

Armed Robbery among Youths: Implication on Security in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the upsurge in armed robbery as a dimension of criminal activity among youths and its implications for security in Nigeria. It traces the root causes of armed robbery to lack of parental supervision, ethnic conflict, unemployment, and the inefficiency of security agencies resulting from corruption and complicity. The provision of adequate security is a social necessity for the smooth running of every society either developed or developing. The foremost social problem inhibiting security and developmental progress in Nigeria over the decades is the considerable increased rate of criminal activities among youths. Armed robbery is one of the most popular crimes in contemporary Nigerian society. It has to do with the unlawful utilization of any form of arms to forcefully deprive innocent people of their legitimate possessions. The study used qualitative method of data collection based on secondary data to explore the root causes and implications of armed robbery among youths. Findings revealed that youths are largely involved in armed robbery and other crimes majorly as a result of lack of supervision by parents, ineffectiveness of security agencies, unemployment and poverty. This has given rise to insecurity of lives and property of citizens. The study submits that if armed robbery is not handled properly, it will definitely threaten the corporate existence of Nigeria and portend grave dangers for National security. The study was hinged on the Rational Choice Theory and Robert K. Merton's Strain Theory (1968). The study recommended that a multi-pronged approach is needed to curb the menace of armed robbery in Nigeria, which include among others reduction of the means by tackling proliferation of illegal firearms through intensive border patrols and restricting access to weapons through the fire arms registry. Secondly, addressing socio-economic and political factors such as unemployment, ethnicity, poverty, through skills acquisition and increased funding towards alternative means of subsistence by government like farming, rearing of animal and others to youths in order to help curb their engagement in armed robbery and other crimes.

Keywords: Armed Robbery, Youths, Security, Insecurity, Armed robbers

Introduction

The provision of adequate security is a social necessity for the smooth running of every society either developed or developing. For every society to achieve its developmental goals, security of lives and property must be ensured. Armed robbery, kidnapping and other crimes have constituted major security threats to any given society. Oluwaleye (2021) averred that hardly would a day pass by without the news of armed robbery attack or incidences of other heinous crimes in any given society either in the print or electronic media, and the rate of crime is increasing daily especially among youths. According to Stephen (2020), 60% of crime in the world is committed by youths which are an escalating global security problem. The very worrisome aspect includes the age bracket of the perpetrators, the level of brutality during each

attack, the varying targets, and the brazen manner in which the attacks are carried out. Adeleye and Jamal (2020) pointed out that the foremost social problem inhibiting security and developmental progress in the African region over the decades is the considerable increased rate of criminal activities among youths. Nigeria has had its share of the ugly trend of security challenges as a result of criminal activities of youths which are portrayed in high rate of kidnappings, armed robbery, and so on.

Achu et al (2024) pointed out that illegal activities such as kidnapping, armed robbery, and drug abuse or trafficking tend to flourish in regions with inadequate law enforcement, posing a threat to security. They stated further that effectively addressing crime within the framework of sustainable security necessitates a comprehensive approach that engages multiple stakeholders. This includes collaboration among governments, security organizations, local communities, and law enforcement agencies to create a cohesive strategy for crime prevention. Nasiru (2020) opined that Nigeria is currently facing security crisis which seems to be an unending challenge.

According to Umar (2015), armed robbery is one of the most popular crimes in contemporary Nigerian society. It has to do with the unlawful utilization of any form of arms to forcefully deprive innocent people of their legitimate possessions; it is therefore a crime against the Nigerian criminal laws. Armed robbers use advanced equipment particularly firearms like pistols, AK 47, short guns and violent force to coerce suspecting victims into submitting their valuables such as cash, phones, trinkets, electronics and others. Gabriel (2017) asserted that unlike their previous modes of operation which used to be at night and often hooded, armed robbers now operate bare-faced in broad day-light. They attack homes, offices, shops, restaurants and churches to rob, rape, maim and kill. They operate on the high ways, streets and strike at filling stations and banks. The incidence of robbery in Nigeria today is so appalling leaving sorrow, tears, and blood in their trail. Government has made great efforts towards tackling this challenge in Nigeria through various joint military/police/local vigilante operations and the enactment of extant laws. Unfortunately, despite these efforts of government, armed robbery seems to persist. It is on this premise that this paper critically examined armed robbery among youths and its implication on security in Nigeria.

