

HIGH RATE OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND CRIME INCREASE IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Crime situation in Nigeria is more intense in urban centres than rural areas due to high level of urban poverty, congestion, unemployment, cost of living, disorganization and moral decadence confronting urban system. The preponderance of urban crimes in Nigeria is a reflection of deprivation, marginalization and breakdown in infrastructure and amenities that are suppose to manage or control crime among urban residents. Violent crimes such as murder, armed robbery, kidnapping and terrorism are the most inhumane crimes that continue to plague Nigeria. Lately, kidnappings for ransom and terrorism have taken the centre stage leading to bloodshed and economic set-backs. The causes are not farfetched as studies have associated rising youth unemployment to the increase in crimes. The youths are also the most volatile when their energies are misdirected or channeled into wrong endeavours. Available data show that youth employment is very rampant in Nigeria and this has contributed immensely to their involvement in criminal activities. The paper argues that criminal activities such as armed robbery, kidnapping, political thuggery, militancy and other social vices found among the unemployed and jobless youths have contributed greatly to the slow pace of development in Nigeria. The paper proffers that addressing youths' unemployment will stop the tide of crime and foster rapid development in Nigeria. We find significantly negative effects of unemployment on high crime rates that are stable across model specifications.

Keywords: Youth, Unemployment, Crimes, Urbanization, Nigeria.

Introduction

There are several reasons to suspect that the available evidence understates the effect of unemployment on crime. Given that much of the previous research relies on time-series variation in macroeconomic conditions, the failure to control for variables that exert procyclical pressure on crime rates may downwardly bias estimates of the unemployment-crime effect. Historically, there have been two major schools of thought regarding the unemployment-crime relationship, the first school focuses on the “supply of offenders” while the second school focuses on the “supply of victims.” Economists have traditionally focused on explaining the economic behavior of potential offenders and the way they react to changes in economic conditions. One basic notion is that in order for an individual to maintain a certain standard of living during a period of unemployment he/she will become more likely to commit a criminal act. However, after being unable to fully substantiate their hypothesis that a positive relationship should exist between unemployment and crime a new school of thought developed.

Unemployment rate in Nigeria has continued to be on the increase despite the abundant human and natural resources available in the country. Chronic youth's unemployment is evident in Nigeria. Every year, thousands of graduates are produced but there are no jobs for majority of them. Nigerian streets are littered with youth hawkers who ordinarily would have found gainful employment in some enterprise (Okafor, 2011). The large number of youths who are unemployed is capable of undermining democratic practice as they constitute a serious threat if engaged by the political class for clandestine and criminal activities. The Nigerian crime-problem is multidimensional and is capable of undermining its corporate existence as well as efforts towards sustainable development. The Nigeria corporate existence and development can be undermined by a number of factors among which is an escalating and uncontrolled crime problem (Tanimu, 2006).

Examining individual-level employment experiences and characteristics offers a more thorough understanding of how work at the individual level influences criminal behavior. Treating community and individual characteristics simultaneously as important predictors of criminal behavior permits the parceling out of the individual and contextual effects through which labor markets influence crime. Unemployment appears to be the root cause of violence in Nigeria. Research suggests that unemployed youths are disproportionately more likely to be perpetrators, as well as victims of crime and violence (Okafor, 2011). The growing gap between the rich and poor affects the society through increased violence. The self employed are in quandary as scant infrastructure makes it impossible for them to ply their trade (Okafor, 2011). This is exacerbated by political corruption, poverty, poor governance, increasing population, and lack of policy initiatives and implementation to some extent encouraged criminal groups to thrive across Nigeria. This paper examines how youth unemployment contributes to violent crimes across Nigeria.

Kidnappings are on the increase across Nigeria and the unemployed youths view the business lucrative. They are available for recruitment by politicians. In the Northern part, they are recruited both by politicians and religious groups to be used in political, religious and terrorism acts.

In the SW Nigeria, they find easy employment in petty criminal activities. The culture must at least accept, if not approve, violent action as a means to an end. This could be the reason why suicide bombing is exclusive to the Northern part of the country as violence is encouraged by some Islamic sects. Political violence is also likely if the current leadership and or the socio-economic and political system are seen as illegitimate. The proposition that unemployment induces criminal behavior is intuitively appealing and grounded in the notion that individuals respond to incentives. Conceptualizing criminal activity as a form of employment that requires time and generates income,⁹ a "rational offender" should compare returns to time use in legal and illegal activities and make decisions accordingly. Holding all else equal, the decrease in income and potential earnings associated with involuntary unemployment increases the relative returns to illegal activity.

