

CAUSES AND TRENDS OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

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Abstract

Juvenile delinquency in contemporary Nigeria has intensified into a major social problem, marked by the increasing involvement of children and adolescents in violent, organised, and diverse forms of criminal behaviour. This has posed serious threats to public safety and social stability in the country. This study therefore examines the causes and emerging trends of juvenile delinquency in Nigeria, with particular attention to how changing social, economic, and cultural conditions shape youth involvement in delinquent acts. Guided by social learning theory, the study interrogates how family instability, poverty, peer influence, urbanisation, weak social control, and exposure to violence interact to normalise and reproduce delinquent behaviour among young people. A qualitative narrative review design was adopted, drawing on secondary sources including peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, institutional reports, and scholarly books published between 2019 and 2024. Thematic content analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns, explanatory frameworks, and areas of convergence and divergence in existing studies. The findings reveal that juvenile delinquency in Nigeria is increasingly diverse, violent, and embedded within broader processes of socio-economic marginalisation, urban stress, and declining moral and institutional regulation. The study concludes that addressing juvenile delinquency requires a shift from punitive responses toward comprehensive social interventions that strengthen families, educational systems, and community structures.

Keywords: *Juvenile Delinquency, Youth Crime, Social Learning Theory, Socio-Economic Factors, Nigeria.*

Introduction

Juvenile delinquency has long been recognized as a critical social problem that threatens social order, public safety, and the future of national development. Across societies, children and adolescents are expected to internalize social norms, develop pro-social behaviours, and transition gradually into responsible adulthood. When this process is disrupted, manifesting in persistent involvement in anti-social or criminal behaviour, it raises fundamental concerns not only about individual deviance but also about structural failures within families, schools, communities, and the wider society. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

(UNODC, 2021) defines juvenile delinquency as participation by persons below the age of 18 in behaviours that violate criminal law or societal norms, emphasizing that such acts are often shaped by broader socio-economic and environmental conditions rather than individual pathology alone.

Globally, youth involvement in crime has been linked to poverty, social exclusion, weak social institutions, exposure to violence, and limited access to education and economic opportunities (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2021; The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2022). In many developing societies, these structural pressures are intensified by rapid urbanization, digital exposure, unemployment, and fragile child protection systems. Consequently, juvenile delinquency is no longer viewed merely as youthful mischief but as a complex social phenomenon with far-reaching implications for security, governance, and sustainable development.

In Nigeria, concerns about juvenile delinquency have reached heightened levels in recent years. Media reports, police records, and academic studies increasingly point to the growing involvement of adolescents in a wide range of delinquent and criminal activities, including theft, cultism, cybercrime, drug abuse, examination malpractice, sexual violence, armed robbery, and gang-related violence (Aremu, 2020; National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023). The 2022 Nigeria Crime and Safety Survey indicates that young people constitute a significant proportion of individuals apprehended for property-related and violent crimes, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas (NBS, 2023). These trends have generated widespread anxiety among parents, educators, policymakers, and security agencies, as juvenile crime increasingly blurs into adult criminal networks.

Recent incidents reported across Nigerian states illustrate the disturbing depth of the problem. Arrests of minors in connection with armed robbery, homicide, drug trafficking, and cyber-enabled fraud highlight the early entry of adolescents into organized and violent forms of criminality (ThisDay Live, 2022; Premium Times, 2023). While media coverage often presents these cases as isolated events, they reflect broader and recurring patterns of youth vulnerability, social breakdown, and inadequate institutional responses. The visibility of such cases has further reinforced public perceptions that juvenile delinquency in contemporary Nigeria is not only increasing but also becoming more violent, sophisticated, and normalized.

Historically, juvenile delinquency is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria. Colonial records and early post-independence studies document youth involvement in offences such as petty theft, vagrancy, prostitution, and street trading as far back as the 1920s, prompting the establishment of juvenile courts and correctional institutions by colonial administrators (Leung & Shek, 2020). However, scholars argue that the nature, scale, and drivers of delinquency in contemporary Nigeria differ markedly from earlier periods. Unlike the past, today's adolescents operate within a rapidly changing social environment characterized by digital technology, social media exposure, urban overcrowding, weakened family structures, and declining moral authority of traditional institutions (Awonaike & Fadairo, 2024).