Gabriel (2017) lamented that in Nigeria, security measures taken so far by both the Government and public security operatives have failed to control or reduce rate of armed robbery. On the contrary, the crime rate continues to soar to such extent that it beats the imagination of relevant authorities at all levels. Numerous studies have been carried out on factors that push youths into armed robbery and other crimes resulting in security threats. The studies did not consider lack of supervision of youths and materialistic family values, religious intolerance and ethnicity etc. as factors that may push youths into armed robbery resulting in security threat. It did not also investigate the likely existence of complicity of security agents which may be a serious challenge at curbing armed robbery and maintenance of security. The study, therefore, included these variables to close the gap. The question therefore is: what are the root causes of armed robbery in Nigeria, what are its security implications, and how can the menace of armed robbery be curbed?

Theoretical Framework

This work is hinged on Rational Choice Theory and Criminal Behaviour propounded by Cesare Beccaria during the late eighteenth century, and Robert K. Merton's Strain Theory (1968). Rational choice theory is a framework used in various social sciences, including economics, sociology, criminology, and political science, to explain human decision-making. It is based on the assumption that individuals are rational actors who make choices by carefully weighing the

potential benefits and costs of their actions. This theory can be applied to understand a wide range of behaviours, including criminal activity, consumer choices, and political decisions. Rational choice theory suggests that individuals weigh the potential gains from committing a crime against the perceived risks or costs of getting caught. In the context of armed robbery, criminals may see opportunities to exploit the vulnerability of victims for financial gain. Criminal activities of armed robbery and kidnapping often target victims due to their perceived vulnerability. Offenders target victims who are less likely to be familiar with local crime patterns and who may carry valuables.

Rational choice theory also suggests that increasing the perceived risks or costs of committing a crime can deter potential offenders. Adequate security measures, visible law enforcement, and surveillance can deter criminals from targeting victims and thus enhance sustainability of security. For example, the presence of police and other security agents in popular black spots, such as forest areas, pot holes, road bends and in residential and business areas can create a visible deterrence to potential criminals, reducing the likelihood of criminal activity. Citizens themselves may apply rational choice principles around their vicinities or when making travel decisions. Perceptions of possible attacks or destination safety influence citizens' choices, as they weigh the perceived risks and benefits of visiting or staying in a particular location. This can expressly show when residents of a place or travellers choose to avoid areas or destinations with high crime rates in favour of safer alternatives, impacting the sustainability of those areas or destinations.

According to this theory, security sustainability depends on effective crime prevention strategies. Areas that invest in crime prevention, including community engagement, education and local employment, can reduce the incentives for criminal behaviour, hence promoting long-term security sustainability. Impliedly, rational choice theory helps us understand the decision-making process of criminals in targeting victims and the subsequent impact on security sustainability. By examining the rational calculations made by both offenders and potential victims, we can develop effective crime prevention strategies and security measures that can enhance the safety and attractiveness of individuals, ultimately promoting sustainability. While rational choice theory provides valuable insights into human decision-making, critics argue that it oversimplifies human behaviour by assuming perfect rationality and neglecting psychological factors, emotions, and social influences that can also shape choices. Nonetheless, it remains a foundational framework for understanding and predicting decision-making in various contexts. Hence the strain theory is used to augment its shortcomings.

Robert Merton in 1968 propounded the Strain Theory to explain the relationship between social structure and deviance or crime. The main tenet of the theory is that deviant behaviour is a normal, systemic response to a disconnect between the culturally defined goals (such as monetary success) and socially structured, legitimate means available to achieve them. According to Merton, when individuals are unable to achieve their goals through legitimate means, they may turn to deviant behaviours as a way of achieving those goals. The desire to overcome poverty and become successful without matching it with hard work and creativity can only heighten the tendency for complicity and increase in crime in the society. As people deviate from acceptable norms and means with active collaboration of some members of the security agencies, armed robbery thrive, and it is creating adverse consequences in Nigeria. The theory has also been criticized for focusing almost exclusively on lower class crime, seeing crime as a consequence of inequality in the distribution of material resources thereby giving a stereotypical

view of crime and criminals which associates being a criminal with being a member of the lower class.

Methodology

The study used a descriptive and qualitative design. This approach involved a cross sectional method of data collection through extensive literature review based on secondary data to explore the root causes and implications of armed robbery among youths in conjunction with relevance of Rational Choice and Merton's Strain Theories. The available literature on the subject matter of the study was used.

