

## Ritual Crimes and Youth Well-Being in Lafia Nasarawa State, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

This paper interrogates the effects of ritual crimes on youth well-being in Lafia, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The study objectives were to assess the effect of human sacrifice, money ritual, and organ harvesting on youth well-being in Lafia. The study adopted strain theory as theoretical framework. Cross-sectional survey design was utilised. Data were collected through structured questionnaire and key informant interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). While, qualitative data were transcribed thematically. The study found among others that human sacrifice undermines youth social wellbeing by disrupting communal trust, promoting fear-based interactions, and weakening social cohesion. The study also found that money rituals harm youth emotional wellbeing by fostering feelings of insecurity, moral confusion, and emotional distress due to exposure to violent and unethical practices. The study concludes among others that organ harvesting negatively affects youth mental wellbeing by instilling persistent fear, anxiety, psychological trauma and sense of insecurity among young people. The study recommended among others that community leaders, government, religious institutions, and Civil Society Organizations should intensify awareness campaigns to discourage harmful traditional practices such as human sacrifice and promote youth social wellbeing. Also, youth empowerment programmes and moral education should be prioritised to discourage involvement in money rituals and support emotional stability among young people.

**Keyboard:** Ritual crimes, human sacrifice, organ harvesting, money ritual and youth wellbeing,

### 1.1 Introduction

Globally, ritual crimes have become a social issue, with youths being both victims and perpetrators. This phenomenon, known as ritual crimes, involves the killing of people for their blood and body parts, often for perceived spiritual or material benefits. On the other hand, well-being refers to a state of being comfortable, healthy, and happy, encompassing physical, mental, emotional, and social aspects of individual's life. However, ritual crimes affect millions of people well-being across the globe. Nwankwo (2020), noted that ritual crimes are deeply rooted in cultural myths, economic desperation, and the influence of occult practices that promise quick wealth or power. These acts, often fueled by desperation for wealth, peer influence, and declining moral values significantly endanger the mental, social, emotional and physical well-being of young people. The growing prevalence of such crimes not only threatens individual lives but also undermines community safety, development, and social cohesion.

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In many African cultures, traditional rituals and medicinal practices were historically harnessed with natural ingredients including plants, leaves and animals, to promote health, fertility, protection, and prosperity. However, the use of human body parts and blood has become alarmingly prevalent in rituals and medicinal practices within some African communities in recent years (Agazue, 2023). Most people believe that human blood and body parts can boost the effectiveness of traditional medicines and rituals, promising benefits such as wealth, long life, protection from harm, and social advancement, which often fuels a deadly and illicit trade. Since the mid-1980s, Africa has experienced a disturbing surge in ritual crimes, particularly targeting children, girls, including those with albinism (Mazuru, 2019).

The prevalence of such activities not only exposes youths to physical danger but also fosters a climate of fear, mistrust, and moral decay within communities. As a result, it posed serious threats to the social, psychological, and emotional health of young individuals, disrupting their development and eroding their sense of safety and purpose. The persistence of ritual crimes is often attributed to several factors, with widespread unemployment, poverty, and economic hardship being commonly cited as underlying causes (Adewunmi & Chigbo, 2021). Desperation to escape poverty makes individuals vulnerable to false promises from traditional spiritualists, who claim that rituals involving human ingredients can bring financial prosperity and improved living conditions.

In Europe, particularly in the United Kingdom and Germany, there have been documented cases of human sacrifices linked to African diasporic communities and occult practices (Anderson & Green, 2020). These crimes often target vulnerable populations such as immigrants and youth, leading to significant psychological trauma and social marginalization. In North America, between 2019 and 2022, the FBI reported sporadic cases involving human trafficking and occult symbols tied to criminal groups (U.S. Department of Justice, 2023). These crimes, while rare, have been linked to increased anxiety, depression, and fear among youth exposed to or involved in these activities. In Brazil and Colombia, criminal organizations have incorporated Afro-Caribbean spiritual rituals into their initiation processes, including symbolic killings and mutilations (Gonzalez & Pereira, 2021). These acts often traumatize young participants and perpetuate cycles of violence, severely impairing their mental health and well-being.

