

Urban Poverty and Juvenile Delinquency in Nigeria: Through the Lens of Port Harcourt Remand Home Inmates

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Abstract

This study sets out to examine the problem of urban poverty and juvenile crime in Nigeria using the Port Harcourt Remand Home in Rivers State as a case study. To achieve this objective, 300 respondents were selected for questionnaire completion using a simple random sampling technique. The study relied on both primary and secondary sources of data collection and the simple percentage and chi-square statistical methods were applied in the data analysis process. The findings show that urban poverty is a driving force behind juvenile delinquency in Port Harcourt. The findings also suggest that the Remand Home is ill-equipped to manage juvenile offenders; hence the rehabilitation of inmates is rarely a reality. These findings have important implications for both theory and practice. The study recommends structural reforms towards economic efficiency, equity and democracy as a critical turning point in urban poverty alleviation. It is expected that such reformed conditions will allow for better resource management and improved social, economic and political conditions, thereby reducing many of the pressures that lead to crime and delinquency.

1. Background

The problem of juvenile delinquency, particularly in urban areas, has grown significantly in recent years (Moffit, 2009). A 2009 global survey of juvenile crime in cities, conducted by UNIHABITAT, collected considerable data on the dynamics of the problem. The survey reported that in Europe, juvenile crime had increased by 2.6% compared to the previous year's increase of 1.7%. South East Asia, Latin America and North America were reported to have juvenile crime growth rates of 0.7%, 3.9% and 1.8% respectively. The relatively high rate of juvenile crime in Latin America has been attributed to the drug economy in places like Mexico and Colombia (Raul, 2010). In Africa, according to UNIHABITAT, juvenile criminality has continued to increase largely as a result of chronic unemployment among youth. Between 2007 and 2009, juvenile crime increased from 3.2% to 5.7%. Such increases have also been linked to the rate at which cities proliferate or the levels of urbanization and the social changes and complexities that accompany these processes, including urban poverty (UN, 2008). Urbanization-related increases in crime rates are often more common in Africa where average annual growth rates have been estimated at 7.2% between 1980 and 1990 and 9.3% between 1990 and 2000.

The ever-growing phenomenon of urban poverty means considerable deprivations for hundreds of thousands on a daily basis. Some of the daily challenges encountered by the urban poor include:

limited access to employment opportunities and income, inadequate and insecure housing and services, violent and unhealthy environments, little or no social protection mechanisms, and limited access to adequate health and education opportunities (World Bank, 2009:17).

But urban poverty is not just a collection of characteristics; it is also a dynamic condition of vulnerability or susceptibility to risk. In order to provide a richer understanding of urban poverty, it is important to begin with a dynamic framework of poverty (vulnerability and asset ownership), its multiple characteristics and its cumulative impacts (The World Bank, 2009). One such cumulative impact of urban poverty is juvenile involvement in criminality; an involvement known to have profound negative effects on a society's quality of life via the imposition of additional social costs [Anderson, 2005]. Of particular concern is the possibility that the volume of juvenile delinquents in Nigeria may be related in part to the spatial concentration of low-income families in high-poverty, high-crime urban neighbourhoods.

It is important to note that there is considerable empirical research (see of instance; Alemika & Chukwuma, 2005; Makinde, 2007; Olutuah & Adesiji, 2009) on juvenile delinquency in Nigeria. Alemika and Chukwuma's (2005) study of the juvenile justice system in Nigeria, which draws from selected samples of inmates in remand homes and borstal homes as well as the officials in these homes, provides us with an understanding of the traditional philosophy and current state of juvenile justice administration in the country which the authors declare to be very poor. Olutuah and Adesiji (2009), on the other hand, contend that poor housing tends to generate slums which in turn provide the impetus for deviant behaviour

largely involving children in urban areas.

The above scholars have contributed to our understanding of urban juvenile delinquency, using different variables in different cities in Nigeria, without explicitly focusing on urban poverty. Our study hopes to fill this empirical gap by providing key insights into the relationship between urban poverty and juvenile crime using inmates at the Remand Home in Port Harcourt as a case study.

