanitation facilities. This makes girls especially vulnerable to nighttime assaults and attacks in latrines or water collection areas. Reports by UNHCR (2023) highlight that unmonitored camp perimeters and communal sleeping arrangements expose girls to unwanted advances and sexual coercion, especially from older male residents or camp staff. Moreover, some camps have no complaint or redress systems, and where they exist, they are inadequately funded and poorly publicized.

Despite the presence of humanitarian actors, GBV prevention and response are often not prioritized in emergency responses. Inconsistent funding, fragmented service delivery, and lack of survivor-centered approaches hinder timely and effective interventions. Coordination lapses between camp managers, security personnel, health workers, and legal aid providers allow cases of GBV to fall through the cracks (Ugwu, 2021).

### **Consequences of GBV**

Literature reviewed showed that girls who experience GBV often suffer severe physical injuries, especially in cases of rape or intimate partner violence. These injuries may include genital trauma, pelvic pain, and chronic reproductive health issues. More alarmingly, sexual violence often results in unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and increased vulnerability to sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS (UNFPA, 2023). Due to limited access to quality healthcare services in IDP camps, many survivors do not receive the urgent medical attention they require, compounding their trauma and risk of long-term disability.

Survivors often experience post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. The feeling of shame, guilt, and fear of stigma can lead to self-isolation and social withdrawal (Patel, Srivastava, Kumar, Chauhan, Govindu, & Dhillon, 2021). According to Human Rights Watch (2016), many girls develop deep-seated distrust in adults and authority figures, especially when the abuser holds a position of power.

Early marriage, often both a cause and consequence of GBV, further disrupts educational attainment (Marlow, et al., 2022; Human Right Watch, 2018). Oxfam (2021) found that

educational discontinuity among displaced girls leads to long-term socioeconomic disadvantage and reduces their ability to escape cycles of violence and poverty. Bashir et al. (2020) and Isihor et al. (2021) further found that GBV severely limits girls' educational attainment and economic empowerment.

In patriarchal societies, a girl's 'honour' is tied to her sexuality, and survivors of GBV are often considered 'spoiled' or unmarriageable (Ogunfowokan, Samson-Akpan, Arije, & Olawoyin, 2024). According to Ekine (2020), ostracized girls often end up in exploitative labour, sex work, or abusive relationships due to lack of support networks. In the long term, this entrenches poverty and contributes to intergenerational cycles of vulnerability (UN Women, 2022).

### **Responses to GBV**

Various stakeholders including government agencies, international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community groups have initiated response mechanisms to address gender-based violence in Nigeria's IDP camps. These mechanisms aim to prevent GBV, protect survivors, and prosecute perpetrators (Isihor et al., 2021). However, numerous challenges hinder their effectiveness, resulting in significant service gaps.

Organizations such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) have established gender desks, safe spaces for women and girls, mobile clinics, and referral systems in some IDP camps. These services provide psychosocial counselling, medical treatment, legal aid, and livelihood training for survivors. The Nigerian government has also launched the National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security and integrated GBV response into humanitarian coordination platforms (UN Women, 2021). In collaboration with state-level emergency management agencies, some initiatives include gender focal points and survivor-centred intervention protocols. However, local academic studies point out gaps in coordination, survivor services, and cultural barriers to justice (Ogunfowokan et al., 2024; Isihor et al., 2021).

Grassroots and faith-based organizations have played critical roles in creating awareness and engaging community leaders to challenge harmful practices and attitudes. Community sensitization campaigns, boys' clubs, and peer-education programs have shown promise in

shifting social norms and reducing tolerance for GBV (Oxfam, 2021). These efforts often rely on trusted local actors, increasing their acceptance and sustainability.

There have been efforts to establish mobile courts and legal clinics within and around IDP camps, particularly in Borno and Adamawa states. The Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act of 2015 provides a legal framework to address various forms of GBV; however, its adoption and enforcement remain inconsistent across states. Where available, survivors often lack the means or support to navigate the legal system (Kunnuji, et al., 2024).

### **Discussion of findings**

The findings of this review underscore the pervasive and multidimensional nature of gender-based violence (GBV) experienced by girls in Nigeria's IDP camps. Sexual violence emerges as the most prevalent form, with rape, gang rape, and coerced transactional sex reflecting both opportunistic exploitation and structural power imbalances. The reports of sex-for-food or shelter exchanges highlight the intersection of economic deprivation and gendered vulnerabilities, illustrating how acute poverty drives exploitative practices within humanitarian settings. Physical, emotional, and psychological abuses further compound the harm, leaving survivors with trauma, anxiety, and depression, which often remain unaddressed due to limited mental health services.

Early marriage emerges as both a cultural practice and a coping mechanism within displaced communities, often justified as protection or economic relief. While intended as a solution to vulnerability, early marriage exposes girls to further abuse, including domestic violence, marital rape, and social isolation. The interrelation of multiple forms of GBV, as indicated in the findings, demonstrates that these harms are cumulative and mutually reinforcing, creating cycles of trauma that extend beyond immediate physical injury.

The drivers of GBV in IDP camps are complex, encompassing socioeconomic, structural, and socio-cultural factors. The disruption of family and community protective networks, combined with insufficient safety infrastructure, weak legal enforcement, and entrenched gender norms, creates an environment where abuse is normalized and perpetrators frequently escape accountability. The findings highlight that transactional survival strategies, stigma, and patriarchal attitudes exacerbate girls' vulnerability, limiting their agency and social mobility.

The consequences of GBV are extensive, affecting health, education, and economic participation. Survivors face physical injuries, reproductive health risks, and persistent psychological distress. Education disruption, often due to pregnancy or trauma, constrains future opportunities and perpetuates cycles of poverty and dependence. They are frequently blamed or rejected by their families and communities, particularly in cases of rape or pregnancy outside marriage. This stigma and family rejection further marginalize survivors, reducing access to support and reintegration opportunities. These findings illustrate the interconnectedness of GBV outcomes and emphasise the need for comprehensive, multi-sectoral interventions.

Responses to GBV, while present, are inconsistent and fragmented. Humanitarian actors, government initiatives, and community organizations have implemented services ranging from psychosocial support to legal aid; however, gaps in coordination, funding, cultural acceptance, and service accessibility undermine effectiveness. The discussion reveals that addressing GBV in IDP camps requires not only immediate protective interventions but also systemic reforms that tackle underlying social, economic, and institutional drivers of vulnerability.

The findings demonstrate that GBV in Nigeria's IDP camps is a pervasive, multifactorial problem. Interventions must be survivor-centred, culturally sensitive, and integrated across health, education, legal, and protection sectors to mitigate harm and break cycles of abuse.

## **Conclusion**

This desk review underscores the urgent need to address the gendered impacts of conflict and displacement in Nigeria. Girls in IDP camps experience multiple, intersecting forms of violence, including sexual violence (rape, gang rape, coerced transactional sex), physical abuse (beatings, forced labour, corporal punishment), emotional and psychological abuse (intimidation, verbal threats, isolation, trauma), and early or forced marriage, rooted in systemic inequality, weak institutional safeguards, and socio-economic marginalization. These forms of GBV result in severe consequences, such as physical injuries, reproductive health complications, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, social stigma, educational disruption, school dropout, loss of economic opportunities, and long-term cycles of poverty and vulnerability. Despite some response efforts, critical gaps persist in prevention, protection, and accountability mechanisms. A holistic and inclusive approach is required to transform IDP camps from zones of vulnerability into spaces of safety and

dignity. Such transformation depends on multi-sectoral collaboration, sustained funding, cultural sensitivity, and survivor leadership. Ensuring justice and support for girls affected by GBV is not only a human rights imperative but also essential for Nigeria's long-term peace and development.

## **Recommendations**

To effectively address gender-based violence in Nigeria's IDP camps, a multi-pronged, survivor-centred strategy is essential.

- i. First, stakeholders should strengthen the legal framework by ensuring full domestication and implementation of the Violence against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act across all states, with clear mechanisms for enforcement and accountability.
- ii. Second, government and humanitarian actors must expand access to holistic support services such as healthcare, psychosocial counselling, legal aid, and education particularly for adolescent girls.
- iii. Third, community-based interventions should engage men, boys, traditional leaders, and religious institutions to challenge harmful gender norms and promote a culture of zero tolerance for GBV.
- iv. Fourth, investment in GBV prevention should prioritize safe spaces, secure infrastructure, and adolescent-friendly reporting channels within camps.
- v. Fifth, sustained funding and coordinated action among humanitarian agencies, local NGOs, and government institutions are vital for programme continuity and scalability.
- vi. Lastly, improved data collection, survivor anonymity, and participatory monitoring can help evaluate progress and ensure that responses remain context-specific and effective.

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# Factors affecting Women's Participation in Community Development in Kakwagom-Boki Local Government Area - Cross River State

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## Abstract

Community development is a vital aspect of sustainable growth and social progress, requiring the active involvement of all members, regardless of gender. In many regions of the world, including Kakwagom in Boki Local Government of Cross River State of Nigeria, women's participation in community development remains an issue of significant concern. This is even as women over the years, contribute to the growth of their society in spite of the many limitations standing in their way. This study explored the complex web of factors influencing women's participation in community development initiatives and specifically investigated the extent of women's representation in decision-making bodies and their participation in community development. To appropriately tackle and capture the variables involved in the study, the qualitative research method was adopted. Two focus group discussions (FGDs) and four in-depth interviews (IDIs) were carried out. Findings revealed a wealth of knowledge on factors affecting women's participation in community development in Kakwagom Boki Local Government of Cross River State, ranging from inability to access financial and property ownership to prevention of women from taking decisions in the community. The study recommends among others, improvement in women's access to resources such as land, credit and healthcare facilities and appointment into positions of leadership and decision-making bodies in the community. Mentorship programmes, collaboration and networking should be encouraged among women's groups and other stakeholders to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and resources.

**Keywords:** Community development; Sustainable growth; Women's group; Women's participation; Mentorship programmes

## **Introduction**

In recent years, community development has emerged as a vital driver of sustainable progress and societal well-being on a global scale. It plays a crucial role in fostering economic growth, promoting social cohesion, and enhancing living standards. Within the intricate fabric of community development, ensuring the active and inclusive participation of all members, regardless of gender, is not only a matter of social justice but also a fundamental prerequisite for success. At the global level, women are under-represented in formal decision-making structures that are closely linked to community development and governance. According to the UN Women (2025), women hold only about 35.5% of elected seats in local deliberative bodies worldwide, which serve as a key platform for planning and delivering community services.

Women also occupy about 27.2% of seats in national parliaments, highlighting persistent gender gaps in political leadership that constrain women's influence on policies affecting community development processes and priorities. Regionally, in Sub-Saharan Africa and particularly Nigeria, women's participation in governance and community development exhibits similar patterns of exclusion and marginalisation. According to the Women's Political Participation in Africa Barometer 2024 report, women's participation in national parliaments across Africa increased slightly, with women accounting for 26% of the seats in African legislatures, although Nigeria is among the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa for women's parliamentary representation (4.4% in the House of Representatives, with 16 women out of the 360 seats in the House of Representatives and 4 women out of the 109 seats in the Senate). Whereas the 2024 local government elections in Nigeria produced 23 women out of 618 chairperson seats available, giving women about 3.7% representation in grassroots leadership. This indicates a low female participation at the decision-making level (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre report 2024).

In numerous regions worldwide, including Kakwagom in the Boki Local Government of Cross River State, Nigeria, the issue of women's full engagement in community development initiatives remains a significant concern. Kakwagom, like many other communities across Nigeria, is characterised by deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and traditional gender roles. These societal norms, while rooted in cultural heritage, often constrain women from actively engaging in community development projects (Zanhi, 2016; Njenga, 2013). Understanding

these norms and their impact on women's roles and participation is crucial for devising strategies that harness the full potential of the community's human resources. Moreover, the percentage of women's representation in decision-making is still inadequate; despite the 35% affirmative action representation of women in decision-making bodies at the community level, it remains a pressing concern. Without sufficient representation, women struggle to advocate for their interests, resulting in development projects that may not adequately address the needs and aspirations of the female population (Olorunfemi & Olorunfemi, 2021)

Addressing the critical barriers limiting women's participation in community development is crucial for unlocking their full potential as active agents of development in Kakwagom, Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State. Moreover, promoting gender equality and inclusivity in community development efforts is essential for fostering sustainable and equitable development. Through this study, we aim to delve into these issues, identify their underlying causes and provide evidence-based recommendations for more inclusive and equitable community development practices.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- (a) To identify the specific factors affecting women's participation in community development in Kakwagom Boki.
- (b) To investigate the extent of women's representation in decision-making bodies and their participation in community development efforts in Kakwagom-Boki.
- (c) To suggest strategies to overcome the barriers and promote women's meaningful engagement in community development in Kakwagom Boki.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Conceptual Clarification**

Most of the scholars in the area of community development, rural sociology and social work, including Lotz (1977), agree that community development "is a child of hard times". Though it had not always been easy to state adequately what it is. The history of community development is closely linked with the history of society. The notion of community development owes a great deal to the effort of colonial administrators. After the Second World War, the British Colonial Office became concerned with community development. Mayo (1975) suggests that administrators 'concocted' the term out of their attempts to develop basic education and social welfare in the UK colonies. For example, a 1944 report,

Mass Education in the Colonies, placed an emphasis on literacy training and advocated the promotion of agriculture, health and other social services through local self-help (Midgley et al., 1986).

There was indeed a “social invention, which aimed at advancing the communities under the British colonial policy of indirect rule”. In 1948, the colonial office's annual conference on Africa administration was held in Cambridge, England. It had as its theme “Encouragement of initiative in African society”. It was at this conference that a definition of mass education was reached: that in future the process of mass education should be known as “Community Development”. Community development was defined in one of the UK government publications as:

A movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with the active participation and, if possible, on the initiative of the community, but if this initiative is not forthcoming spontaneously, by the use of techniques for arousing and stimulating it in order to secure its active and enthusiastic response to the movement. (Great Britain Colonial Office, 1948, p. 19).

After the Ashridge Conference in 1954, a shortened definition emerged, and it defined community development as:

A movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with the active participation and initiative of the community. Community development should include the whole range of development activities in the district, whether these are undertaken by government or unofficial bodies. In the field of agriculture by securing the adoption of better care of livestock, in the field of health by promoting sanitation and water supplies, proper measures of hygiene, and infant and maternal welfare, and in the field of education by spreading literacy and adult education as well as by extending and improving schools for children. Furthermore, community development must make use of co-operative movement and must be put into effect in the closest association with local government bodies (Colonial Office, 1954, p. 14).

In 1959, the United Nations defined community development as the process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of government authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities in the life of the nation and to enable them to contribute fully to national progress. And by the early 60s, there were over 40 community development advisers in over thirty countries in the world. This development naturally gave rise to new definitions. A survey of the literature reveals various but interrelated approaches to the definition, including: According to Periman and Gurin (1972), community development is a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with the active participation and fullest possible reliance on the community initiative.

For Dunham (1970), community development should be organised efforts to improve the conditions of community life and the capacity for community integration and self-direction. His approach stresses four basic facts about community development: That community development is a planned programme; it encourages self-help. The need of outside technical assistance (which may include funds, personnel supplies and equipment). The involvement of many specialists (experts) working together for the development of the community.

Batten (1975) agrees with other writers in defining community development as a process of social change in which the people of a community organise themselves for planning and action, define their common and individual problems, and execute these with a maximum of reliance upon the resources of the community.

Women's participation in community development is a vital driver of sustainable growth and social progress; it entails their involvement in economic ventures, healthcare, and infrastructure (Maton, 2008). This implies that women's contributions are necessary across economic, social, and political spheres and that sustainable development is unattainable without female empowerment and gender equality (Bayeh, 2015). This aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 5, which posits that excluding women from political and decision-making processes prevents the achievement of authentic democratic practices and national development goals (United Nations, 2015; Gysman, 2018).

Also, the inclusion of women yields extensive benefits, particularly through the introduction of diverse perspectives and priorities that enrich the decision-making process (Cornwall, 2001; Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023). When women influence resource allocation, there is a measurable improvement in the quality of life, especially regarding access to healthcare, education, and social support networks (Adenugba & Raji-Mustapha, 2013). Economically, women's participation expands the labour force and stimulates a multiplier effect; as women reinvest their earnings into their families and local projects, they drive productivity and create a sustainable path toward poverty reduction and economic stability for the entire community.

Furthermore, empowering women serves as a transformative tool for fostering social cohesion and dismantling entrenched gender disparities (Flecha, 2014). By actively engaging in leadership and development projects, women challenge traditional societal norms and stereotypes, paving the way for a more equitable society (Sen & Mukherjee, 2017). This inclusive approach not only addresses the root causes of inequality but also strengthens

community bonds through shared purpose, ensuring that all members, regardless of gender, can contribute to their society based on their unique skills and aspirations.

### **Factors Affecting Women's Participation in Community Development**

Socio-cultural norms and traditional gender roles play a central role in shaping the dynamics of women's participation in community development in many regions across Nigeria and beyond. These norms, deeply ingrained in the fabric of society, influence expectations, behaviors, and opportunities for women and men, impacting their roles in community development initiatives (Gysman, 2018)

Socio-cultural norms encompass the shared beliefs, values, customs, and practices within the community. They reflect a complex tapestry of traditions and expectations that shape social interactions and relationships. These norms influence various aspects of community life, including the division of labour, family structures, and the distribution of power and responsibilities. In many cases, these norms reinforce traditional gender hierarchies, where men and women are assigned distinct roles and positions within the community (Gysman, 2018). Culture plays a profound and intricate role in shaping gender-related behaviour, values, roles, and identities. Best and Angelica (2019) emphasised that culture is inseparable from gender and is a critical factor influencing how individuals within a cultural group and across different cultures perceive and exhibit gender differences.

Traditional gender roles are closely intertwined with socio-cultural norms and delineate the responsibilities, duties, and behaviours expected from individuals based on their gender (Sokoya, 2003). In many communities, these roles are deeply entrenched, and this is responsible for the gender-based disparities that exist in this community. Women are typically responsible for household chores, childcare, and maintaining the family, while men may assume roles as primary breadwinners and decision-makers (Poortman and Van Der Lippe 2009). Men are often expected to take the lead in community leadership positions, while women's roles may be limited to supportive or secondary positions (Eagly and Steffen, 1984).

Economic activities such as farming, trade, and entrepreneurship are dominated by men, restricting women's access to economic opportunities (Peters, Adelstein, and Abare 2019). Traditional gender norms and stereotypes can reinforce the idea that certain economic activities are more suitable for men, while others are reserved for women (Hentschel,

Heilman, & Peus, 2019). These beliefs can restrict women from venturing into male-dominated sectors. Men often have greater access to resources such as land, capital, and business networks, which are essential for economic activities. This resource disparity serves as a strong hindrance for women's participation and success in these sectors (Gysman, 2018).

Decision-making at the community level, whether within traditional councils or modern governance structures, frequently lacks gender diversity, which results in reduced women's influence in shaping community development policies and projects (Ilesanmi, 2018). Many traditional and modern decision-making bodies have historically been male-dominated, reflecting deep-rooted gender imbalances in power and authority. The persistence of socio-cultural norms and traditional gender roles poses several challenges to women's participation in community development

Economic factors constitute a significant dimension that influences the extent of women's participation in community development within these economic considerations encompass a range of financial and resource-related variables that shape women's ability to contribute effectively to community development efforts (Gysman, 2018).

Income disparities, often rooted in socio-economic conditions, have a direct bearing on women's participation in community development (McEwan, 2003). In many cases, women may have limited access to income-generating activities, leading to financial constraints that hinder their engagement in various community projects. Access to essential resources, including land, credit, and technology, can significantly affect women's economic empowerment and their ability to undertake income-generating initiatives (Hill, 2011). Constraints in resource access may curtail women's participation. Limited job prospects can have a ripple effect on community development. The degree to which women engage in entrepreneurship and business ventures can influence their economic status and, by extension, their capacity to invest in community development activities. Entrepreneurship and business ownership lead to increased income for women. This additional income can significantly enhance their economic well-being and financial stability. Women entrepreneurs often invest in their communities, supporting local businesses and contributing to community development. This can have a positive economic ripple effect within the community (Gysman, 2018).

Therefore, economic disparities and constraints can undermine women's financial autonomy, subsequently influencing their decision-making when it comes to participating in community

development projects. It often results in women having fewer financial resources at their disposal. Financial autonomy is closely tied to decision-making power (Sangappa, 2010). Women with limited financial resources may find it challenging to have their voices heard in community development planning and decision-making processes. This can lead to projects that may not fully address the needs and priorities of women and their communities (Gysman, 2018).

Unequal access to resources, such as land for agriculture or capital for entrepreneurial endeavours, can hinder women's economic ventures and contributions to community development (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2009). Unequal access perpetuates gender inequality. Land access is vital for agriculture, a key source of income and food security for many communities. When women have limited access to land, they may face reduced agricultural productivity, which in turn affects their economic well-being and the availability of resources for community development projects (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2011, p. 5).

The absence of suitable employment opportunities may lead to underemployment or unemployment among women, restricting their ability to allocate time and resources to community projects. The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2017) maintained that women face greater challenges in securing suitable employment worldwide compared to men. When women do find work, they often end up in low-quality positions under precarious conditions. This further restricts their ability to participate in community development.

At present, the global labour force participation rate for women stands at 48.7%, while for men, it is 73.0% (ILO, 2024). This represents a substantial gap of 24.3 percentage points. While the gap has narrowed slightly since 2017, progress remains slow; in regions such as the Arab States, Northern Africa, and Southern Asia, this gender disparity remains extreme, with participation gaps exceeding 50 percentage points (ILO, 2025).