In Australia, the Australian Institute of Criminology (2022), identified ritualistic abuse in some child exploitation cases, emphasizing long-term effects such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and emotional detachment among youth victims.

In India and some parts of Southeast Asia, ritual killings are often children or women, and in rural areas where superstitious beliefs are entrenched (Singh & Rajan, 2020). These crimes are justified by perpetrators as means to gain prosperity or fertility. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2022), Southeast Asia has over 600,000 victims annually, with many being youths coerced into rituals masquerading as traditional practices. Such circumstances create lasting trauma and existential crises, profoundly affecting the victims' long-term psychological health and societal integration.

Within African, ritual crimes have been documented as a grave concern, particularly in regions plagued by poverty and social unrest. Countries like Uganda, South Africa, and Nigeria report frequent cases where youth are either perpetrators or victims (Adewunmi & Chigbo, 2021). The belief in "money rituals" has grown in prevalence, fueled by social media and economic desperation. Studies conducted by Ijeoma and Nnamani (2020); Mazuru (2019), and Ngubane (2020), shows the prevalence of ritual victims in countries such as Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria and Uganda. According to Ngubane

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(2020), children account for a significant proportion of ritual homicide cases, with reports indicating 62 out of 116 victims in Ghana, 53% in Kenya, and 60% in Uganda. These crimes have dire consequences on youth well-being, including death, trauma, displacement, and distrust of institutions. A survey by Onyango, Okwera et al., (2021), revealed that approximately 68% of youths in certain African nations perceive ritual killings as a significant threat to their safety and mental health. In Nigeria, over 2,000 cases of ritual killings were reported between 2019 and 2022, with many victims being minors or young adults (National Human Rights Commission, 2022). Factors such as unemployment, poverty, peer pressure, and cultural beliefs in supernatural wealth acquisition drive this trend. The glamorization of wealth on social media and in popular culture further fuels youths' involvement in such practices (Okonkwo & Ibrahim, 2023).

Nasarawa State is no exception. A report published by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022), shows that over 1,000 cases of reported ritual killings in Nasarawa State between 2018 and 2021. Similarly, in the year 2022, the Nasarawa State Police Command recorded over 120 suspected ritual-related cases, many involving youth either as victims or perpetrators. Abubakar and Ishaq (2020), notes that youths in Nasarawa state are vulnerable, being both the primary victims and perpetrators in the cycle of violence that surrounds ritual crimes. The study shows alarming correlation between knowledge of ritualistic practices and engagement in related criminal endeavors, signifying a critical area of concern.

According to Eze, et al., (2021), over 70% of youths in Lafia reported feeling unsafe in their neighborhoods due to the prevalence of such activities. In 2023, two teenagers were arrested in Lafia for attempting to perform a money ritual using body parts obtained from a graveyard (Nasarawa Mirror, 2023). Therefore, the persistent incidences of ritual crimes posed a serious danger to youths and entire population of Lafia Local Government Area. Despite government efforts, Non-Governmental Organizations, and civil society groups, including agencies like the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), Nigeria Police Force and National Orientation Agency (NOA), ritual crimes continue to persist in Nigeria, due to inadequate implementation or enforcement, which may be influenced by cultural norms.