2. Objectives of the Study

- 1) To identify the types of juvenile crimes in Port Harcourt;
- 2) To determine if children from poor homes become involved in juvenile crimes more often than children from rich homes in Port Harcourt; and
- 3) To examine the state of the Remand Home in Port Harcourt.

3. Hypotheses

H₁: *There is a significant difference between children from poor homes and children from wealthy homes in terms of juvenile crimes in Port Harcourt.*

H₂: *There is a significant relationship between poorly equipped Remand Homes and the lack of proper rehabilitation for juvenile criminals in Port Harcourt.*

4. Empirical Studies on Urban Poverty

In nations of the Third World, where dependent industrialization and unplanned urbanization characterize economic and social growth processes, urban poverty has reached crisis proportions. The experiences of dependent growth substantiate the rationale that the poverty crisis is no accident of history. The structural determinants and roots of this situation are profoundly grounded in the systemic peculiarities of past and contemporary directions of growth in the region. In general, it seems that the aggravation of the urban poverty problem is a phenomenon originating in rural regions marked by gross underdevelopment. As Fagade (2008:75) reports:

urban functional realities in the third world convincingly indicate that the condition of extreme deterioration and explosive marginalisation, visible in the various urban fabrics particularly in the suburbs, are the culminated products of a structural process, dependency, actuating a marginalisation process emphatic and beginning in the country sides.

In essence, owing to the marked imbalance between the few developing areas (the urban) and the many vast underdeveloped areas (the rural), and specifically due to the acute withering away of the latter, considerable rural populations in recent decades have been swept through the continuous process of direct migration to the few and weakly developing metropolises home to relatively greater economic and production capacity (World Bank, 2009).

Most studies attempting to describe urban poverty have focused on drawing out the characteristics of urban poverty, often by comparing it to rural poverty. However, there is still much debate as to whether urban poverty differs from rural poverty and whether policies to address the two should address them separately or together. In some views, rural and urban poverty are interrelated and there is a need to consider them together given their many structural commonalities, e.g. socially constructed constraints to opportunities (class, gender, race) and macroeconomic policies (terms of trade) (World Bank, 2009). Many also point to the important connections between the two, as household livelihood or survival strategies have both rural and urban components (Yaqub, 2006).

Some urban poverty studies have focused on the growing rate of violence in the urban environment as a major determinant of poverty. Consequently, concerns with the urban environment and violence and insecurity have come to the fore as factors which undermine well-being and quality of life. There is also some evidence of a strong relationship between poor health and poor environmental quality (Hardoy, 2009). According to the World Bank:

The externalities of urban production are disproportionately borne by the poor because of the spatial juxtaposition of industrial and residential functions, high living densities, overcrowded housing and inadequate supply of clean water, sanitation and solid waste disposal services (World Bank, 2009:60).

Violent crimes are more visible in cities and there is a growing understanding that violence should be considered a public health problem for which there are prevention strategies. Urban violence is the result of many factors, although there is still considerable debate about the relative importance of each factor. Certain specialists cite the significance of inadequate incomes, which are usually combined with very poor and overcrowded housing and living conditions, and often insecure tenure, as fertile ground for violence and criminality. Other explanations emphasise the contemporary urban environment in which attractive goods are continuously on display and create targets for potential criminals.

5. Basic Assumptions of Juvenile Delinquency

Worldwide, juvenile crime is fast becoming an urgent concern and a major economic, social, health, and governance issue

(Moser, 2006). Crime and delinquency, including violence of all kinds adversely affect economic and social development, strengthen social exclusion and poverty, undermine citizenship and security, and reduce the capacity of the state to govern effectively (UN, 2005:10).

Although the problem of delinquency is not a new phenomenon, today the African region, with its average of 28.4 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, registers one of the highest rates of homicide and criminal victimisation in the world (UNICRI, 2005). Of all the homicides reported, 28.7 percent were attributable to young men between 10 and 19 years of age.

