



PREVALENCE OF CRIME IN RURAL COMMUNITIES OF BOKKOS LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Crime hampers development and remains a major concern in rural communities, particularly among adolescents; therefore, this study investigated the prevalence, causes, and prevention of adolescent crime in Bokkos Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria. A cross-sectional survey was conducted among 150 adolescents selected through stratified random sampling, with data collected using a structured questionnaire measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) and analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations—in SPSS version 26. The findings indicated that theft and burglary were the most prevalent crimes, with 71.3% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 1.32$), while 60.0% reported that adolescent involvement in rural crime had increased over the past year ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.38$). Drug abuse (56.0% agreement; $M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.44$) and peer pressure (54.7%; $M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.67$) were also identified as major contributors, whereas adolescent violence was not perceived as widespread, as 76.6% disagreed or strongly disagreed ($M = 1.93$, $SD = 1.08$). Poverty (62.7% agreement; $M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.35$), family instability (58.0%; $M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.48$), and unemployment (52.7%; $M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.57$) were identified as the primary drivers of adolescent crime. Regarding prevention, community policing (68.7% agreement; $M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.13$) and school-based awareness programs (66.0%; $M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.12$) were considered the most effective interventions, while NGO involvement was rated least effective, with 65.3% disagreement ($M = 2.07$, $SD = 1.18$). The study concludes that adolescent crime in Bokkos is influenced largely by economic hardship, family instability, and unemployment, and recommends comprehensive structural interventions alongside strengthened community-based prevention strategies to address the growing challenge of rural delinquency.

Keywords: Adolescents, crime, prevention mechanisms, rural Nigeria

Introduction

Crime is broadly understood as any action or behaviour that violates legal codes and is punishable by law. It encompasses a wide range of acts, from theft and burglary to fraud, assault, and drug trafficking (Douglas, Burgess, Burgess & Ressler, 2013). The legal definition and severity of crime vary across jurisdictions, but fundamentally, crime represents actions considered harmful to individuals, communities, or the state, warranting formal sanctions such as fines, imprisonment, or, in some contexts, capital punishment (Kessy, 2024). Beyond legal implications, crime undermines social cohesion, disrupts community stability, and imposes economic and psychological burdens on victims and society at large.

Adolescence is a particularly sensitive stage in our development when exposure to adverse conditions may increase vulnerability to delinquent behaviour. Research highlights several key drivers of adolescent crime, including peer pressure, family dysfunction, economic deprivation, and exposure to community violence (Fix, Aaron, & Greenberg, 2023).

The incidence of crime among adolescents is a complex issue influenced by a myriad of social, economic, and psychological factors. Adolescents may engage in delinquent behaviour as a result of peer pressure, family dysfunction, socioeconomic disadvantage, exposure to violence, or inadequate parental supervision (Nisar et al., 2015). Common types of adolescent crime include vandalism, theft, drug abuse, and violent offenses. While most adolescents navigate this developmental stage without engaging in criminal behaviour, those who do often face long-term consequences, including involvement in the criminal justice system, academic difficulties, and compromised future opportunities. Effective prevention and intervention strategies are essential to address the root causes of adolescent crime, promote positive youth development, and create supportive environments that steer young people away from delinquency towards productive and law-abiding pathways (Fix et al., 2023).

The incidence of crime among adolescents in Nigeria reflects a multifaceted challenge influenced by various socio-economic and cultural factors. Economic hardship, lack of access to education and employment opportunities, urbanization, and exposure to violence are among the key drivers of adolescent involvement in criminal activities such as theft, drug abuse, gang violence, and cybercrime. Additionally, factors such as family breakdown, peer pressure, and inadequate parental supervision contribute to delinquent behaviour among young people (Abhishek & Balamurugan, 2024). The consequences of adolescent crime extend beyond individual perpetrators to impact communities and society at large, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and insecurity. Addressing the root causes of adolescent crime requires comprehensive strategies that encompass social interventions, youth empowerment programs, community

engagement, and law enforcement efforts aimed at prevention, rehabilitation, and reintegration to create safer and more resilient communities for Nigeria's youth (Madubuike & Dimnaji, 2023).

Rural adolescent crime in Nigeria manifests in various forms, reflecting a complex interplay of socio-economic disparities, cultural influences, and structural challenges (Onyeneke, 2022). From petty theft and substance abuse to involvement in gang activities and violence, adolescents in rural areas often face a lack of adequate educational and employment opportunities, which can push them towards delinquent behaviour as a means of survival or social belonging (Moore & Sween, 2015). Moreover, factors such as family breakdown, peer pressure, and limited access to social services exacerbate the vulnerability of rural youth to criminal activities. To address these issues effectively, comprehensive strategies are needed, including community empowerment initiatives, educational reforms, vocational training programs, and law enforcement interventions, all aimed at providing support and opportunities for rural adolescents to lead fulfilling and law-abiding lives (Díaz & Patachini, 2023).