Literature Review

Causes of Armed Robbery among Youths

The causes of armed robbery cannot be divorced from the causes of crime generally. Several scholars have given different reasons why youths engage in different criminal activities, armed robbery inclusive. These may range from individual to societal factors. Looking at the views of these scholars, it implies that a number of closely related factors are responsible for crime among youths in Nigeria. These factors, if carefully handled can mitigate armed robbery in any given society. The factors among others include:

Lack of supervision of youths and materialistic family values

The family is undoubtedly the most critical agent of socialization for humankind and has the initial and long-lasting influence on family members. Recently research in criminology has begun to refocus its attention on the role of family in explaining crime. Philip and Tungu (2021) asserted that the family environment goes a long way in determining to a large extent what a child becomes in the later part of his life. They opined further that affectionate, supportive, and understanding homes are likely to promote conformist and constructive social behaviour, because a positive family environment leads to healthy personality development. Conversely, a lack of parental affection and support, or in more severe cases parental indifference, hostility or rejection, causes children to feel emotionally insecure and leads to poor personality development, thus encouraging antisocial or criminal behaviour. Thomas (2021) averred that the lack of supervision, coupled with exposure to social media or movies related to crime and killing, was seen to be putting young people at risk. Parents' behaviour relating to violence and drugs becomes normalized in the family and children do not have the best role models. Philip and Tungu (2021) also pointed out that some parents give poor directions to their children. In addition, parents fail to control children's behaviour and fail to appropriately reward or punish their children. It is disheartening, that all criminals or offenders were born into one family or the other. While Thomas (2021) emphasizes lack of family supervision, Philip & Tungu (2021) prioritize family environment as causes of armed robbery among youths. Yet neither of them fully accounted for peer influence. A child from an unsupervised family learns whatever he/she likes outside the home from peer groups and such learning can be dangerous.

In another dimension, Ulo and Jike (2022) opined that materialistic family values and get-rich-quick syndrome appear to be the major factors fuelling crime among youths. Oyinlola (2022) allured that many families have failed in performing their major role of protection, provision for their members, socializing their members and ensuring they conform to the socially acceptable patterns of behaviour in society, thereby increasing the rate of adolescent crime in society.

Eze and Musa (2021) in their study on dysfunction and youth criminality in Enugu State Nigeria found out that weak parental supervision and poor moral upbringing contribute to deviant behaviour among adolescents. Similarly, the study corroborates with the study of Okafor (2022), whose work on The Get-Rich-Quick Syndrome and Its Influence on Youth Deviance in South Eastern Nigeria, found that the cultural glorification of sudden wealth encourages fraudulent and criminal activities among young people seeking social validation.

Religious intolerance

Religious intolerance has also been considered as one of the causes of crime among youths. The relationship between religion and crime is not however as straightforward. Religion could serve, and has indeed served as an instrument of social harmony in many civilizations. Paradoxically, however, it has also served as a motivation for violence and crime, hence its indication in some literature as a 'double-edged sword'. Srijan (2022) stated that religion and crime are linked both positively and negatively. Even though millions of people are utterly unaware of this, hundreds of crimes are perpetrated every day tied to religion. In addition, recent incidents of religious-based violence have occurred across the globe. Hiteshi (2022) averred that in the name of religion many great and fine deeds have been performed. In the name of religion also, thousands and millions have been killed, and every possible crime including armed robbery has been committed. Religious crimes are prevalent worldwide, from Islamic countries to communist countries, even to the so-called secular countries. In the Northern part of Nigeria, for instance, the current place of 'Almajiri' (Islamic students) tradition is a prime example of religious-motivated youth crime. This age-long and acceptable Islamic religious practice has been abused in recent times. Macpherson (2023) attested that these children roam the streets, constituting public nuisance and consequently are predisposed to antisocial conducts thereby inadvertently making themselves ever readily available 'sophisticated weapons' of robbery and terror. Because they are exposed to criminogenic needs and factors and are routinely found or reside in deviant/criminal neighbourhoods where there is an absence of capable guardianship, these particular children become suitable targets of being recruited into terrorism and other criminal activities as kidnapping, armed robbery, religious wars, and so on. Nonetheless, the role of bad governance remains relevant, as supported by the study of Abubakar (2023) whose work on governance deficits and youth crime in Nigeria, found that poor leadership and corruption exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities that indirectly foster criminal tendencies among the youth rather than religion.