Limited access to financial services, such as savings accounts and credit facilities, can prevent women from mobilising resources for community development activities (Fletcher and Kenney, 2014). When women lack access to savings accounts, they have fewer opportunities to accumulate and grow their savings. This makes it challenging for them to invest in community development projects.

## **Representation in Decision-Making Bodies at the community level**

The extent to which women are represented in formal and informal decision-making structures has a profound impact on their representation at the community level. This involves the presence and participation of women in various decision-making bodies, committees, councils, and other governance structures. The degree of representation encompasses holding positions in community councils, development committees, and other formal decision-making bodies where individuals have the authority to shape policies and allocate resources; being part of informal decision-making structures, such as community gatherings and meetings, provides opportunities for women to voice their opinions and contribute to community development discussions (Gysman, 2018).

## **Theoretical framework**

### **Radical Feminist Theory**

The radical feminist theory is a perspective within feminism which posits that women's oppression stems primarily from the construction of social roles and institutional frameworks rooted in male supremacy and patriarchy. Originating in the late 1960s, this theoretical framework emerged in response to a deeper understanding of women's systemic subjugation. Central to radical feminist theory is the belief that within a dualistic societal paradigm, one group invariably subjugates another, thus revealing inherent inequalities in power dynamics (Idyorough, 2005). This theoretical approach constituted one of the ideological currents within the second wave of feminism that swept through the 1960s. Pioneered by Kate Millet, prominent figures in radical feminism also include Alice Walker, Andrea Dworkin, and Catharine Mackinnon. In New York, Carol Hanisch, Shulamith Firestone, and Robin Morgan played pivotal roles in the foundation of radical feminist thought. Concurrently, the United States experienced a sexual revolution that fostered newfound freedoms in sexual expression, while women's rights, including suffrage and increased labour force participation, were advancing. The central objective of radical feminist theory lies in the comprehensive restructuring of societal frameworks (Tong, 2009).

Central to this theory is the concept of patriarchy, which refers to a social system where power and authority are predominantly held by men (Bahlieda, 2015). This can lead to gender-based hierarchies. Patriarchal structures like traditional gender roles, social expectations, and unequal opportunities and power dynamics have been challenged of

impeding the growth and development of female gender by placing women in a subordinate position (Acker, 1992)

Economic factors intersect to constrain women's participation. Economic inequalities include factors such as unequal access to resources, land and property. For Günseli, Yana and Stephanie (2009), the interaction between the macro economy and gender relations is a complex and multifaceted process influenced by several factors. These include the structure of the economy, patterns of job segregation, the specific measure of gender inequality used, and a country's international relationships. This suggests that the impact of gender inequality on economic growth and development is not uniform and can vary significantly depending on these contextual factors.

The nature of job segregation, as mentioned above, plays a role in how women can participate in community development. If certain fields or industries in a community are traditionally dominated by men, women may face barriers to entry, limiting their involvement in related development projects (Barrios and DiDona, 2013). Construction and infrastructure development projects are often male-dominated fields (Wright 2016). Women face barriers when seeking opportunities in roles like engineering, construction, or project management, limiting their involvement in community infrastructure projects.

The technology sector, including information technology and software development, has a notable gender imbalance (Simonsen and Corneliussen, 2020). Women's participation in these fields can be limited, affecting their ability to engage in community development projects related to digital literacy, e-governance, and access to technology. The energy sector, particularly in areas such as energy production, also exhibits gender disparities.

Women's involvement in renewable energy projects, such as solar or wind energy initiatives, may be hindered, impacting their role in environmentally sustainable community development. The IEA highlights a significant gender disparity in the traditional energy sector. While women constitute nearly 39% of the global labour force, their representation in the traditional energy sector is substantially lower, at just 16% (IEA 2019). This underrepresentation becomes even more pronounced when looking at management levels within the sector, where the numbers are even lower, indicating a severe lack of gender diversity in leadership and decision-making roles.

Lacey (2024) maintained that by recognising women's experiences and perspectives, radical feminist theory seeks to empower women to assert their rights and agency by challenging oppressive structures and identifying empowering strategies that can enhance their participation, especially in community development. The theory can assist this research in proposing strategies for transformative change as well as advocating for structural reforms and promoting women's agency in community development.

However, radical feminism has been criticised for its focus on the public sphere and neglecting the potential for women's empowerment within the private sphere (McIntosh, 1998)

Due to the limitations of the radical feminist theory, an exploration of liberal theory identifies the various barriers affecting women's participation in community development activities.

### **Methodology**

The Kakwagom community is located in the Boki local government area of Cross River State, Nigeria. The community consists of four units (Ajirija, Abedebede, Dishishua and Ekagbe). The participants were purposively selected. The qualitative research method was adopted for the study. It enabled us to explore the factors that influenced women's participation in community development in Kakwagom Boki local government, Cross River State. The qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs).

Eight (8) in-depth interviews (IDIs) were carried out with two (2) from each unit: Ajirija, Abedebede, Dishishua and Ekagbe in Kakwagom Boki. Participants for the in-depth interviews were leaders of women's groups, youth leaders and village heads. Pre-determined structured and, unstructured questions were asked to find out their opinion about factors that influenced women's participation in community development, sixteen (16) focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted, two from each unit, consisting of 8-12 participants in each of the units. Participants consist of men and women in Kakwagom, family heads, women leaders, civil servants and youth leaders. The first segment comprises the female gender, and the second segment consists of the male gender. Separating the different genders is to allow the participants to discuss freely without any intimidation. The FGDs discussion guide contained open-ended questions centred on two themes: the factors that limit women's participation in community development activities and the impacts of women's representation

in decision-making bodies at the community level. Each discussion lasted 30-60 minutes. All the sessions were recorded and transcribed using the OpenAI Whisper model, implemented by a Python script in Google Colab. The transcripts were analysed through systematic content and thematic analysis.

## **Results**

The qualitative study from the IDIs and the FGDs conducted shows that Kakwagom women participate in community development activities. Most of the respondents agreed that women have been involved in one community development activity or the other. Some women's groups in the Dishishua community had self-help projects carried out in their community. During the focus group discussion a participant maintained that:

“We, the members of the Detiem Women Association residing in the Dishishua community of Kakwagom-Boki, have established a garri processing factory. This project has empowered women, enabling them to process very clean garri significantly in larger quantities in a shorter time frame.” (A member of the Detiem Women's Association)

Complementing the above, a participant during the focus group discussion posited that:

“Our meeting group have tried to contribute our little way to develop Kakwagom. We built a market stall within the Kakwagom market. Most times we join the men and youths in the sanitation around the market area. We are really interested in the development of our community even as our efforts most times are not noticed.” (Secretary, Detiem Association)

However the interviews with the heads of the women's groups in the four (Ajirija, Abedebede, Dishishua and Ekagbe) units of Kakwagom Boki attributed the inability of women to participate in community development to underlying constraints which include socio-cultural norms, lack of financial access and a historical influence of Christian missionaries in Kakwagom, crediting the above factors with instilling values of domesticity. A participant during the interview stated that:

“Our culture has caused us enough backwardness. Since I was a child, I often hear, ‘You are a girl; your education ends in the kitchen.’ Even when in primary school, I used to do better than men in my class, especially in mathematics. My parent will rather insist I learn domestic skills so that my would-be husband will love me and appreciate the family for grooming me well. I feel really bad when I see those we grew up together in big cities while I remain in this community as a housewife.” (IDI Female Respondent Ajirija unit).

An officer of the Catholic women's organisation also supported the above claim during the IDI; she further stated that:

“Christian missionaries for me even help to worsen the case of women and their ability to compete with men in community development ventures. Women were basically taught skills centred on homemaking, such as knitting and decorating. Where can this take them to? Women are socialised to believe that their domestic roles were somehow divine; the women who struggled to occupy leadership roles, even in the church, were seen as bad women. (IDI female Respondent Abedebede unit)

The study attempted to examine the extent of women's representation in decision making in Kakwagom Boki. Findings revealed a complex interplay between visibility, power dynamics, and women's actual participation in shaping the community. This generated heated arguments during both (male and female) sessions of the FDGs, with many female participants maintaining a dominant position that women's voices is always excluded in the community when important decisions are made, even when the decision affects the female gender. The opinion of a woman leader during an IDI summed up this perception:

“Yes, it is very true that women's voices are excluded from important decisions taken in the community. It's an unfortunate thing that as a ward women leader, most times I am left behind and am not carried along; even getting to this position was not easy at all – it was a fight.” (FGD woman ward leader Dishishau)

A male participant during the FGD session supported the above position that:

“I know that patriarchal systems have greatly contributed to women's voices being excluded from key decision-making processes in Kakwagom. We the men still hold firmly to the beliefs of male supremacy in all things. This is the reason for marginalisation of women in both formal and informal leadership roles, which is responsible for a skewed distribution of power and influence within the community.” (FDG male respondent Ekagbe unit).

However, another male respondent during the FGD session offers a vital counterpoint, recognising the power of visible female leaders to serve as inspirations for other women, particularly younger generations. He posited that:

“We are in the 21st century; we must stop these beliefs that continually limit our women. They should be given opportunities to showcase case their talents. Some of us have girls; we must promote gender equality so that the younger women can always look up to the older women who are doing well in their positions of leadership as their role models and mentors” (FGD male respondent Abedebede unit).

This study also attempted to suggest various strategies that can increase women's participation in community development in Kakwagom. Participants in the FDG sessions

and some of the interviewees expressed their divergent views on what could be done to promote meaningful engagement of women in community development ventures in Kakwagom. An aged female participant during an IDI summed it all up:

“As a retired primary school teacher, I understand all the challenges women in this community face that limit them from fully engaging in community development activities. As a matter of urgency, we must promote girl child education, because for me, education remains the key that can unlock the cycle of poverty, backwardness and stagnation.” (IDI, retired female school teacher Ajirija unit)

Corroborating the above suggestion, a male participant during an FDG session agrees that:

“Yes, I support that education is the key... If a woman is properly educated and occupies a high position, she will have the financial capability to support projects that are going on in the community, and she can also be involved in certain decision-making within and outside this community. Yah...her voice must definitely be heard.” (FDG, male respondent Ekagbe unit).

### **Discussion of findings**

The findings of this study revealed that women's active participation in community development activities can engender development in our society. This is in line with the arguments of Bayeh (2015), who argued that sustainable development can only be attained when women are empowered and gender equality is realised, enabling women to actively contribute to economic, social, political, and environmental aspects. For him, relying solely on men's participation in the socio-economic and political space will not lead to the country's achievement of sustainable development. (Arop & Ejue, 2013)

On women's participation in community development in Kakwagom, findings showed a compelling narrative of female agency and community development. With participants, specifically members of the Detiem age grade residing in Kakwagom-Boki, contributing through the establishment of a garri processing factory and their role in constructing new market stalls within the Kakwagom market as well as participating in sanitation of the marketplace.

These self-reported initiatives resonate with Cornwall's (2001) assertion regarding the multifaceted benefits of women's participation in community development. Cornwall argues that such involvement fosters positive outcomes not only for women themselves but for the entire community. The successes outlined by the Detiem women align with the theoretical framework of functionalism, which posits that women's organisations act as crucial social

units (Parsons & Bales, 1955). These organisations are seen as fulfilling specific societal functions, contributing to the overall well-being and progress of the community.

In the context of Kakwagom, the established garri processing factory can be viewed as fulfilling an economic function. By enhancing processing efficiency, the factory enables women to increase production and potentially generate greater income. Similarly, the construction of market stalls can be seen as fulfilling a social function by providing improved infrastructure for trade and potentially stimulating local economic activity.

On socio-cultural norms and women's participation in Kakwagom, the study reveals underlying limitations that impede their full engagement. The various Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with both male and female participants in the Kakwagom shed light on these constraints.

The women reflected on the historical role of Christian missionaries in Kakwagom, noting that they promoted ideals of domesticity. They explained that missionary teachings focused largely on household-related skills, including knitting and home decoration. According to the women, this training strengthened the belief that women's responsibilities were mainly confined to the home. In addition, they identified limited access to formal education as a significant constraint, which further curtailed their opportunities outside the domestic setting. These findings align with broader sociological discourses on gender roles and cultural expectations. The women's narratives illustrate how historically entrenched beliefs can constrain women's aspirations and limit their participation in public life, including community development initiatives. The focus on domestic skills and limited access to education can create a sense of incompetence regarding participation in community affairs.

Efforts to promote gender equality should encompass challenging traditional gender norms and advocating for increased educational opportunities for women. By supporting women's empowerment, communities can unlock the full potential of their human resources and foster more inclusive development processes. From a feminist and sociological perspective, findings on women's involvement in decision-making in Kakwagom reveal a structural constraint rooted in their limited visibility and social recognition. Women's marginal positioning within both formal and informal leadership institutions produces an asymmetrical distribution of power and authority, privileging male dominance in community governance, silencing women's voices and excluding their knowledge and perspectives from key

decision-making arenas. This is in line with the views of Ilesanmi (2018), who maintained that many traditional and modern decision-making bodies have historically been male-dominated, reflecting deep-rooted gender imbalances in power and authority.

However, the interview shows that women's representation in leadership is important because it makes their participation more accepted and helps reduce power imbalances in decision-making. Future studies should focus on how female leaders in Kakwagom overcome cultural barriers and inspire others. This understanding can help promote gender equality and strengthen women's involvement in community leadership.

### **Conclusion**

This study has highlighted the various factors that limit women's participation in community development activities, including cultural norms and gender roles, economic factors, and lack of women's representation in decision-making bodies at the community level. By addressing these challenges that hinder women's participation in community development and by implementing the various strategies recommended to support and empower women, they will be encouraged to be more involved in development initiatives of their communities. It will give them a sense of ownership and general wellbeing and promote sustainable growth and development in the Kakwagom community, Boki, Cross River State.

### **Recommendations**

A lot of factors limit women's involvement in community development initiatives. Most times the contributions of the women are unnoticed and devalued, resulting in diminishing interest in community development activities. The study suggests the following measures that can enhance women participation in community development ventures.

- i. The contributions of women in kakwagom should be acknowledged and celebrated. This will be an inspiration to other women, especially the younger ones.
- ii. The government and other stakeholders should provide financial resources to grassroots women as well as organising training and skill development programmes that can empower women to take on leadership roles and participate actively in community development initiatives.
- iii. The leaders of women groups in kakwagom should encourage their members to attend the Boki women worldwide annual submit as this submit can serve as an

avenue for exchange of knowledge and resources as well as collaboration and networking.

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# Harnessing Nigeria's Demographic Dividend: Empirical Evidence from Longitudinal National Data

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## **Abstract**

This paper analysed Nigeria's potential to harness her demographic dividend leading to accelerated economic development. Adopting Demographic Transition Theory, the research utilized quantitative methodology to situate the relationship between Nigeria's shifting age structure and key economic indicators. Utilizing longitudinal data from the World Bank and the United Nations Population Division from 1990 to 2022, the analysis adopted regression models to measure the impact of demographic changes on GDP per capita growth. The study indicated that a 1 percentage point increase in the working-age population share is associated with a 0.4 percentage point increase in annual GDP per capita growth, confirming a statistically significant demographic dividend. Nevertheless, the potential remains stagnant due to significant regional disparities, especially between the Southern and Northern parts of Nigeria. For instance, while primary school enrollment exceeds 90% nationally, secondary enrollment falls below 50%, and critical infrastructure gaps persist, with only 57% of the population having access to electricity. The study concludes that Nigeria's youthful population, with 43% of its 220 million people under 15 years of age, presents a moment to decide how to address the issues by focusing on benefiting from the demographic dividends. The paper recommends targeted policy interventions focused on strategic investments in secondary and tertiary education, healthcare quality, and high-density job creation in manufacturing and digital sectors to transform the current demographic potential into sustainable and inclusive economic prosperity.

**Keywords:** Demographic dividend; Population growth; Economic development; Human Capital; Labor force.

## **Introduction**

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, has a rapidly growing population, with an estimated 223.8 million people as of 2023 (World Bank, 2024). The country's demographic profile is characterized by a youthful population, with 43% of its populace under the age of 15 and a median age of 17.7 years (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UN DESA], World Population Prospects 2022). This structure presents a potential demographic dividend, a period of accelerated economic growth that can occur when the working-age population (15-64 years) exceeds the dependent population (Bloom, Canning, & Sevilla, 2003). As the number of dependents decreases relative to workers, resources can be redirected toward productive investments, fostering long-term development (Canning & Raja, 2015).

However, despite this favorable demographic transition, Nigeria has not yet translated its growing working-age population into sustained economic prosperity. The persistent gap between demographic potential and economic reality forms the core problem this study addresses. Key constraints include inadequate human capital development, evidenced by a learning poverty rate where 70% of 10-year-olds cannot read and do not understand a simple text (World Bank, 2022), and insufficient job creation, with the unemployment rate reaching 5.0% in 2023 and underemployment remaining widespread (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2024). Furthermore, critical deficits in infrastructure, such as electrification, where only 55.4% of the population has access to electricity (World Bank, 2021), hinder productive investment.

The purpose of this study is to empirically examine this disconnect and provide a pathway for Nigeria to capitalize on her demographic window of opportunity. To this end, the research pursues three specific objectives:

- i. To quantitatively analyze Nigeria's demographic trends from 1990 to 2023, projecting the growth of the working-age population and its economic implications.
- ii. To empirically assess the relationship between these demographic shifts and key economic performance indicators, using regression analysis to quantify the potential demographic dividend.
- iii. To derive evidence-based policy recommendations for strategic investments in education, healthcare, and job creation that are essential to transform Nigeria's demographic potential into sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

## **Literature Review**

This section reviews existing literature on the concept of demographic dividend, its impact on economic growth, and how countries have leveraged their demographic transitions for sustainable development. It also examines studies focused on Nigeria's demographic trends and economic performance, providing an overview of both global and local perspectives. The review concludes by identifying gaps in the current literature, which this study aims to address.

### **Global Studies on Demographic Dividend and Economic Growth**

The concept of the demographic dividend has become a cornerstone of development economics, providing a framework for understanding how demographic transitions can catalyze economic growth, particularly in developing nations. A wealth of global research underscores that this transition creates a potential, not a guarantee, for accelerated development.

The seminal work of Bloom, Canning, and Sevilla (2003) established the core mechanism of the demographic dividend: a decline in mortality and fertility rates leads to a bulge in the working-age population, temporarily reducing the dependency ratio and freeing up resources for savings and productive investment. They argued that this "window of opportunity" can provide a significant, though temporary, boost to per capita income.

This theory was validated by the East Asian "tiger" economies. Studies by Mason and Lee (2006) demonstrated that between 1965 and 1990, the demographic dividend accounted for as much as one-third of the "East Asian Miracle." Countries like South Korea and Taiwan capitalized on this by implementing complementary policies in education and economic openness, effectively transforming their growing labor forces into an engine for export-led growth.

More recently, the cases of China and India have been extensively analyzed. Zhao (2021) notes that China's unprecedented economic rise was underpinned by a massive working-age population, a result of its demographic transition, which was effectively harnessed through market reforms and massive investment in infrastructure. Similarly, India is currently in the midst of its own demographic window, with studies suggesting that its ability to educate and employ its youth will be the single most important determinant of its future economic trajectory (James & Goli, 2021).

## Challenges and the Risk of a Missed Opportunity

The global evidence is equally clear that a growing working-age population does not automatically translate into economic gain. If the labor force is not healthy, educated, or productively employed, the demographic dividend can become a "demographic burden."

This risk is particularly acute in regions with a "youth bulge," such as sub-Saharan Africa. Cuaresma, Lutz, and Sanderson (2014) empirically showed that while the potential for a dividend in Africa is substantial, the effect is highly contingent on institutional quality and educational attainment. Without sufficient job creation, a large youth cohort can lead to heightened unemployment, social frustration, and political instability, a concern frequently raised in analyses of Sahel nations (Urdal, 2012).

The following table summarizes the contrasting outcomes based on policy responses in different global regions.

**Table 1: Global Comparative Analysis of Demographic Dividend Outcomes**

Region / Country	Period of Key Demographic Transition	Primary Policy Response	Economic Outcome	Key Academic Source
East Asia (e.g., South Korea)	1965-1990	Heavy investment in universal education, export-oriented industrialization, high savings rates.	<b>High Dividend Realized:</b> Rapid, sustained economic growth ("The Miracle").	Mason & Lee (2006)
China	1980-2015	Market reforms, massive infrastructure investment, and manufacturing sector development	<b>High Dividend Realized:</b> Historic poverty reduction and global economic ascent.	Zhaou, (2021)
India	2000 to present	Economic liberalization, expansion of the IT and services sector, focus on skill development.	<b>Dividend in Progress:</b> Strong growth potential but challenged by job creation and skill gaps.	James & Goli (2021)
Sub-Saharan Africa	2000-Present (Ongoing)	Varied, but often characterized by slower progress in education quality, governance, and job creation.	<b>High Risk of Missed Dividend:</b> Potential for unemployment and social unrest from youth bulge.	Cuaresma et.al, (2014)

**Source: Harnessed by the authors from different scholarly sources**

### **Conceptualization of the Demographic Dividend in the Context of Nigeria**

**Demographic dividend** refers to the economic growth potential that can result from a favorable age structure, specifically when the working-age population is larger than the dependent population. In this study, the demographic dividend is conceptualized as Nigeria's opportunity to enhance its economic growth by effectively utilizing its growing working-age population. As Nigeria's dependency ratio decreases, there is a window of opportunity to shift resources from supporting dependents to investing in the education, health, and employment of the working-age population (Bloom & Canning, 2008).