The Concept of Crime

Crime is like other concepts in social sciences, which have no generally accepted definition. According to Oxford Dictionary of Sociology (2009), "a crime is held to be an offence, which goes beyond the personal and into the public sphere, breaking prohibitory rules or laws, to

which legitimate punishments or sanctions are attached, and which requires the intervention of a public authority... for crime to be known as such, it must come to the notice of, and be processed through, an administrative system or enforcement agency. It must be reported and recorded by the police (or other investigator); it may then become part of criminal statistics; may or may not be investigated; and may or may not result in a court case." Dambazau (1994) defined crime as an act or omission against public interest and which is prescribed by law enacted by the legislature in the overall interests of the society, and to which prescribed punishment is attached in the event of violation and it involves four major principles which are public wrong, moral wrong, law and punishment for the criminal.

Globally, four out of every ten unemployed persons are young women or young men. In some countries, youth unemployment is three times higher than adult unemployment (Vremudia, 2012). Many youth have become pessimistic, feeling powerless to change their situation (Somavia, 2012). ILO 2011 report shows that one in two young persons was actively participating in the labour market. However, unemployment is only one dimension of the youth employment problem. Apart from high levels of unemployment, there is also a decline in the quality of employment available to youth. Many youth end up in situations informal employment and poor working conditions. Thus the challenge is not just to create employment but to create decent work (Alabi and Alanana, 2012; ILO, 2012). A person could both commit crimes and have a job; it is also possible to change between the two options. Ehrlich considers this and expands his model to include time. Since time is limited, the individual's choice between working and committing crimes is about finding the optimal allocation of time.

In the Ehrlich model, the individuals must make a choice regarding their optimal participation at the beginning of a given period. It is strongly perceived that youth unemployment has given rise to different forms of criminality which has badly affected the economy of the nation. Local businesses have in the wake of violent crime committed by the unemployed youth, resorted to hiring of armed guards for the security of their lives and property thereby incurring extra costs in the running of the business. Some who were unfortunate to have been victims of kidnapping pays huge ransom to secure their release. Unemployment is a social as well as economic issues which every nation deals with regularly but differently. In fact, the classical economists averred that there can never be a situation of total employment in any economy (Ogunyomi & Oginni, 2013). However, situation in Nigeria has assumed an unimaginable proportion. Statistics shows that almost 75% of those who are able and willing to work, cannot find gainful employment especially among the graduates/ school leavers. The situation has become very bad and appears to have defied any remedy. They argued that young individuals experience volatile employment for many reasons finding no association with crime. Grogger (1998) also disagrees with the link between unemployment and crime as he identified that the employed also commit crime. Machin et al. (2011) found that introducing control variables in their methodology led to an insignificant relationship between crime and unemployment.

Looking at unemployment, the partial effect of an increase of the probability of unemployment on entry into illegitimate activities are positive. Thus, an increase in the probability of being unemployed will increase the incentive to commit crimes.

This theory is mostly suited for property crimes since it has more economic incentives compared to violent crimes which are rarely committed due to economic reasons (Levitt, 2004). However, the model may still explain crime that has no economic incentive. If the possibility to earn money legitimately from working increases, then the time that is spent on work will increase, holding everything else constant. This will decrease the available time for committing crime, which in turn may lead to a decrease in the overall crime rate (Ehrlich, 1973). Being unemployed may also make individuals frustrated, which in turn may lead to violent crime (Agnew, 1992). Nilsson and Agell (2003) argue that criminality is an outcome of social interactions. Thus, if the unemployment rate increases, it may create a criminal culture within some groups of society.

The Concept of unemployment

There seems to be a consensus on the definition of unemployment. Simply put, unemployment describes the condition of people who are without jobs (Okafor, 2011). The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines the unemployed as the number of the economically active population who is without work but available and seeking work, including people who have lost their jobs and those who have voluntarily left work (World Bank, 1993). Various forms of unemployment have been identified by scholars. These include seasonal, frictional, cyclical, and structural unemployment (Adebayo, 1999; Damachi, 2001; Hollister and Goldstein, 1994; Todaro, 1992). Unemployment is a global trend but it occurs mostly in the developing countries of the world, with social, economic, political and psychological attendants. Thus massive youth's unemployment in any country is an indication of far more complex problems (Okafor, 2009).