Ethnicity

One of the causes of crime is ethnic conflict which leads to ethnic violence. Ethnicity itself is not the primary cause of crime. While ethnic differences can be a factor, it is the underlying political, economic and social dynamics that create the conditions for crime. Ethnicity had provided the pattern and potential for the protracted violent ethnic conflicts Nigeria has experienced in the past three decades (Azeez, 2018). Anthony and Abioye (2021) argued that the ethnic conflicts that have befallen Nigeria since the return to civil rule in 1999 are inbuilt in socio-economic and political management of post-colonial Nigeria. However, with the renewed attempt at entrenching democracy, struggle for political and economic spaces and marginalization has intensified between and among the various ethnic and political groups, thus making these conflicts inevitable. Friedrich (2021) stated that just like in many developing countries that are highly fractionalized, ethnic crisis ranks amongst many security challenges facing Nigeria, making Nigeria loosely a country at war with itself. This situation magnifies Nigeria's political

instability and the efforts of security agencies to address the range of insecurity issues which beyond fractionalization crisis encircle terrorism, banditry, ritual killings, armed robbery and kidnapping. Ethnicity accounted for the civil war that ravaged most countries leading to the death and displacement of large number of people. Jones (2022) stated further that the outcome of ethnic violence is private armies, militant leaders and violent political groups that may cause additional harm which can result in separation, fragmentation and destabilization of a country in the long run. These militants and violent political groups rob, maim and rape innocent citizens in order to survive when their pay masters are not able to sufficiently sponsor their activities and cater for their needs. The finding that ethnic conflict and struggle over scarce resources contribute to youth crime supports the position of Bala (2020) in his study 'ethno-religious conflicts and youth violence in Kaduna State, Nigeria'. Bala (2020) asserted that competition for political and economic dominance among ethnic groups often manipulates youths into participating in violent crimes.

Ineffectiveness and complicity of security agencies

Thus, armed robbery in Nigeria is rife and the fight against it is reported daily, Kingsley, Ebele & Chidi (2023) emphasized that the Nigerian security agencies have largely been ineffective and complacent in fighting the crime, which has led to a colossal amount of insecurity and violence in the country. This, Ezemenaka (2018) said is especially true of Nigeria where there are frequent incidences of particular crimes, such as armed robbery, sectarian violence, ethno-religious conflict, political assassination, ransom kidnapping, campus cultism and election violence to human rights violations. Ezemenaka (2018) opined that there is a need for alertness, call to order and an overhaul of security institutions in a country where crime precedes security. However, this contrasts with the study of Okonkwo (2022) on crime and security management in Abuja Municipal Area Council, who reported that cases of armed robbery have declined in some urban centres due to increased police surveillance and use of technology in crime monitoring.

Though The Nigerian police avow that as an institution, it has arrested over a thousand kidnapping and armed robbery suspects in 2017, but the menace is increasing daily. Armed robbery as a security discourse is not new in Nigeria and its prevalence alongside the strain it brings on security needs to be investigated thoroughly. Though these assertions hold weight to an extent, however, it must be noted that the effectiveness of security in the state is a causal effect of the political order. Politicians are not exempt from the ills they have created through armed robbery. The ineffectiveness of Nigerian security leading to the prevalence of crimes such as armed robbery and kidnapping has multi-causal connotations; among these causal variables, corruption and complicity are salient in the reasons and explanation of ineffective security. Ishola (2025) opined that the National Public Security Communication System (NPSCS) project of 2010 became a cautionary tale of poor procurement, weak oversight, questionable technical choices, corruption, vandalism, and the political churn that turned a strategic security asset into expensive scrap. The NPSCS was a modernizing dream, a single backbone -- secure voice trunking for security services, CCTV coverage of major cities, video -- conferencing for commands, e-policing databases and an emergency dispatch network. But corruption and incompetence broke the project.

Unemployment

The alarming increase in youth unemployment is said to be one of the causes of youth crime especially armed robbery. Okafor (2022) observed that unemployment is a global trend, but occurs mostly in developing countries of the world, with attendant social, economic, political,

and psychological consequences. Emeh (2012) asserted that unemployment in Nigeria looms large and its concomitant consequences are alarmingly daring, especially as youths are the worst hit. Okafor (2022) in his research endeavours, have brought to the fore that because youths face lack of employment potential and also lack necessary productive skills to keep body and soul together, resultantly, this situation makes crime a more attractive option for so many Nigerian youths. This is because in Nigeria it is common to find some graduates still roaming the streets, five years after graduating in search of jobs that are not there; thereby lending force to crimes such as ethnic conflicts, armed robbery, kidnapping, car snatching, pipeline vandalism, oil bunkering, and prostitution among others. This situation poses great challenges to the very existence of individuals and National security in Nigeria thereby calling for the training of men and women who can function effectively in the society in which they live in.

