



EMPOWERING YOUTHS FOR A CRIME-FREE SOCIETY: THE CASE OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the role of empowerment for youth as key to a crime-free society. This is with a view to establishing the level of socio-economic well-being and reduces crime in the society. It highlights the factors that motivate youths to participate in organization and community development. It also examines the extent to which socio-economic factors determine the outcome of people's lives. Descriptive research design was used for the study. A structured questionnaire was used in collecting data from a sample of 450 respondents for the study. Data collected were analyzed using Chi-square and t-test analysis. The findings established that there is a significant relationship between youth empowerment and attitude to crime involvement ($X^2_{cal} = 453.025 > X^2_{crit} = 26.30$ at 0.05 level of significance). It showed that there is significant relationship between capacity building of youths and reduction of youth's involvement in crime ($X^2_{cal} = 744.301 > X^2_{crit} = 26.30$ at 0.05 level of significance). The findings also revealed that there is significant relationship between male and female attitudes to crime involvement ($t_{cal} = 34.616 > t_{tab} = 1.965$ at 0.05 level of significance). It is, therefore, recommended that government's empowerment programmes should be restructured, if not re-designed, and should be centred on a "participatory approach". There should also be greater investment in the human capital investment of youths. Besides, government should reach out to youths, regardless of their ethnic, cultural, religious, geographical or political affiliation.

Key Words: Empowerment, youth, crime-free, society, Nigeria

Introduction

Young people account for a large percentage of Nigeria's population figure, representing an important and dynamic force in the Nigerian society. However, young people face many challenges in the Nigerian society, such as high rate of poverty and unemployment, illiteracy, lack of access to information, and essential welfare services, that are manifested in young people's diminished hopes for the future. Some of the highest rates of violence, crime and high risk sexual behaviours of any age group are seen in the youth population, leading many to label the youths as a source of society's problems rather than its potentials (Blum, 2003).

In recent years, almost all governments of countries of the world, including advanced countries have sought new approaches to harness the potential of young people and address the problems facing them. The concept of youth empowerment has gained increasing attention. Youth empowerment means involving young people in decision-making processes on issues that affect them, as well as entrusting them with the knowledge and skills necessary for them to effectively and meaningfully participate.

According to Messner and Tardiff (1986), Bursik and Grasmik (1993), unmarried or divorced adults, teenagers, non-working adults, poor people, persons with criminal histories, especially males and single parents, have all been identified in the literature as the kind of people whose presence is associated with higher rates of violent crimes. Public policies contributing to the concentration of high risk people in certain neighbourhoods include the federally funded highway system that took low risk people out of urban neighbourhoods to the suburbs (Skogan, 1986). The suburbanization of both white middle-class people through highways, and black middle-class people through federal open-housing laws (Wilson, 1987), helped tip the proportions of many inner-city communities towards the majority of persons or families at higher risk of crime. As long as those high-risk persons were in a minority, their low-risk neighbourhoods were able to exercise a community protective factor against violent crimes.

When the high- risk families became a majority in many urban communities, a spiral of crime and the fear of crime led to further loss of middle- class residents and jobs. This, in turn, increased the concentration of unemployed and poor people, followed by further increases in crime (Schuerman and Kobrin, 1986; Wilson, 1996). The kinds of people who live in a community and the way in which they interact affect the risk of violent crime. Children of single parents, for example, may be at greater risk of crime because of their family structure. But a community with a high percentage of single parent households may put all its children at greater risk of delinquency, by reducing the capacity of a community to maintain adult networks of informal control of children.

There is greater difficulty of single- parent families in supervising young children with other unsupervised young children, since delinquency is well known to be a group phenomenon (Reiss, 1988). The empirical evidence for this risk factor is particularly strong, with violent victimization rates up to three times higher among neighbourhoods of high family disruption compared to low levels, regardless of other characteristics, such as poverty. The correlation between race and violent crime at the neighbourhood level disappears after controlling the percentage of female-headed households (Sampson and Lauristen, 1993).