Some studies have attempted to examine ritual crimes in other settings. Study conducted by Nwankwo (2020), in Rivers State found that ritual crimes significantly disrupt the mental and emotional stability of youths, often resulting in symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression. The research revealed that youths who have either witnessed or been indirectly exposed to ritual killings exhibit increased fear and a sense of helplessness, which negatively impacts their daily functioning and social relationships. While Nwankwo (2020), explored psychological outcomes, the author failed to interrogate human sacrifice as a form of ritual crime that affect the youth's well-being. Adebayo and Ogunleye (2021), examined the educational and economic consequences of ritual crimes on youth in southwestern Nigeria. Their findings showed that many students abandon school due to fear of abduction or community unrest, leading to lower educational attainment and limited job prospects. This disruption in academic progress contributes to long-term poverty and vulnerability, pushing some youths toward criminal networks as a means of survival. However, the authors did not address the impact of money ritual on youths' well-being. Similarly, Usman and Ibrahim (2023), explored the sociopolitical effects of ritual crimes, noting that the persistent threat of such violence undermines youths' trust in government institutions and law enforcement. Their study revealed that when justice is not served, youths perceive the state as complicit or powerless, which can lead to civic disengagement and anti-social behaviour. The authors failed to account for organ harvesting as well as its social effects. There is need to bridge these knowledge gaps created by previous studies by

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examining the effect of ritual crimes on youths' well-being in Lafia Local Government Area Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study include;

- i. to investigate the effects of human sacrifice on youths' well-being in Lafia Local Government Area Nasarawa State, Nigeria
- ii. to explore the effect of money ritual on youths' well-being in Lafia Local Government Area Nasarawa State, Nigeria
- iii. to assess the effect of organ harvesting on youths' well-being in Lafia Local Government Area Nasarawa State, Nigeria

## **2.1 Conceptualization of terms**

### **Ritual crimes**

These are illegal acts committed as part of spiritual or occult practices, such as killing someone for a ritual, for example, a person murdered to appease a deity. Adinkrah (2005), defines ritual crimes as killings carried out specifically to obtain body parts, blood or other human materials for use in occult/juju practices or murders performed because the perpetrators believe the victim's body-parts will be converted into spiritual power, wealth or protection. LaFontaine (2011), described ritual crimes as killings linked to occult or supernatural beliefs (human sacrifice and related practices), and stresses the slippery boundary between local religious ritual, alleged occult commerce in body parts, and crime. This definition covers a range of acts from symbolic sacrificial killing to killings intended to supply material for charms or medicines.

In the same context, Petrus (2007), defined ritual crime as those violent acts whose motive and form are embedded in local ritual systems: when murder or abuse is performed as part of an asserted ritual, the act acquires extra-legal meaning (ritual logic) that complicates investigation and prosecution. Hoskins (2012) defines ritual crime as homicides in which elements beyond killing (mutilation, removal of specific organs, staging of corpse, altars/offerings) indicate a belief that specific human parts or rites will produce spiritual/financial benefits. Owusu (2020), defines ritual crimes as the deliberate killing for ritual, occult or juju purposes, typically involving harvesting of body parts or blood for use in charms, medicines or money-making rituals. Similarly, Nwakanma (2020), describes ritual crimes as murders committed to supply human body parts or human blood for magical/occult practices (often tied to claims of economic gain), and uses the terms interchangeably with "human sacrifice" or "occult ritual" while emphasising social and gender patterns (women and children commonly targeted).

### **Youth well-being**

It refers to the physical, mental, emotional, and social health of young people, for instance, access to education, safety, and employment contributes to their well-being. It involves personal and societal good in which young people thrive and achieve their full potential. World Health Organization (2024), described adolescent mental well-being as more than just the absence of illness, encompassing positive elements such as happiness, life satisfaction, and psychosocial functioning, supported by protective environments in family, school, and community. In the same context, United Nation Children's Fund (2021), defined youth well-being as comprising both subjective aspects, such as life satisfaction and positive affect, and objective conditions, including health, education, and safety, with a focus on incorporating young people's own evaluations of their lives. According to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2021), youth well-being is a multidimensional construct like health and education with subjective assessments such as life satisfaction and emotional states, intended for people-centred policy monitoring. Again, Casas and González-Carrasco (2021), described youth well-being primarily through subjective evaluations, including life satisfaction, happiness, and appraisals of specific life domains such as family, school, and friendships, noting the influence of age

and culture on these perceptions. The American Academy of Pediatrics (2022), defined youth well-being as thriving or flourishing construct incorporating physical and mental health, social connections, competence, and opportunities.