Awogbenle and Iwuamadi (2012) observed that unemployment has become a major problem bedevilling the lives of Nigerian youths causing frustration, dejection and dependency on family members and friends. The high rate of unemployment among youths in Nigeria has contributed to the high rate of poverty and insecurity in the country. Onwachukwu (2015) asserted that in recent times, there have been notable adverse social, economic and political developments in Nigeria, a consequence of youth unemployment and underemployment, particularly exemplified by increasing militancy, ethnic conflicts, violent crimes, kidnapping, armed robbery restiveness and political instability. Njoku and Ihuaga (2011) contended that unemployment has been identified as one of the major causes of social vices. Nwankwo (2021) opined that a depressed labour market makes crime relatively more attractive than work. These social vices may constitute serious security threat to a state and the country in general. Unemployment is one of the most serious problems facing Nigeria like many other countries of the world. In view of this, the country is going through security challenges which call for serious concern. However, the work of Suleiman (2020) disagreed with these findings. Suleiman (2020) in his work political marginalization and youth restiveness in Niger Delta, Nigeria, found out that marginalization is the most significant determinant of youth crime rather than unemployment or poverty. In contrast, the current study found unemployment and bad governance to be secondary causes when compared with economic factors such as joblessness and deprivation. Also, Akinyetun (2022) has a different view from the assertions above pointing out that opportunities play a great role in armed robbery. He said the phenomenon is concentrated in time and space; the opportunities for the menace are highly specific and that the incidence produces opportunities for other crimes.

Poverty

Poverty is also seen as one of the reasons for crime among youths. Orobosa and Odoni (2023) asserted that Nigeria has a high level of poverty among youths hence the increasing crime rate among the youths in their quest for survival as a result of the level misery index of the country. They stressed further that Nigeria has low Per Capital Income, high rate of poverty and crime; hence there are several socioeconomic challenges alongside crime of various dimensions, such as kidnapping, banditry/armed robbery, burglary, social vices, rituals and internet fraud etc. Puzzanchera, Hockenberry, and Sickmund, (2022) alluded that exposure to poverty at an early age is linked to crime. They stressed further that research has often supported a connection between poverty and involvement in crime. Youth who grow up in families or communities with limited resources are at a higher risk of offending than those who are raised under more privileged circumstances. Those who are very poor or chronically poor seem to be at an increased risk of serious crime. Ulo and Jike (2022) remarkably stated that some parents have

nothing to offer regarding good morals and sometime encourage their children to make wealth not minding the method of its acquisition because of poverty. Adejoh, Alabi, Adisa and Emezie (2019) reported that 71% of Nigerian households are poor with the halving of this classified as core poor or very poor. About 77% of the urban and 68% of the rural family is considered poor pointing to the fact that a greater majority of youth criminals are poor. On the contrary however, Agbo (2022) opined that today, the general attitude of the society towards offences and offenders, developments in science and technology, urbanization and expansion of human populations have combined to favour criminal activities. In the olden days, say in the African societies, crimes were not tolerated. Any breach of the criminal law of the land was visited with severe punishments ranging from caning, shaming, restitution, ostracization, death, etc. Agbo stated further that, Nigeria, until very recently, has been static while the rest of the world is changing their criminal justice system to conform to the changing orientations. In addition, he asserted that the absence of comprehensive sentencing guidelines in Nigeria has led to the overuse of imprisonment as a criminal sanction in Nigeria which contributed to increase in criminal activities.

In fact, many youths in cities and rural areas have embraced crime as a way of life and a means of improving their economic condition, especially as poverty rate continues to soar. Kostadis (2017) examined the relationship between poverty and crime and posited that individuals are more likely to become involved in criminal activity when they experienced a negative income shock. He revealed that deteriorating economic conditions may favour criminal activity and more people are likely to engage in crime as an alternative source of income. Orobosa and Odoni (2023) concluded that poverty is an enemy of man and a multi-dimensional incident that affects many aspects of human conditions, ranging from physical, moral, to the psychological, and has the ability to humiliate and dehumanize its victims pushing them into crime. This assertion corroborates with the study of Bello (2023) on Socio-economic Drivers of Youth Crime in Nasarawa State who found that poverty among youths contribute to their vulnerability to criminal recruitment. On the contrary, Adamu (2022) disagreed with the finding in his study and stated that many robbery operations are coordinated by experienced adult criminals who recruit poor vulnerable youths merely as accomplices. Agović and Kemp (2022) also observed that not only children from disadvantaged backgrounds engage in armed robbery. But that there are also young people who come from wealthy families and get involved in criminal activities to show off and revolt against their parents. There are also cases, for example of young kids from well-off backgrounds joining hooligan groups as a result of drugs that are both easily available and affordable.

Result of the Findings

This section presents the findings of the study as derived from the literature reviewed. The findings are organized thematically according to the research objectives.