Oppositional culture arising from a lack of participation in mainstream economic and social life, bad becomes good and good becomes bad. Given the apparent rejection of community members by the larger society, the community members reject the values and aspirations of that society by developing an “opposition identity” (Cohen and Uphoff, 1977; Clark, 1965; Braithwaite, 1989; Massey and Denton, 2008). This is especially notable in terms of values that oppose the protective factors of marriage and family, education, work and obedience to the law. As inner-city labour force participation rates have declined and inner-city segregation has increased over the past three decades, the strength of the opposition has increased. Public policy has contributed to this, primarily by its historical support for segregation and its modern failure to prevent its inner-city concentration, both by race and gender (Massey and Denton, 2008).

Youth empowerment in any development is imperative not only for national development but also because the transitional period from childhood to adulthood is unquestionably a challenge for many youths. There are serious social and economic consequences associated with not addressing the minority group of youths who are at the risk of negative circumstances – not only for the youth themselves and their families, but also for society at large. If the potential of these youths are not profitably harnessed and marshalled towards development, there is bound to be trouble (Ojikutu, 1998).

This implies that all stakeholders in youth empowerment and development, including governments, Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), religious organizations, parents, guardians, and elders have the responsibility to empower youths around them in order to jointly realize the national objective of socio-economic transformation of communities (Oladele, 2003).

A committed and determined effort is required on the part of all stakeholders in order to help youths achieve their potentiality and make them appropriate partners in the task of community and national development. However, the ability of any stakeholder to empower youths depends on the nature of the socio-political and economic environment prevalent in the state. They can impose serious constraints in terms of meeting the needs and aspirations of the youths (World Bank, 1998).

According to Chigunta (2002), unless the crises in socio-economic factors, like employment, education, and other institutions, are addressed by the government, the crisis facing contemporary African youths and the communities where they live will remain unresolved and possibly worsen. In the same vein, Schuerman and Kobrin (1986), state that the socio-economic situations of young people determine the prospects of empowering or creating additional livelihood opportunities for them. Consequently, this will determine the level of their participation in community development.

To develop and empower youths for community development participation, the government and other stakeholders (e.g. NGO's) must coordinate and organize youth empowerment programmes aimed at integrating them (the youths) into the crucial task of community development. The implementation, effectiveness, and impact of these programmes are affected by a number of socio-economic factors ranging from micro factors, like family background, to macro factors, like state of the national economy (Reiss, and Roth 1993).. In other words, socio-economic factors can be accepted as those factors within an individual's environment which affects his total well-being and which the individual has little or no control over.

Socio-economic factors are external forces within the society which determine the outcome of people's lives (World Bank, 1998). They can be risk factors which increase the likelihood of experiencing negative outcomes, for example high crime and violence neighbourhoods (Sampson and Lauristen, 1993); and they can be protective factors which increase the likelihood of experiencing positive outcomes, for example caring family (Blum, 2003).

Socio-economic factors can hinder or enhance youth empowerment in development programmes at all levels. They affect youth participation in agricultural activities, and information and communication technology. Socio-economic factors determine the extent to which youths can partake in developing their communities through cultural activities. They constitute the framework that determines the general outcome of youth behaviours and their influence on the society at large (World Bank, 1998).

Most of the socio-economic factors that affect the empowerment of youths in development programmes are infrastructural facilities, working capital, and standard of education, policy reversals, and systems of taxation, systematic corruption, and violence. They also include mass media, state of the national economy, nature of public institutions, cultural and historical background, gender perceptions/values, family background, social networks and supports, and community structures (Chigunta, 2002).

However, from the social work perspective, the empowerment of the youth for community development approach enables practitioners to investigate reality with the poor, that is the working poor, the physically and mentally challenged, and the youth, to help them confront the obstacle imposed by class, and race, in order to reduce crime in the society. Thus, the synthesis of a wide range of theories and skills is needed for effective integration, actively involving the target population for empowerment at all levels of decision making, in this context, the youth (Akinyemi, 1990).

Stakeholders of youth empowerment would need to appraise the situation of the youths in planning intervention programmes to address developmental needs at the community level, but the implementation, effectiveness, and outcome/impact of these programmes on youths are determined by the socio-economic factors inherent in the community. The socio-economic factors in the macro environment represent the "distal contexts of youth", which is the youth's macro environment or context that is detached from him or her. These factors include the state of the national economy, poverty and inequality levels, the institutional framework, public institutions, policy and legal frameworks, political realities, the cultural and historical background, the media, gender (values, behavioural norms, and customs), and social exclusion. They can act as risk or protective factors in youth and community development (World Bank, 1998).