Contemporary Nigerian youths are increasingly exposed to global cultures, online subcultures, and peer networks that may normalize violence, materialism, drug use, and criminal lifestyles. Access to the internet and social networking platforms has expanded adolescents' social worlds beyond parental and community control, creating new avenues for recruitment into cult groups, cybercrime rings, and other deviant networks (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2021). At the same time, persistent economic hardship, youth unemployment, school dropout, and declining quality of education have deepened frustration and eroded legitimate pathways to social mobility (World Bank, 2022). These conditions create fertile ground for delinquent behaviour, particularly among adolescents from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Empirical studies in Nigeria consistently associate juvenile delinquency with a constellation of risk factors, including family instability, poor parental supervision, exposure

to violence, peer pressure, substance abuse, and weak school attachment (Olawale et al., 2020; Abdulraheem-Mustapha, 2019). Delinquent acts among juveniles are commonly categorized into status offences such as truancy, running away from home, and disobedience and criminal offences, including theft, vandalism, cultism, sexual assault, drug trafficking, and homicide (Eke, 2019; UNODC, 2022). Alarming, the boundary between these categories has become increasingly porous, with many youths transitioning rapidly from minor infractions to serious criminal behaviour.

The implications of rising juvenile delinquency for Nigerian society are profound. Beyond immediate threats to public safety, youth crime undermines educational systems, strains the criminal justice process, and perpetuates cycles of violence and social exclusion. Schools experience heightened insecurity through bullying, cult-related violence, and examination malpractice, while communities grapple with fear, mistrust, and the normalization of crime (Akanle & Omotayo, 2021). If left unaddressed, juvenile delinquency not only jeopardizes the well-being of affected youths but also threatens Nigeria's long-term prospects for social stability and economic development.

Against this backdrop, this study examines juvenile delinquency in contemporary Nigerian society with a focus on its causes and emerging trends. Specifically, the study seeks to analyse the patterns and forms of juvenile delinquency prevalent in Nigeria, identify the socio-economic, familial, and environmental factors driving youth involvement in delinquent behaviour, and assess how contemporary social changes are reshaping juvenile crime.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Understanding juvenile delinquency in contemporary Nigerian society requires more than documenting crime statistics or listing delinquent acts; it demands a framework that illuminates the social processes through which such behaviours are learned, reinforced, and sustained. Children and adolescents do not develop in isolation. Their actions are shaped by families, peer groups, schools, neighbourhoods, and increasingly, digital environments. Theoretical perspectives therefore provide the intellectual tools needed to move beyond moral judgments and examine how everyday interactions and social contexts contribute to youth involvement in delinquent behaviour. In this regard, the study is anchored in Social Learning Theory.

Social Learning Theory, originally developed by Albert Bandura and further refined in contemporary criminological scholarship, posits that behaviour is learned through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within social environments (Bandura, 1986; Akers & Jennings, 2019). The theory emphasizes that individuals, especially children and adolescents, learn not only through direct instruction but also by watching significant others such as parents, siblings, peers, teachers, and community figures whom they perceive as role models. Behaviour that is rewarded, normalized, or left unpunished is more likely to be repeated, while behaviour that attracts sanctions or disapproval is less likely to persist. In this sense, delinquency is not innate but socially produced through patterned interactions and repeated exposure to deviant models.

The Social Learning Theory offers a compelling explanation for the persistence and escalation of juvenile delinquency in Nigerian. Many Nigerian adolescents grow up in environments characterized by economic strain, family instability, domestic conflict, substance abuse, and weak institutional supervision. When children repeatedly observe violence, law-breaking, or substance use within the household or neighbourhood without meaningful consequences, they may come to interpret such behaviours as acceptable or even necessary for survival (Olawale et al., 2020; Akanle & Omotayo, 2021). Peer groups further reinforce these patterns, as adolescents often seek approval, identity, and protection within delinquent networks, particularly in urban and peri-urban settings where state and community controls are weak.