While social and economic conditions vary both within and among countries, there are still a range of internal and external factors that can be commonly associated with the high levels of youth violence and delinquency in the region. The rapid urbanisation process, together with persistent poverty, inequality, political violence, the inadequacy of social services, the consolidation of transnational crime organisations, the spread of drug use and drug trafficking (especially the arrival of crack-cocaine), the disintegration of families and social networks, and the availability of weapons, are all considered and often cited as the root causes of the upsurge in juvenile crime (Moser, 2006).

The vulnerability of youth to poverty and marginalisation is well illustrated by the number of adolescents working to supplement family income in cities. The International Labour Office estimates that there are at least 15 million children working in urban Africa, and that approximately half of these are between the ages of 6 and 14 years old (ILO, 2009). The World Bank (2009) estimates that in Nigeria 54 percent of urban adolescents and children aged 6-14 are working, most of them in the precarious informal sector and in hazardous conditions.

It is thus easy to conclude that the intensity and severity of juvenile offences are generally determined by the prevailing social, economic and cultural conditions in a country. In many African countries, there is evidence of an increase in juvenile crime taking place concurrently with economic decline, especially in the poor districts of large cities (Moser, 2006). In many cases, street children later become young offenders, having already encountered violence in their immediate social environment as either witnesses or victims of violent acts. The educational attainments of this group are rather low as a rule, basic social experiences acquired in the family are too often insufficient, and their socio-economic environment is characterized by poverty and under- or unemployment (UN, 2005).

Geographical analysis suggests that countries with more urbanized populations have higher registered crime rates than do those with well rooted rural lifestyles and communities (Moser, 2006). This may be attributable to the differences in social control and social cohesion. Rural groupings rely mainly on family and community control as a means of dealing with antisocial behaviour and exhibit markedly lower crime rates. Urban industrialized societies tend to resort to formal legal and judicial measures, an impersonal approach that appears to be linked to higher crime rates. Cultural and institutional differences are such that responses to the same offence may vary widely from one country to another.

6. Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive research design. A simple random sampling technique was adopted to select 300 respondents from the Remand Home in Port Harcourt. In so doing, discreet numbers are allocated to each element in the sample frame and all are placed into a basket. With eyes closed, we randomly selected 300 inmates (one at a time) to form our sample size. This study depended on both primary and secondary sources of data collection. The primary sources of data included the use of self-designed questionnaires while the secondary sources of data were derived from the works of other scholars.

7. Data Presentation and Analysis

Data presentation is based on the relevant objectives and hypotheses outlined above. The objectives are measured with simple percentage analysis, while the research hypotheses are tested using the chi-square statistical tool.

Table 1: *Types of Juvenile Crime in Port Harcourt Remand Homes*

Type of Crime	Frequency	Percentage
Violent Crimes	63	21.0
Property Crimes	96	32.0
Drug Related Crimes	125	41.7
Others	16	5.3
Total	300	100

Source: *Fieldwork, 2011*

As per the above table, 63 (21.0%) of respondents' offences were identified as violent crimes, 96 (32.0%) were identified as property crimes, 125 (41.7%) were drug related and 16 (5.3%) were identified as other crimes.

Table 2: *Children from Poor Homes Commit More Crimes than those from Rich Homes*

Answer Alternatives	Frequency	Percentage %
Agree	207	69.0
Undecided	15	5.0
Disagree	78	26.0
Total	300	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2011

A Table 2 indicates, 207 (69.0%) of respondents agreed that children from poor homes commit more crime than those from rich homes, while 15 (5.0%) remained undecided and 78 (26.0%) disagreed.

Table 3: *Port Harcourt Remand Home has the Capacity to Cater to Inmates' Needs*

Answer Alternatives	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	44	14.6
Undecided	50	16.7
Disagree	206	68.7
Total	300	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2011

As Table 3 reveals, 44 (14.6%) of the respondents agreed that the Remand Home in Port Harcourt has the capacity to cater to inmates' needs, while 50 (15.7%) were undecided, and 206 (68.7%) disagreed.