Communities with very high rates of youth violence are places in which there are high concentrations of criminogenic commodities. Both alcohol and drug use are highly correlated with violent crime at the situational level of analysis and gun use in crime generally causes greater risk of homicide (Cook, 1991; Reiss and Roth, 1993). Evidence suggests that high crime communities appear to have very high concentrations of locations selling alcohol and drugs.

The economic hardship experienced in which society has made poverty and malnutrition to deeply penetrate the youth (one of the most vulnerable groups in any



society). They lack almost all the basic things needed for a standard living, such as meaningful employment, balanced diet, good health care services, clothing, affordable education etc. When youth are passing through terrible experiences, such as low self-esteem, depression and other mental health issues, increased risk of sexually transmitted diseases, homelessness, unsafe environments and lack of participation in decision making with little or no concern on the part of the government, there is tendency for high rate of crime. Youths are disproportionately susceptible to poverty in comparison with other age groups primarily because of the fluid nature of the challenges and opportunities they face during transition to adulthood, particularly in relation to the labour market.

Youth suffering from poverty have higher rate of juvenile delinquency, crime records and their proximity to drug and alcohol abuse is equally high. A lot of them who are neither having education (formal or informal) nor working, due to lack of fund or lack of adequate skills, get involved in various criminal activities, like stealing, pick-pocketing, raping, robbery, kidnapping, ritual killing etc. They usually live in bad neighbourhoods where positive role models are either non-existent or out of reach. This study, therefore, examined way of empowering youths for a crime-free society.

This present study was conducted with the broad objective of identifying and exposing ways of empowering youths for a crime-free society. The specific objectives include: to assess ways of increasing the capacity building of youths to reduce crime; to determine how social exclusion of the youth in depersonalize society can be discouraged to reduce crime.

Research Hypotheses

- H₁ There is no significant relationship between youth empowerment and youth's attitude to crime involvement.
- H₂ There is no significant relationship between capacity building of youths and reduction of youth's involvement in crime.
- H₃ There is no significant difference between gender (male and female) youth's involvement in crime.

Methodology

Research Design

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study to elicit information on empowering youths for a crime-free society. This is appropriate to capture the effectiveness of empowering youth for a crime-free society. The descriptive survey design is once - for - all observation of the variables with a view to collecting data with which to test the research hypotheses.

Population of the Study

Based on the information gathered during pilot study, the sample size for this research is 450 respondents.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select the sample from among the population. In doing this, Ibadan North West Local Government Area was stratified along the axis of the existing three youth groups/associations within this local government area as at the time of the study. The stratified random sampling technique was used to select one hundred and fifty respondents from each association. Thus, four hundred and fifty respondents were selected for the study.



Research Instrument

The main instrument used for data collection was a structured closed-ended questionnaire tagged “Empowering Youth for a Crime-Free Society” (EYCFS) carefully designed for the participating youths and sample.

Validity and Reliability of the Study

In order to ensure that the instrument measures what it was supposed to measure, both the face and content validity of the instrument were given to experts in field of community social work, rural development, sociology and social work for their expertise input and necessary improvement. Based on their comments, some items were reworded, while some were modified to ensure that there were no ambiguities. Cronbach Alpha and Kuder Richardson (KR21) were used to provide reliability estimate of the instrument. KR21 was used for items that were dichotomously scored, while Cronbach Alpha was used for 3, 4 and 5 point items scales. In order to achieve this, a pilot study was carried out with a sample of 50 subjects in Akinyele Local Government Area, Oyo State, Nigeria. The result of reliability coefficient was $r = 0.63$. This result indicates that the instrument used for data collection is reliable.

Analysis of Data

Chi-square (X^2) and t-test were used to analyze the data to measure the relationship, using a 0.05 level of significance.