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework

### Strain Theory

Strain theory was developed by Robert K. Merton in 1938. Strain theory assumes that society sets culturally approved goals, such as wealth and success, but not everyone has equal access to the legitimate means of achieving them. When individuals, particularly those in disadvantaged settings, are blocked from achieving these goals through education or employment, they experience strain or pressure. This strain can lead to frustration and may drive individuals to resort to deviant or criminal behaviour as alternative means of achieving success (Merton, 1938). These conditions create a disconnect between the societal expectation of success often portrayed through wealth and material possessions and the youths' ability to achieve it through conventional means. Merton's five adaptive Perspectives includes;

Merton's Five Adaptive Perspectives in Strain Theory

**Conformity:** Accepting both societal goals (wealth, success) and the legitimate means to achieve them.

**Innovation:** Accepting societal goals but rejecting or bypassing legitimate means, using illegitimate or unconventional methods to achieve them.

**Ritualism:** Rejecting societal goals but rigidly adhering to the legitimate means (following rules without aiming for success).

**Retreatism:** Rejecting both societal goals and legitimate means, often withdrawing from societal expectations entirely (substance abuse, vagrancy).

**Rebellion:** Rejecting and replacing societal goals and means with alternative ones, often aiming to restructure the social system.

In this context, the innovation mode of Merton aligns with this study, where individuals accept culturally approved goals but resort to illegitimate or unconventional means to achieve them. Many youths aspire to achieve societal markers of success such as wealth, influence, and status. However, when legitimate opportunities such as gainful employment, quality education, or fair access to resources are limited, some youths may turn to ritual crimes as an alternative path to achieving these goals. Ritual crimes in Nigeria, including Lafia, often have economic, spiritual, and socio-cultural dimensions. Under innovation, young people who perceive legitimate economic avenues as blocked may adopt illicit practices such as ritual killings, human part trafficking, or occult sacrifices in the belief that these acts will bring sudden wealth, power, or protection. The acceptance of wealth as a legitimate life goal remains, but the chosen method to attain it is culturally forbidden and legally punishable, representing a clear case of innovation. Beyond legal consequences, the psychological toll on youths involved in or exposed to ritual crimes is severe. Many suffer from anxiety, guilt, fear of retribution, or trauma from witnessing violent acts. These mental health issues reduce their overall well-being and hinder their ability to function productively in society. Thus, strain not only leads to criminal behaviour but also results in long-term emotional and psychological harm. Furthermore, even those who do not participate directly in ritual crimes may feel unsafe and disillusioned by the prevalence of such acts in their communities. They may become apathetic toward law enforcement or societal norms, viewing crime as a normal or unavoidable part of life. This sense of hopelessness further deteriorates communal trust and the social fabric that should support youth development.

Therefore, strain theory effectively explains how economic deprivation, social pressure, and lack of opportunity in Lafia Local Government Area that can push youths toward ritual crimes. These crimes, while seemingly a solution to their immediate frustrations, ultimately compromise their well-being

through legal risks, mental health challenges, and social exclusion. However, strain theory ignores cultural and religious motivations specific to ritual crimes, which in places like Lafia may be rooted in beliefs rather than purely economic strain. It also does not account for why many disadvantaged youths under similar pressures choose not to engage in deviant behavior. Despite the weakness of strain theory, the theory is still useful for this study as it provides a structural explanation for why economically marginalised youths may turn to ritual crimes like human sacrifice, money ritual and organ harvesting as alternative means of achieving societal goals.