The theory is equally relevant in explaining newer forms of juvenile delinquency emerging in contemporary Nigeria. Exposure to violent media content, social media influencers who glamourise wealth without labour, and online peer networks involved in cybercrime provides adolescents with alternative models of success and status. When these models appear to yield rewards: money, recognition, or social capital without visible punishment, delinquent behaviour becomes attractive and normalized (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2021; UNODC, 2022). Social Learning Theory thus helps to explain why some juveniles transition rapidly from minor infractions to serious criminal acts, especially when reinforcement mechanisms outweigh deterrence. The theory is particularly valuable for this study because it portrays juvenile delinquency within everyday social relations rather than framing it solely as individual deviance or moral failure. It underscores the responsibility of families, schools, communities, media, and state institutions in shaping the behavioural repertoires available to young people. The theory provides a coherent framework for analysing the causes and trends of juvenile delinquency in Nigeria by foregrounding imitation, reinforcement, and social context, and showcases the importance of preventive interventions that promote positive role models, effective supervision, and consistent social sanctions.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative narrative review design to examine the causes and trends of juvenile delinquency in contemporary Nigerian society. Relevant peer-reviewed journal articles, books, policy reports, and institutional publications were systematically identified through electronic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and AJOL. The review focused on literature published between 2019 and 2024 to ensure analytical relevance and currency. Search terms included juvenile delinquency, youth crime, adolescent offending, and Nigeria, used in various combinations. Inclusion criteria were studies that addressed patterns, determinants, or social contexts of juvenile delinquency in Nigeria or comparable developing societies, while purely anecdotal reports and non-scholarly sources were excluded. Retrieved materials were subjected to thematic content analysis, with emphasis on recurring explanatory frameworks, empirical trends, and identified risk factors. The synthesis prioritizes convergence and divergence in findings to generate an integrated understanding of juvenile delinquency within Nigeria's contemporary socio-economic context.

Patterns and Trends of Juvenile Delinquency in Contemporary Nigeria

The nature of juvenile delinquency in contemporary Nigeria reveals deep social transformations rather than isolated acts of youthful deviance. Recent Nigerian studies identify multiple patterns of juvenile delinquency, often drawing attention to the social environments in which such behaviours are learned and sustained. Awonaike and Fadairo (2024) categorise juvenile delinquency into individual, group-supported, organized, and situational forms, a typology that remains analytically relevant in explaining contemporary youth crime. Individual delinquency typically involves lone actors and is often linked to psychological stress, family dysfunction, or emotional neglect. However, contemporary scholarship cautions against over-pathologizing juvenile offenders, noting that individual delinquency in Nigeria frequently intersects with poverty, parental absence, and exposure to domestic violence rather than innate psychological disorders (Olawale et al., 2020).

Group-supported delinquency, by contrast, is widely reported as the most prevalent form among Nigerian adolescents. Studies emphasize the centrality of peer influence, especially in urban and peri-urban communities where youth seek belonging, protection, and social identity through gangs, cult groups, and informal networks (Akanle & Omotayo, 2021). Delinquent acts such as bullying, vandalism, cult-related violence, drug use, and examination malpractice are often reinforced within these peer structures, where deviance is normalized and rewarded. This aligns with broader criminological findings that adolescents are more likely to

engage in delinquency when such behaviour is socially validated within their immediate reference groups (UNODC, 2022).

Organised forms of juvenile delinquency have also gained scholarly attention in recent years, particularly with the rise of cultism, cybercrime, drug trafficking, and armed robbery involving minors. Unlike earlier forms of loosely coordinated youth crime, contemporary organized delinquency often involves structured recruitment, division of roles, and connections to adult criminal networks (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2021). Scholars argue that economic hardship, unemployment, and the visibility of illicit wealth have made such networks increasingly attractive to adolescents who perceive limited legitimate opportunities for social mobility (World Bank, 2022). This trend signals a troubling shift from spontaneous delinquency to more entrenched criminal careers beginning at increasingly younger ages.