Table 1: Analysis of the Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

S/N	Items	Variables	Frequency	%
1	Sex	Female	275	61.2
		Male	175	38.8
		Total	450	100
2	Age	Below 21 - 25yrs	158	35.1
		26 - 30yrs	205	45.6
		Above 31yrs	82	18.3
		Total	450	100
3	Marital Status	Single	122	27.2
		Married	235	52.2
		Separated	21	4.6
		Divorced	48	10.7
		Widowed	24	5.3
		Total	450	100
4	Religion	Christianity	185	41.2
		Muslim	255	56.6
		Traditional	10	2.2
		Total	450	100
5	Education	Pry/Koranic	65	14.5
		Secondary	235	52.3
		Tertiary	50	11.2
		Total	450	100
		Total		

Table 1 shows that, 275 (61.2%) of the respondents were females while 158 (38.8%) were males. The age bracket of the unemployed youths below 21 to 25 years were indicated as 158 (35.1%), 26 to 30 years were analysed as 205 45.6% while 31 and above were indicated as 82 (18.3%) respectively. This goes a long way to show that the majority of the respondents are between 21 to 35 years and above.

On the marital status of the respondents, 122 (27.2%) were single, 235 (52.2%) were married, 21 (4.6%) respondents were separated were divorced, 48 (10. 7% while 24 (5.3%) were widowed. The religion of the unemployed youths shows that 66 (64.7%) were Christians, 26 (25.5%) were into Muslims and 10 (9.8%) were traditional believers. This indicated that majority of the unemployed youths are still single since there was no means to care for themselves. On the educational attainment level of the respondents, 65 (14.5%) had primary / Koranic education while those secondary school education were 235 (52.3%) and tertiary education had 50 (11.2%) respondents.



Discussions of Result

Table 2: χ^2 Analysis on Relationship between Youth Empowerment and Youth's Attitude to Crime involvement

Empowerment	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	χ^2_{cal}	χ^2_{crit}	df	Sig (2 tailed)
Count	70	75	37	0	0	182	453.025	26.30	16	0.000
Expected count	16.4	36.4	116.2	8.1	4.9	182.0				
% within	38.5%	41.2%	20.3%	0.0%	0.0%	100%				
Count	0	47	330	16	3	396				
Expected count	35.7	79.2	252.8	17.6	10.8	396.0				
% within	0.0%	11.9%	83.3%	4.0%	0.8%	100%				
Count	3	40	99	20	17	179				
Expected count	16.1	35.8	114.3	8.0	4.9	179				
% within	1.7%	22.3%	55.3%	11.2%	9.5%	100%				
Count	0	0	45	0	1	46				
Expected count	4.1	9.2	29.4	2.0	1.2	46.0				
% within	0.0%	0.0%	97.8%	0.0%	2.2%	100%				
Count	0	0	6	0	1	7				
Expected count	0.6	1.4	4.5	0.3	0.2	7.0				
% within	0.0%	0.0%	85.7%	0.0%	14.3%	100%				
Count	73	162	517	36	22	810				
Expected count	73.0	162.0	517.0	36.0	22.0	810.0				
% within	9.0%	9.0%	63.8%	4.4%	2.7%	100%				

Table 2 shows that there is significant relationship between youth empowerment and youth's attitude to crime involvement ($\chi^2_{cal} = 453.025 > \chi^2_{crit} = 26.30$ at 0.05 level of significance). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. Thus, there is a significant relationship between youth empowerment and youth's attitude to crime involvement.

Table 3: χ^2 Analysis on Relationship between Capacity Building of Youths and Reduction of Youth's Involvement in Crime

Empowerment	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	Total	χ^2_{cal}	χ^2_{crit}	df	Sig (2 tailed)
Count	182	0	0	0	0	182	744.301	26.30	16	0.000
Expected count	76.4	39.3	54.4	9.0	2.9	182.0				
% within	100%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%				
Count	158	141	97	0	0	396				
Expected count	166.2	85.6	118.3	19.6	6.4	396.0				
% within	39.9%	35.6%	24.5%	0.0%	0.0%	100%				
Count	0	34	103	33	9	179				
Expected count	75.1	38.7	53.5	8.8	2.9	179.0				
% within	0.0%	19.0%	57.5%	18.4%	5.0%	100%				
Count	0	0	39	7	0	46				
Expected count	19.3	19.9	13.7	2.3	0.7	46.0				
% within	0.0%	0.0%	84.8%	15.2%	0.0%	100%				
Count	0	0	3	0	4	7				
Expected count	2.9	1.5	2.1	0.3	0.1	7.0				
% within	0.0%	0.0%	42.9%	0.0%	57.1%	100%				
Count	340	175	242	40	13	810				
Expected count	340.0	175.0	242.0	40.0	13.0	810.0				
% within	42.0%	21.6%	29.9%	4.9%	1.6%	100%				