Causes of Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

The level of unemployment is highly dependent on the overall status of the economy (Awogbenle and Iwuamadi, 2010). Despite its riches from oil economy, employment in Nigeria is actually falling. The years of corruption, civil war, military rule, and mismanagement have hindered economic growth. These resources have not been effectively utilized in order to yield maximum economic benefits. These are primary causes of unemployment; however scholars have identified other causes of unemployment as well.

- The first is population growth (140,431,790 as per 2006 census) and is projected to be over 180 million by 2020 if the annual growth rate of 3.2% continues (National Population Commission and ICF Macro, 2009). While the population increases, the number of industries growth is dwindling and if nothing serious is done, both population and unemployment will continue to rise.
- The second is outdated school curricula and lack of employable skills: Some scholars have argued that as far as the formal sector is concerned, the average Nigerian graduate is not employable therefore, does not possess the skills needed by the employers (Anyadike et al, 2012). This is due to the curricula of most Nigerian schools that do not include entrepreneur skill acquisition to benefit job seekers.
- The third is adoption of untimely economic policy measures that contributed to the demise of small scale and cottage industries operated in both formal and informal sectors. Following the introduction of Structural Adjustment Program in September 1986 that ushered in liberalization, deregulation and devaluation program of the

domestic currency, many of the teething domestic firms collapsed that resulted in serious job losses (Bello, 2003).

- The fourth is over emphasis on university certificates and neglect of skill acquisition trainings that contributes to youth unemployment.
- Lack of employable skills due to inappropriate school curriculum is one of the factors that have contributed greatly to the rising youth unemployment in Nigeria. Analysts have argued that in Nigeria generally, the skills that job seekers possess do not match the needs and demands of employer (Mcgrath, 1999; Kent & Mushi, 1996). According to them, the education system in Nigeria has its liberal bias which indeed over supplies the labour market with graduates who do not possess the skills required by employers. Also, many graduates in Nigeria lack entrepreneurial skills to facilitate self-employment.
- **Rapid rural-urban migration:** The rate at which young people move from the rural areas to the urban centers in Nigeria in search of greener pastures is alarming. Many of these youths are fleeing from the poverty in the rural areas. This can be explained in the light of the push-pull factors. The push factors include the pressure resulting from man-land ratio in the rural areas and the existence of serious underemployment arising from the seasonal cycle of climate (Okafor, 2011).
- **Corruption:** High level of corruption in Nigeria has robbed the country of developing a vibrant economic base in spite of her abundant natural resources. Massive corruption is perpetuated in every sector and has permeated the entire social structure of Nigeria. Funds meant for development projects which could have generated employment have been misappropriated, diverted, or embezzled and stashed away in foreign banks.

The Challenges of Crime Control (Amongst the Youths) in Nigeria

From what is happening around the world today, crime and criminal activities especially among the youths appear to be permanent features of our modern society. Although, crime has been with mankind from creation, there are increasing categories of criminal deeds that are really baffling, senseless, often shocking and vicious. Ever since the biblical Cain killed Abel his younger brother in a classic case of homicide in the Garden of Eden, the world has not known peace and has been oscillating from one horrendous crime to another. The task of protection continues to be increasingly complex one at a time when technology is creating new products at explosive rate. A criminal does not need to have developed the systems of thinking that built the technology in order to use it against humanity (victims).

The youths are one of the greatest assets a nation could possibly possess. The National Youth Development Policy (2001) asserts that the youths are the foundation of a society; their energies, inventiveness, character and orientation define the pattern of development and security of a nation. Through their creative talents and labour power, a nation makes giant strides. The youths are a particular segment of the national population that is sensitive, energetic, active and the most productive phase of life of citizens. The youths are also the most volatile when their energies are misdirected or channeled into wrong endeavours. Consequently, youth unemployment poses a great threat to the country's stability and development, and if not checkmated on time, it may lead to disastrous consequences for the nation. Desperation can drive the unemployed youths into living outside the law in order to

survive and as a means of expressing dissatisfaction at the apparent neglect of their very existence.