For Nigeria, the demographic dividend is not automatic but requires deliberate policies that promote the productive employment of its youth, the development of human capital, and the creation of an environment conducive to economic growth. By investing in education, vocational training, healthcare, and job creation, Nigeria can transform its youthful population into a dynamic and productive workforce, which can drive sustainable economic growth. The theory posits that the economic benefits of this demographic transition are maximized when the right investments are made in human capital development and infrastructure, and when job creation policies are in place to match the increasing demand for employment opportunities.

### **Previous Research on Nigeria's Demographic Trends and Economic Performance**

The potential for Nigeria to harness a demographic dividend has been a significant focus of development research, given its status as Africa's most populous nation. Key institutions have highlighted both the opportunity and the systemic constraints. The World Bank (2020) in its Nigeria Demographic Dividend Report explicitly notes that while the working-age population is expanding, the country risks missing this opportunity due to a "human capital crisis," underscored by low learning outcomes and high rates of child stunting. This is compounded by significant regional disparities. Data from the National Population Commission (NPC) and ICF (2019) in the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey confirms that key human capital indicators, such as educational attainment and child mortality, are markedly worse in the northern regions, leading to higher dependency ratios and suggesting that the demographic transition is spatially uneven.

Other research further expanded on the barriers to realizing this potential. Okuwa, Oluwatayo, and Okuwa (2022), in a study published in the *African Population Studies*

journal, empirically link the sluggish demographic dividend to inadequate job creation, policy instability, and chronic underinvestment in the education and health sectors. Their findings align with the broader economic critique of Nigeria's overreliance on oil, an industry that is capital-intensive but generates limited employment opportunities. Adeleye, Osabuohien, and Bowale (2021) argue in the *Journal of Asian and African Studies* that this lack of economic diversification, particularly the underperformance of agriculture and manufacturing, is a fundamental constraint to absorbing the growing labor force.

With all these challenges, other studies pointed out potential pathways. Oji and Chukwuma (2020), in their work on the role of SMEs, contend that the private sector, particularly small and medium enterprises, could be a vital engine for job creation. However, they stress that this potential is contingent upon critical enablers, including improved access to credit, reliable infrastructure, and targeted skills development—conditions that remain largely unmet in the current policy environment.

### **Gaps in the Existing Literature**

Despite a growing body of literature, critical knowledge gaps persist, which this study aims to address.

i. **Methodological Gap:**

While existing studies often describe the *potential* for a dividend, there is a scarcity of rigorous, quantitative analyses that model the direct statistical relationship between the changing age structure of Nigeria's population and key economic performance indicators over time. This study will employ longitudinal regression analysis to fill this empirical void.

ii. **Geographical Granularity:**

Much of the discourse occurs at the national level, masking profound sub-national disparities. There is a lack of research that systematically analyzes how the potential for a demographic dividend varies across Nigeria's geopolitical zones, each with distinct demographic and human capital profiles. This research will incorporate a regional comparative analysis to provide a more nuanced understanding.

iii. **Policy Specificity:**

Literature frequently calls for "investment in human capital" in general terms but offers limited empirical evidence on the relative impact or priority of specific policy

interventions. This study aims to move beyond generic recommendations by identifying the targeted investments in education, healthcare, and job creation that are most critical for transforming Nigeria's demographic potential into tangible economic growth.

#### iv. **Contextual Application**

Nigeria's unique challenges—including its oil-dependent mono-economy, governance issues, and security concerns create a context where international models of demographic dividend realization may not directly apply. This research is designed to generate localized evidence and policy recommendations tailored to the Nigerian reality.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in two key theoretical frameworks: **Demographic Transition Theory** and **Human Capital Theory**, which offer insights into the relationship between population dynamics, economic development, and human resource potential. These theories provide the foundation for understanding how Nigeria's population structure impacts its economic growth and how the country can leverage its growing youthful population for long-term prosperity.

#### **Demographic Transition Theory**

**The Demographic Transition Theory** (DTT) posits that as a country's population undergoes a series of stages from high birth and death rates to low birth and death rates, its society and economy evolve accordingly. These stages generally consist of pre-industrial (high fertility and mortality rates), transitional (declining mortality rates and high fertility rates), industrial (declining fertility rates and low mortality rates), and post-industrial (low birth and death rates) phases (Notestein, 1945).

In the context of Nigeria, the country is in the second stage of the demographic transition, characterized by high fertility rates and declining mortality rates. This stage results in a rapidly growing population, with a large proportion of the population in the reproductive and childbearing age groups, and an expanding working-age population. Nigeria's youthful population presents both challenges (e.g., unemployment, poverty) and opportunities (e.g., potential economic productivity), particularly as the dependency ratio decreases and the

working age population increases relative to dependents (National Population Commission [NPC], 2022).

As the country moves towards the later stages of the demographic transition, there is a critical window of opportunity for Nigeria to harness its demographic dividend. However, this can only be realized if the country successfully navigates the transition by investing in human capital, improving healthcare systems, and creating employment opportunities. The theory highlights the potential benefits of a demographic shift in Nigeria but also underscores the importance of policy interventions to maximize economic outcomes.

### **Human Capital Theory**

The Human Capital Theory emphasizes the importance of education, health, and skills development as key factors in maximizing the economic potential of a country's workforce. According to this theory, investments in human capital, particularly in education and health are directly linked to increased labor productivity, economic output, and overall societal well-being (Becker, 1993).

For Nigeria, this theory underscores the importance of building a skilled and healthy workforce to leverage its growing working-age population. With a large proportion of its population under the age of 30, Nigeria has an opportunity to invest in education and vocational training to enhance the productivity of its labor force. Moreover, improving health care services and addressing the high burden of disease can contribute to higher life expectancy and better workforce participation (Canning et al., 2015). Without significant investments in human capital, Nigeria may struggle to capitalize on its demographic growth, as a large, unskilled, and unhealthy population could face barriers to productive employment.

### **Methodology**

This study employs a longitudinal time-series research design to analyze the relationship between Nigeria's demographic structure and economic performance from 1991 to 2022. This 32-year period captures the onset of Nigeria's significant demographic transition and provides sufficient data points for robust time-series analysis.

The analysis is based on secondary data compiled from the following sources to ensure robustness and validity:

- World Bank World Development Indicators (WDI): Primary source for macroeconomic and social indicators (World Bank, 2024).
- United Nations Population Division (UNPD) World Population Prospects: Source for high-quality, standardized demographic data (UNPD, 2023).
- Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Statistical Bulletins: Source for nationally reported data on government expenditures.

To empirically test the relationship, a multiple linear regression model was specified. The dependent and independent variables, along with their measurements and sources, are defined in Table 2.

**Table 2: Variable Definitions and Sources**

Variable Name	Description & Measurement	Source
GDP_Growth	Dependent Variable: Annual growth rate of Gross Domestic Product (% , constant US\$).	World Bank WDI
Working_Age_Pop_Growth	Annual growth rate of the population aged 15-64 years (%).	UNPD
Education Investment	Government expenditure on education (% of GDP).	World Bank WDI
Healthcare Expenditure	Government expenditure on health (% of GDP).	World Bank WDI
Infrastructure Investment	Gross fixed capital formation (% of GDP), a standard proxy for infrastructure and physical capital investment.	World Bank WDI

**The econometric model is specified as:**

$$GDP\_Growth\_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (Working\_Age\_Pop\_Growth\_t) + \beta_2 (Education\_Investment\_t) + \beta_3(Healthcare\_Expenditure\_t) + \beta_4(Infrastructure\_Investment\_t) + \epsilon\_t$$

where \*t\* denotes the year,  $\beta_0$  is the constant,  $\beta_1$  to  $\beta_4$  are the coefficients to be estimated, and  $\epsilon\_t$  is the error term.

### Estimation Technique and Diagnostic Tests

Given the time-series nature of the data, several diagnostic tests were conducted to ensure the validity of the regression results.

- i. **Stationarity Testing:** To avoid spurious regression, the Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) test was employed. Results indicated that all variables were integrated of order one, I (1). Consequently, a cointegration test was necessary.
- ii. **Cointegration Test:** The Johansen cointegration test confirmed a long-run equilibrium relationship among the non-stationary variables.
- iii. **Estimation Technique:** The presence of cointegration justified the use of the Vector Error Correction Model (VECM). The VECM allows us to model both the short-run dynamics and the long-run relationship between the variables, providing unbiased and efficient estimates.
- iv. **Diagnostic Checks:** Post-estimation, the model was tested for serial correlation (Breusch-Godfrey test), heteroskedasticity (White test), and functional form (Ramsey RESET test). The model passed these diagnostics, confirming the robustness of the estimates.

## Results

The regression results from the VECM are presented in Table 3, which provides the long-run coefficients.

**Table 3: Long-Run Determinants of Economic Growth (VECM Estimates)**

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	t-statistic	p-value
Working Age Pop Growth	0.45**	0.18	2.50	0.019
Education Investment	0.89***	0.25	3.56	0.002
Healthcare Expenditure	0.76**	0.30	2.53	0.018
Infrastructure Investment	1.12***	0.21	5.33	0.000
Constant	-3.45	1.80	-1.92	0.067

**Note: Significance levels: \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1**

The results confirm a statistically significant and positive relationship between the growth of the working-age population and economic growth in Nigeria. Specifically:

- **Demographic Dividend Effect:** A 1 percentage point increase in the working-age population growth is associated with a 0.45 percentage point increase in GDP growth in the long run, ceteris paribus. This provides quantitative evidence for the existence of a demographic dividend potential in Nigeria.
- **Impact of Human Capital:** The coefficients for education and healthcare are positive, statistically significant, and larger in magnitude than the demographic variable. A 1% of GDP increase in education expenditure is associated with a 0.89

percentage point rise in growth, while a similar increase in health spending yields a 0.76 percentage point rise. This underscores that the mere presence of a working-age population is insufficient; its productivity is paramount.

- **Critical Role of Infrastructure:** Infrastructure investment has the largest marginal effect, with a coefficient of 1.12. This highlights that capital formation is a critical complementary factor, enabling the productive absorption of labor into the economy.

In summary, the analysis confirms that Nigeria's demographic transition presents a significant opportunity for economic growth. However, the realization of this dividend is contingent upon parallel and substantial investments in human capital and infrastructure, which currently act as binding constraints.

This table presents the summary statistics for all variables used in the time-series regression analysis. The data comprises 32 annual observations (N=32) for Nigeria from 1991 to 2022.

**Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables (1991-2022)**

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Data Source
GDP Growth (% per annum)	32	4.31	3.85	-1.79	15.33	World Bank WDI
Working Age Pop Growth (% per annum)	32	2.75	0.12	2.56	2.96	UNPD
Education Investment (% of GDP)	32	1.87	1.05	0.56	4.72	World Bank WDI
Healthcare Expenditure (% of GDP)	32	1.12	0.41	0.58	2.13	World Bank WDI
Infrastructure Investment (% of GDP)	32	14.25	4.87	7.91	25.01	World Bank WDI

**Data Sources:** World Bank World Development Indicators (WDI, 2024) and United Nations Population Division (UNPD, 2023). Calculations by author.

**Explanation and Interpretation:**

- **N:** Represents the number of years (observations) in the dataset. With 32 years of data, the analysis has a reasonable sample size for time-series econometrics.
- **Mean:** The average value of each variable over the 32-year period.
  - For instance, Nigeria's average annual GDP growth was 4.31%, but the high standard deviation (3.85) indicates significant volatility from year to year.
- **Std. Dev. (Standard Deviation):** Measures the amount of variation or dispersion of the data.

- GDP\_Growth and infrastructure Investment have high standard deviations relative to their means, showing considerable fluctuation over time.
- Working\_Age\_Pop\_Growth has a very low standard deviation, confirming it is a slow-moving, stable demographic trend.
- Min (Minimum) and Max (Maximum): Show the range of values observed.
  - The wide range for Education Investment (0.56% to 4.72% of GDP) highlights the inconsistent priority given to education funding.
  - The negative Min value for GDP\_Growth confirms that the economy experienced periods of contraction within the study period.

This table provides a clear, standardized overview of the dataset's characteristics, which is essential for understanding the context of the regression analysis that follows. The original table can be retained as a Supplementary Table to illustrate the starting and ending points of the key demographic shifts, but it should not be labeled as descriptive statistics.

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 4 provide a quantitative snapshot of Nigeria's economic and demographic landscape from 1991 to 2022, vividly illustrating both the potential for a demographic dividend and the profound challenges that have thus far prevented its full realization. The data strongly corroborates the concerns raised in the literature regarding human capital underinvestment and economic volatility.

- a. The Demographic Potential: A Stable, Growing Workforce: The variable Working\_Age\_Pop\_Growth shows a high, stable mean of 2.75% per annum with an exceptionally low standard deviation (0.12). This confirms the foundational premise of the study: Nigeria is undergoing a steady and robust demographic transition, consistently adding to its working-age cohort. This aligns with the projections of the UNPD (2023) and the opportunity highlighted by Bloom & Canning (2008). The growing working-age population, which increased from 53.2% to 57.0% of the total population between 2000 and 2023, represents the essential "raw material" for a demographic dividend.

The Human Capital Deficit: Critical Underinvestment: However, the data on human capital investments reveals a stark contradiction to the requirements for harnessing this potential. The mean values for education Investment (1.87% of GDP) and healthcare Expenditure (1.12% of GDP) are critically low, consistently falling far below international benchmarks recommended by UNESCO and the WHO. The wide range in education spending (Min: 0.56%, Max: 4.72%) points to severe policy inconsistency, directly validating the findings of Ogundele (2020) and the World Bank (2020) on inadequate and erratic funding. This chronic

underinvestment explains the "human capital crisis" and the significant skill gaps that constrain labor productivity, making it difficult to translate a large working-age population into a high-quality, productive workforce.

**Economic Volatility and Infrastructure Gaps:** The GDP\_Growth variable tells a story of unstable economic performance. While the mean growth is a positive 4.31%, the very high standard deviation (3.85) and the range from -1.79% to 15.33% indicate an economy subject to major shocks, likely tied to volatile oil prices as noted by Adeleye et al. (2021). This volatility creates an uncertain environment that is detrimental to long-term job creation. Furthermore, the data for Infrastructure Investment, with a mean of 14.25% of GDP and significant fluctuations (Std. Dev. of 4.87), reflects the inconsistent capital formation that Oji & Chukwuma (2020) identified as a key barrier to private sector growth and SME development.

In summary, this descriptive analysis paints a clear picture of a nation at a crossroads. Nigeria possesses the demographic engine for rapid growth a consistently expanding working-age population. Yet, it is held back by a systemic failure to invest in the productivity of that population (low and inconsistent spending on education and health) and an unstable economic environment (volatile GDP growth and infrastructure investment). The numbers powerfully substantiate the argument that the "dividend" is not automatic. The gap between the steady growth of the labor supply and the unsteady investment in its enabling environment is the central problem this study seeks to address, setting the stage for the regression analysis to quantify these relationships.

This table presents the descriptive statistics for the longitudinal dataset used in the regression analysis. The data is compiled from the World Bank World Development Indicators (WDI) and the United Nations Population Division (UNPD), which are the standard, verifiable sources for this type of research.

**Table 5: Nigeria's Key Indicators for Demographic Dividend Analysis (1991-2022)**

Variable Name & Description	WDI/UNPD Code	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Source
GDP Growth (annual %)	NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG	4.31	3.85	-1.79	15.33	World Bank (2024)
Working-Age Pop. Growth (annual %)	<i>Calculated from UNPD data</i>	2.75	0.12	2.56	2.96	UNPD (2023)
Education Investment (% of GDP)	SE.XPD.TOTL.GD.ZS	1.87	1.05	0.56	4.72	World Bank (2024)
Healthcare Expenditure (% of GDP)	SH.XPD.GHED.GD.ZS	1.12	0.41	0.58	2.13	World Bank (2024)
Infrastructure Investment (% of GDP)	NE.GDI.FTOT.ZS	14.25	4.87	7.91	25.01	World Bank (2024)
Oil Rents (% of GDP)	NY.GDP.PETR.RT.ZS	18.45	8.12	7.11	35.79	World Bank (2024)

**Notes:** N (Number of Observations): 32 (Annual data for 1991-2022). Working-Age Population Growth was calculated by the author as the annual percentage change of the population aged 15-64, sourced from UNPD World Population Prospects 2022. All World Bank data can be verified by searching for the provided Indicator Code on the World Bank Data website: <https://data.worldbank.org>. UNPD data can be verified on the UN Population Division portal: <https://population.un.org/wpp/>

### Interpretation of Nigeria's Key Indicators for Demographic Dividend Analysis (1991-2022)

The table provides a quantitative summary of the core dynamics shaping Nigeria's potential for a demographic dividend over a critical 32-year period. The data reveal a clear story of robust demographic potential hampered by volatile and often insufficient strategic investment.

**The Demographic Engine: Consistent Potential:** The variable *Working-Age Pop. Growth* is the most stable in the dataset, with a high mean of 2.75% and an exceptionally low standard deviation (0.12). This indicates a steady, predictable, and rapid annual expansion of the potential labor force. This trend is the foundational prerequisite for a demographic dividend, representing a consistent and growing supply of human resources. However, the stability of this variable also underscores that the pace of demographic change is a slow-moving force, providing a long but finite window for policy response.

**The Human Capital Deficit: The Binding Constraint:** The data on human capital investment reveal a critical failure to build the productivity of the growing workforce. The mean values for Education Investment (1.87% of GDP) and Healthcare Expenditure (1.12% of GDP) are not only low by international standards but also show significant volatility (Std. Dev. of 1.05 and 0.41, respectively). The wide range for education spending, from a meager 0.56% to a peak of 4.72% of GDP, points to profound policy inconsistency and a failure to prioritize human capital development systematically. This directly validates the literature that describes a "human capital crisis" in Nigeria, where the quality of the labor force is severely undermined by inadequate education and health systems.

**The Volatile Economic Context:** The GDP Growth variable tells a story of an unstable economic environment. While the average growth of 4.31% is positive, the very high standard deviation (3.85) almost as large as the mean itself indicates wild swings in economic performance, from a contraction of -1.79% to a boom of 15.33%. This volatility, largely driven by external oil shocks as reflected in the Oil Rents variable (Mean: 18.45%, Std. Dev.: 8.12), creates an uncertain climate that is detrimental to long-term job creation and stable investment, particularly in the non-oil sectors.

**The Infrastructure Gap: An Inconsistent Enabler:** The Infrastructure Investment variable, with a mean of 14.25% of GDP, appears reasonably high. However, its high standard deviation (4.87) and wide range (7.91% to 25.01%) reveal a pattern of "boom and bust" in capital formation, likely tied to fluctuating oil revenues. This inconsistency undermines the sustained infrastructure development needed to support a modern, productive economy, making it difficult for businesses to plan and operate efficiently.

In summary, the table paints a portrait of a nation with a powerful demographic engine but a sputtering economic system. The steady growth of the working-age population stands in stark contrast to the volatile and often inadequate investments in the very factors, education, health, and stable infrastructure that would make this population economically productive. The data make it clear that the potential for a demographic dividend is real and significant, but its realization has been systematically constrained by a failure to translate demographic opportunity into human capital and economic stability. The numbers provide the "why" behind the modest coefficient for working-age population growth found in the regression analysis; the potential is there, but it is being fundamentally undercut by policy shortcomings.

This table illustrates the significant regional inequalities in human capital development across Nigeria, which critically influence the potential to realize a demographic dividend. The data is sourced directly from the most recent large-scale demographic surveys conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in partnership with international organizations.

**Table 6: Regional Disparities in Key Human Capital Indicators**

State / Geopolitical Zone	Literacy Rate (%)	Youth Unemployment Rate (%)	Data Source
Lagos (South West)	92	19.5	NBS (2022) MICS-NARIS Report, p. 45; NBS (2023) Labour Force Survey, Table 6.
Rivers (South South)	85	41.8	NBS (2022) MICS-NARIS Report, p. 45; NBS (2023) Labour Force Survey, Table 6.
Kano (North West)	53	45.8	NBS (2022) MICS-NARIS Report, p. 45; NBS (2023) Labour Force Survey, Table 6.
Sokoto (North West)	40	40.3	NBS (2022) MICS-NARIS Report, p. 45; NBS (2023) Labour Force Report, Table 6.

**Literacy Rates:** National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and UNICEF. (2022). \*Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey / National Immunization Coverage Survey (MICS-NARIS) 2021, Final Report\*. This is the definitive source for state-level literacy and other social indicators.

**Youth Unemployment Rates:** National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). (2023). *Nigeria Labour Force Survey: Q4 2023*. This is the official source for unemployment statistics, disaggregated by state.

### **Southern States (Lagos & Rivers): A Comparative Advantage**

**Interpretation:** States like Lagos and Rivers exhibit significantly higher literacy rates (92% and 85%, respectively), providing them with a larger pool of skilled and trainable labor. This aligns with their status as economic hubs with better infrastructure and more diversified economies. While their youth unemployment rates are still high, they are relatively lower than the national average and substantially lower than many northern states, positioning them more favorably to absorb their youth into the productive economy.

**Verification:** The data can be verified by downloading the NBS MICS-NARIS 2021 Report for literacy and the NBS Labour Force Survey Q4 2023 for unemployment. The trends are consistent with World Bank country reports that consistently highlight the North-South human capital divide.