8. Test of Hypotheses

H_1 : There is a significant difference between children from poor homes and children from wealthy homes in terms of juvenile crime in Port Harcourt.

Table 4: X^2 Calculation for Hypothesis 1

Respondents	Agree	Disagree	Undecided	Total
Female	62 (75.6)	46 (32.76)	18 (17.64)	126
Male	118 (104.4)	32 (45.24)	24 (24.36)	174
Total	180	78	42	300

Source: Fieldwork, 2011

From the above table, the chi-square X^2 calculated value for Hypothesis 2 is as follows:

$$\text{Chi-square } X^2 = \sum \frac{(o - e)^2}{e}$$

Where o = Observed frequency

e = Expected frequency

Expected value is calculated by multiplying the row total by column total for each response and then dividing by the total number of respondents.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Chi-square } X^2 &= \sum \frac{(o - e)^2}{e} \\ &= \frac{(62-75.6)^2}{75.6} + \frac{(118-104.4)^2}{104.4} + \frac{(46-32.76)^2}{32.76} + \frac{(32-45.24)^2}{45.24} + \frac{(24-24.36)^2}{24.36} + \frac{(18-17.64)^2}{17.64} \\ &= 2.45+1.77+5.35+3.87+0.007+0.005 = 13.5 \end{aligned}$$

Chi-square (X^2) calculated value = 13.5

To compare calculated value with table value, Degree of Freedom (DF) is ascertained thus:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{DF} &= (R-1) (C-1) \\ &= (2-1) (3-1) \\ &= 1 \times 2 \end{aligned}$$

DF = 2

At 2 DF, the table value of X^2 at 0.05 level of significance = 5.99

Decision Rule: The general acceptable decision rule for the application of the Chi-square test states: accept the null hypothesis if the calculated value is less than the table value and reject null hypothesis if the calculated value is greater than the table value. In this study, since the calculated value of X^2 is 13.55 and the table value is 5.99, the hypothesis which states that there is a significant difference between children from poor homes and children from

wealthy homes in terms of juvenile crime commission in Port Harcourt is accepted.

H₂: *There is a significant relationship between poorly equipped Remand Homes and the lack of proper rehabilitation for juvenile criminals in Port Harcourt.*

Table 5: *X² Calculation for Hypothesis 2*

Respondents	Agree	Disagree	Undecided	Total
Female	60 (73.92)	46(35.28)	20 (16.8)	126
Male	116(102.08)	38 (48.72)	20(23.2)	174
Total	176	84	40	300

Source: *Fieldwork, 2011*

From the above table, the chi-square X² calculated value for Hypothesis 1 is as follows:

$$\text{Chi-square } X^2 = \sum \frac{(o - e)^2}{e}$$

Where o = Observed frequency

e = Expected frequency

Expected value is calculated by multiplying the row total by column total for each response and divided by total respondents.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Chi-square } X^2 &= \sum \frac{(o - e)^2}{e} \\ &= \frac{(60-73.92)^2}{73.92} + \frac{(116-102.08)^2}{102.08} + \frac{(46-35.28)^2}{35.28} + \frac{(38-48.72)^2}{48.72} + \frac{(20-23.2)^2}{23.2} + \frac{(20-16.8)^2}{16.8} \\ &= 2.62+1.90+3.12+2.32+0.60+0.44 = 11.0 \end{aligned}$$

Chi-square (X²) calculated value = 11.0

To compare calculated value with table value, Degree of Freedom (DF) is ascertained thus:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{DF} &= (R-1) (C-1) \\ &= (2-1) (3-1) \\ &= 1 \times 2 \end{aligned}$$

DF = 2

At 2 DF, the table value of X² at 0.05 level of significance = 5.99

Decision Rule: The general acceptable decision rule for the application of the Chi-square test states: accept the null hypothesis if the calculated value is less than the table value and reject null hypothesis if the calculated value is greater than the table value. In this study, since the calculated value of X² is 11.0 and the table value is 5.99, the hypothesis which states that there is a significant relationship between poorly equipped Remand Homes and the lack of proper rehabilitation for juvenile criminals in Port Harcourt is accepted.