The rural crime incidence among adolescents in Bokkos Local Government Area, Nigeria, reflects a complex interplay of socio-economic factors and limited access to resources and opportunities. Economic marginalization, lack of educational infrastructure, and insufficient job prospects often push adolescents towards involvement in criminal activities such as petty theft, substance abuse, and vandalism. Moreover, the remote and isolated nature of rural communities may exacerbate issues related to social isolation and limited law enforcement presence, making it easier for delinquent behaviour to go unchecked. Family dynamics, peer influence, and cultural norms also play significant roles in shaping adolescent behaviour in rural areas (Ali & Masood, 2018). Addressing rural crime incidence among adolescents in Bokkos requires a holistic approach that includes community empowerment, investment in education and vocational training, strengthening of social support networks, and collaboration between local authorities and community stakeholders to create safer and more prosperous environments for young people to thrive.

The assessment of rural crime incidence among adolescents in Bokkos Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria, necessitates a multifaceted approach that considers socio-economic factors, cultural dynamics, and the unique challenges of the region. By employing comprehensive data collection methods, including surveys and interviews, researchers can gain insights into the root causes and prevalent forms of juvenile delinquency in the area. This assessment should inform the development of targeted prevention mechanisms, such as community-based interventions, educational programs, and youth engagement initiatives,

aimed at addressing underlying issues and fostering a safer environment for adolescents to thrive and contribute positively to society.

Etim, et al (2024) investigated traditional crime control measures and their effectiveness in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, utilizing primary data from 400 respondents across twelve Local Government Areas. The research, guided by the Routine Activity theory, identifies traditional measures like Idiong, Mbiam, and Ekpo among others. The findings reveal that the rise in crime is partly due to the abandonment of these traditional measures and poor collaboration between the police and traditional institutions. The study recommends fostering partnerships between traditional and modern crime control agencies and developing policies to facilitate such collaborations for enhanced crime control. Grote, et al (2024) used a panel dataset of around 3500 rural households from Southeast Asia, this study examines crime victimization and its determinants. Employing logit models within the Routine Activity framework, it finds a 5.46% crime victimization rate, mainly theft. Factors such as higher inequality and crop commercialization increase victimization risk, while livestock ownership decreases it. Past victimization and weather shocks also correlate with higher crime risks. The study highlights significant negative impacts of theft on food consumption and child health, emphasizing the need for enhanced guardianship and inequality reduction to prevent rural crime.

Adams and Hafsat (2023) explored substance abuse and its link to crime among Nigerian youth, relying on secondary data and guided by Paul Goldstein's psychopharmacological model. Findings indicate widespread abuse of substances like cocaine, alcohol, and codeine syrup, with new trends including the inhalation of petrol and bio gas. Substance abuse is linked to violent crimes such as assault and robbery. The study recommends family education on drugs, establishment of a criminal justice drug program for detoxification, education, and vocational training, alongside pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy for addicts involved in criminal activities.

Dölek and Adeleke (2023) focused on rising crime rates among Nigerian youth, examined the causes and socio-economic impacts using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Data from 1800 youths across six geopolitical regions indicate that unemployment and lack of government empowerment initiatives are major contributors to youth crime. The study calls for urgent government action to provide meaningful employment and rehabilitation programs for offenders, emphasizing the need for effective policies to reduce crime and foster socio-economic development.

Adeyemi et al (2021) explored the spatial distribution of crime in Nigeria, analyzing 2017

crime statistics with a Poisson mixed model to account for spatial dependencies and state-level heterogeneities. It examines armed robbery, theft, rape, and kidnapping in relation to socio-demographic factors like unemployment, population density, and GNI. Findings show unemployment is positively associated with rape, kidnapping, and armed robbery, but negatively with theft. The study highlights significant clustering effects in crime patterns and produces spatial maps to aid crime prevention and effective policing, suggesting targeted interventions in high-crime areas.

Against this backdrop, the present study investigates the prevalence, drivers, and perceived prevention mechanisms of adolescent crime in Bokkos Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria.

Methodology

Research

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design, utilising quantitative methods to investigate the prevalence, causes, and preventive mechanisms of adolescent crime in rural communities of Bokkos Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria. The design was appropriate for capturing diverse perceptions and experiences of adolescents at a single point in time.