### 3.1 Methodology

The study adopted cross-sectional survey research design. Cross-sectional study is suitable for population-based surveys, offering advantages such as direct observation by the researcher, efficient data collection without the need for participant follow-up, and quicker, cost-effective results compared to other designs. The study area is Lafia Local Government Area of Nasarawa State Nigeria. The Local Government has 13 political wards as follows: Adogi, Agyaragun Tofa, Arikyia, Ashigie, Assakio, Bakin Rajiya, Chiroma, Gayamu, Keffin/Wambai, Makama, Shabu/Kwandere, Wakwa and Zanwa. As of 2023, the population of Lafia Local Government Area is projected to be around 388,000 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Taro (1967) was adopted for sample size determination since the population is known. Thus, the total sample for both quantitative and qualitative data were 410. Data in this study was collected by the researcher. The analysis was done using frequency distribution tables, mean and standard deviation. Responses were presented in counts and percentages. Respondents were adequately informed that they had the right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any time.

### 4.1 Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

**Table 1: Human sacrifice and youths' well-being**

Statements	Yes	No	Not Sure	Mean	STD
Are you aware of human sacrifice in your area	250	118	12	2.57	.505
Youths who engage in human sacrifice are more likely to experience trauma	203	170	8	2.50	.501
Human sacrifice increased insecurity among youths	239	118	23	3.03	.635
Fear of being a victim of human sacrifice affects the daily activities of youths	137	98	145	2.35	1.464
Human sacrifice has led to a breakdown in community cohesion and trust among youths	208	151	21	2.65	.539
Youths who are victims of human sacrifice often experience psychological damage	216	159	5	2.58	.577

**Source:** Field Survey, 2025

Data in Table 1 show how human sacrifice is a recognised issue within the community, with a high awareness level among respondents (mean = 2.57, STD = .505), indicating a consistent agreement on its presence. In addition, the result in table 1 showed that human sacrifice contributes to psychological

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trauma (mean = 2.50, STD = .501) and damages community cohesion and trust among youths (mean = 2.65, STD = .539). These low standard deviations suggest relatively uniform responses, implying widespread consensus on the harmful effects of human sacrifice on youth well-being, especially in terms of mental health and social relationships. On the other hand, the high standard deviation for the item on fear affecting daily activities (STD = 1.464, mean = 2.35) suggests significant variability in respondents' experiences or perceptions. This may indicate that while some youths are deeply affected in their daily routines by fear of victimization, others feel less impacted. Furthermore, the highest mean score (3.03) was recorded for the statement linking human sacrifice to increased insecurity, underscoring a strong agreement that this practice destabilizes safety among youths. These findings collectively suggest that human sacrifice has both direct and indirect negative implications on youth well-being, affecting their psychological health, community interactions, and sense of security. The result from KII corroborated the findings from the quantitative data. In his observations, a male respondent aged 45 years explained that:

Human sacrifice has created a sense of fear and insecurity among youths in our community. Many are always on edge, wondering if they'll be the next target. It's affected our mental health and well-being. We need more protection and support from authorities **(Male/45yrs/2025)**.

A male respondent aged 40 years stated that:

I've seen friends become withdrawn and anxious due to the threat of human sacrifice. It's like living in constant dread. The ritual killings have made us question our safety and trust in the community. Youths are no longer free to move around without fear. It's a nightmare **(Male/40yrs/2025)**.

During the interview, an interviewee age 42 years said that:

As a youth leader, I've witnessed firsthand the impact of human sacrifice on our mental health and well-being. Human sacrifice has ruined our community's reputation and scared away investors. Youths are losing hope and opportunities. We need to work together to stop these killings. Even when we try to ignore it, the fear comes back when there's a new incident. I've seen young people break down after hearing such news. These things are not just physical crimes; they damage us mentally. We feel helpless **(Male/45yrs/youth leader/2025)**.