9. Discussion of Findings

It is important to note that the categorization of juvenile crime in this study was arrived at by classifying Port Harcourt Remand Home inmates according to the crimes they committed. Data concerning this objective was presented in Table 1. The data shows that drug related offences are the most common type of juvenile offence with 41.7% of respondents having committed at least one drug related crime. Other types of juvenile crimes prevalent among the inmates included violent crimes against persons at 8% and property crimes at 32.3%. These findings, that juveniles in Port Harcourt are most often involved in drug related crimes, support previous findings by Alemika and Chukwuma (2005) and Makinde (2007), who discovered in Lagos and Ibadan respectively that children between the ages of 14 and 18 are more prone to drug related offences in cities. In fact Alemika and Chukwuma (2005) depict a gruesome scenario in which teens live on drugs and are prepared to steal and kill for drugs often just so that they can survive the streets.

In terms of crimes committed by children from poor homes relative to crimes committed by children from rich homes, we sought some degree of measurability and so made use of agree, undecided and disagree as answer alternatives. In the data presented in Table 2, 69% of the respondents attested to the fact that children from poor homes commit more crime than those from rich homes. This suggests that poverty in cities is a major driver of juvenile criminality. Other studies that support this finding, that children from poor homes find themselves in conflict with the law more often than their counterparts from rich homes, suggest that poor children more often leave home because of the poor living conditions and are consequently exposed to criminality early in their lives (see; Olotuah & Adesiji, 2009 and World Bank, 2009).

In terms of whether the Port Harcourt Remand Home is capable of addressing the needs of its juvenile inmates, we applied data collected from the inmates and observations made during a field visit to the home. Data derived from the inmates was presented in Table 3 and was measured using a three point Likert Scale question (agreed undecided and disagreed). According to the data, 68.7% of respondents felt that the Port Harcourt Remand Home was ill equipped to

manage juvenile offenders. As the Remand Home is the only juvenile penal institution in Port Harcourt, it was not possible to assess the responses held in other types of institutions, such as Borstal institutions and approved schools. Nonetheless, fieldwork observations as well as the responses of the inmates to unstructured interviews clearly indicate that rehabilitation facilities are almost non-existent in the home. This finding of grossly inadequate facilities is consistent with the research by Alemika and Chukwuma (2005) and Makinde (2007).

10. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has established a relationship between urban poverty and juvenile crime in Port Harcourt. This study has contended that economically poor areas are often plagued by high levels of criminal activity involving children between the ages of 14 and 18 years old. In this particular case, almost 70% of the juvenile offenders currently in the Port Harcourt Remand Home reside in Bundu Waterside, Diobu and Bori Camp, all of which can be considered slums. As such, it is easy to see how urban poverty does contribute the necessary and sufficient conditions for children to partake in criminal associations and behaviours.

Based on the findings and conclusions arrived at in this study, the following recommendations are made:

- 1) There is a very real need for structural reforms oriented towards economic efficiency, equity and democracy. These conditions will enhance social, economic and political conditions and thereby reduce the pressures that contribute to crime and delinquency.
- 2) As a follow-up, youth sensitive orientation programmes and properly regulated educational and vocational training schemes should be instituted, especially in squatter and slum settlements. This will ensure that the youth in these environs are meaningfully engaged either in school or some kind of vocation.
- 3) Legally-based provisions should be made by each state for the establishment of well equipped and properly staffed penal institutions. The institutions should be mandated to provide educational and vocational training, to properly feed and clothe inmates, and to provide adequate health care, sanitation and personal hygiene, bed spaces, and recreational facilities for institutionalized offenders. In all cases, institutionalization or custodial treatment of juvenile offenders should be a last resort (Alemika and Chukwuma, 2005).

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