Population and Sample

The target population comprised adolescents residing in rural communities of Bokkos. A total of 150 respondents were selected using a stratified random sampling technique. Stratification was based on age, gender, and socio-economic status to ensure representativeness of key demographic subgroups.

Sampling Technique

Stratified random sampling was chosen to reduce bias and achieve proportional representation. Adolescents were first categorised into strata based on age and gender, and participants were then randomly selected from each stratum. This approach enhanced the reliability of the findings by capturing heterogeneity within the population.

Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire designed to capture information on demographic characteristics, types of crimes, contributing factors, and perceptions of prevention mechanisms. The questionnaire was composed of closed-ended

questions measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5).

Validity and Reliability

The instrument was pre-tested on 20 adolescents from a neighbouring community with similar socio-demographic features. Feedback was used to revise ambiguous questions and ensure content validity. Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient was computed during the pilot test, producing a value above 0.70, which indicates acceptable internal consistency.

Ethical Considerations

Given the involvement of adolescents, ethical approval was obtained from the University Research Ethics Committee. Informed consent was secured from participants aged 18 and above, while parental/guardian consent and adolescent assent were obtained for minors. Participation was voluntary, anonymity was assured, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Method of Data Collection

Trained research assistants administered the questionnaires in face-to-face sessions, ensuring clarity and comprehension of questions. Data collection took place over four weeks in early 2024.

Method of Data Analysis

Responses were coded and analysed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize demographic data and responses on crime prevalence, causes, and prevention mechanisms.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of respondents. A majority were aged 19–21 years (39.3%), followed by those aged 16–18 years (32.0%). Males constituted 61.3% of the sample, while females accounted for 38.7%. In terms of education, 34.7% had attained secondary education, 29.3% primary education, 24.7% tertiary education, while 11.3% reported no formal education. More than half of respondents (52.7%) were students, with others engaged in farming (24.0%), trading (14.0%), or unemployed (8.0%).

Table 1. Demographic Information of Respondents (N = 150)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	12–15 years	11	7.3

	16–18 years	48	32
	19–21 years	59	39.3
	22+ years	32	21.3
Gender	Male	92	61.3
	Female	58	38.7
Education Level	Primary	44	29.3
	Secondary	52	34.7
	Tertiary	37	24.7
	None	17	11.3
Occupation	Student	79	52.7
	Farmer	36	24
	Trader	21	14
	Unemployed	12	8
	Others	2	1.3

Note: Source – Author’s computation using SPSS v26

Incidence of Rural Adolescent Crime

Table 2 summarises respondents’ perceptions of crime incidence. On a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree), theft and burglary were rated most prevalent ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 1.32$). Respondents also indicated increased adolescent involvement in crime over the past year ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.38$). Drug abuse ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.44$) and peer pressure ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.67$) were recognised as contributing factors. In contrast, adolescent violence was rated low ($M = 1.93$, $SD = 1.08$), suggesting that the community does not perceive violence as widespread.

Table 2. Perceptions of Crime Incidence (N = 150)

Statement	Mean	SD
Increase in adolescent involvement in rural crime (past year)	3.93	1.38
Theft and burglary are common crimes among adolescents	4.2	1.32
Adolescent violence has become more frequent in the community	1.93	1.08

Drug abuse among adolescents contributes significantly to crime	3.67	1.44
Peer pressure is a major factor in adolescent crime	3.6	1.67

Note: Scale = 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Causes and Contributing Factors

As shown in Table 3, poverty (M = 3.83, SD = 1.35) and family instability (M = 3.67, SD = 1.48) were identified as the most influential drivers of adolescent crime. Unemployment (M = 3.43, SD = 1.57) was also recognised as significant. Conversely, lack of educational opportunities (M = 1.77, SD = 0.96) and lack of recreational facilities (M = 2.18, SD = 1.23) were rated lower, suggesting these are not widely perceived as critical contributors.

Table 3. Causes and Contributing Factors of Adolescent Crime (N = 150)

Statement	Mean	SD
Lack of educational opportunities contributes to crime	1.77	0.96
Unemployment among youth increases crime rates	3.43	1.57
Family issues and broken homes drive adolescent crime	3.67	1.48
Poverty is a major driver of adolescent crime	3.83	1.35
Lack of recreational facilities leads to crime	2.18	1.23

Note: Scale = 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Effectiveness of Prevention Mechanisms

Table 4 indicates that community policing (M = 3.94, SD = 1.13) and school-based awareness programs (M = 3.91, SD = 1.12) were considered the most effective crime-prevention mechanisms. Vocational training (M = 3.79, SD = 1.33) and parental guidance (M = 3.75, SD = 1.29) were also viewed positively. In contrast, NGO involvement in community development was rated poorly (M = 2.07, SD = 1.18).