**Table 2: Money ritual and youths' well-being**

Statements	Yes	No	Not Sure	Mean	STD
Are you aware of youths who have been involved in or affected by money rituals	205	140	35	2.74	.630
Money rituals have led to increased crime rates among youths	120	243	17	2.53	1.342
Desire for quick wealth through money rituals has negatively impacted the moral values of youths	221	147	12	3.05	.673
Youths who engage in money rituals often experience social isolation	250	119	11	3.28	.790
Money rituals lead to emotional disorder among youths	210	147	23	3.12	.646
Fear of being harmed by someone involved in money rituals causes anxiety in youths.	120	242	18	2.47	1.014
Money ritual culture has led some youths into risky and unlawful behaviour	224	148	8	3.15	.661
Exposure to money ritual social wellbeing among youths	190	117	13	2.53	.557

**Source:** Field Survey, 2025.

The data in Table 2 showed that a significant proportion of respondents are aware of youths involved in or affected by money rituals (mean = 2.74, STD = .630), indicating that this phenomenon is relatively well-known in the community. The high mean scores for statements like social isolation (mean = 3.28, STD = .790) and emotional disorder (mean = 3.12, STD = .646) suggest strong agreement that money rituals severely impact the psychological and social well-being of youths. Similarly, the perception that the desire for quick wealth undermines moral values (mean = 3.05, STD = .673) implies that these practices are eroding ethical standards among young people. The relatively low standard deviations for these items show consistency in respondents' views, reinforcing the belief that money rituals have broad and negative effects on youth development. Additionally, the statement linking money rituals to increased crime has a moderate mean (2.53) but a high standard deviation (1.342), suggesting diverse

opinions some youths may associate money rituals with crime, while others do not see a direct link. The fear and anxiety caused by potential harm from individuals involved in money rituals (mean = 2.47, STD = 1.014) also reflects mixed experiences. On the other hand, there is strong agreement that the culture of money rituals drives risky and unlawful behaviors (mean = 3.15, STD = .661), and that such exposure affects youths' social well-being (mean = 2.53, STD = .557). These findings highlight the psychological, social, and behavioral risks money rituals pose to youth well-being, suggesting the need for community interventions and policy responses to curb the influence of these harmful practices. Findings from KII correlated with those from quantitative analysis. A 39 years female respondent submitted that:

Many young people today believe the only way to make it is through money rituals. It's sad because hard work is no longer respected. There's this pressure to get rich quick. That pressure is dangerous and affects our mindset. I've seen friends become desperate because they feel left behind. Social media doesn't help it makes ritual money look attractive. Some even joke about it, but deep down, they're considering it. That desperation causes stress. Our values have really dropped. People no longer ask how you got rich they just respect the wealth. Youths copy this trend, thinking rituals are the way forward. This has made many of us anxious and confused **(Female/39yrs/2025)**.

A male respondent said:

Some of my peers talk about money rituals like it's just a business idea. That scares me because it shows how normalized it has become. They don't care about the risks or the consequences. It affects our moral direction. Money ritual culture is destroying ambition and integrity. People don't want to struggle or build gradually anymore. It's creating a generation that values wealth over life. That kind of thinking is harmful to our well-being **(Male/36yrs/2025)**.

**Table 3: Organ harvesting and youths' well-being**

Statements	Yes	No	Not sure	Mean	STD
Are you aware of organ harvesting in your area	220	147	13	2.71	1.134
Fear of organ harvesting makes many youths avoid walking alone or at night	239	123	18	3.0	.568
Organ trafficking have increased distrust among youths toward strangers	248	124	8	2.63	.581
Organ harvesting cases cause psychological trauma to survivors and communities	241	76	63	3.83	1.023
Organ harvesting lead to physical damage to survivors	255	108	17	3.11	.656
Threat of organ harvesting has disrupted youths' sense of peace and well-being	160	123	97	2.43	1.015
Organ harvesting has contributed to a sense of insecurity among youths	193	157	30	3.18	.627