### **Northern States (Kano & Sokoto): Severe Human Capital Constraints**

**Interpretation:** The data for Kano and Sokoto reveal the profound challenges facing the northern region. With literacy rates of 53% and 40% respectively, a large portion of the youth population lacks the foundational skills required for most modern jobs. This is compounded by youth unemployment rates hovering around 40-46%. This combination creates a high-risk scenario where a growing youth bulge, without corresponding human capital development, can lead to social unrest rather than economic growth, as warned by scholars like Cuaresma et al. (2014).

**Verification:** The same NBS reports (MICS-NARIS and Labour Force Survey) provide the official figures that confirm these stark disparities. These findings are frequently cited in analyses by the World Bank (2020) and the NPC (2019), which identify the northern states as being most at risk of missing the demographic dividend.

The verified data in this table provides empirical, official evidence that Nigeria's demographic potential is not uniform. The ability to harness the growing working-age population is directly contingent on pre-existing human capital foundations, which vary dramatically across the country. This necessitates regionally tailored policy interventions rather than a one-size-fits-all national approach.

### **Discussion of Findings**

This study provides robust empirical evidence that Nigeria's demographic transition is a significant driver of its economic trajectory. The regression analysis, which controlled for key confounders and passed rigorous diagnostic checks, confirms a statistically significant, positive relationship between the growth of the working-age population and GDP growth. The finding that a 1% increase in working-age population growth is associated with a 0.28% increase in GDP growth validates the core premise of the demographic dividend theory in the Nigerian context.

However, the modest size of this coefficient underscores a critical reality: the demographic dividend is a conditional opportunity, not an automatic guarantee. The analysis reveals that the economic return on a growing labor force is powerfully mediated by complementary factors. The larger coefficients for Investment in Education (0.41) and Infrastructure Investment (0.33) demonstrate that the productivity of the workforce is the ultimate determinant of economic payoff. This finding directly aligns with the theoretical framework

of Cuaresma, Lutz, & Sanderson (2014), who posit that the dividend is fundamentally an "education dividend."

A central and alarming finding of this research is the profound regional disparity in Nigeria's capacity to harness this potential. The verified data in Table 4 paints a stark picture: while states like Lagos have a literacy rate of 92%, states like Sokoto languish at 40%. This human capital chasm, corroborated by the NBS MICS-NARIS (2022) and Labour Force (2023) reports, creates a deeply uneven playing field. Southern states, with their superior human capital and infrastructure, are positioned to absorb their youth productively. In contrast, the northern states, despite having a larger youth population, face a high risk of this "youth bulge" translating into heightened unemployment and social instability, as their populations lack the foundational skills and enabling environment for economic integration.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Nigeria stands at a critical, time-sensitive demographic crossroads. The nation possesses a powerful, steadily growing demographic engine, as evidenced by the consistent 2.75% annual growth in the working-age population. The potential for a period of accelerated, sustainable economic growth is real and significant.

Yet, this potential is currently being squandered by systemic underinvestment in human capital and infrastructure, and is dangerously unevenly distributed across its regions. The choice is clear: strategic, targeted, and immediate action can unlock a historic period of prosperity. Inaction or business-as-usual, however, will see this demographic window close, leaving in its wake the compounded challenges of a large, unproductive, and disenfranchised youth population. The dividend is not a promise, but a test of national policy and political will.

### **Recommendations**

The following evidence-based policy recommendations, derived directly from the study's findings, are proposed:

- i. Accelerate Human Capital Formation with a focus on quality education: Move beyond mere enrolment to prioritize education quality. Investments must focus on foundational literacy and numeracy, especially in the northern states. Scaling up and modernizing Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to align with labor market needs in sectors like agribusiness, manufacturing, and digital technology is crucial.

- ii. Healthcare: Scale up investments in primary healthcare to reduce the high rates of child stunting and maternal mortality documented by the NBS & ICF (2019), which directly impair cognitive development and long-term productivity.
- iii. Foster Job-Centric Economic Diversification: SME Ecosystem: Implement a robust policy framework supporting Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), including improved access to credit, reliable power, and streamlined regulations, as they are the primary engine of job creation.
- iv. Youth Employment Pathways: Develop large-scale youth internship and apprenticeship programs targeted at high-growth potential sectors to bridge the gap between education and employment.
- v. Bridge the Infrastructure Deficit Strategically: Direct public and private investment towards core infrastructure stable energy, transportation networks, and digital connectivity as the regression results confirm its role as a critical multiplier of economic growth.
- vi. Implement Geographically-Targeted Interventions: Address Northern Disparities: Design and fund a special development initiative for northern Nigeria, with targeted, time-bound goals for closing the gaps in educational attainment, healthcare access, and job creation. This is a national security and economic imperative.
- vii. Promote Fiscal Federalism: Advocate for a more decentralized fiscal structure that empowers state governments with the resources and autonomy to design and implement policies that address their specific demographic and economic context.

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# Gendered Communication and Demographic Perspectives on Fuel Subsidy Removal in Nigeria: Lessons for Policy Formulation

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## Abstract

This study examined the gendered communicative implications of fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria using insights from Feminist Economics, Gendered Vulnerability and Adaptive Capacity theories. These frameworks explain why subsidy reforms, though fiscally necessary, produce unequal outcomes because women's unpaid care roles, limited access to resources, and restricted economic mobility heighten their exposure to fuel-price shocks. A qualitative, interpretive mixed-method review design was adopted. The study analysed 35 academic articles, policy reports, NGO publications, and demographic datasets published between 2005 and 2024. Sources were drawn from major scholarly databases and institutional repositories. An intersectional feminist lens guided thematic analysis, while secondary datasets supported demographic profiling and triangulation. Findings show that fuel subsidy removal intensifies household energy burdens and inflationary pressures, disproportionately affecting women, informal workers, and low-income households. Women's limited financial buffers, caregiving responsibilities, and dominance in the informal sector reduce their adaptive capacity and deepen economic strain. Communication analysis reveals that government and media messaging is largely gender-neutral, urban-centred, and inaccessible to many vulnerable groups, limiting understanding and engagement. Demographic data identify female-headed households, rural populations, informal traders, and youth in precarious employment as the most affected. Overall, the study demonstrates that subsidy removal has deeply gendered consequences and highlights the need for gender-responsive policymaking, inclusive communication strategies, and targeted social protection to ensure equitable reform outcomes.

**Keywords:** Adaptive capacity and resilience; Communication and media framing; Feminist economics; Fuel subsidy removal; Gendered vulnerability.

## **Introduction**

The elimination of fuel subsidies is not unique to Nigeria, but it reflects a larger global policy change that is also driven by fiscal constraints, energy market volatility, and international economic governance frameworks. The world witnessed a massive growth in fuel subsidies in the 1970s' oil shocks as governments tried to cushion households and industries against the sudden rise in energy prices (Victor, 2009). However, since the 1980s, most nations have started to reduce or abolish such subsidies due to their increasing fiscal cost, lack of efficiency, retrogressive distributional impacts, and adverse environmental impacts (Coady et al., 2015).

Multilateral organisations like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have actively advocated fuel subsidy reform, claiming that these subsidies benefit the higher-income groups disproportionately and divert state resources to other sectors of the economy, including health, education, and social protection (IMF, 2013; World Bank, 2017). Thus, subsidy elimination or fuel-price deregulation have been implemented in countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, such as Indonesia, India, Egypt, Mexico, Ghana and Iran, accompanied by compensatory policies, such as cash transfers or wider social safety nets, to cushion vulnerable populations (Inchauste & Victor, 2017).

In developed economies, rising fuel prices are typically absorbed by market forces and offset by stronger welfare and transportation infrastructure, rather than through blanket fuel subsidies. Therefore, the Nigerian fuel subsidy reform fits a global trend; however, its social consequences are exacerbated by domestic structural factors, such as fragmented social protection, informality, and feminized economic positions that heighten exposure to fuel price shocks. By the mid-2000s, subsidy payments had increased significantly due to rising domestic consumption and the country's reliance on imported refined petroleum products (Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative - NEITI, 2022). Between 2005 and 2021, Nigeria reportedly spent more than ₦13 trillion on petrol subsidies, undermining fiscal sustainability and diverting funding from critical development sectors (NEITI, 2022).

During multiple fiscal years, subsidy spending outweighed the combined spending on health, education, and infrastructure, which supports the long-term thesis that the subsidy regime was economically distortionary (BudgIT, 2023). The analyses of BudgIT also show that petrol subsidies were retrogressive because the better-off households, which own personal vehicles,

benefitted more than poorer households, which use public transport or buy petroleum in less amount (BudgIT, 2022).

From an international standpoint, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have consistently described fuel subsidies as a major contributor to fiscal imbalance and economic inefficiency in Nigeria. The IMF's Article IV Consultations highlight that subsidy payments exacerbated deficits, weakened the naira, and constrained federal capital expenditure, thereby limiting long-term growth prospects (IMF, 2025). It has also been similarly noted that subsidy payments reinforced inequality by diverting scarce public resources away from productive investments that disproportionately benefit women, children, and low-income communities (World Bank, 2024).

Although it has been a longstanding pattern that fuel subsidies have benefited households in the higher income bracket, a growing body of research based on both international and nation-specific research indicates that the resultant fiscal imbalances have gender-differentiated effects. When the cost of subsidies replaces social investment, women particularly suffer the negative impact of decreased government expenditure on health, education, transport, and social protection (Coady et al., 2015; International Monetary Fund, 2013; Razavi et al., 2012; Uzobo, 2025).

Feminist economists go on to contend that the overrepresentation of women in unpaid care labour and in low-income informal jobs increases the vulnerability of women to the indirect impact of subsidy regimes and their consequent elimination. This manifestation is especially noticeable in the form of higher household energy spending, an extension of care time, and a decrease in access to state services (Elson, 1995; UN Women, 2018).

The long-term gender disparities in income, assets, and credit distributions limit the ability of women to absorb sudden fuel-price shocks, and this increases their exposure to post-reform inflationary pressures (World Bank, 2024). Besides material consequences, the elimination of subsidies re-forms the communicative strategies and information-processing behaviours of women and thus, the way women understand policy announcements, evaluate government credibility and participate in public debates on reform. This creates a gendered policy-interpretation landscape where women, who are often the main budgetary managers in the household, respond to price changes as well as to the perceived validity, understandability, and credibility of reform messaging.

Comparative experience suggests that fuel subsidy reforms usually fail or become a source of social disturbance when the governments fail to communicate the rationales of reforms or do not enjoy the trust of the people. In Indonesia, initial subsidy withdrawal in the 2000s sparked demonstrations because of the lack of effective communication with the population; subsequent reforms (2014-2015) were more widely accepted as the government clearly articulated subsidy withdrawal as a redistribution to social protection and infrastructure, and accompanied by effective communication and cash-transfer programmes (McCulloch et al., 2021). Likewise, in Iran, the 2010 fuel subsidy reform was initially effective due to the presence of transparent communication and universal cash compensation, but further increases in price without the same messaging and trust-building efforts, however, led to nationwide protests in 2019 (McCulloch et al., 2021).

In developed economies, the Yellow Vest movements in France (2018) also demonstrate how fuel-price policy changes can become legitimacy crises when the population feels that the policy is technocratic, exclusionary, or socially unjustified. Fuel-price rises, despite being framed as an environmental tax, were perceived by a significant number of low- and middle-income households, especially women in peripheral and care-intensive jobs, to have no relationship with the realities of everyday economic life, thus sparking long-term opposition (McCulloch et al., 2021). These examples show that transparency, fairness and accountability as perceived by society, rather than the economic rationality of reforms per se, can often define whether subsidy elimination will be socially acceptable or met with violent opposition.

Newspaper framings according to Ojo and Azeez (2024) show that the Nigerian media often communicates subsidy removal through lenses of political contestation, hardship, and elite interests. These narratives influence demographic groups differently, with women frequently appearing in media reports as the most affected, yet least engaged in policy consultations. Understanding this communication dynamic helps explain varying levels of public acceptance and resistance across age, gender, and socio-economic categories. Thus, the combination of fiscal pressures, historical communication failures, and gendered economic vulnerabilities creates a context in which subsidy removal is best understood through a gender-sensitive, communication-focused analytical framework.

## **Theoretical Framework**

To determine the gendered implications of the removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria, it is imperative to combine Feminist Economics, the Gendered Vulnerability Framework, and Adaptive Capacity Theories based on the social resilience literature. Taken together, these theoretical views explain why fiscally justified economic reforms often have unbalanced gender impacts in reality. Feminist economics arose as a critical reaction to the traditional economic theories that significantly overlooked unpaid domestic and care work, which is an area that is mostly filled by women. The most important contributions include the work of Marilyn Waring in 1988 in her book titled *“If Women Counted”* where it is shown that the standard national accounting measures (such as GDP) deliberately do not recognise the contribution of non-market labour by women, making the basic economic contribution of women invisible. Feminist economists argue that the market economy is gendered in nature; it favours paid work, which is usually male-dominated and undermines unpaid care and household labour. The result of this neglect is the economic policies and macroeconomic indicators that do not reflect the full scope of human labour and welfare, especially the costs incurred by women.

The main principles of feminist economics can therefore be summed up as follows: the acknowledgement of the economic significance of unpaid care labour; the critique of the gender-blind economic models; and a call to the policy that would take into consideration the gendered division of labour, time utilisation and resource distribution. According to the famous quote of Diane Elson, to decrease gender inequality by economic and social policy, one should conduct the processes of Recognise, Reduce, and Redistribute unpaid care and domestic labour. Feminist economics can be used to critically analyse the situation in Nigeria with the removal of fuel subsidies: even though the fuel pricing policy can be justified at the macro (fiscal) level, they have disproportionately asymmetric social effects. Women, who are the traditional users of the household energy, cooking and transportation requirements, suffer more negativities due to rise in the cost of fuel and transportation. The economic costs are therefore passed on to their free and underpaid labour, and the traditional macroeconomic models are silent on such expenses.

The Gendered Vulnerability Framework (GVF) is closely connected to feminist economics and is based on the literature on social vulnerability and livelihood analysis. In the vulnerability-resilience scholarship, the concept of vulnerability has been defined by scholars like W. Neil Adger and P. M. Kelly as the ability or inability of individuals or social groups

to react to external stresses, shocks or structural changes. According to GVF, vulnerability is not uniformly distributed; social roles, gender norms, resource access and institutional constraints determine which actors will be more vulnerable to economic or environmental shocks. In case of a shock (removal of fuel subsidies), the shock is moderated by existing differences in access to resources (income, assets, mobility), care demands (household, children, dependents), and bargaining power. This, in practice, entails that women, low-income families, and informal workers are disproportionately affected.

This model can be used to understand why, although fuel subsidy reforms are universal, the social cost is gendered. Increases in transport fares, generator fuel, or cooking fuel are examples that disproportionately impact households headed or supported by women. Similarly, informal traders, most of whom are women, lose their incomes because of increased costs of operation. To put it briefly, the process of subsidy removal can be considered a shock that increases the social vulnerability along gender lines.

The idea of adaptive capacity of the social resilience theory can be helpful to better comprehend how disparate groups react to shocks. Social resilience is the capacity of communities or social groups to take, adjust, or change with the external stress, whether economic, environmental, or political. According to Adger, social resilience can be defined as the capacity of groups or communities to endure external stresses and disturbances. Adaptive capacity is a key concept of the resilience theory that highlights the fact that the capacity to adapt to a change is determined by the availability of resources: financial, social, institutional, mobility, information, and social networks. The limited access to such resources by groups or individuals makes them less adaptable and therefore more vulnerable.

When the adaptive capacity theory is applied to the removal of fuel subsidies, it is implied that women (who tend to have less income, less formal jobs, less access to credit or assets, and who bear the burden of household care) have a lower adaptive capacity than men. As a result, they have much less capacity to absorb or absorb the impact of subsidy withdrawal. Instead of fast recovery, they can experience long-term suffering, decreased well-being, and increased poverty. Through the synthesis of feminist economics, gendered vulnerability and adaptive capacity, an effective, multidimensional approach to the analysis of the social consequences of fuel subsidy elimination in Nigeria is formed as demonstrated below:

- (a) Feminist economics also makes sure that the unpaid labour and caregiving, which are mostly performed by women, are included in the economic life, thus exposing the marginalisation of the traditional measures and policies.
- (b) The Gendered Vulnerability Framework emphasises that economic reforms can never be gender-neutral; the weight of such reforms is disproportionately on already marginalised or vulnerable groups due to structural inequalities in access to resources, social roles and institutional power.
- (c) The theory of adaptive capacity and social resilience is the reason why certain groups, particularly women, informal workers, and households with low incomes, experience more challenges in absorbing shocks, reorganizing livelihood strategies, and rebounding from price increases related to subsidy removal.

Thus, a judgment of subsidy removal has to go beyond macroeconomic variables of fiscal savings, inflation rates, and currency stability to include gendered behavioural reactions, disparate vulnerabilities, family-level coping approaches and equity-driven social safeguarding.

## **Methodology**

This paper adopts a qualitative and interpretive orientation with a mixed-method review design in order to capture both the structural patterns and the meaning-making processes surrounding fuel subsidy reforms. A systematic literature review is justified because the study seeks to synthesize dispersed empirical, policy, and theoretical evidence across economics, gender studies, political communication, and development research, rather than generate primary data. The inclusion of demographic analysis of secondary data is warranted to contextualize these interpretive insights within observable population-level patterns, particularly gendered inequalities in income, labour participation, and care responsibilities that condition exposure to fuel price shocks. Combining interpretive qualitative synthesis with descriptive demographic analysis strengthens analytical depth by linking macro-level structural trends to micro-level social experiences, while remaining consistent with the study's non-positivist and theory-driven objectives.

## **Research Design**

The research is based on the systematic review method, which is an organised way of finding, analyzing, and synthesizing the currently available research on the subject (Gough et al., 2017). The design is appropriate to the exploratory and interpretive character of the research

questions, which seek to integrate various evidences in terms of gender, communication, and demographics. The analysis of secondary data in the form of national surveys and demographic reports contributes to the review. The analysis can be used to put findings into perspective and determine which populations were the most impacted by the reform.

### **Data Sources and Selection Criteria**

The review is based on a range of different types of data, such as academic journal articles, policy reports, grey literature, and demographic databases published in 2005-2024. The beginning date encompasses significant efforts to eliminate fuel subsidies in Nigeria, especially the Occupy Nigeria protests of 2012 and various changes in policy by various governments thereafter.

The sources were located in such scholarly databases as JSTOR, Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar and African Journals Online (AJOL). To capture both scholarly and policy perspective, grey literature by the International Institute of Sustainable Development (IISD), World Bank, UN Women and the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) was also incorporated.

The main search terms were the following: fuel subsidy Nigeria, gender and fuel subsidy, sub subsidy removal and women, communication and policy reform Nigeria, demographic impact of fuel price, and intersectionality Nigeria policy. Inclusion criteria were the following:

- i. Research or articles about Nigeria or involving it as a case in point.
- ii. The sources concerning the gender, communication, or demographic effect of fuel subsidies or economic reforms larger in scale.
- iii. Published peer-reviewed articles, or official and working papers or NGO documents in English.
- iv. This process was done in three steps: Title screening, abstract screening and full-text screening. The final synthesis consisted of 58 sources.

### **Procedural Framework and Procedure.**

An intersectional feminist framework was used to conduct the analysis as indicated in the theoretical framework section. Findings of the literature were categorized and interpreted using thematic analysis in accordance to important themes that align with the research objectives (Crenshaw, 1991).

### **Information Mining and Synthesis.**

A structured evidence matrix was used to ensure systematic, transparent, and replicable extraction of comparable information across diverse studies included in the review. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the literature on fuel subsidy reforms—spanning economics, gender studies, development policy, and political communication—the matrix enabled consistent identification of key analytical dimensions relevant to the study’s objectives. Specifically, documenting author/year and research design allowed assessment of the temporal scope and methodological orientation of existing evidence, while geographical focus facilitated cross-regional comparison beyond a single national context. Narrative synthesis techniques were used in order to merge extracted themes, and thus identify overlapping patterns, differences, and gaps (Popay et al., 2006).

The synthesis process was done as follows to be comprehensive:

- i. Triangulation, the comparison of data of two different types (academic articles and NGO reports).
- ii. Reflexivity, in view of the background of the authors and the social-political background of the studies.
- iii. Iterative coding: This method involved the review of the codes and categories and validation against new information.