Causes of Armed Robbery among Youths

The study identified five major categories of causal factors responsible for armed robbery among youths in Nigeria:

Family-related Factors

The study found that the family environment plays a critical role in determining youth involvement in crime. Findings in this category include:

- Lack of Parental Supervision: Philip and Tungu (2021) found that lack of parental affection and support, or in severe cases parental indifference, hostility or rejection, causes children to feel emotionally insecure and leads to poor personality development, thus encouraging antisocial or criminal behaviour. Thomas (2021) also found that lack of supervision, coupled with exposure to social media or movies related to crime, puts young people at risk.
- Materialistic Family Values: Ulo and Jike (2022) found that materialistic family values and get-rich-quick syndrome appear to be the major factors fuelling crime among youths. Okafor (2022) found that the cultural glorification of sudden wealth encourages fraudulent and criminal activities among young people seeking social validation.
- Poor Moral Upbringing: Eze and Musa (2021) found that weak parental supervision and poor moral upbringing contribute to deviant behaviour among adolescents. Oyinlola (2022) found that many families have failed in performing their major roles, thereby increasing the rate of adolescent crime in society.

Socio-economic Factors

The study found that socio-economic factors significantly drive youths into armed robbery. Findings in this category include:

- Unemployment: Okafor (2022) found that because youths lack employment potential and necessary productive skills, crime becomes a more attractive option. Emeh (2012) asserted that unemployment in Nigeria looms large and its consequences are alarming, especially as youths are the worst hit. Awogbenle and Iwuamadi (2012) found that unemployment causes frustration, dejection and dependency on family members and friends. Nwankwo (2021) opined that a depressed labour market makes crime relatively more attractive than work.
- Poverty: Orobosa and Odoni (2023) found that Nigeria has a high level of poverty among youths, hence the increasing crime rate in their quest for survival. Puzzanchera, Hockenberry, and Sickmund (2022) found that exposure to poverty at an early age is linked to crime, and that youth who grow up in families or communities with limited resources are at a higher risk of offending. Kostadis (2017) found that individuals are more likely to become involved in criminal activity when they experience a negative income shock.
- Lack of Productive Skills: The study found that lack of necessary productive skills to keep body and soul together makes crime a more attractive option for Nigerian youths (Okafor, 2022; Onwachukwu, 2015).
- Contrasting Views: Suleiman (2020) found that marginalization is the most significant determinant of youth crime rather than unemployment or poverty. Akinyetun (2022) found that opportunities play a great role in armed robbery, as the phenomenon is concentrated in time and space.

Religious Factors

The study found that religious intolerance contributes to youth crime. Findings in this category include:

- Religious Violence: Srijan (2022) found that religion and crime are linked both positively and negatively, with hundreds of crimes perpetrated every day tied to religion. Hiteshi (2022) found that in the name of religion, thousands and millions have been killed, and every possible crime including armed robbery has been committed.
- Almajiri System: Macpherson (2023) found that the Almajiri tradition in Northern Nigeria has been abused, with these children roaming the streets, constituting public nuisance, and becoming readily available for recruitment into criminal activities such as kidnapping, armed robbery, and religious wars.
- Governance Factors: Abubakar (2023) found that poor leadership and corruption exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities that indirectly foster criminal tendencies among the youth rather than religion itself.

Ethnic Factors

The study found that ethnic conflicts contribute to youth crime. Findings in this category include:

- Ethnic Conflicts: Anthony and Abioye (2021) found that ethnic conflicts in Nigeria are inbuilt in the socio-economic and political management of post-colonial Nigeria. Friedrich (2021) found that ethnic crisis ranks amongst many security challenges facing Nigeria.
- Private Armies: Jones (2022) found that the outcome of ethnic violence includes private armies, militant leaders, and violent political groups that rob, maim, and rape innocent citizens to survive when their paymasters cannot sponsor their activities.
- Political Manipulation: Bala (2020) found that competition for political and economic dominance among ethnic groups often manipulates youths into participating in violent crimes.

Institutional Factors

- The study found that ineffectiveness and complicity of security agencies contribute to armed robbery. Findings in this category include:
- Ineffectiveness of Security Agencies: Kingsley, Ebele, and Chidi (2023) found that Nigerian security agencies have largely been ineffective and complacent in fighting crime, leading to colossal insecurity. Ezemenaka (2018) found that there is a need for an overhaul of security institutions in a country where crime precedes security.
- Corruption and Complicity: Ishola (2025) found that the National Public Security Communication System (NPSCS) project of 2010 failed due to poor procurement, weak oversight, corruption, vandalism, and political churn.
- Weak Criminal Justice System: Agbo (2022) found that the absence of comprehensive sentencing guidelines in Nigeria has led to the overuse of imprisonment as a criminal sanction, contributing to increased criminal activities.
- Contrasting View: Okonkwo (2022) found that cases of armed robbery have declined in some urban centres due to increased police surveillance and use of technology in crime monitoring.