**Source:** Field Survey, 2025

The data in Table 3 indicated a high level of awareness about organ harvesting among respondents (mean = 2.71, STD = 1.134), although the relatively high standard deviation suggests varied experiences or levels of exposure. Notably, respondents strongly agreed that fear of organ harvesting impacts behavior such as avoiding walking alone or at night (mean = 3.00, STD = .568) demonstrating that perceived threats are influencing the daily routines and mobility of youths. Similarly, the high mean score (3.83) for the psychological trauma associated with organ harvesting cases, despite a higher standard deviation (1.023), underscores the severe emotional impact these incidents have on both survivors and their communities. This suggests organ harvesting is not just a physical threat but a source of deep emotional and social disruption. Other responses further confirm the negative influence of organ harvesting on youth well-being. There is strong agreement that it causes physical damage to survivors (mean = 3.11, STD = .656) and contributes to a sense of insecurity among youths (mean = 3.18, STD = .627). Although the mean score is slightly lower (2.43) for the impact on youths' sense of peace, the high standard deviation (1.015) implies mixed feelings some youths may feel deeply affected, while others are less impacted or less aware. The general trend across the table shows that organ harvesting is not only a health and legal issue but also a significant psychological and social concern for youths, reinforcing the need for improved security measures and public health education

in affected communities. The result from KII corroborated the findings. As noted by a 34 years female respondent who opined that:

The fear of organ harvesting makes us live with caution. We don't trust strangers anymore, especially in isolated places. Everyone is suspicious of everything. That level of fear affects how we move and interact. I've stopped going out at night because of organ trafficking stories. Even in the daytime, I'm always alert. This constant state of fear is tiring. It's affecting our peace and freedom **(Female/36yrs/2025)**.

A male respondent aged 43 said that:

Organ harvesting makes youths feel like targets. It's scary to think someone could harm you just for money. That fear changes how we live our daily lives. We're constantly looking over our shoulders. I know someone who had a close call with suspected traffickers. She's still traumatized and barely goes anywhere alone. That experience has changed her completely. It's not just physical harm it's emotional too **(Male/43yrs/2025)**.

Commenting, a female respondent aged 35 years submitted that:

“These crimes make us feel unsafe even in our communities. Sometimes we wonder who to trust. The fear spreads through the youth population like wildfire. It damages our mental health and sense of belonging” **(Female/35yrs/2025)**.

### **Discussions of findings**

The study found that human sacrifice creates fear among youths in Lafia Local Government Area making them feel unsafe in their environment. This finding aligns with Adebayo and Akinyemi (2020), who found that ritual killings in Nigeria have instilled a pervasive sense of insecurity, especially among the youth population. Fear limits young people's freedom to move about, socialize, or engage in community activities. As participants reported, mere rumors of human sacrifice are enough to provoke anxiety, paranoia, and mistrust, indicating that even indirect exposure to such crimes can have lasting psychological consequences. In the same context, the study found that human sacrifice contributes to emotional distress and trauma among youths. This corroborates the findings of Eze and Umeh (2021), who observed that constant exposure to violent or ritual-related incidents can cause lasting emotional and psychological harm. Where these crimes are occasionally reported, the trauma associated with hearing or witnessing such acts leads to nightmares, stress, and general emotional instability. The fear of abduction for human sacrifice was also found to significantly restrict young people's movement and freedom, leading to social withdrawal and a breakdown of communal trust. This finding is in agreement with Onuoha (2019), who emphasised that ritual-related fears reduce public interaction and increase suspicion within communities. Youths become reluctant to attend events, move alone, or engage in public life due to fear of being targeted. The effect is a socially isolated and emotionally insecure generation of young people. In relation to the second objective, the study found that money rituals are contributing to a decline in moral values among youths.