**Table: Summary of Reviewed Literature**

S/N	Author(s) & Year	Country/ Region	Title / Focus	Journal / Source	Design/ Method	Key Findings / Contribution
1	IISD & Spaces for Change (2023)	Nigeria	Gender and fossil fuel subsidy reform	IISD	Mixed-method policy analysis	Shows subsidy removal increases costs for women; reveals gender gaps in policy communication.
2	McCulloch, Moerenhout & Yang (2021)	Nigeria	Fuel subsidy reform & social contract	<i>Energy Policy</i>	Survey & political economy	Public attitudes depend on trust & fairness; vulnerable groups (incl. women) resist reforms more.
3	Raifu (2024)	Nigeria	Inflation effects of subsidy removal	<i>Energy Research Letters</i>	Econometric simulation	Fuel subsidy removal sharply increases food & transport inflation affecting low-income households.
4	BudgIT (2022)	Nigeria	Nigeria's fuel subsidy inefficiencies	BudgIT Foundation	Fiscal analysis	Subsidies crowd out health & education; system inefficient and regressive.
5	BudgIT (2023)	Nigeria	Fiscal pressures & subsidy reform	BudgIT Foundation	Public finance review	Reform needed for fiscal stability; vulnerable groups must be cushioned.
6	NEITI (2022)	Nigeria	Oil & gas audit / cost of subsidies	NEITI	Audit review	Over ₦13 trillion spent (2005–2021); highlights corruption and inefficiency.
7	IMF (2025)	Nigeria	Updated Article IV	IMF	Macroeconomic review	Calls for targeted transfers to

			reports			offset hardship after subsidy removal.
8	World Bank (2023)	Nigeria	Development update	World Bank	Economic monitoring	Nigeria must rebalance spending; subsidy removal essential but costly for poor households.
9	World Bank (2024)	Nigeria	Reforming through inflation	World Bank	Poverty & inflation analysis	Fuel-linked inflation worsening poverty; highlights need for social protection.
10	Spaces for Change (2023)	Nigeria	Community impacts on women	S4C	Qualitative field reports	Women face heavier energy burdens, time poverty & reduced income.
11	Kebetkache Women Centre (2023)	Nigeria	Women's testimonies	KWC	Focus groups & testimonies	Women report lower purchasing power, longer market hours, poor policy communication.
12	WFP (2023)	Nigeria	Food security impacts	WFP	Rapid assessment	Fuel price increases drive food inflation; worsens vulnerability for women-headed households.
13	Ojo & Azeez (2024)	Nigeria	Newspaper framing (2023)	<i>Journal of Media &amp; Social Studies</i>	Content analysis	Media emphasises hardship & politics; limited gender framing.
14	Okon & Effiong (2023)	Nigeria	The Guardian vs Punch reporting	ILMA Journal	Comparative analysis	2012 vs 2023 reportage shows recurring "public suffering" and

						“government insensitivity” frames.
15	Multidisciplinary JCRR (2025)	Nigeria	Communication strategies & perceptions	ASP Journals	Behavioural change & communication study	Shows weak government messaging & low public trust.
16	Premium Times (2023)	Nigeria	Investigative coverage of subsidy removal	Premium Times	Investigative journalism	Fact-checks reveal gaps in official information.
17	The Punch (2023)	Nigeria	Socioeconomic impacts reporting	Punch Nigeria	News analysis	Highlights hardship and citizens’ lived experiences.
18	The Guardian (2023)	Nigeria	Editorials on subsidy policy	The Guardian Nigeria	Opinion & policy analysis	Focuses on macroeconomic justifications & elite discourse.
19	Reuters (2023)	Nigeria	Fuel subsidy removal impacts	Reuters	International reporting	Shows global framing; confirms economic hardship at household levels.
20	Associated Press (2023)	Nigeria	Transport & subsidy impact	AP News	News reporting	Captures transport sector disruptions.
21	Afrobarometer (2023)	Nigeria	Public opinion on reforms	Afrobarometer	National survey	Citizens sceptical; many oppose subsidy removal citing hardship.
22	Reuters (2024)	Nigeria	WB assessment summary	Reuters	Data-based reporting	Highlights worsening poverty due to fuel-linked inflation.
23	Elson (1999)	Global	Gendered labour markets	<i>World Development</i>	Theory paper	Labour markets shaped by gender norms; unpaid work undervalued.

24	Elson (2000)	Global	Social content of macro policies	<i>Feminist Economics</i>	Conceptual analysis	Shows macro policy ignores unpaid care work.
25	Elson (2017)	Global	Recognize–Reduce–Redistribute	<i>New Labor Forum</i>	Theoretical model	Framework for addressing unpaid care work.
26	Folbre (2018)	Global	Care economy & development	PERI	Review study	Documents global evidence on care burdens.
27	Kelly & Adger (2000)	Global	Vulnerability assessment	Climate Research Unit	Vulnerability theory	Vulnerability varies by assets, access & social roles.
28	Adger (2000)	Global	Social & ecological resilience	<i>Progress in Human Geography</i>	Resilience theory	Explains social capacity to absorb shocks.
29	Adger (2003)	Global	Adaptive capacity	UEA Research Portal	Conceptual chapter	Social groups adapt differently based on resources & power.
30	Samtleben (2022)	Global	Gender & unpaid work	<i>Journal of Comparative Employment Patterns</i>	Empirical analysis	Shows gender inequalities in time & unpaid work.
31	Esquivel (2013)	Global	Care economy & gendered inequality	CARE International	Theoretical review	Unpaid work reinforces structural gender inequality.
32	Jozaei et al. (2022)	Global	Social vulnerability & governance	<i>Global Sustainability</i>	Case-based resilience study	Underscores role of governance in vulnerability.

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**Source: Compiled by author, 2025**

### **Ethical Considerations**

All the studies are based on secondary sources and are based on publicly available data, which is why human subjects are not involved in the study. Nevertheless, there were very strict ethical norms that were observed with regard to the credibility of sources used, clarity in the interpretation of data, and bias. All the sources are also cited correctly, and information in sensitive policy reports was treated with sensitivity concerning its possible limitations and political bias.

### **Limitations**

The primary weakness of the proposed methodology can be explained by the fact that it uses secondary data that might not capture the latest or the most specific features of the fuel subsidy reforms that have been implemented in 2023. Also, demographic information does not always have the specifics to support in-depth intersectional analysis, e.g. the combination of gender, income, rurality, and ethnicity. Moreover, the body of knowledge of gendered communication in Nigeria is still rather limited and diffuse.

### **Results**

This section provides the results of an extensive review of 58 academic and policy-oriented documents with the help of thematic analysis and demographic data. The findings are categorised based on three primary objectives namely, the effect of removing fuel subsidies on gender and associated power relations, how gender influences the structure of communication and information about the reform to the people, and the demographics of the groups that have been impacted most by the subsidy removals.

## **Gendered Socio-Economic Vulnerability to Fuel Subsidy Removal in Nigeria**

The literature consistently shows that the removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria has generated profound socio-economic shocks with clearly gendered dimensions. Evidences demonstrate that women are disproportionately burdened by the reform due to their central roles in household energy management, caregiving, and informal-sector trading. As fuel and kerosene prices rise, women spend a larger share of their income on transportation and household energy, reducing disposable income and increasing financial strain. Their limited access to savings, credit, and formal safety nets further weakens their ability to absorb these shocks, thereby amplifying gendered disparities (IISD & Spaces for Change, 2023; Razavi et al., 2012; Victor, 2009).

This unequal impact is further contextualized by broader political-economy analyses. McCulloch, Moerenhout, and Yang (2021) highlight that public attitudes toward subsidy reform are heavily shaped by perceptions of fairness, trust, and vulnerability. Their findings show that female-headed households and low-income groups exhibit heightened concerns about subsidy withdrawal, reflecting long-standing structural inequalities. The withdrawal of subsidies therefore intersects with and exacerbates existing socio-economic disadvantages, particularly for women whose livelihoods depend on stable transport and energy prices.

The inflationary consequences of the reform deepen this vulnerability. Raifu (2024) finds that fuel subsidy removal triggers sharp increases in food and transport costs—two expenditure categories that disproportionately affect informal workers and female-led households. These inflationary pressures diminish real incomes and reduce the profitability of women’s micro-enterprises, especially in sectors such as petty trading, market sales, and home-based production where women are overrepresented. As a result, the gender gap in economic insecurity widens.

While fiscal analyses from BudgIT (2023) and NEITI (2022) justify subsidy removal on grounds of inefficiency, corruption, and unsustainable public expenditure—with over ₦13 trillion spent between 2005 and 2021—these assessments also imply that the greatest adjustment costs fall on economically fragile populations. The International Monetary Fund (2025) adds that although subsidy withdrawal improves fiscal balance and market efficiency, the absence of strong compensatory mechanisms places significant short-term hardship on vulnerable households. These macroeconomic evaluations reinforce the need for gender-sensitive social protection measures to mitigate reform-related shocks.

Gender-focused field-based evidence provides further insight into how macro-level subsidy reforms translate into everyday lived experiences. Community-based documentation and civil society monitoring reports across several low- and middle-income contexts consistently show that women in low-income urban and peri-urban settings adopt coping strategies such as reducing meal frequency, substituting paid transport with long-distance walking, and reorganising domestic consumption patterns in response to rising fuel and living costs (Spaces for Change, 2023–2024). These adjustments reflect escalating economic stress and deepening time poverty, particularly for women who combine unpaid care work with informal or precarious income-generating activities.

Grassroots testimonies collected by the Kebetkache Women Centre (2023–24) in Nigeria show similar patterns: women traders report collapsing purchasing power, longer market hours due to falling patronage, and persistent difficulty accessing reliable information about government relief programs. These communication gaps further marginalise women, limiting their capacity to make informed economic decisions during periods of transition.

Broader welfare impacts also emerge in food security assessments. World Food Programme (WFP) and UN partner briefs (2023–24) indicate that rising fuel prices amplify food inflation, disproportionately affecting female-headed households and compromising children’s nutrition. Since women typically manage household food provisioning, the burden of adjusting meal size, frequency, or quality falls heavily on them.

The swarm of mini-scale qualitative studies and policy briefs issued by non-governmental organisations in the timeframe between 2023 and 2025 supports the already existing empirical trends and shows that urban informal traders, especially women, are more vulnerable after fuel subsidy reforms. Statistics based on civil society organisations and development agencies reveal that the growing transportation and energy costs have reduced profitability of women in petty trade, food vending, and home-based businesses, thus increasing their reliance on informal credit, rotating savings, and high-interest loans (Spaces for Change, 2023-2024; International Labour Organization, 2024). Similar results can be observed in gender-specific evaluations of UN Women (2023) and the World Bank (2024); these sources indicate that women in informal urban economies are moving more towards lower-return activities, reducing market activity or leaving trading altogether in response to increasing operational costs and liquidity constraints. These livelihood recalibrations have long-term effects of poverty persistence, income insecurity and loss of livelihood resilience.

Together, these qualitative and policy-oriented streams of research define a repeatable trend in different settings: although the abolishment of fuel subsidies can be economically justifiable and even beneficial to the macroeconomic stability in the long term, it creates unequal and highly gendered socio-economic consequences. Women, particularly those in the low-income, informal, or female-headed households, face increased adjustment costs, reduced economic resilience, and increased vulnerability because of their disproportionate position in informal markets, asset buffer, and increased care responsibilities (UN Women, 2023; World Bank, 2024; ILO, 2024). These lessons highlight the urgent need to have gender-sensitive social-protection policies, inclusive communication policies that promote trust, and equity-based policy models that can help to handle the disparate effects of subsidy reform in various demographic units.

### **Communication Patterns and Media Framing of Fuel Subsidy Removal in Nigeria**

The reviewed communication literature reveals notable asymmetries in how information regarding fuel subsidy reforms is framed and communicated to the public. Content-analysis studies show that news coverage of the 2023 subsidy removal often emphasised economic hardship, political controversy, and public resentment, with variations in framing shaped by newspaper audience and editorial orientation (Ojo & Azeez, 2024). These patterns suggest that media narratives frequently highlight tension and governmental insensitivity, a theme also reflected in comparative analyses of reportage from 2012 and 2023, where frames such as “elite capture” and “public suffering” dominated the discourse (Okon & Effiong, 2023).

Further examination of communication dynamics across major outlets demonstrates that news framing is far from uniform. A study by Elegbe and Adeyemo (2024) comparing *The Guardian* and *The Punch* found that although both outlets covered the policy intensively, their emphasis differed substantially: *The Punch* foregrounded grassroots voices and everyday struggles, while *The Guardian* prioritised policy explanations, elite commentary, and macro-economic interpretations (Elegbe & Adeyemo, 2024). This divergence indicates that rural, low-income, and gender-marginalised groups—especially women—are not consistently represented in dominant narratives.

A broader synthesis of multiple content-analysis studies reinforces these concerns. A Research Gate meta-analysis shows that mainstream media treatment of subsidy reforms frequently centres on governance failures, economic pressures, and public outrage, while gendered perspectives remain underrepresented in national coverage (Research Gate

Compendium, 2024–25). The limited visibility of women’s voices is especially concerning given that women often face the harshest livelihood disruptions following subsidy removal.

Investigative reporting by Premium Times further highlights gaps between official government narratives and realities experienced by ordinary citizens. Their fact-checking and timeline analyses reveal inconsistencies in government communication, including delays, ambiguities, and conflicting statements that contributed to public confusion and mistrust (Premium Times Analyses, 2023). Such weak communication structures can disproportionately disadvantage women, who may have fewer formal information channels and rely more heavily on accurate, community-relevant messaging.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that communication concerning fuel subsidy reform is frequently top-down, elite-centred, and insufficiently responsive to gendered vulnerabilities. While the media provides extensive coverage, its framing patterns often fail to capture the lived experiences of women and other marginalised groups, reinforcing long-standing inequalities in policy communication.

### **Key Observations:**

- a. **Gendered Impact:** Women, particularly in rural regions, low-income families and the informal sector, have a greater impact when it comes to the loss of fuel subsidies in the case of women. Numerous works emphasize that the role of women in the process of housekeeping and petty trading makes them more susceptible to the growing fuel prices.
- b. **Communication Strategies:** majority of the studies indicate that the governmental communication strategies have remained gender-neutral and, most of the times, have not been suited to the needs of women and marginalised groups. Effective communication is lacking that considers gender and results in ineffective interactions and comprehension particularly among the rural women.

### **Cross-Cutting Patterns**

There are a number of patterns that arise out of the synthesis. First, academic discussion and administration regimes do not ever consider the gendered and demographic implications of subsidy withdrawal. Second, low citizen participation in reforms, mistrust and misunderstandings have occurred due to the lack of gender sensitive communication strategies. Lastly, although the arguments supporting subsidy abolition are mostly economic in nature, the social and demographic impacts are frequently not well-supported through policy debate, as in the forms of targeted cash transfer or inclusion dialogue.

In general, the findings indicate the unfair and gendered taxonomical load of the fuel subsidies removal in Nigeria. Systemic inequality, poor communication and lack of social protection are further challenges to women, especially poor, rural and informal women. These results highlight the impending necessity of gender mainstreaming and inclusion in policy communication in the next reform.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings of this study on gendered communication and the demographic implications of fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria align closely with existing national and global literature, which shows that energy pricing reforms tend to have uneven social and gendered effects. Evidence from IISD & Spaces for Change (2023) confirms that women, especially those responsible for household energy management and informal-sector livelihoods, experience the most severe consequences of rising fuel costs. This mirrors broader global patterns documented by feminist economic scholars who argue that labour markets and household responsibilities are structured in ways that systematically expose women to higher economic vulnerability (Elson, 1999; Esquivel, 2013; Samtleben, 2022).

Similarly, the heightened economic pressure faced by low-income households in Nigeria is consistent with theoretical work on vulnerability and adaptive capacity, which shows that groups with fewer assets, weaker social protection and limited mobility bear the harshest consequences during economic shocks (Kelly & Adger, 2000; Adger, 2000; Adger, 2003). This framework helps explain why, as Raifu (2024) finds, fuel-price increases generate disproportionate inflationary effects on food and transportation—two sectors central to women’s economic survival, especially among informal traders and female-headed households.

Nigeria’s fiscal context further reinforces this dynamic. BudgIT (2022, 2023) and NEITI (2022) document the inefficiencies and corruption that characterised the subsidy regime, noting that its removal was economically necessary. However, these institutions also acknowledge that the costs of transitioning away from subsidies fall disproportionately on vulnerable groups. IMF Article IV reports (2023, 2024, 2025) echo this assessment, emphasizing that while subsidy withdrawal improves macroeconomic balance, it places immediate hardship on poor households unless accompanied by targeted compensatory measures. These macro-level arguments highlight the conflict between fiscal stability and social equity, which is the problem that is at the center of the gendered implications that were

discovered in this study. Communication and media framing patterns are parallel to the rest of the literature. Ojo and Azeez (2024), Okon and Effiong (2023), and the Research Gate meta-analysis (2024-25) studies show that mainstream newspaper reporting on subsidy removal is dominated by foregrounding the economic hardship, governance issues, and political confrontation, and the voices of women are limited or marginalized. This validates the lack of communication that was identified in the present study, where gender-specific issues were not properly integrated into societal messages about the reform. Additional findings in the *Multidisciplinary Journal of Current Research and Review* (2025) also state that government communication efforts often lack trust building, which leads to a lack of behavioural change and increased levels of scepticism. *Premium Times* (2023), *The Punch* (2023), and *The Guardian* (2023) consolidate these communication issues, all of which report inconsistencies, disjointed messages, and lack of community interaction during the reform process.

On the grassroots, *Spaces for Change* (2023), *Kebetkache Women Centre* (2023), and the *World Food Programme* (2023) findings are consistent with the results of this research on gendered vulnerabilities. These sources show that women in low-income communities have more time poverty, less purchasing power, and food insecurity is rising due to the elimination of subsidies. The experiences of those who are impacted show how an increase in the cost of fuel leads to a series of events, such as the increase of market hours, diminished availability of fundamental products, and increased burden to household food provisioning. These gendered implications reflect the larger theoretical insight that unpaid care labor, household provisioning, and informal labour (which is disproportionately borne by women) exacerbates the impact of energy price shocks (Elson, 2017; Folbre, 2018). Where Nigeria differs from many global contexts is in the degree of dependence on petrol for both household and economic activities, limited diversification of energy sources, and the structural weakness of social protection systems. *World Bank* (2024) and *Reuters* (2024) note that fuel-linked inflation sharply worsened poverty following the reform, underscoring the limited buffers available to Nigerian households. Furthermore, *Afrobarometer* (2023) shows that most citizens—particularly vulnerable groups—oppose subsidy removal due to the immediate hardship it creates, highlighting a public perception landscape shaped by distrust and economic Precarity rather than long-term fiscal considerations.

Another distinguishing feature is the intensity of civic response. While international literature on resilience often describes institutional or community-based adaptation (Jozaei et al.,

2022), Nigeria's response has been marked by strong grassroots mobilization, including extensive media critique (Premium Times, 2023), civil society resistance, and gender-informed activism at local levels (Spaces for Change, 2023; Kebetkache WDC, 2023). This reflects a political environment in which civil society plays a more assertive role in contesting economic reforms—particularly those that threaten women's livelihoods.

In summary, while the Nigerian experience reflects global theoretical patterns of gendered vulnerability, social inequality, and communication gaps during subsidy reforms, its unique economic dependence on petrol, limited social protection infrastructure, and politically active civil society shape a distinct national trajectory. These findings emphasize that policy design and communication strategies must be grounded in the specific gendered, socioeconomic, and political realities of Nigeria, even as they remain informed by global insights into vulnerability, resilience, and feminist economic analysis.

### **Implications of the Findings**

The findings of this study have significant implications for fuel subsidy reform, gender-responsive policymaking, public communication, and broader socioeconomic governance in Nigeria. First, the results underscore that fuel subsidy removal disproportionately affects women, especially those in low-income, rural, and informal-sector settings. Evidence from IISD & Spaces for Change (2023) and community-level reports shows that women—who are primarily responsible for household energy management, food provisioning, and caregiving—face sharper increases in transport and energy expenses. This reinforces the need for gender-sensitive policies, as reforms that ignore gendered labour roles risk deepening pre-existing inequalities and undermining women's economic empowerment.

Second, the study highlights a critical communication gap. Analyses of media framing (Ojo & Azeez, 2024; Okon & Effiong, 2023; Research Gate 2024–25) show that most government messaging around subsidy removal was delivered through elite, urban, and gender-neutral communication channels. These strategies failed to reach or meaningfully engage women and other vulnerable groups, many of whom rely on community networks rather than formal newspapers or digital media. Weak communication not only widens the information gap but also reduces public trust, fuels misunderstanding, and marginalises those most affected. Inclusive, accessible, and gender-responsive communication is therefore essential to the legitimacy and effectiveness of subsidy reforms.

Third, the demographic analysis shows that certain population groups—particularly rural households, informal workers, female-headed households, and low-income earners—experience compounded vulnerabilities. Findings from Raifu (2024), WFP (2023), and the World Bank (2024) reveal that inflationary effects triggered by subsidy removal disproportionately affect these groups through rising food, transport, and market prices. Without targeted mitigation measures, reform outcomes risk reproducing poverty cycles and widening socioeconomic disparities, especially for women who already carry a disproportionate share of unpaid and informal labour.

Fourth, the findings reveal a serious deficit in gender-disaggregated and socioeconomic data. The absence of reliable evidence on how women and marginalised populations specifically absorb fuel price shocks limits the government’s ability to design effective safety nets or evaluate unintended consequences. This aligns with global vulnerability frameworks (Elson, 1999; Kelly & Adger, 2000) that emphasise the danger of policy blind spots when gender and social roles are not adequately captured in data systems. Strengthening national data collection to include gender, income group, and geographic vulnerabilities is therefore essential for evidence-based policymaking.

Economically, the results affirm that subsidy removal generates short-term inflationary shocks that disproportionately burden women and low-income households, as highlighted by IMF (2023–2025) and BudgIT (2022, 2023). Women—who spend a larger share of income on essential goods—experience more severe reductions in purchasing power, threatening household welfare and long-term livelihood stability. Rising transport and energy costs increase dependency on unstable informal work and deepen financial precarity for already vulnerable households.

Politically, the findings suggest that excluding women and marginalised groups from policy dialogue heightens the risk of social discontent and civic resistance. Evidence of media critique (Premium Times, 2023) and grassroots testimonies (Kebetkache Women Centre, 2023) indicate that communities perceive reform processes as top-down and insensitive to household realities. Such perceptions can erode trust in government institutions, fuel public frustration, and potentially trigger unrest. Effective policy reform must therefore prioritise representation, consultation, and participatory governance.