Situational delinquency is a different, though equally important dimension. Here, delinquent acts are not rooted in long-term commitment to deviance but arise from weak supervision, impulsivity, and immediate opportunity. Nigerian adolescents may engage in theft, truancy, street violence, or substance use without a strong delinquent identity, particularly where family and school controls are fragile (Awonaike & Fadairo, 2024). Scholars note that this form of delinquency is often overlooked in policy debates, despite its potential to escalate into more serious criminal behaviour if left unaddressed.

Running alongside these patterns is a clear set of evolving trends that signal a qualitative transformation in juvenile delinquency. Empirical evidence demonstrates that juvenile delinquency in Nigeria spans a wide range of behaviours including violent crimes such as robbery, rape, and homicide, alongside non-violent offences including drug use, alcohol abuse, examination malpractice, vandalism, truancy, and cyber-related fraud (Ojiabor & Sanni, 2021; NBS, 2023). Within school environments, deviant behaviours such as aggression, bullying, cheating, cultism, and substance use are frequently reported. This underscores the erosion of institutional control and moral authority (Okorodudu & Okorodudu, 2020; Onyehalu, 2022), and suggests that schools are increasingly becoming both sites of delinquency and conduits for wider social problems.

One of the most striking trends in juvenile delinquency in contemporary Nigeria is the diversification of offenses committed by juveniles, particularly in urban centers. Empirical studies from Lagos State indicate that crimes against property, such as burglary and arson, now account for a significant proportion of juvenile offenses, closely followed by crimes against persons, including assault and rape (Alabi & Balogun, 2023). These findings challenge earlier portrayals of juvenile delinquency as largely non-violent and underscore a growing normalization of aggression among adolescents in densely populated cities. Scholars link this pattern to overcrowded neighborhoods, weak community surveillance, and prolonged exposure to street life, where violence becomes both a survival strategy and a form of social capital.

Alongside conventional street crimes, cybercrime has emerged as one of the most defining trends in contemporary juvenile delinquency. Studies reveal increasing involvement of secondary school students in internet fraud, hacking, and online impersonation, driven largely by the glamorization of illicit digital wealth (Chukwuka, 2022). The cultural visibility of “Yahoo Boys,” often celebrated on social media and in popular music, has reframed cyber fraud as ingenuity rather than deviance. Recent empirical evidence shows that fraudulent online activities are no longer confined to out-of-school youth but are increasingly embedded within school environments, raising questions about the moral authority of educational institutions and the absence of effective digital ethics education (Ogunsakin et al., 2025).

Violent gangs and cult-related activities represent another disturbing trend, particularly among younger adolescents aged 14–16 years. Urban markets, motor parks, and school vicinities in cities such as Lagos have become sites of recurrent clashes involving teenage gangs engaged in thuggery, extortion, and daylight assaults. Scholars argue that these groups provide alternative systems of identity, protection, and income for juveniles excluded from

formal economic opportunities (Alabi & Balogun, 2023). Importantly, these trends exhibit regional variation. While gang violence and cultism dominate urbanized states, financial fraud is more pronounced in commercial hubs, and economically distressed regions experience delinquency driven primarily by survival imperatives.

Underlying these crime trends are persistent socio-economic and environmental pressures. High youth unemployment and widespread multidimensional poverty have intensified juvenile vulnerability to recruitment into criminal networks. With over half of Nigerians aged 15–24 years unemployed or underemployed, delinquency often emerges as an adaptive response to blocked legitimate opportunities (World Bank, 2022). Family instability further compounds this risk. Studies consistently link broken homes, single parenting, and weak parental supervision to higher delinquency rates, particularly among school dropouts and street-connected youth (Ajayi & Amorighoye, 2024). Peer influence and media exposure amplify these risks, as violent films, pornography, and online subcultures normalize deviance and reinforce recidivism.

Institutional responses to these evolving trends have been widely criticized as inadequate and counterproductive. The juvenile justice system is frequently described as dysfunctional, with overcrowded remand homes lacking basic rehabilitative infrastructure (LightRay Media, 2024). Despite the provisions of the Child Rights Act (2003), minors are still detained in adult correctional facilities in several states, exposing them to abuse and advanced criminal socialization. Legal pluralism further complicates the situation, as discrepancies between statutory law and Shari'ah-based criminal responsibility standards result in inconsistent treatment of juvenile offenders (Mboho & Udousoro, 2014). Rather than correcting delinquent behaviour, such institutional failures often entrench criminal identities.