Security Implications of Armed Robbery

The study identified three major categories of security implications of armed robbery:

National Security Implications

Findings in this category include:

- **Threat to National Security:** Nte and Nte (2023) found that armed robbery constituted a major threat to national security in Nigeria. Nigeria faces multifaceted security threats including armed robbery, kidnapping, terrorism, and insurgency.
- **Increasing Crime Rates:** Haruna, Ochigbo, and Agbor (2022) found that there has been an increase in the number of armed robbery cases reported to the police, from 10.61% in 2015 to 21.30% in 2021.
- **Deteriorating Security Situation:** Madubuegwu and Abah (2023) found that the security situation in Nigeria is rapidly deteriorating in alarming scale and intensity across all geopolitical zones.
- **Multiple Crises:** Abdulrasheed (2020) found that Nigeria has been facing multiple crises since independence, with many Nigerians apprehensive of the future.

Social and Economic Implications

Findings in this category include:

- **Loss of Lives and Properties:** Haruna, Ochigbo, and Agbor (2022) found that armed robbery has led to the loss of lives and properties worth millions of Naira.
- **Culture of Fear and Mistrust:** Umar (2015) found that armed robbery has imposed a culture and atmosphere of fear, mistrust, and violence in the country.
- **Development Challenges:** Nasiru (2020) found that armed robbery poses serious development challenges to the state and society.
- **Victim Consequences:** Umar (2015) found that victims of armed robbery suffer tremendous negative social and economic consequences.
- **Financial Institutions:** Haruna, Ochigbo, and Agbor (2022) found that some financial institutions have resorted to sketchy services to avert repeat attacks.

Psychological Implications

Findings in this category include:

- **Fear and Apprehension:** Madubuegwu and Abah (2023) found that few people get shocked by news of bloody attacks due to their frequency.
- **Uncertainty About the Future:** Abdulrasheed (2020) found that many Nigerians are apprehensive of what the future of the country might be.
- **Dominant Fear:** Nasiru (2020) found that insecurity has emerged as the dominant fear of human beings.

Discussion of Findings

Causes of Armed Robbery among Youths

The findings of this study reveal that armed robbery among youths is a multifaceted problem with deep-rooted causes spanning family, socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors.

Family-related Factors: The finding that lack of parental supervision and poor moral upbringing contribute to youth crime aligns with the works of Philip and Tungu (2021), Thomas (2021), and Eze and Musa (2021). The finding on materialistic values and get-rich-quick syndrome supports Ulo and Jike (2022) and Okafor (2022), who documented the influence of cultural glorification of sudden wealth on youth criminality. From the perspective of Strain Theory, the family's failure to provide adequate supervision and moral upbringing creates conditions where youths are unable to achieve societal goals through legitimate means. The pressure to attain wealth and success, reinforced by materialistic family values, pushes youths towards deviant behaviours. From the perspective of Rational Choice Theory, when parents fail to supervise their children, the perceived risks of engaging in crime decrease, making armed robbery more attractive.

Socio-Economic Factors: The study reinforces the established connection between unemployment, poverty, and crime as documented by Okafor (2022), Awogbenle and Iwuamadi (2012), and Orobosa and Odoni (2023). The finding that a depressed labour market makes crime more attractive than work supports Nwankwo (2021) and Onwachukwu (2015). Both theories explain these findings. Strain Theory explains how the inability to achieve economic success through legitimate means due to unemployment and poverty drives youths into crime. Rational Choice Theory explains how youths weigh the benefits of crime against the costs. When unemployment is high and poverty is severe, the benefits of crime outweigh the costs, especially when security agencies are ineffective.

Religious Factors: The study acknowledges the complex role of religion in youth crime. While Srijan (2022), Hiteshi (2022), and Macpherson (2023) emphasize religious factors, Abubakar (2023) points to governance deficits. The finding on the Almajiri system in Northern Nigeria is particularly significant, as it shows how a religious institution can be abused to create conditions conducive to crime. From the perspective of Strain Theory, the Almajiri system creates a disconnect between religious goals and legitimate means of achieving them, pushing these children into crime. From Rational Choice Theory, the absence of capable guardianship in Almajiri settings reduces the perceived risks of criminal activity.