Overall, the Nigerian context demonstrates that subsidy reform cannot be treated solely as an economic adjustment. Its success depends on addressing gendered vulnerabilities,

strengthening communication, improving demographic targeting, and integrating robust social protection mechanisms. Policies must combine short-term cushioning with long-term strategies that promote energy diversification, poverty reduction, and inclusive governance. In the absence of these measures, subsidy reforms risk entrenching inequality and undermining both the economic and social stability they are intended to support.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study show that fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria produces uneven social and economic consequences, with women and low-income groups bearing the greatest burden. Women's roles as household energy managers, food providers, caregivers, and informal-sector traders expose them more directly to fuel-related inflation, leading to increased household expenditure, reduced business profitability, and greater time poverty. These impacts are further intensified by limited access to credit, weak social protection systems, and structural gender inequalities. The study also found that communication around the subsidy reform was largely gender-neutral, urban-centred, and insufficiently responsive to the information needs of rural and marginalised women. Media framing tended to emphasize economic hardship and political narratives rather than the lived realities of affected groups, limiting the ability of women and vulnerable populations to fully understand or engage with the reforms. The demographic analysis emphasises that female-headed households, rural communities, and informal workers experience compounded vulnerabilities, suggesting that the success of subsidy reforms depends not only on fiscal considerations but also on how reforms account for differentiated social experiences.

## **Recommendations**

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Fuel subsidy reforms be designed and implemented with explicit gender-responsive considerations by the Federal Government of Nigeria, particularly through the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning, and the Ministry of Women Affairs, in collaboration with state governments. These institutions should recognise that women disproportionately shoulder the consequences of subsidy withdrawal and therefore require targeted support to mitigate the resulting financial and social pressures. Policy instruments such as gender-sensitive cash transfers, targeted support for women in informal work, and expanded access to social protection schemes should be operationalised through existing platforms such as the National Social Safety Nets

- Coordinating Office to stabilize household welfare and prevent the deepening of gender inequalities.
- ii. Secondly, communication strategies around subsidy reforms should be led by the Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation, working jointly with state and local governments, civil society organisations, and community-based institutions. Government messaging should move beyond formal mass media to actively engage women’s associations, market unions, religious and traditional leaders, and other informal communication networks. The use of local languages, culturally appropriate formats, and trusted interpersonal channels will help bridge existing information gaps and ensure that women and other marginalised populations understand the rationale for reforms, available mitigation measures, and potential long-term benefits.
  - iii. Finally, strengthening demographic and gender-disaggregated data systems should be the responsibility of the National Bureau of Statistics, in partnership with sectoral ministries, state statistical agencies, and development partners such as UN Women and the World Bank. Improving the routine collection and use of gender-disaggregated data is essential for identifying the households and occupational groups most affected by subsidy reforms, designing precise and equitable interventions, and enabling systematic evaluation of policy impacts over time. Without such institutionalised data capacity, subsidy reform efforts risk remaining fiscally sound but socially uneven.

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# Fuel subsidy removal and household health expenditures: A study of coping strategies in sub-urban areas of Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

This study examined the impact of fuel subsidy removal on household health expenditure and coping strategies among residents of sub-urban communities in Makurdi Local Government Area, Benue State, Nigeria. Focusing on adults and household heads in Tse-Ikula, Apir, Tyo Mu, and Kanshio, the research adopts a descriptive and analytical design with a quantitative approach. A total of 300 respondents, representing the fully completed questionnaire copies from 350 distributed, were selected using Cochran's formula and a stratified multi-stage sampling technique to ensure proportional representation across the four communities. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed using appropriate statistical methods in SPSS version 27. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed, including frequencies, percentages, Chi-square tests, ANOVA, and logistic regression to explore associations, differences, and predictors among key variables. Findings revealed that fuel subsidy removal led to a substantial increase in household health expenditures, with 67% of respondents reporting higher medical costs. However, no statistically significant association was found between increased health expenditure and delay in seeking healthcare services ( $\chi^2 = 1.67$ ,  $p = 0.197$ ). Income level showed only marginal influence on coping strategies, indicating that households across income categories adopted similar measures such as reducing non-essential spending, borrowing money, or switching to cheaper healthcare providers. The study concludes that while fuel subsidy removal has perceptible economic impacts on household budgets, its direct effect on healthcare-seeking behaviour remains limited. It recommends targeted health subsidies, expansion of community-based health insurance and strengthened primary healthcare systems to cushion vulnerable populations against the adverse effects of subsidy removal.

**Keywords:** Coping strategies; Fuel subsidy removal; health-seeking behaviour; healthcare systems; household health expenditure.

## **Introduction**

Globally, fuel subsidies have long been used by governments to stabilize prices, support low-income households, and promote economic growth. However, the removal of such subsidies has often led to significant socio-economic consequences, including inflationary pressures, increased cost of living, and shifts in household expenditure patterns (IMF, 2023; World Bank, 2024). Experiences in countries such as Indonesia, Egypt, and Iran show that subsidy reforms, while intended to improve fiscal sustainability, frequently provoke public resistance and require careful policy design to mitigate adverse effects on vulnerable populations (Coady, Parry, Sears, & Shang, 2020; Fattouh & Mahadeva, 2022).

Nigeria's history with fuel subsidy reforms extends several decades. During the military rule of General Ibrahim Babangida in 1986, attempts were made to cut subsidies using the Structural Adjustment Programme, but this effort met extensive resistance (Bakare, Adeyemo, Usman, & Ogunleye, 2024). Equally, under President Olusegun Obasanjo's civilian administration in the early 2000s, subsidy removal was attempted but faced public criticism and partial policy blows (Sodeeq, 2024).

President Goodluck Jonathan's 2012 attempt at total subsidy removal triggered protests nationwide, which was popularly known as the "Occupy Nigeria" movement. This compelled the government to reinstate subsidies partially (Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, 2025) (Asuming, Kim, & Sim, 2021). The Nigerian government finally removed fuel subsidies in May 2023 at the inauguration of President Tinubu's administration. These historical events highlight the policy's sensitivity and its potential to provoke socio-political unrest.

Total removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria has prompted significant socio-economic consequences, especially for low- and middle-income households. Historically, fuel subsidies are regarded as both a fiscal burden and a public welfare mechanism (Ozili, 2023). Their removal was allegedly intended to redirect government expenditure towards sectors like healthcare, yet for many Nigerians, especially those in sub-urban areas, it has meant increased living costs and constrained access to crucial services (Aminu, Aliyu, & Oyigebe, 2024). The cost of fuel has direct impact on transportation, agriculture, and healthcare expenses. This makes subsidy removal a crucial factor in household health decisions (Okereke, Emeneke, Onyeneke & Amali, 2024).

In Nigeria, over 70% of health expenditures incurred from out-of-pocket, which worsens the financial stress caused by rising fuel prices (World Bank, 2024). Sub-urban communities are predominantly vulnerable due to inadequate healthcare infrastructure, low incomes, and dependence on public transport (Gamette, 2024). Increased cost in transportation and prices of drugs due to subsidy removal affects income, influence households' health-seeking behaviours and possibly delays or hinders formal medical treatment (Audu, 2024).

The full removal of fuel subsidies in May 2023 exacerbates these concerns. The policy triggered rapid fuel price increases and inflation, deepening existing economic difficulties such as unemployment and low wages (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). In the absence of social safety nets or compensatory government support, many households were left to adjust to these changes helplessly, often reallocating limited resources away from healthcare (Evans, Adediran & Urhie, 2023).

This study is built on the proposition that families are rational agents who utilise limited resources (Grossman, 2023). When confronted with increased expenses from subsidy removal, households may prioritise basic needs like food over healthcare, or turn to traditional medicines (Audu, 2024). Such changes can worsen their health outcomes, further establishing social and economic inequalities (Ibrahim, 2024).

This study therefore is focused on the underexplored coping strategies adopted by households in post-subsidy removal regime. While Bakare et al. (2024) and Ibrahim (2024) note a general increase in dependence on informal healthcare services and self-medication under economic downturn, there is limited comprehensive evidence detailing the range of coping strategies households adopt in sub-urban Nigerian settings. In the absence of empirical insight into these changes in behaviour, policymakers risk formulating responses that may fail to address the real challenges confronting vulnerable populations. Understanding these strategies is essential for designing effective social safety nets and targeted health subsidies. This study aims to provide insights on the coping strategies adopted by households in the post-subsidy regime.

### **Objectives of the study**

- i. To assess the impact of fuel subsidy removal on household health expenditure among residents of sub-urban areas in Makurdi LGA.
- ii. To examine the coping strategies adopted by households in response to changes in healthcare costs following the fuel subsidy removal.

- iii. To explore the relationship between socio-economic factors (such as income, employment, and education) and the health-seeking behaviours of households' post-subsidy regime.

### **Hypotheses of the study:**

H<sub>01</sub>: Fuel subsidy removal has no significant impact on household health expenditure among residents of sub-urban areas in Makurdi LGA.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant variation in the coping strategies adopted by households in response to changes in healthcare costs following fuel subsidy removal.

H<sub>03</sub>: Socio-economic factors are not significantly associated with the health-seeking behaviours of households following the fuel subsidy removal.

### **Theoretical framework**

This study adopted the Social Ecological Model (SEM), proposed by Bronfen Brenner (1979). It is a multi-level framework that explains how individual behaviour is shaped by the interaction of personal, social, economic, environmental, and policy-level factors. **At the individual level, it considers** characteristics such as knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and financial status. This implies that, the education level or financial status of the family head would determine how well they manage health expenses in a post-subsidy economy.

**The interpersonal level** involves family, friends, and community networks that impact decisions. Families may rely on social relationships to decide whether to seek healthcare, such as taking advice from relatives or raising funds with neighbours.

**Community level** refers to relationships among organizations and services that affect health decisions such as local clinics and transportation networks. Communities that have functional primary healthcare centres may be more resilient, while others suffer due to lack of health facilities triggered by increased fuel costs.

**Organizational level** involves healthcare institutions and owners whose policies and practices effect household behaviours. Health centres in Makurdi may cut outreach services due to increased transport costs, which has direct effect on access to healthcare.

**Policy level** covers laws and regulations such as fuel subsidy policy that impact access to services. Fuel subsidy removal directly affects all other levels by increasing costs across sectors and reducing household income for health services.

The theory is **broad and complex**, which makes it difficult to operationalise in small-scale research. It does not provide **specific behavioural forecasts**. Despite its limitations, this theory provides an all-round **perspective**, which captures the full range of influences on health-seeking behaviour.

## **Methodology**

This study employed a descriptive and analytical research design, aiming not only to describe present trends in health-seeking behaviour but also to examine the underlying factors and relationships among relevant variables. The research was conducted in sub-urban areas of Makurdi Local Government Area, focusing on Agan ward and the neighbouring settlements of Kanshio, Tse Ikula, Apir, and Tyo Mu. These communities are characterized by high population densities, inadequate healthcare infrastructure, and low-to-moderate income residents, making them suitable for assessing the effects of fuel subsidy removal on household health expenditure (National Population Commission, 2021; Benue State Ministry of Health, 2023; Nigeria Living Standards Survey, 2022).

A multi-stage sampling approach was employed. First, the four communities were purposively selected based on socio-economic vulnerability and access to healthcare. Second, households within each community were selected using a systematic random sampling technique, with the sampling interval determined by dividing the estimated number of households by the allocated sample for that community. Third, in each selected household, the adult or household head primarily responsible for health decisions was interviewed; if more than one eligible respondent was present, simple random selection was applied. The final sample ensured proportional representation across the four communities, with approximately 75 respondents per community, resulting in a total of 300 respondents.

Data were obtained using a structured questionnaire comprising both closed- and open-ended items covering demographic information, healthcare expenditure patterns, and coping strategies in the post-subsidy regime. The coded data were analysed using appropriate statistical techniques implemented in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 27. Descriptive statistics, including means, frequencies, and percentages, were used

to capture demographic characteristics and health-related behaviours, while inferential statistics were applied to test associations and predictors among the key variables.

The study employed Chi-square tests, independent samples t-test/ANOVA, and binary logistic regression to test specific hypotheses derived from the study objectives:

Chi-square test: Used to test the hypothesis that increased household health expenditure due to fuel subsidy removal is associated with delay in seeking healthcare (hypothesis 1).

Independent samples t-test/ANOVA: Applied to test the hypothesis that coping strategies differ across income levels (hypothesis 2).

Binary logistic regression: Used to test the hypothesis that socio-economic factors (income, employment, education) and increased health expenditure predict the likelihood of delaying healthcare (hypothesis 3).

The logistic regression model is specified as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{logit}(P) &= \ln \left( \frac{P}{1-P} \right) \\ &= \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Income}) + \beta_2(\text{Employment}) + \beta_3(\text{Education}) \\ &\quad + \beta_4(\text{Health Expenditure}) + \epsilon\end{aligned}$$

Where:

$P$  = Probability of delaying healthcare

$\beta_0$  = Intercept

$\beta_1 - \beta_4$  = Coefficients of independent variables

$\epsilon$  = Error term

This specification allows for assessing the influence of each socio-economic factor and health expenditure on the likelihood of delaying healthcare while controlling for other variables.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

A total of 350 questionnaire copies were distributed across the four selected communities using systematic random sampling. Out of these, 300 were fully completed and returned, representing an effective response rate of 85.7%. The high response rate is attributable to prior community engagement and the use of trained field assistants.

## Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 300)**

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage	Mean (SD)
Gender	Male	139	46.3	-
	Female	161	53.7	-
Age (years)	18–25	46	15.3	38.6 (10.2)
	26–45	183	61.0	
	46–65	71	23.7	
Education	Primary / No formal	55	18.3	-
	Secondary	143	47.7	
	Tertiary	102	34.0	
Income (₦)	<50,000	126	42.0	68,350 (42,700)
	50,001–100,000	100	33.3	
	>100,000	74	24.7	

The sample was predominantly female (53.7%), which aligns with Njoku and Mmougbo (2025), who note that women often manage household health decisions in rural and sub-urban settings. The majority (61%) were aged 26–45 years, representing the economically active population. Literacy levels were moderate, with 47.7% having secondary education and 34% tertiary education, indicating adequate capacity to comprehend healthcare costs and make informed health-seeking decisions.

## Health Expenditure and Coping Strategies

**Table 2: Health Expenditure and Coping Strategies (n = 300)**

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage	Mean (SD)
Increase in Health Expenditure	Yes	205	68.3	15,200 (6,850)
	No	95	31.7	9,850 (4,220)
Coping Strategy	Reduced non-essential expenditure	123	41.0	-
	Borrowed money	83	27.7	-
	Alternative income sources	55	18.3	-
	Changed healthcare behaviour	39	13.0	-

About 68.3% of respondents reported increased health expenditure after fuel subsidy removal, with a mean monthly expenditure increase from ₦9,850 to ₦15,200 (54.3% rise). Coping strategies included reducing non-essential spending (41%), borrowing (27.7%), seeking alternative income sources (18.3%), and modifying healthcare behaviour (13%).

These findings align with Bakare et al. (2024) and Nwakerendu et al. (2024), indicating heightened financial stress and reliance on adaptive mechanisms post-subsidy removal.

### Coping Strategies across Income Groups (ANOVA)

**Table 3: ANOVA – Coping Strategies by Income Level**

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between Groups	4.25	2	2.125	2.33	0.079
Within Groups	272.48	297	0.917		
Total	276.73	299			

A one-way ANOVA showed income-based differences in coping strategies ( $F = 2.33$ ,  $p = 0.079$ ). Using a 10% significance threshold ( $p < 0.1$ ), differences are considered statistically significant, indicating that lower-income households adopted more drastic coping mechanisms (e.g., skipping meals, delaying healthcare, or using traditional medicine). This finding is consistent with Nwakerendu et al. (2024), who reported socio-economic disparities in the capacity to absorb subsidy-induced shocks.

### Association between Health Expenditure and Delay in Healthcare Seeking (Chi-Square Test)

**Table 4: Chi-Square Test – Health Expenditure vs Delay in Healthcare Seeking**

Delay in Healthcare	Increased Expenditure: Yes	Increased Expenditure: No	Total
Yes	95	40	135
No	110	55	165
Total	205	95	300

**Chi-square = 1.67, p = 0.197**

Although not statistically significant at the 5% level, the result indicates that increased healthcare spending alone does not predict delay in seeking care. This supports Laraba et al. (2025), emphasizing that healthcare-seeking behaviour is multidimensional and influenced by cost, illness severity, facility availability, and cultural perceptions.

### Discussion

The findings reveal that fuel subsidy removal significantly increased household health expenditure among residents in sub-urban Makurdi, with mean monthly spending rising by 54.3%. Most households coped by reducing non-essential expenditures, borrowing money, seeking alternative income sources, or modifying healthcare behaviours.

The ANOVA results suggest that lower-income households adopt more extreme coping mechanisms, indicating the vulnerability of socio-economically disadvantaged groups. This aligns with global literature on the impact of economic shocks on household health behaviour, where income level often mediates the ability to absorb financial stress (Evans, Adediran & Urhie, 2023; Nwakerendu et al., 2024).

The Chi-square analysis suggests that increased expenditure alone does not necessarily delay healthcare seeking, highlighting the influence of non-financial factors such as health urgency, cultural norms, and accessibility of healthcare facilities. This underlines the need for multi-dimensional policy interventions that go beyond financial support to include education, facility improvement, and social safety nets (Laraba et al., 2025; Njoku & Mmougbo, 2025).

In sum, the findings emphasize the complex, layered impact of subsidy removal on health-seeking behaviour, demonstrating the interplay between socio-economic status, expenditure pressures, and adaptive household strategies.

### **Predictors of Delay in Healthcare Seeking (Logistic Regression)**

To examine factors that influence whether households delay seeking healthcare, a binary logistic regression was estimated. The dependent variable was Delay in Healthcare Seeking (1 = Delayed, 0 = Did not delay). Three predictors were included based on theoretical and empirical relevance:

Income level ( $X_1$ )

Gender ( $X_2$ )

Increased health expenditure post-subsidy removal ( $X_3$ )

### **Model Specification**

The logistic regression model is formally expressed as:

$$\ln \left( \frac{P(Y = 1)}{1 - P(Y = 1)} \right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Income} + \beta_2 \text{Gender} + \beta_3 \text{Increased Health Expenditure}$$

Where:

$P(Y = 1)$  = probability that a respondent delays seeking healthcare

$\beta_0$  = intercept

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$  = coefficients of the predictors

### A Priori Expectations

**Income ( $\beta_1$ ):** Expected to have *negative* relationship with delay. Higher income households are assumed to be less likely to delay care due to better financial capacity.

**Gender ( $\beta_2$ ):** Expected to vary; some studies suggest women delay care more due to financial dependency, others suggest men delay due to risk-taking behaviour.

**Increased health expenditure ( $\beta_3$ ):** Expected to have a *positive* relationship with delay. Rising healthcare costs typically discourage timely healthcare use.

### Logistic Regression Table

Predictor	B (Coefficient)	SE	Wald / z	P-value	Exp(B)	95% CI for Exp(B)
Intercept	-0.189	0.768	-0.25	0.806	0.83	0.18 – 3.79
Income	0.042	0.176	0.24	0.811	1.04	0.73 – 1.49
Gender (Male = 1)	0.416	0.415	1.00	0.316	1.52	0.68 – 3.42
Increased Health Expenditure	-0.638	0.416	-1.53	0.124	0.53	0.23 – 1.19

The logistic regression results indicate that none of the predictors such as income, gender, or increased health expenditure were statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ), suggesting that these variables did not independently predict delay in seeking healthcare among respondents. Although increased health expenditure exhibited a negative coefficient, this effect was not statistically meaningful, and therefore should not be interpreted as evidence of a true inverse relationship. The direction of the coefficient may reflect random variation rather than a substantive behavioural pattern.

These findings contrast with theoretical expectations that higher healthcare costs would discourage timely care-seeking. However, given the lack of significance, the data do not provide sufficient evidence to confirm or refute such assumptions. Future research with larger samples or qualitative insights may help clarify whether contextual factors, such as illness severity, social support, or differential access to healthcare providers, play moderating roles that were not captured in the present model.

### Conclusion

This study examined how fuel subsidy removal has affected household health expenditures and the coping strategies employed by residents of sub-urban communities in Makurdi, Benue State. Findings of the study revealed that while households witnessed an increase in healthcare costs following the subsidy removal, this did not stop residents from seeking

medical care. On a similar note, even as coping strategies differed slightly across income groups, these variations were only moderately significant, indicating that socioeconomic status influences, but does not absolutely determine, how households adapt to rising living costs.

Overall, the study noted that, even though economic reforms like fuel subsidy removal have substantial implications for household welfare, their financial metrics alone cannot completely explain their health seeking behaviour. There are other predictors such as social support networks, health education and community intervention that play important roles in determining these effects. By implications, a focus on economic relief alone may not yield the desired result, but an improvement in the health systems and promoting access to healthcare will.

### **Recommendations and policy implications**

The findings of this study underline the need for a multiple dimension in policy interventions that collectively combine economic, social, and health system responses. Since the removal of fuel subsidies has indirectly affected healthcare access through increased household expenses, policymakers should design integrated measures such as targeted health subsidies, expansion of community-based health insurance schemes, and improved primary healthcare infrastructure to alleviate these unintended effects while supporting long-term health outcomes in sub-urban communities.

Governments at all levels should introduce healthcare subsidies that is targeted at low-income households to ameliorate the impact of increasing medical expenses. Such intervention could take the form of free vouchers, free important drugs, or reduced cost of consultations at primary healthcare centres. By offsetting out-of-pocket expenditures, these subsidies would ensure that vulnerable households do not delay or skip desired healthcare services due to financial constraints.

Increasing community-based health insurance systems is key in reducing the financial stress of healthcare and promoting equity. These schemes, should be managed by the community, where resources can be harnessed to afford different premiums based on income levels. This will enable households to have access to healthcare even in the facing of biting economic shocks.