High recidivism rates among juvenile offenders point to the limitations of punitive approaches. Upon release, many juveniles face stigma, rejection, and limited reintegration support, conditions that push them back into delinquent peer networks. However, recent evidence suggests that well-structured vocational and skills-acquisition programmes can disrupt this cycle. Studies from correctional centres in Benin City demonstrate that vocational training enhances self-esteem, economic self-sufficiency, and social reintegration, significantly reducing repeat offending (Ajayi & Amorighoye, 2024). These findings reveal the imperative of rehabilitation instead of punishment as a critical approach for reversing current trends in juvenile delinquency across Nigeria.

Drivers of Juvenile Delinquency in Nigeria

The reasons for the alarming increase in juvenile delinquency in contemporary Nigeria are multidimensional. These factors range from social, economic, to psychological. They encompass poor socio-economic status, indifferent attitude of parents, feelings of inferiority, lack of attention, and many other reasons can lead to various types of psychological issues in children and adolescents. Awonike and Fadairo (2024) dissect these factors to include broken families, lack of communication, poverty/lack of finance, lack of social and moral training, urbanization and lack of access to education.

Research has held that family structure is a major factor in the causation of juvenile delinquency. Scholars who hold on that knowledge assume that if the family background (especially the general atmosphere of the home and the attitude of the other members of the family) is congenial for proper development of a child, it is likely that the child will grow up to be law abiding. On the other hand scholars who claimed that extra family conditions are crucial in the explanation of delinquent behaviour worked on the assumption that participation in the creation and maintenance of delinquent subculture is an important factor in causation of juvenile delinquency (Adegoke, 2015). Indeed, teenagers both in the past and present adopt moral and ethical values from their parents and other family members. It goes without saying that family plays a vital role in shaping a teen's behavior and grooming his/her personality.

However, teens become violent or show signs of juvenile delinquency only when they are facing disturbance at home. However, there are escalating cases of broken homes in Nigeria due to social problems including poverty, divorce, displacement, etc. Broken or disturbed families with bad relations can cause teens to go astray and become violent. Single parents are often busy working and may therefore not be able to spend quality time with their children. This causes teens to seek attention from others, especially their peers who often expose them to delinquent behaviour.

Lack of discourse in the family can also lead children to find solace in places other than homes. In their study, Binik, et al (2019) established a correlation between communication in the family and juvenile delinquency. The scholars argue that the level of communication that exists among family members is a significant predictor of juvenile crime. Investigating the purpose of family cohesion, Walters (2018) found that there are minimal chances of occurrence of delinquent behaviours in cohesive family environments. Binik, et al (2019), established low adaptability of the family to socioeconomic changes contributes to high juvenile crime levels. Thus, it is clear that juvenile crime and family arrangements are interrelated. In Nigeria, there is a deteriorating level of communication between parents and their children. This is strongly associated with different factors including the drive to make ends meet in the wake of the harsh economic realities. However, a fundamental factor in the breakdown in communication between parents and children is the growing addiction to mobile phones and the internet which has significantly limited physical, face-to-face interaction. However, when children are not having any communication with their parents or family members at home, they may lose unity, trust, and understanding, which can eventually lower their self-esteem or self-confidence. Once they feel they are losing their individuality, they tend to do things they shouldn't do to boost their self-confidence. They blindly follow their peers and adopt their unhealthy lifestyles. They shoplift and consume drugs to look cool in the eyes of their peers.

Abubakar (2018) sees poverty as the state of inability to obtain a certain minimum level of consumption of food and essentially no food items universally considered to satisfy the minimum requirements for human sustenance. Poverty is not always an absolute state but can relate more generally to a situation in which the family income is not sufficient to meet outgoing needs and where alternative means of meeting these outgoing needs must be found. Poverty may be a state in which a family lives with no possessions at all and cannot afford to put food on the table. It may be a temporary situation where a family has entered into debt, for example by borrowing money it cannot afford to repay, or by acquiring goods and defaulting on repayments. The people most affected by poverty are well defined by other socio-economic categories namely, the landless, pastoralist, the handicapped, female-headed households, households headed by people without formal education, unskilled casual workers, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) orphans, street children and beggars. The major contributing factor to the exposure of these categories of persons is the increasing inequality in the distribution of wealth and income, poor access to economic and social goods as well as remunerative employment, inequality in the participation in social and political process and in other life choices.