Ethnic Factors: The study confirms that ethnic conflicts contribute to youth crime, supporting Anthony and Abioye (2021), Friedrich (2021), and Bala (2020). The finding that competition for political and economic dominance manipulates youths into crime is particularly important. From a theoretical perspective, ethnic conflicts create conditions where the legitimate means of achieving success are blocked for certain ethnic groups (Strain Theory), while also providing opportunities for criminal activity (Rational Choice Theory).

Institutional Factors: The study highlights the critical role of security agencies' ineffectiveness and complicity, supporting the works of Kingsley, Ebele, and Chidi (2023) and Ezemenaka (2018). The failure of the NPSCS project as documented by Ishola (2025) exemplifies how corruption undermines security infrastructure. From Rational Choice Theory, when security agencies are ineffective or complicit, the perceived risks of committing armed robbery decrease significantly. The weak criminal justice system, including the absence of comprehensive sentencing guidelines (Agbo, 2022), further reduces the costs of crime.

Security Implications of Armed Robbery

The study reveals that armed robbery has severe implications for national security, social and economic development, and psychological well-being. The finding that armed robbery constitutes a major threat to national security supports Nte and Nte (2023) and Madubuegwu and

Abah (2023). The increase in reported cases from 10.61% in 2015 to 21.30% in 2021 (Haruna, Ochigbo & Agbor, 2022) indicates a deteriorating security situation.

The social and economic implications, including loss of lives and properties, culture of fear, and development challenges, are consistent with Umar (2015), Igbini (2022), and Nasiru (2020). The psychological impact, including fear, mistrust, and apprehension, has been documented by Umar (2015) and Abdurashheed (2020).

From a theoretical perspective, the security implications of armed robbery create a vicious cycle: insecurity leads to fear and mistrust, which in turn discourage investment and economic development, leading to more unemployment and poverty, which create conditions for more crime (Strain Theory). Similarly, when security is poor, the perceived risks of crime decrease, encouraging more criminal activity (Rational Choice Theory).

Conclusion

Armed robbery among youths has become a recurring menace in Nigeria, threatening national security and socio-economic development. This study identified key causal factors including lack of parental supervision, unemployment, poverty, religious intolerance, ethnic conflicts, and institutional failures. The security implications are profound, ranging from loss of lives and properties to a pervasive culture of fear and mistrust. Urgent multi-pronged interventions are required, encompassing legislative reforms, socio-economic empowerment, improved intelligence gathering, community engagement, and criminal justice system overhaul. The Nigerian government must demonstrate political will in implementing these recommendations to safeguard the future of the nation and its youths.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed to curb the menace of armed robbery in Nigeria:

- i. **Reduce Access to Illegal Firearms;** The government should intensify border patrols to curb the proliferation of illegal firearms and strengthen the firearms registry. Comprehensive sentencing guidelines should be enacted, and security agents found complicit with criminals must face severe punishment. International collaboration should be enhanced to prevent cross-border arms trafficking.
- ii. **Address Socio-Economic Factors;** Government should equip youths with productive skills through skills acquisition programmes and increase funding for alternative livelihoods such as farming and small-scale businesses. Job creation through industrialization and public-private partnerships, alongside poverty alleviation programmes focused on youth empowerment, should be prioritized. NGOs should complement these efforts.
- iii. **Improve Intelligence Gathering and Security Operations;** Advanced technologies including drones and CCTV should be adopted for proactive intelligence gathering. A synchronized approach merging human, open-source, and financial intelligence is essential. Structural reforms should enhance inter-agency synergy, and corrupt officials must be punished. Security agents require modern equipment, training, and aggressive patrols in high-risk areas. International military collaborations should be sustained.

- iv. Strengthen Community-Based Security; Community leaders and residents should be engaged to identify and report suspected criminals, with informant identities protected. Intelligence education should be integrated into university curricula to deepen national security knowledge and preparedness.
- v. Implement Government Policy Interventions; Government at all levels must formulate and implement deliberate policies addressing marginalization, boundary demarcations, ethnic conflict, and religious intolerance. Proactive policymaking should prioritize youth-related challenges, particularly unemployment.
- vi. Reform the Criminal Justice System; The criminal justice system requires comprehensive overhaul, including updated sentencing guidelines and proportionate punishment for offenders. Alternative sentencing options should reduce over-reliance on imprisonment, ensuring swift and certain justice.
- vii. Strengthen Family and Social Interventions; Parents must provide adequate supervision and moral upbringing, discouraging materialistic values and the get-rich-quick syndrome. Religious and ethnic leaders should promote tolerance and harmony, while community leaders foster social cohesion to discourage intolerance.

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