This aligns with Adebajo and Alabi (2020), who asserted that the glamorization of ritual wealth in Nigerian media and popular culture has shifted young people's perception of success and integrity. Participants reported that many youths now equate success with quick wealth, regardless of the means. This mindset fosters moral decay and weakens the societal value system that once emphasized hard work and honesty. Furthermore, findings revealed that peer pressure and societal expectations are pushing many young people toward considering or participating in money rituals. This finding is in

agreement with the work of Nwosu (2022), who highlighted that peer influence and socio-economic desperation often drive youths to embrace occult practices in search of wealth. The normalization of ritual practices in certain social circles increases the risk of youth involvement in such activities. This trend has disturbing implications for youth identity and mental health. The study also discovered that anxiety, fear of harm, and loss of self-worth are prevalent among youths exposed to the culture of money rituals.

These findings support Ugwueze and Ojukwu (2021), who observed that the psychological burden of living in a society where wealth is linked to suspected ritual practices causes unease and insecurity among the younger generation. The pressure to 'belong' or meet certain economic standards can result in depression or reckless behavior. Thus, ritual practices indirectly affect youth well-being by destabilizing their psychological resilience. Regarding the third objective, the study found that organ harvesting instills fear and mistrust in youths, particularly in public and isolated spaces. This finding aligns with the work of Okeke (2023), who reported that organ trafficking has heightened community-wide panic and distrust in many Nigerian towns. Participants described limiting their movements, especially at night, and being hyper-vigilant even in familiar environments. The social effect is a breakdown in community trust and a heightened sense of vulnerability. Moreover, the study revealed that organ harvesting has led to trauma and emotional insecurity among youths, particularly among those with direct or indirect experiences with such crimes. This is in agreement with Ijeoma and Nnamani (2020), who emphasized that survivors or witnesses of organ trafficking suffer long-term psychological effects, including PTSD and chronic anxiety. Young people, especially females, reported avoiding certain locations or people due to fear of being targeted. These behaviours show the deep emotional impact of ritual crimes beyond their physical violence.

The findings also indicate that organ harvesting contributes to reduced participation in social and economic life among youths. Many reported avoiding school, evening jobs, or social gatherings for fear of being abducted. This corroborates findings by Musa and Ibrahim (2019), who documented how the threat of ritual crimes can discourage youth from engaging in meaningful developmental activities. As a result, fear-driven behavior compromises educational access, peer interaction, and general well-being. Therefore, the study shows that human sacrifice, money rituals, and organ harvesting negatively impact youth well-being through fear, trauma, social withdrawal, and moral distortion. These findings are consistent with previous research conducted in various parts of Nigeria, confirming that ritual crimes are not only criminal issues but also significant public health, physical, social and psychological challenges.

## **5.1 Conclusions and recommendations**

This study examined the effects of ritual crimes specifically human sacrifice, money rituals, and organ harvesting on the well-being of youths in Lafia Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. The findings reveal that these practices, whether experienced directly or indirectly, instill fear, anxiety, emotional trauma, and social mistrust among young people. Human sacrifice, in particular, has created a culture of fear and suspicion, where many youths limit their movement and social activities out of concern for their safety. The study also showed that the rising influence of money rituals has contributed significantly to the erosion of moral values among youths. Exposure to ritual-related beliefs and practices has normalized the pursuit of wealth through harmful means, leading to increased peer pressure, anxiety, and psychological distress. This shift in mindset undermines hard work, promotes unhealthy competition, and encourages unethical behavior among impressionable youths seeking quick success. Above all, the practice of ritual crimes in the use of human sacrifice has shown how humanity

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has degenerated in values; humans now value money, riches and wealth over human life and sanctity of life. Our priority as humans have drastically changed, man`s life is mere tool for money making. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are presented:

1. Community leaders, government, religious institutions, and civil society organisation should intensify awareness campaigns to discourage harmful traditional practices such as human sacrifice and promote youth social wellbeing.
2. Youth empowerment programmes and moral education should be prioritised to discourage involvement in money rituals and support emotional stability among young people
3. Law enforcement agencies should intensify surveillance and community policing efforts to dismantle organ trafficking networks and restore public trust among youths.

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