Poverty has pushed most children to perform delinquent acts as a means of survival. Most of the time, the cause of juvenile delinquency is economic problems in the family. Youth from a poor economic status get involved in criminal activities. The failure of parent to provide necessities of life such as food, clothing, shelter etc draw their children to delinquency in a quest for earning by whatever means. Young adults may take the wrong path to improve their financial conditions. Teens become juvenile delinquents due to lack of finances. When they experience poor economic conditions, they start engaging in the wrong activities. They may start selling drugs or steal things to improve their economic conditions. Bakari (2021) stressed that poor economic conditions tend to turn stable families into disorganized neighbourhoods characterized by high rates of crime. This situation is likely to expose children to delinquent

behaviours. With time, they may end up becoming members of delinquent gangs. The researcher also opines that financial vulnerability is also likely to cause strain and hardship among children of single parent families. The situation may make it difficult for their needs to be met and as a result, they might be pushed to engage in delinquent actions such as extortion and theft to make ends meet.

Teens who have not given any social or moral training often lead to juvenile delinquency. It is the parent's duty to teach moral and ethical values to their children. They should teach them the difference between right and wrong behavior. Lack of social and moral values can lead children to poor interaction with others and make them less confident. They may become selfish and arrogant. They would not know how to respect the laws of the state. Parents often neglect their children and focus more on working hard to earn money for them. However, while doing so, they forget the importance of spending quality time with their children. In their absence, children tend to spend time with someone who pays attention to them. They may also fall into wrong hands or get involved in bad company while seeking attention from someone other than their parents. Bakari (2021) added that the impact of parental abuse and neglect as a contributing factor to the behavior cannot be overemphasized. According to the juvenile's department in Kenya, neglect is regarded as a type of child abuse in the country. This is a push factor for many juveniles who engage in petty theft and other types of crimes. For example, in 2012, a child was taken to the Juvenile's department in Malindi for stealing *ugali* (maize meal). He argued that he committed the offence out of hunger as his parents were neglectful drunkards who did not feed him.

Ekpenyong *et al* (2012) averred that the intensity and severity of juvenile offences are generally determined by the prevailing social, economic and cultural conditions in a country. In many African countries, there is evidence of an increase in juvenile crime taking place concurrently with economic decline, especially in the poor districts of large cities. In many cases, street children later become young offenders, having already encountered violence in their immediate social environment as either witnesses or victims of violent acts. The educational attainments of this group are rather low as a rule, basic social experiences acquired in the family are too often insufficient, and their socio-economic environment is characterized by poverty and under- or unemployment. In Nigeria, the industrial development and economic growth in cities like Lagos, Port Harcourt, Kano, etc has resulted in urbanization which in turn bringing about the migration of a large number of population from the rural area to urban area. It has also resulted in problems such as housing, overcrowding, slum dwelling and so on. The high cost of living in urban areas makes it necessary for women to take up outdoor jobs to support their family financially. This results in the neglect of children or ineffective or almost no parental control. Thus, this unplanned urbanization is one of the causes of the rising levels of juvenile delinquency in Nigeria (Awonike & Fadairo, 2024).

In many parts of the world, children who are denied access to education (for example, because of the costs involved, geographical factors or insufficient resources) or whose experience of the neighbourhood school is negative (poor quality teaching, abusive or absent of teachers) tend to get involved in juvenile delinquency to a large extent. In Nigeria also, there is a high level of out-of-school children owing to the significant level of poverty, insecurity and inadequate government response to the issue of child illiteracy in the country. The lack of educational opportunities has therefore created idleness among the adolescent youth who continually engage themselves in criminal activities.