Table 3 shows that there is significant relationship between capacity building of youths and reduction of youth involvement in crime ($\chi^2_{cal} = 744.301 > \chi^2_{crit} = 26.30$ at 0.05 level of significance). The null hypothesis is, therefore, rejected. Hence, there is significant relationship between capacity building of youths and reduction of youth's involvement in crime.

Table 4: T-test Analysis of Difference between Gender (Male and Female) Attitudes to Crime Involvement

Sex	N	Mean	Std. dev.	t_{cal}	df	P
Male	280	32.3679	5.3692	34.616	448	< 0.05
Female	170	14.5529	5.1648			

The above table indicate that there is significant difference between male and female attitudes to crime involvement ($t_{cal} = 34.616 > t_{tab} = 1.965$ at 0.05 level of significance). The null hypothesis is, therefore, rejected. Findings from the study show that the males (32.3679) are more involved in crime than the females. (14.5529). Thus, there is a significant relationship between male and female attitudes to crime involvement.

Discussions

The result in research hypothesis one asserts that there is significant relationship between youth empowerment and youth's attitude to crime involvement ($\chi^2_{cal} = 453.025 > \chi^2_{crit} = 26.30$ at 0.05 level of significance). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. Thus, there is a significant relationship between youth empowerment and youth's attitude to crime involvement. This is supported by the findings of Reiss, A.J. Jr. and Roth, G. (1993) that youth in poverty have higher rate of juvenile delinquency, crime records and their proximity to drug and alcohol abuse is equally high. A lot of them who are neither having education (formal or informal) nor working, due to lack of fund or lack of adequate skills, get involved in various criminal activities, like stealing, pick- pocketing, raping, robbery, kidnapping, ritual killing etc.

It was also discovered in research hypothesis two that there is significant relationship between capacity building of youths and reduction of youth involvement in crime ($\chi^2_{cal} = 744.301 > \chi^2_{crit} = 26.30$ at 0.05 level of significance). The null hypothesis is,

therefore, rejected. Hence, there is significant relationship between capacity building of youths and reduction of youth's involvement in crime. This is buttressed by the findings of Reiss (1988) who asserts that virtually all governments of the world, including advanced countries have sought new approaches to harness the potential of young people and address the problems facing them. The concept of youth empowerment has gained increasing attention.

Research hypothesis three reveals that there is significant difference between male and female attitudes to crime involvement ($t_{cal} = 34.616 > t_{tab} = 1.965$ at 0.05 level of significance). The null hypothesis is, therefore, rejected. Findings from the study show that the males (32.3679) are more involved in crime than the females. (14.5529). Thus, there is a significant relationship between male and female attitudes to crime involvement. This is in line with the findings of Messner and Tardiff (1986), Bursik and Grasmik (1993), who aver that unmarried or divorced adults, teenagers, non-working adults, poor people, persons with criminal histories, especially male and single parents, are the kind of people whose presence is associated with higher rates of violent crime.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study has established that the government should reach out to the youth, regardless of their ethnic, cultural, religious, geographical or political affiliation. The findings of the study also have implications for community development planners, policy makers, non-governmental agencies, and other stakeholders participating in development planning and design, and service delivery system. Furthermore, it enables youth association to develop the ability to link up with other communities or agencies for assistance in their empowerment programmes. The study has equally established that government's empowerment programmes should be restructured, or re-designed, and should be centred on the "participatory approach". This approach emphasizes the importance of involving the beneficiaries in all stages of the programme. It also recommends that there should be greater investment on the human capital investment of youths. This implies that improvement in education, health and nutrition, employment opportunities, shelter and social services, directly address the most important problem of poverty and reduces crime among the youth.

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