Consequences of Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

Unemployment in Nigeria, as in other African countries has youth and gender dimensions. Employment data for Nigeria presented earlier has shown that majority of the unemployed are youth. High level of unemployment, especially youth unemployment has several negative consequences. In the Niger Delta, lack of employment opportunities was highly correlated with the high incidences of youth restiveness and conflicts (UNDP, 2006). An unwholesome aspect of youth unemployment and underemployment in many cities in Nigeria is visible 'idleness', whereby youth congregate at bars and eating places to drink, watch football matches, converse or smoke marijuana, for substantial parts of the day (Chigunta, 2002). Such places encourage the development of street gangs and criminal activities. Unemployed youth roaming the streets have been given various names in different cities, such as "Area Boys" Yan-iska, kwanta kwanta e.t.c in Nigeria (Somavia, 2012). Youth unemployment has also promoted 'gangsterism'. Many youth now engaged in violence, armed robbery, kidnapping, car snatching, illegal bunkering and fuel sales, and illegal importation of arms, most of which have reached alarming levels in several Nigerian cities. Bennel (2000) argued that urban society is becoming increasingly criminalized, especially with the proliferation of youth gangs. Neither homes, nor markets are safe in Nigeria because of frequent occurrence of armed robbery incidents. Unemployment problem, which now seems beyond remedy, has produced army of idle hands and some of them have decided to punish the society that fails to provide them with means of livelihood and dignity by robbing its members of their property at gunpoint (Ideyi, 2005). The police cannot perform effectively because they are overstretched by the amount of cases that awaits them daily, and is worsened by outdated instruments they use that are no match to the modern sophisticated weapons used by the criminals.

Conclusion

No nation can achieve growth or any form of stability that will enhance socio-economic development in an atmosphere of chronic youth unemployment. The role of Nigerian government must include the formulation of policies and laws that could help improve the economic and social wellbeing of its citizens and wealth creation. There is a need to increase jobs through small enterprises and poverty alleviation schemes. Economic growth in Nigeria is not the only solution to curb unemployment as the official statistics illustrate that previous unemployment did not decline economic growth. Other solutions such as the provision of right skills to youth should be given an importance. If factors that are responsible for unemployment in Nigeria are addressed, criminality would be reduced. One of the ways is that government should invest massively in agriculture and also encourage youths into this direction. Government should make agric-business to be exciting, creative and innovative enough to stir and spur youth interest. Government should engage the teeming youths by establishing farm settlements and employ youths who will contribute their quota to national development. Furthermore, youths should be creative and learn different vocational skills. By so doing, they will be job- providers and not job seekers. Vocational and technical education should be vigorously pursued. This will go a long way to reduce unemployment. However, at the completion of the vocational training, government should provide soft loans to the trained youths as take-off capital. To reduce unemployment in the nation,

entrepreneurship education should be incorporated into the curricula of secondary and tertiary schools. Doing this will also turn the graduates into job-creators and not jobseekers. This will help to curb the trend of graduates seeking the elusive white-collars jobs. Government at all levels should put in place mechanisms that will encourage financial institutions to grant soft loans to intending youth entrepreneurs to start small scale businesses, that will sustain them and prevent them from indulging in criminal activities. To combat soaring youth unemployment, government should create an enabling environment for industries to survive. A situation where companies that are supposed to employ the youths are closing down is not good for the country. Government must ensure the survival of industries. Many of the youths who migrate to the urban centers in search of the elusive greener pastures end up being jobless in the city. Many of them eventually become criminals in order to survive. Consequently, rural-urban migration should be checked through the provision of essential social amenities that will make life in the rural areas attractive to the youths. Corruption is endemic in Nigeria.. Government at all levels, as well as civil society groups should embark on public enlightenment campaigns on the dangers of population explosion, and its adverse effect on national development. From all indications, the reduction of youths unemployment will translate into reduction in crime, and engender sustainable national development. The youths are an important part of the society, who should be encouraged to channel their energies to national development by being positively engaged in the system, and discouraged from activities that could be detrimental to the growth of the country. Therefore, every action taking towards employment is an action towards crime reduction as well as promoting national development.

Recommendations

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Nigerian government should develop information system to capture bio-data of unemployed youth in Nigeria so as to provide unemployment benefits to these target groups. This will help to minimize violent crime in the country as it is done in Europe, America and Asian countries to help reduce crime wave.
2. The government should make entrepreneurship education compulsory at all levels of education and monitor its implementation to ensure that both the trainees and the instructors are complying with the laid down policy and budget plan.
3. Infrastructural facilities such as electricity, roads and water should be provided both at rural and urban areas. This will encourage entrepreneurship and provide enabling business environment by local and foreign investors. The reason is that poor infrastructural facilities results to high cost of doing business in the country which will eventual lead to job loss in the economy.
4. The entrepreneurship development centres across the tertiary institutions in Nigeria should be well equipped and funded adequately to make them functional and responsive to the needs of the students and the instructors that they are meant to serve.
5. The government should set up industries through revenue realized from Sure-P fund and create enabling environment for the small and medium businesses in both the formal and informal sectors to perform effectively and help in reducing youth unemployment

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