Societal Costs of Juvenile Delinquency in Nigeria

Juvenile delinquency and deviant behaviour are increasingly framed in Nigerian scholarship as indicators of deeper structural dysfunctions, with far-reaching consequences for social stability, public safety, and national development. Beyond individual acts of lawbreaking, youth involvement in crime disrupts communal life, strains state institutions, and

erodes social trust. Recent studies emphasize that the effects of juvenile delinquency are not confined to offenders and immediate victims but radiate outward, reshaping everyday experiences of security, citizenship, and belonging within Nigerian society (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2020; UNODC, 2022).

One of the most visible consequences of juvenile delinquency is the intensification of insecurity at the community level. Empirical evidence shows that youth involvement in robbery, cult-related violence, drug trafficking, and cybercrime contributes to heightened fear and reduced social cohesion in both urban and semi-urban spaces (Onifade et al., 2021; Adebayo, 2023). As delinquent activities become normalized within certain neighbourhoods, residents increasingly restrict their movements, withdraw from communal life, and rely on private or informal security arrangements. This erosion of everyday safety undermines collective efficacy and weakens informal social controls that traditionally regulated youth behaviour.

The economic costs of juvenile delinquency further compound these security concerns. Nigerian studies demonstrate that significant public resources are diverted toward policing, surveillance technologies, detention facilities, and rehabilitation programmes in response to youth crime (NBS, 2023; World Bank, 2022). These expenditures represent opportunity costs, as funds that could support education, healthcare, or youth development initiatives are instead allocated to crime control. At the household level, victims of juvenile crime bear direct financial losses through theft, property damage, medical expenses, and lost income, while families of offending youths face legal fees, disrupted livelihoods, and long-term economic precarity (Akanle & Omotayo, 2021).

Psychological and social harms constitute another critical but less visible dimension of the impact of juvenile delinquency. Research indicates that exposure to youth violence, whether as victims, witnesses, or community members produces lasting trauma, anxiety, and mistrust, particularly among women, children, and the elderly (UNICEF, 2021). The families of juvenile offenders experience stigma, shame, and social exclusion, which can fracture kinship networks and weaken informal support systems. Rather than functioning as spaces of reintegration, many communities respond to delinquent youth through labeling and rejection, inadvertently reinforcing cycles of deviance and marginalization.

The consequences for the juveniles themselves are especially profound. Involvement in crime during adolescence is strongly associated with disrupted education, substance abuse, incarceration, and long-term exclusion from formal economic opportunities (Olawale & Adegoke, 2020; UNODC, 2022). Nigerian correctional and rehabilitation institutions, often overcrowded and under-resourced, struggle to deliver meaningful reformatory outcomes, increasing the likelihood of recidivism. As a result, juvenile delinquency represents not only a security challenge but also a loss of human capital, as young people who might otherwise contribute productively to society become trapped in cycles of criminalization.

The cumulative effect of juvenile delinquency is the normalization of violence and illegality. Scholars warn that when youth crime becomes pervasive, it reshapes moral expectations and weakens confidence in state institutions' capacity to enforce justice fairly and effectively (Adebayo, 2023). This dynamic is particularly evident in contexts where high-profile cases involving juveniles generate public outrage but are followed by inconsistent prosecution or politicized responses. Over time, such patterns foster cynicism toward the justice system and blur the boundaries between acceptable and deviant behaviour.

Conclusion

The contemporary Nigerian society faces multiple issues of juvenile delinquency and deviance including stealing, cultism, vandalism, murder, pick-pocketing, rape, harassment, drug abuse, robberies, carjacking, bank heists among others. These delinquent acts are exhibited in various forms and traits, with diverse causes, categories, and driving forces. In the

present-day Nigeria, broken families, poverty or lack of finance to meet basic social and economic needs, poor social and moral upbringing, the impacts of urbanization and poor access to education by adolescents predispose them to the menace of juvenile delinquency. It is therefore important for family members, especially parents, to bring up children in a morally upright manner. This is because the family is the major and most fundamental agent of socialization where the child learns most of the societal values, norms and expectations. On its part, the government should create opportunities for employment, make educational opportunities easily accessible to children, and provide workable strategies to manage the influx of population into urban centers across Nigeria so as to address the motivations to juvenile delinquency in Nigeria.

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