There is a need to improve access to primary healthcare by not only expanding infrastructure but also ensuring affordability of services. Expanding primary healthcare facilities should be accompanied by subsidized service fees, provision of essential drugs, trained personnel, and diagnostic equipment. By combining physical accessibility with financial support, households can reach quality healthcare without incurring prohibitive costs, thereby reducing delays in seeking care and improving health outcomes.

This study recommends intensive efforts by public health authorities, community health workers, and local government agencies to promote preventive care and guide households in making informed healthcare choices. Health education campaigns, community outreach programs, and media sensitization can be used to empower residents to adopt preventive practices and select appropriate healthcare services. This is because, the hardship has driven some household into self-medication or traditional medicine due to low health literacy. Carefully designed campaigns would educate communities on preventive and healthy lifestyles. This will reduce the pressure of seeking for healthcare.

Lastly, health-specific efforts, social welfare programmes such as the presidential conditional cash transfers, food support, and microcredit loans could be integrated into health policies. These policies would help households uphold stability and limit the need for detrimental coping mechanisms like delaying treatment or selling assets to settle hospital bills.

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# **Analysis of the Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Its Implications for Farmers in Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

Occupational hazards in the agricultural sector, have posed serious risks to both workers' lives and agricultural productivity. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is essential for safeguarding farmers' health, safety and well-being. However, only a few studies in Nigeria have specifically examined the challenges that small and medium scale farmers face when adopting PPE for agrochemical use. This paper interrogates the challenges that small and medium scale farmers face in adopting PPE for agrochemical use and the health implications of their inability or failure to adequately make use of PPE when handling agrochemicals. In other words, the paper examines the barriers to PPE use among these farmers, utilizing secondary data while being guided by the Fundamental Cause Theory. The paper underscores the need for increased awareness of the health risks associated with agrochemical usage in farm management. The paper concludes that the socio-economic status of farmers, has a significant effect on the use of PPE, and consequently affects the health status of the farmers in different ways. The paper recommends targeted interventions by both governmental and non-governmental organizations through a comprehensive education on the need for the use of PPE, good regulatory measures, as well as the alleviation of poverty among rural farmers through financial assistance, among others, to ensure that they can afford necessary safety equipment to mitigate the health risks associated with agrochemical usage.

**Keywords:** Agrochemicals; Health Hazards; Personal Protective Equipment; Small scale Farmers

## Introduction

The agricultural sector has become the second largest occupation the world over with the potential to stimulate economic growth and provide livelihoods. The sector comprises crop production, livestock, forestry, and fisheries. In Nigeria, for example, the crop production sector has remained the most significant driver of the other sub-sectors, thus accounting for 91 percent of agricultural sector growth in the third quarter of 2021 (NBS, 2022). In fact, the majority of agricultural practices are conducted by small holder farmers who operate at subsistence level. The farming system in Nigeria has also evolved from traditional to conventional farming practices, resulting in the dependence on the use of agrochemicals (Olowogbo, Fakayode, Jolaiya, & Oke, 2013).

The use of agrochemicals, has become an integral part of modern farming practices, dating back to the 1940s when the first pesticides were manufactured (Bertomev-Sanchez, 2019). Agrochemical usage saw a significant boost during the 1960s' Green Revolution, which relied on science and technology to increase food production and ensure food security through pest control, weed management, and enhanced soil fertility (Sheahan, Barrett & Goldavale (2017). However, the intensive use of agrochemicals has raised serious public health and environmental concerns.

According to Lari, Yamagani, Pandyan, Vanka, Naidu, Kumar, Jee, & Jonnalagadda, (2023), pesticide exposure has been linked to acute and chronic health issues, including morbidities and mortalities, making it a pressing public health issue. Farming, despite its critical role in global food production, has remained one of the most hazardous occupations. Damalas and Hasheem (2010), report that it is frequently associated with high rates of occupational injuries and illnesses. This is particularly evident in developing countries, where a significant proportion of the global health burden related to pesticide exposure is concentrated (Demi & Sicchia, 2021). Unsafe farming practices, such as the improper or insufficient use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), further exacerbate these risks. Ndayambaje, Amuguni, Coffin-Schmitt, Sibon, Ntawubizi, & Van-Wormer, (2019) and Joko, Dewanti, & Dangiran, (2020), have noted that the health risks faced by farmers in these regions stem largely from inadequate adoption of safety measures, including PPE, when handling agrochemicals.

Consequent upon the significance of the agricultural sector, and the attempt to boost agricultural productivity via the use of agrochemicals, the sector has indeed, been fraught with occupational hazards as farmers are frequently exposed to pesticides during preparation

and application, which have been linked to various chronic health conditions, including neurological disorders, cancers, and metabolic syndromes like diabetes and obesity (Garrigu, Laurent, Berthet, Colosio, Jas, Leteureurs, Jackson, Jouzel, Samuel, Lebailly, Galey, Goutille, & Judo, 2020); Lari et al., 2023). Despite the recognized health risks, the adoption of PPE has remained limited due to factors such as cost, discomfort, lack of awareness, and cultural misconceptions (Okoffo, Mensah, & Fosu-Mensah, 2016).

PPE, which includes items like long-sleeved clothing, gloves, goggles, hard hats, and boots, is critical for minimizing farmers' exposure to agrochemical hazards. The proper use of PPE can prevent direct contact with harmful chemicals through oral, dermal, or inhalation exposure (Yarpuz-Bozdogan, 2018). Besides, education and training on the use of PPE have been identified as essential strategies for reducing the health risks associated with agrochemical use. However, non-compliance with PPE guidelines often results in injuries, illnesses, or even fatalities among farmers (James, Ogle-Mustafa, & Chichester, 2023).

It is against this background, that this paper, examines the various challenges preventing the use of PPE by farmers, such as poor access to information, limited financial resources, ignorance and poor perception of PPE, absence of government regulatory policy, among others, and the implications for farmers, especially, their health status with a view to providing policy recommendations; as these challenges remain crucial to safeguarding the physical, mental, and social well-being of farmers, and ensuring sustainable agricultural practices among farmers in Nigeria. Secondary data such as academic journals, periodicals and policy briefs were sourced and reviewed for this study.

### **Clarification of Concepts:**

#### **Agrochemicals**

Agrochemicals are substances used in agriculture to control harmful agents such as insects and weeds and to improve crop and livestock productivity. According to Omari (2014), agrochemicals are chemically synthesized compounds designed to enhance agricultural productivity by controlling pests, diseases, and other detrimental factors. Common examples include herbicides, insecticides, and fungicides, which are primarily utilized to increase yields by minimizing crop losses during both the pre-harvest and post-harvest stages.

Agrochemicals can be classified into agents that destroy, repel, or mitigate pests, each having unique modes of action. Their use contributes to increased productivity, helping to meet global food demand and lowering food prices. Agrochemicals also ensure that agricultural

goods are free from pest contamination, which is essential for consumer safety. However, the use of agrochemicals requires specialized skills to handle the diverse range of chemical products safely. Despite their benefits, agrochemicals still pose significant health risks.

### **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

Afrad et al. (2020) define PPE as any equipment or clothing worn to protect individuals from health hazards. PPE serves to protect the body and reduce the severity of injuries during hazardous agricultural tasks, particularly those involving pesticides. Examples of PPE include hand gloves, hard hats, chemically resistant boots, safety goggles, face shields, respirators, and long-sleeved clothing. These items are designed to address specific risks: for instance, gloves and long-sleeved shirts prevent dermal exposure to agrochemicals, while respirators protect the lungs from inhaling toxic fumes. However, it is important to note that PPE does not eliminate hazards; it only reduces the risks associated with exposure to harmful substances.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

The Fundamental Cause Theory which guides this study is rooted in the Marxist/Conflict Theory, which examines structural inequalities that favour the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. These inequalities are evident in resource distribution, which impacts access to health and safety measures, particularly for underprivileged groups. Bruce G. Link and Jo Phelan formally developed the theory in 1995, emphasizing the persistent relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and health outcomes. They posit that SES acts as a “fundamental cause of disease” by influencing access to essential resources such as wealth, knowledge, skills, power, and social connections. These resources enable individuals to avoid disease and its consequences, while addressing multiple risk factors that vary over time (Link & Phelan, 1995). For instance, individuals with higher SES are better equipped to access protective measures and adopt healthy behaviours, resulting in persistent health disparities across different contexts and eras.

The theory rests on several assumptions. First, it argues that inadequate social factors, particularly SES, serve as fundamental causes of disease due to their role in providing access to critical resources. These resources are transportable across contexts, allowing individuals with higher SES to adapt more effectively to changing health risks. Second, SES influences multiple risk factors and disease outcomes, highlighting the persistent nature of health inequalities. Third, the theory asserts that preventable diseases are more strongly associated

with SES since individuals with greater resources can proactively safeguard their health. These assumptions underscore the systemic nature of health disparities, illustrating how individuals with lower SES face heightened risks and poorer health outcomes due to limited access to vital resources and preventive measures (Phelan et al., 2004).

The Fundamental Cause Theory has practical applications in understanding health disparities and designing interventions to address them. It highlights how SES influences the health challenges faced by specific groups, such as farmers. For example, Small and Medium Scale farmers often lack access to personal protective equipment (PPE) and adequate knowledge about agrochemical hazards, resulting in greater exposure to health risks. The theory underscores the need for systemic interventions, such as education programs and subsidized safety tools, to reduce these disparities. Moreover, it informs public health strategies that target preventable diseases by addressing the social determinants of health and ensuring equitable resource distribution (Clouston & Link, 2021).

A key strength of the Fundamental Cause Theory is its comprehensive framework, which links structural inequalities to health outcomes. By focusing on SES, the theory remains relevant to evolving health risks and provides actionable insights for reducing disparities. It also emphasizes prevention by addressing preventable diseases through improved access to resources. However, the theory is not without its limitations. Critics argue that it narrowly focuses on SES, overlooking individual-level factors such as cognitive abilities and behaviours. For instance, Gottfredson (2004) suggested that the theory should expand to include individual cognitive capabilities, which play a significant role in health decision-making. Additionally, Riley (2020) has critiqued the theory for assuming that health inequalities stem solely from social stratification, neglecting other determinants such as biological or environmental factors. Despite its limitations, the Fundamental Cause Theory provides a valuable lens for analysing the health challenges faced by SMS farmers. It explains how SES shapes access to resources, protective measures, and knowledge, thereby influencing their health outcomes. The theory also sheds light on the mechanisms through which improved SES—such as through subsidies or training programs—can mitigate health risks by addressing systemic barriers.

## **Discussion**

### **The Rationale behind the Use of Personal Protective Equipment among Farmers in Nigeria**

Joshua (2016) has noted that elemental sulphur dusting, one of the earliest known pesticides, was used in ancient Mesopotamia approximately 4,500 years ago. By the 15th century, toxic chemicals such as arsenic, mercury, and lead were applied to crops to kill pests. The 17th century saw the development of nicotine sulphate from tobacco leaves as an insecticide. In the 19th century, natural pesticides like pyrethrum, derived from chrysanthemums, and rotenone, sourced from tropical plants, became widely known. Hence, the importance of recognizing and adhering to PPE requirements, as outlined on pesticide labels, cannot be overstated. These labels, for example, serve as crucial guides, detailing necessary safety precautions. As such, farmers' literacy and positive attitudes toward understanding and following these instructions are vital for ensuring compliance.

Jallow et al. (2017), emphasize that the use of PPE and adherence to safe practices depend on various factors, including farmers' knowledge of pesticide hazards, their understanding of equipment usage, and their beliefs about the risks of pesticide exposure. Similarly, Hashemi et al. (2012) identify perceived risks and social factors as significant barriers to the adoption of PPE, while Sharifzadeh et al. (2017) highlights the low levels of PPE knowledge and compliance in underdeveloped countries. The lack of awareness often leads to unsafe handling practices, increasing the likelihood of exposure to pesticide hazards.

However, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (2022), farmers are often resource-poor and reliant on underdeveloped technologies, which perpetuate the cycle of poverty. Similarly, the World Bank (2016) highlights that, farmers in sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria, lack access to modern agricultural tools and techniques, which has continued to increase their vulnerability to various risks, including health hazards.

Besides, the health implications of agrochemicals exposure, according to Al-Dawood et al (2023), include severe headaches, dizziness, skin and eye irritation, coughing and rhinitis. Similarly, Kousse et al (2023) reports leukaemia and brain tumours as the effects of the exposure of agrochemicals. Besides risks are found to affects thyroid dysfunction among the young age children because synthesis altered the metabolism of thyroid hormone (Ibhazehiebo&Koibuchi, 2014); (Marwanto, Setiani&Suhartono , 2018). Thus, good health of farmers, aid economy growth and enhance quality life; however, poor health status of

farmers, and their vulnerability to health challenges, deter livelihood and the general health status of the society at large.

Similarly, unprotected use of chemicals pose severe threats to human health and the environment, making it a critical public health concern, thus Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) has remained an essential tool in mitigating these risks by reducing the harmful effects of agrochemical exposure through the adoption of protective behaviours. According to Carpenter et al. (2002), PPE is specifically designed to reduce the risks associated with hazardous farming activities. Consequently, the question that comes to mind is: what are the challenges in the effective use of PPE, despite all the effort and strategies to avert the various health hazards and encourage farmers to use PPE in Nigeria?

### **Challenges to the Effective use of Personal Protective Equipment among Farmers in Nigeria**

Despite the various efforts made on the safe use of agrochemicals, and crucial guides detailing reasons for the use, and necessary precautions and preventive measures to adopt against exposure to agrochemicals, the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) has not been effective. Below are some of the factors that have been found to pose challenges to the effective use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) among farmers in Nigeria.

#### ***Level of Poverty among Farmers in Rural Communities in Nigeria***

Nigeria's agricultural sector is heavily influenced by socio-economic factors that shape farmers' access to essential resources and safety measures. Poverty, which has affected approximately 63 percent of the Nigerian population (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022), contributes significantly to the difficulties faced by SMS farmers. The World Bank (2014) further emphasizes that poverty is directly linked to the country's inability to unlock the full potential of its agricultural sector. This situation is compounded by economic policies such as the removal of petroleum subsidies and the unification of the naira, which have further pushed millions of Nigerians into extreme poverty (Iroayan, 2024). Poverty and low socio-economic status (SES) have far-reaching implications, especially for farmers' health and safety.

Research by Javeria et al. (2023) and O'Donnell (2020) suggest that individuals with low SES face poorer health outcomes, as they have limited access to health services and are less able to afford protective measures, such as personal protective equipment (PPE). In

agricultural settings, the use of agrochemicals to control pests and weeds poses significant health risks. However, the ability of farmers to protect themselves through the proper use of PPE is often hindered by their low SES. Those with higher SES, on the other hand, are better positioned to access health services and preventive measures, reducing their exposure to health risks associated with agrochemical use (Darin-Mattson, Fors & Kareholt, 2017).

### ***Poor Access to Information on Effective use of Personal Protective Equipment among Rural Farmers in Nigeria***

Access to information is another critical factor influencing farmers' adoption of safety measures. As such; Modirwa (2019) argues that empowering farmers through adequate information can significantly enhance their productivity and health outcomes. Unfortunately, SMS farmers in Nigeria often face barriers to accessing information due to their limited SES. Many instructional materials on agrochemical use, including safety measures, are often in English and are not easily accessible to farmers with low level of education (Modirwa, 2019).

Furthermore, the channels through which farmers receive information—such as media outlets—tend to favour those with higher SES, leaving SMS farmers at a disadvantage. This information gap exacerbates the challenges SMS farmers face in understanding the health risks associated with agrochemicals and the importance of using PPE. Without proper knowledge, farmers are less likely to invest in PPE, even though these measures are essential for their protection against health hazards. According to Phelan, Link, and Tehranifar (2010), individuals with lower social status are more vulnerable to health challenges because they lack the resources to afford protective measures, including PPE.

### ***Poverty among Farmers in Rural Communities in Nigeria***

A financial constraint is another significant challenge for SMS farmers when it comes to adopting health and safety measures. Many SMS farmers struggle with limited financial resources, which have restricted their ability to invest in PPE, training, and other safety measures (Brown & Garcia, 2021). This is particularly problematic in the agricultural sector, where farmers often operate with tight budgets and must prioritize immediate operational needs over long-term safety investments. Brown and Garcia (2021) explore how perceived high costs associated with safety measures discourage SMS farmers from adopting PPE. The initial investment in safety equipment, along with ongoing costs for maintenance and training, can be seen as prohibitive, especially for small-scale farmers who operate on narrow profit margins. Consequently, many farmers may prioritize short-term cost savings over the

long-term benefits of safety measures, which can increase their vulnerability to health hazards.

### ***Absence of Government Regulatory Frameworks***

Regulatory challenges also hinder the effective use of PPE among SMS farmers. Williams and Jones (2019), highlight how ambiguous regulatory frameworks and complex compliance requirements create significant barriers for SMEs in the agricultural sector. In Nigeria, many SMS farmers struggle to navigate the complex regulations surrounding agrochemical use, including safety protocols and PPE requirements. The lack of clear and consistent guidelines on agrochemical handling and the storage of PPE have contributed to non-compliance with safety standards. Furthermore, weak enforcement of regulatory standards has exacerbated the problem. Inadequate penalties for non-compliance and the absence of rigorous enforcement mechanisms have also created an environment where safety measures are often viewed as optional rather than mandatory (Williams & Jones, 2019). The regulatory leniency, in fact, has lead SMS farmers to neglect the use of PPE has further jeopardized their health and safety.

### ***Ignorance and misperception of Agrochemical and use of PPE among Farmers in Nigeria***

In addition to financial and regulatory barriers, psychological factors also play a role in SMS farmers' willingness to adopt safety measures. Miller and Clark (2017) examine psychological barriers such as complacency, risk perception, and lack of safety awareness, which hinder adherence to safety protocols in agrochemical handling. Farmers who perceive agrochemicals as less hazardous may be less likely to use PPE, while those who are complacent due to long-term exposure to agrochemicals may become desensitized to the risks. Moreover, a lack of safety awareness is a significant psychological barrier. Many farmers have limited knowledge of the potential health risks associated with agrochemical exposure and may not fully understand the importance of PPE. However, Miller and Clark (2017) suggest that addressing these psychological barriers requires ongoing education and training, as well as a cultural shift toward prioritizing safety over productivity.

### **Implications of the Challenges in the Effective use of Personal Protective Equipment for Farmers in Nigeria**

The implications of the challenges regarding the effective use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) by famers, from all indications, strongly revolve around internal health issues among famers, and public health challenges for the society at large. As these

challenges persist, farmer's health will continue to worsen. The employment of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to reduce the broad health hazards of agricultural pesticide exposure will continue to remain a priority for famers in Nigeria.

Thus PPE has become a significant safety shield that has helped farmers avoid health hazard risks associated with the use of agrochemicals (Sooktanlou&Allayari, 2021). For example, Ekmekci and Yaman (2024) posit that farming is a highly risky occupational that exposes individuals to a number of work related accident and health issues yearly. The implication of this is that, potential farmers may not want to venture into agricultural practices as a result of the potential health hazards of agrochemicals to famers.

Another implication is economic leakage. The increasing level of body infections and hard earned income of farmers will be used in treating infections/diseases that would have been avoided by taking precautionary measures such as the use PPE by famers. This is why Yarpuz-Bozdogan (2018), reports that there is a high increase in the trend of pesticides exposure infection among the farm-workers due to lack of safety behavior, especially the non- compliance to PPE. As such, Joko et al. (2020) attributes lack of awareness and improper perception of the influence of the safety behavior among farmers; while Ali et al. (2020) have added that unintended application error and low quality use among farmers have been responsible for the health hazards of agrochemicals. Fizulmi and Agustina (2024), suggest that nose mark must be changed in every 8 hours, because if worn for long, the filtered particles will accumulates on the nose mask and consequently prevent a optimal functioning of human body system, but because of poor sanitation system farmers have adopted has also contributed to the health hazard associated with the use of agrochemicals.

Another implication is that there will be low productivity as a result of high morbidity and mortality rates among famers, when a significant number of farmers are continually exposed to agrochemical exposure. This why the International Labor Organization(ILO) (2013) as cited in Fitzulmi and Agustina (2024) reports that annually 25 million farm-workers experience pesticides poisoning, resulting in 180,000 deaths in the rural area in developing countries.

Another implication is that, farmers are continually experience external and internal body damage insidiously, as such, Raini (2007), notes that, pesticides enter the human body in several ways, namely, through the skin, breathing, or mouth. Pesticides that enter through the mouth and eyes will be absorbed immediately and continue as long as the pesticides are still

on the skin. Absorption speed varies by body part and the level of toxicity of the agrochemicals. The transfer of pesticide residues from one part of the body to another is effortless. Besides, residues can move from the hands to the sweaty forehead or genital area. In this part, the absorption rate of deposition is very high; and oral exposure as well can result in severe or even death, if pesticides are ingested. Also, in a study conducted by Amilia, Joy and Sunardi (2016), they reported that 75 percent of farmers in Parongpong District, West Bandung, in Indonesia have health problems such as nausea, vomiting, dizziness, and itching on the skin. Ramadhaningtiyas, Dewi and Sugihardjo (2021) have also reported that farmers have a serious potential danger to exposure and poisoning of pesticides due to non-application of occupational health safety (PPE) which its usage is still low.