Table 4. Perceived Effectiveness of Crime Prevention Mechanisms (N = 150)

Statement	Mean	SD
Community policing reduces	3.94	1.13

adolescent crime

School-based awareness programs reduce crime among adolescents	3.91	1.12
Vocational training programs reduce youth involvement in crime	3.79	1.33
Parental guidance reduces adolescent crime	3.75	1.29
NGO involvement helps curb adolescent crime	2.07	1.18

Note: Scale = 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight theft and burglary as the most prevalent crimes among rural adolescents in Bokkos. This aligns with previous studies in Nigeria and other developing countries, which consistently report property crimes as the dominant form of youth delinquency due to economic hardship and limited opportunities (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2001; Igbo & Ikpa, 2013). The relatively low rating of adolescent violence in the present study contrasts with findings from urban centers such as Lagos and Abuja, where violent crimes, including cultism and gang-related assaults, are more prominent (Adebayo, 2013). This rural–urban distinction suggests that socio-economic context significantly shapes the nature of adolescent crime.

Consistent with Strain Theory (Merton, 1938), poverty and unemployment were identified as major drivers of adolescent crime. Adolescents experiencing limited access to legitimate opportunities may resort to theft and burglary as alternative means of achieving economic survival. Family instability, also found to be significant, aligns with findings of other studies linking broken homes and weak parental supervision to youth delinquency (Agnew, 1992). These findings reinforce the argument that socio-economic deprivation and family dysfunction intersect to heighten adolescents' vulnerability to criminal behaviour.

At the same time, the relatively low perception of lack of educational opportunities as a crime driver in this study diverges from earlier studies that emphasised poor access to schooling as a critical factor (Backman, 2017; Egwakhe & Osabuohien, 2009). This contradiction may reflect improvements in rural educational access in Plateau State, even though systemic poverty continues to undermine the protective role of education. It also highlights that education alone may not deter delinquency if socio-economic pressures persist.

The study further supports Routine Activity Theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979), particularly in

explaining the effectiveness of prevention mechanisms. Community policing and school-based awareness programs were rated high, reflecting the importance of capable guardianship in reducing crime. Similarly, parental guidance aligns with the theory's emphasis on supervision and monitoring as deterrents to delinquency. These findings carry important policy implications. Strengthening community policing and enhancing school-based programs may offer cost-effective strategies for rural areas. Addressing structural drivers such as unemployment and poverty, however, requires broader socio-economic interventions, including vocational training and rural development programs. Policymakers must therefore adopt a dual approach that combines immediate community-based prevention with long-term structural reforms.

Limitations.

The study relied on self-reported perceptions, which may be influenced by social desirability bias. The cross-sectional design also limits causal inference. Furthermore, the study was confined to one local government area, which may restrict the generalisability of findings to other rural Nigerian context. Future research should consider longitudinal designs and comparative rural–urban studies to provide a deeper understanding of adolescent crime dynamics across contexts.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that adolescent crime in rural communities of Bokkos Local Government Area is shaped predominantly by socio-economic deprivation and unstable family environments, with theft and burglary emerging as the most common offenses. Although violent crime was not perceived as widespread, peer influence and drug use remain growing concerns that warrant close attention. The findings reinforce the relevance of Strain Theory and Routine Activity Theory, showing how poverty, unemployment, weak parental supervision, and inadequate social guardianship collectively heighten adolescents' vulnerability to delinquency. Prevention efforts that emphasise community policing, school-based awareness programmes, parental guidance, and vocational training were identified as the most effective mechanisms, highlighting the role of community-level strategies in addressing local crime patterns. However, the limited perceived impact of NGOs suggests the need for stronger engagement and coordination between external actors and local structures.

Recommendations

1. **Strengthen Community Policing:** Expand and institutionalise community policing initiatives in rural areas, ensuring adequate training, funding, and collaboration with local youth leaders.

2. **Enhance School-Based Programs:** Integrate crime prevention and drug education modules into secondary school curricula, while promoting peer-led awareness campaigns.
3. **Support Families:** Develop family counselling and parental training programs to mitigate the effects of broken homes and improve supervision of adolescents.
4. **Promote Vocational and Economic Opportunities:** Establish accessible vocational training and entrepreneurship programs tailored to rural youth, thereby reducing unemployment pressures that contribute to delinquency.
5. **Reorient NGO Engagement:** NGOs should adopt culturally grounded, community-driven approaches, ensuring sustainability and local ownership of crime-prevention projects.
6. **Further Research:** Future studies should adopt longitudinal and comparative designs across rural and urban areas to deepen understanding of adolescent crime trends and intervention effectiveness.

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