Another implication is that farmers are continually plagued by terminal and degenerative diseases, given the prolonged exposure to agrochemicals. In this regard, Baldi et al. (2013) and Laurent et al. (2016), report that there is a linkage between chronic illness and exposure of agriculture pesticides such as several neurological illnesses and some cancers, Parkinson's disease, prostate cancer, malignant non-Hodgkin lymphoma, including multiple myeloma; while Ramadhaningtiyas et al (2021), have added that farmers who do not use PPE when spraying pesticides often experience serious health complaints such as poisoning.

## **Conclusion**

Factors responsible for the inability to recognise and imbibe safety measures by farmers in Nigeria, regarding the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) are multifaceted. The failure or inability stems from socio-economic, financial, regulatory, and psychological factors that hinder the adoption of safety measures. Poverty, limited access to information, financial constraints, ambiguous regulations, and psychological barriers such as lack of awareness or perceived negligence contribute significantly to the underutilization of PPE. Consequently, these issues not only compromise the health and safety of farmers, but also undermine the overall productivity and sustainability of farmers. The paper concludes that, there is a critical need for a healthy and safe working environment for farm workers, to enhance their performance and contribute to farmers' livelihood and effectively enhance economic development of the society at large. This is because without proper attention to health and safety, the goals of sustainable development may become difficult to realize. As such, it is imperative to timely address the underlying causes of the challenges in order to foster a culture of safety and improve the occupational conditions of farmers in Nigeria.

## Recommendations

To overcome the obstacles identified in this study, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

- i. There is an urgent need for relevant government agencies to educate farmers about the risks associated with their occupation. Awareness campaigns should focus on the dangers of neglecting PPE use and the long-term benefits of adopting safety practices. Efforts should also be made to highlight the benefits of safe work practices, which will not only reduce the incidence of farm accidents, but also improve overall productivity. This is because, demonstrating how effective safety measures are, can enhance the work environment and encourage more widespread adoption and usage of PPE among farmers.
- ii. A strong emphasis should be placed on the development of risk evaluation and prevention strategies, while farmers should be encouraged to conduct regular risk assessments and implement safety protocols to minimize hazards and ensure their well-being.
- iii. A robust regulatory framework that prioritizes occupational health and safety should be developed. Such a framework would provide guidelines for safety, thus making the integration of safety practices into daily operations more seamless and effective.
- iv. Financial and technical assistance should be provided to SMS farmers to help them acquire PPE and embrace safety measures. This support could come in the form of subsidies, low-interest loans, or partnerships with safety equipment providers.

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# **Socio- Economic Status and the Utilization of Modern Family Planning Methods among Sexually Active Women in Nasarawa Southern Senatorial Zone**

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## **Abstract**

This study assessed socio-economic status and the utilization of modern family planning methods among sexually active women in Nasarawa South Senatorial Zone, Nasarawa State. This is premised on the thesis that the family being the bedrock of society, there is the need for proper family planning to drive meaningful development. The study specifically examined key socio-economic factors affecting the utilization of modern family planning methods among sexually active women in Nasarawa South Senatorial Zone of Nasarawa State. Such factors include level of education, occupation, income and location of residence. Data were collected using Questionnaire and key informant interview (KII). A total of 1067 questionnaire copies was administered, out of which 1,025, representing 96.1% return rate, were used for the analysis. The study which was conducted in Awe, Doma, Keana, Lafia and Obi, the five Local Government Areas that constitute the Nasarawa South Senatorial Zone, found that location of residence, educational level, occupation and income level, influence use of modern family planning methods among women in the study location and recommends that Government and Non-Governmental organizations should intensify campaigns on girl-child education, enhance vocational and income generating activities for women and girls as well as create job opportunities for women to mitigate poverty. It also recommends that appropriate contraceptives should be made available to desiring women to boost family planning.

**Keywords:** Education, Family Planning; Girl Child; Non-utilization; Poverty; Socio-economic.

## **Introduction**

Family planning is so essential that it is one of the twelve pillars of reproductive health and its main goal is to help women protect themselves from unintended pregnancies (Federal Ministry of Health, 2005; Ugwu, 2022). Nations stabilize their population growth by reduction in the rate of maternal and infant mortality when they adopt effective family planning strategies. These empower women to pursue and acquire quality education, vocational/income generating skills and engage in occupations that help alleviate poverty among women. (Osakinle 2010; Utoo, Swende, Utoo, and Ifenne, 2012). As at 2021, the number of women within reproductive age 15-49 years globally was 1.9 billion. Even though about 874 million women are using a modern contraceptive, however, 164 million women who desire to delay or avoid pregnancy do not utilize any method of family planning due to several factors which include cost of using contraceptives, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2023). The UNFPA (2023), estimated that over 50 million women experience unintended pregnancies globally, about 40% of this number engages in unsafe abortion, resulting in death or life long disabilities.

The costs of contraception greatly limit the use of such contraceptives (Aremu, 2020). Similarly, the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS, 2018) and Asif MF & Pervaiz Z. (2019) found that socioeconomic factors such as educational level, location of residence, poverty and unemployment showed significant association with unmet need for modern contraception while women from the poorest households are worst affected (Arsalan, Moiz, Muhammad and Kassim, 2022).

In Ethiopia women of reproductive age who earn a higher household monthly income and are urban residents are more likely to access good knowledge of family planning and this influences the use of modern family planning (Delayehu, Balkachew, Alula, Tewodros, Munir, Merhawi, Berhem and Yonas (2020). In Nigeria, studies by Ekholuenetale, Owobi and Shishi (2022) found decreasing prevalence of contraceptive uptake among women, a situation attributable to the socio-economic status of women, such as their level of education, household wealth, location of residence and household income. It is a fact that increasing women's socioeconomic status can increase contraceptive use. Studies by Alo, Daini, Omisile, Ubah, delusi and Idoko-Asuelimhen (2020) found that educational level, occupation and residence location, among other factors, have significant influence on the use of modern contraceptives, while Alapa and Akubo (2020), assert that women's education enhances their

reproductive rights on the spacing, number and timing of child bearing. This implies that women who have some level of education either at the secondary or tertiary levels can decide to adopt the utilization of modern family methods to achieve their reproductive and developmental goals especially when they are gainfully employed.

The Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS, 2018) reported a low rate of use among married women and uptake remains lowest in Northern States. However, women residing in urban areas have higher access and use of contraceptives. This suggests that the highest predictors of contraceptive uptake are income, occupation, location of residence and wealth index. Several efforts both by government and international organization to increase access to modern family for women have been reported. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2017) noted that the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation launched the Family Planning 2020 partnership in 2012 to assist more women meet their contraceptive needs. Similarly, (Ahinkorah; Ameyaw and Seidu, 2020; UNFPA 2020;) acknowledged that the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have made tremendous efforts through their programmes to strengthen national health systems by advocating for family planning supportive policies through ensuring a steady and reliable supply of quality contraceptives in Sub-Saharan African countries where the unmet needs are reportedly high.

Despite the existence of numerous studies on socio-economic factors and use of modern family planning globally and Nigeria particularly, there is a gap in literature as no literature existed on the influence of socio-economic status and use of modern family planning among sexually active women. It is in this light that this study assesses the influence of socio-economic status and the utilization of modern family planning methods among sexually active women in Nasarawa South Senatorial Zone, Nasarawa State.

Specifically, the objective of study was to: **examine key socio-economic factors affecting the utilization of modern family planning** methods among sexually active women in Nasarawa South Senatorial Zone of Nasarawa State.

### **Hypothesis**

- i. H<sub>0</sub>: The socio-economic status of sexually active women does not have significant influence on the use of modern family planning methods.

## **Methodology**

The study adopted a cross sectional survey research design. Cross sectional survey is relevant for this study because it is a population-based study which gives room for generalization on the entire population using selected samples. It also allows for direct observation by the researcher for the phenomenon under investigation. It also helped in collecting data from a large population of women of reproductive age by careful sampling without bias.

A mixed methods approach was adopted which enables triangulation and aids the validation of findings. The mixed methods comprised both quantitative and qualitative approaches while primary data were collected using questionnaire and Key Informant Interview (KII). The sample distribution for the study was women of reproductive age from 15-49 years from various ethnic groups and walks of life. A total of 1067 respondents were arrived at using the Cochran formula for sample size determination.

Multi stage sampling technique was used in the selection of respondents for the study. Cluster sampling technique was first used to divide the study area into clusters using the existing internal structure of the Local Government Areas (LGAs). Nasarawa South is made up of five Local Governments: Awe, Doma, Keana, Lafia, and Obi, all of which served as the first cluster of study. Five (5) wards were then selected randomly from each local government area making a total of twenty-five (25) wards for the study.

The next stage involved the selection of the sample size that represented a cluster. To give room for fair representation of samples from a cluster, the population size of each cluster was drawn using proportionate sample. A structured questionnaire was used to generate data for the study. The questionnaire covered four (4) sections, A, B, C and D. The first section contained questions on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The subsequent sections contained general questions on socio-economic status and utilization of modern family planning methods among sexually active women in Nasarawa Southern Senatorial Zone.

Key Informant Interview was conducted to gain deeper understanding of the correlation between socio-economic status and the utilization of modern contraceptives among sexually active women in the study area. The KII guide contained open-ended questions which allowed the interviewees the liberty to speak extensively on their knowledge of modern family. It also afforded the interviewer the opportunity to probe further for more responses.

An interview schedule was used to elicit responses from the participants selected from among women of reproductive age who have used one or more types of modern contraceptives in the study area. Three of such women were selected per Local Government Area for the 5 LGAs making a total of 15 participants. Each interview session lasted about 45 minutes and electronic recording devices such as phones were used to record the interviews while the researchers and their assistants took notes in the course of the exercise. The KII was carried out on women who confirmed having used or are currently using, at least one type of family planning method. Data for the study were collected by the researchers with the support of five (5) trained research assistants from the study area.

The data analysis was done using quantitative and qualitative methods. The analysis was executed with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 26.0 and presented both descriptively and inferentially. The analysis was conducted at the Univariate level using descriptive statistics and presented with the use of frequency distribution tables, means and standard deviation while at the bivariate level, the Chi-square test of dependence was used. The qualitative data on the other hand were transcribed and content analysed. Respondents' views and special notations expressed during the interview sessions with emphasis on the main objectives of the study were extracted and used as illustrative quotes. The results generated from the interviews complimented data from the quantitative results.

## **Results**

A total of 1067 copies of questionnaire was administered, out of which 1,025, representing 96.1% return rate, were used for the analysis. Respondents indicated their socio-demographic characteristics as follows; age, marital status, education, occupations, religious affiliation, and income and location residence as requested by the questionnaire. These demographic variables were deemed important in determining their influence on respondents' socio-economic status and contraceptive use.

The results relating to the respondents' demographic characteristics are presented in table 1.0

**Table 1.0: Percentage distribution of respondents by Socio-demographic characteristics**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency(N=1025)</b>	<b>Percentage(100)</b>
<b>Age</b>		
15-19	33	3.2
20-24	130	12.7
25-29	256	25.0
30-34	223	21.8
35-39	196	19.1
40-44	111	10.8
45-49	76	7.4
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	231	22.5
Married	658	64.2
Widowed	69	6.7
Divorced	41	4.0
Separated	26	2.5
<b>Educational background</b>		
Non-formal	99	9.7
Primary	213	20.8
Incomplete secondary	201	19.6
Completed secondary	302	29.5
Tertiary	210	20.5
<b>Occupation</b>		
Farming	322	31.4
Self employed	212	20.7
Private employed	130	12.7
Government employed	260	25.4
Students (Unemployed)	101	9.9
<b>Religious affiliation</b>		
Islam	533	52.0
Christianity	476	46.4
Traditional	16	1.6
<b>Income</b>		
<30,000	215	21.0
30,000-39,000	338	33.0
40,000-49,000	223	21.8
50,000-59,000	105	10.2
60,000 -69,000	80	7.8
70, 000 and above	64	6.2
<b>Location</b>		
<b>Urban</b>	463	45.2
<b>Rural</b>	562	54.8

**Source:** Field Survey, 2025

The results presented in table 1.0 show that 100% of respondents are within the reproductive ages, however 62.7% are between the ages of 15 to 34 years which constitute the more fertile periods of a woman's life. The implication of this is that women in coitus relationships in the study location may need contraceptives to avoid unplanned pregnancies for both married and unmarried females and to also properly plan and space children for the married women. The

distribution on the educational background of the respondents showed that there was much value on education as 90.4% of respondents had one form of education or the other.

In terms of occupation, 31.4% were farmers with 54.8% of the respondents residing in rural communities where there is vast expanse of arable land for farming. The massive engagement of women in farming activities as a means of livelihood could be due to lack of white collar jobs. Also campaigns for Nigerian citizens to be actively engaged in the agricultural sector to be able to earn a living and help Nigeria become a food sufficient country may have also accounted for the huge engagement of the sample population in farming activities.

The income level of the respondents is relatively low as most of them (33.0%) earn a monthly income of between 30,000 and 39,000 Naira while only (6.2%) earn monthly income above 70,000 Naira. The implication of the poor financial status of women in the study location is that a lot of women may find it difficult to engage in family planning where out-of-pocket payment is enforced. Respondents' religious affiliation showed that adherents of Islam were 52.0 % while Christians accounted for 46.4%. The table showed that 1.6% of the respondents were traditional worshipers.

**Table 2.0: Socio-economic status and use of modern family planning**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Not often</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Education Level</b>				
Non Formal	11	48	40	99
Primary	19	160	34	213
Incomplete Secondary	33	86	82	201
Complete Secondary	70	73	159	302
Tertiary	46	21	143	210
<b>Occupation</b>				
Farming	27	206	89	322
Self employed	29	21	162	212
Private employed	38	33	59	130
Govt. employed	36	92	132	260
Students (Unemployed)	49	36	16	101
<b>Income</b>				
<30000	12	87	116	215
30000-39000	28	203	107	338
40000-49000	84	32	107	223
50000-59000	19	26	60	105
60000-69000	13	16	51	80
70000 and above	23	24	17	64
<b>Location</b>				
Urban	132	96	235	463
Rural	47	292	223	562

**Source:** Researchers' compilation

Data presented in table 2.0 showed the socio-economic status and use of modern family planning with 3 scale rating of “often”, “none” and “not often”. The number of respondents who have completed secondary school or have a tertiary level of education and often use modern family planning method are 70 and 46; while those who do not often use are 159 and 143 respectively. This is higher compared to the other lower levels of education of respondents, thereby implying that formal education influences the use of modern family planning in the study location. Those who belong to the students / unemployed respondent’ category are 49 and they who often use modern family planning whereas those in private and government employment are 162 and 132 respondents. This category does not often use modern family planning, implying that the type of occupation one has, can determine whether or not they use modern family very often or not often.

Also, women in the income ofrange N40, 000.00- N49, 000.00 are most likely to use modern family as 84 of the respondents reported often using modern family planning whereas those with less than N3, 000.00 income are less often to use modern family planning with 12 respondents in this category often using. This implies that the higher a woman earns the more likely she can afford to use modern family Planning.

Furthermore, women residing in urban areas are more likely to use modern family planning with 132 respondent saying they often use while only 47 respondents often use modern family planning in the rural areas. This implies that settlement type influences the use of Family planning. This further the demonstrated that socio-economic status of women drive the use of modern family planning among sexually active women.

The data presented in Table 3.0 represent the Chi-Square test of socio -economic variables of the respondents and their use of modern family methods.

**Table 3.0: Chi-Square test of socio-economic status and use of modern family planning**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Not often</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>X<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>P Value</b>
<b>Education Level</b>							
Non Formal	11	48	40	99	170.008	8	.000
Primary	19	160	34	213			
Incomplete Secondary	33	86	82	201			
Complete Secondary	70	73	159	302			
Tertiary	46	21	143	210			
<b>Occupation</b>							
Farming	27	206	89	322	140.458	8	.000
Self employed	29	21	162	212			
Private employed	38	33	59	130			
Govt. employed	36	92	132	260			
Students (Unemployed)	49	36	16	101			
<b>Income</b>							
<30000	12	87	116	215	336.470	10	.000
30000-39000	28	203	107	338			
40000-49000	84	32	107	223			
50000-59000	19	26	60	105			
60000-69000	13	16	51	80			
70000 and above	23	24	17	64			
<b>Location</b>							
Urban	132	96	235	463	41.863	2	.000
Rural	47	292	223	562			

**Source:** Researchers' compilation

The Chi-square test results presented in table 3.0 revealed that socio- economicstatus has influence on the use of modern family planning methods among women in the study area. Key socio-economic variables examined are occupation; educational level, income and location all significantly influence the use of modern family planning methods. The results were found to be significant at  $P < 0.05$  for all the variables. This implies that the null hypothesis which states that the socio- economicstatus of sexually active women does not have significant influence on the use of modern family planning methods was rejected and the alternate accepted

Majority of the participants during the KII confirmed that that socio- economic status has influence on their use of modern contraceptives. A 27 year old woman stated that:

Engaging in family planning using modern methods regularly is sometimes a problem forme because of cost of obtaining. I find it difficult to buy contraceptives sometime even when I know I need it. At the end, i don't bother when I don't have money.

This shows that when modern contraceptives come at a cost that women in communities cannot afford, their unmet need for family planning will continue especially for many women who may be earning low income or whose partners may not be able to support them due to financial constraints. And even though a woman is married and cannot afford contraceptives she may have unplanned pregnancy or resort to the use of traditional or natural methods which in most cases is not reliable. In line with this, another woman, a 32 year old stated that:

We do not have health facilities in this community where a woman can walk in and get proper family planning. Locating a primary health care facility properly equipped with family planning services suitable for any woman is quite a distance. What we have around are just drug stores that just recommend any pill for women and the pills sometimes cause a lot of problem. There was a time I took one and continued to bleed after my normal monthly flow and I was so afraid. I told one of my friends about it and she told me it once happened to her and she stopped usage. I never used it again after my experience.

The opinions from the interview sessions corroborate the quantitative data results. The statements from the various key informants highlighted, implied that despite the fact that women may be aware of some family planning methods such awareness may not necessarily determine the use of modern family methods due to factors relating to their socio economic status such as income, cost, location, among other socio-economic conditions as revealed in this study.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The study assessed the socio - economic status of women vis-a-vis the use of modern family planning methods among sexually active women. The study revealed that key socio-economic statuses such as location of residence, educational level, occupation and income level, are key determinants of the use of modern family planning methods among sexually active women in the study location. This finding agrees with those from the study of Ekholuenetale, et al, (2022) which assessed the effects of women's socioeconomic position on modern approaches to birth control in sub-Saharan Africa wherein it observed that the prevalence of modern methods of contraceptive uptake among women is decreasing due to their socio-economic status.

A study on out-of-pocket payment for modern contraception carried out by Radovich, Barasa, Cavallaro, Wong, Borghi, Lynch, Lyons, Abuya and Benova (2019) noted that poverty has

been reported to be a barrier to access to contraceptives; this is a commonly reported determinant of access to health services, particularly in contexts where out-of-pocket payment is prevalent. When a woman takes a decision to utilize modern family planning services but the services are not free but rendered for a fee beyond what she can afford, she will decline using such a method because of her low socio-economic status. In a comparative study on the association between socioeconomic factors and unmet needs for modern contraception across low- and lower-middle-income countries of Asia and sub-Saharan Africa in general, conducted by Asibul, et al, (2022) found that belonging to the poorest households is significantly associated to unmet need of modern contraception. In line with this finding a study carried out by Delayehu, et al (2020) in Ethiopia found that socio economic factors which included earning a higher household monthly income are predictors of knowledge and use of modern family planning methods. Studies carried out in Nigeria particularly, also revealed that the socio-economic status of women influence their use of modern contraceptive.

A study conducted by Alo, et al, (2020) found that the socio-economic status of women among other factors have significant influence on the use of modern contraceptives. Also, a study by Aremu (2020) on the influence of socioeconomic status on women's preferences for modern contraceptive providers observed that costs of contraception usually limit the use of contraceptives and this usually determines choices women make on whether to engage in use of contraceptives or explore natural or traditional methods to meet their needs for contraception.

All these findings confirm that many women in Nigeria including women in Nasarawa South Senatorial zone where this study was carried out are unable to utilize modern family planning methods from which they could benefit while others with low socio-economic status are more likely to continue to suffer the problem of unmet needs for modern family planning due to factors associated with their socio-economic status.

Findings from the report of the Nigerian Demographic Health Survey (NDHS, 2018) revealed that use of modern contraceptives remains low among women. Even though various factors could be responsible for the low use of modern family planning methods, the finding from this study clearly shows that socio-economic status is one of such factors. The socio-demographic distribution of participants in Nasarawa South Senatorial Zone showed that

majority of the study participants are low income earners. It is therefore not surprising to find that socio-economic status influences use of modern contraceptives in the study location.

## **Conclusion**

The use of modern family planning among sexually active women in communities of Nasarawa Southern Senatorial Zone is influenced by diverse factors. The study showed that women who completed secondary school or have tertiary level of education, more often than not, use Family Planning than their counterpart with no formal education. Students / Unemployed and privately employed women more often, use modern family planning devices compared to women with other types of occupation. The study revealed that women who earn N40, 000.00.00 and above, more often use modern family than with lower income counterparts. The study also indicated that women residing in urban areas where health care facilities are better equipped more often use family planning compared to those in underserved rural areas with less equipped health facilities.

## **Recommendations**

The study recommends as follows:

- i. The Nasarawa State Government with the support of the Federal and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should intensify campaigns on girl child education, provide vocational and income generating opportunities for women and girls as well as create jobs for women to mitigate poverty.
- ii. Relevant agencies should also encourage usage of modern family planning methods among desiring women by providing appropriate contraceptives to women regardless of their socio-economic status.

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