HOOLIGANISM AND VIOLENCE AMONG NIGERIAN YOUTHS: DEVELOPING INTERVENTIONS TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN ONITSHA, ANAMBRA STATE OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examines hooliganism and violence among the Nigerian youth with the purpose of developing interventions to promote sustainable peace in Onitsha, Anambra State, of Nigeria. Onitsha was regarded as the most "peaceful" mega city in the south eastern geo-political zone due to rare outburst of violence and criminality. However, in the recent past, the peaceful atmosphere of Onitsha has been under serious threat owing to frequent outburst of youth violence, particularly in socially disadvantaged neighborhoods (SDNs). Consequently, youth violence has attracted the attention of policy makers and stakeholders in the State, thereby occupying an important space in local discourses.This study adopted descriptive survey research design, the population is the people living in Onitsha, the targeted size consists of 350 respondents from major cities in Onitsha between the ages of 18 and 45 years, 299 questionnaires were properly filled and returned which served as the sample size. The data was analyzed with simple percentage. The investigation reveals that the hooliganism and youth violence in Onitsha has a historical antecedence and traceable to socio-economic, socio-political and bad governance issues. The study concluded that the abysmal failure of successive administrations in Nigeria to address challenges such as poverty, youth unemployment and inequitable distribution of wealth among ethnic nationalities, ultimately resulted to diverse negative impact of anger, agitation and violent crimes against the Nigerian state by some individuals and groups. The study however, recommends the formulation and effective implementation of policies and programmes capable of addressing the root causes of insecurity in Nigeria.

Keywords: Hooliganism, Violence, Youth, Interventions.

Introduction

Hooliganism and youth violence have been in existence in Nigerian cities for a long time. In the early 1970s, there was a noticeable increase in the incidence of violent crimes and in the heinous nature of these crimes particularly in the use of dangerous weapons and killings, leading to the promulgation of the 1970 Decree No. 47 (the first armed robbery decree). The national awareness and emergence of cult groups and increased violence can be traced back to the aftermath of the Nigerian civil war that lasted from 1967 to 1970. The roots of these variant types of youth violence have been attributed to the loss of traditional structures that kept people together (Aderinto, 1994).

According to Akparanta (1994), attempts were made in providing reasons forhooliganism and youth related violence in post-civil war in Nigeria, he argued that following thewar, there was an abundance of guns in private hands and times were hard economically.Accompanied by

deterioration in the standard of education, and the lack of specific training inareas relevant for sustaining both the agricultural and the industrial sector, many youths wentastray. Another argument centered on the continuous unpredictable political atmosphere and lackof progressive management of the economy which brought about galloping inflation, andconcentration of wealth in the hands of the few who were in positions of public authority fueleda sense of hopeless desperation among the masses. Albert (1994) in his remarks identified causesof urban violence in Africa. These include but not limited to: high population growth rates withits attendant unemployment, poor wages, poor living conditions, urban culture shocks, and poorquality of urban management that is manifested in the crisis in health care, transportation, housing and employment.

However, hooliganism and youth related violence is proliferating in Nigeria. Nigeria isbecoming or has become a theatre of youth violence. Its occurrence and persistence haveostensibly undermined and threatened social security in the country. Apart from militancy in theNiger Delta region and acts of terrorism in North Eastern Nigeria, other common violentactivities include cult member's clashes, political clashes, religious clashes, land disputes, communal clashes, herdsmen/farmer clashes, as well as tribaland ethnic violence. Meanwhile, research has found that persistent violence and restivenessacross the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria is inimical to growth, and stifles economic development (Akpan*et al*., 2012; Ewetan & Urhie, 2014). Apart from wanton destruction ofproperties, several lives have been lost to such violent activities by the youths. Between 1999 and2022, Wikipedia (2023) reported that scores of violence in Nigeria resulted in the death ofover 17,000 people and displaced over millions. Precisely, in Northern Nigeria, more than90 people were injured and more than 20 reported dead in 2007 alone (US Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2008). In 2008, more than 600 people lost their lives and properties worth millions of Naira were destroyed inJos. In 2009, over 600 deaths were recorded in a series of youth related violence in Bauchi, Jos, Nasarawa, Lagos and Ibadan (Adinoyi, 2009; Balogun, 2009; Eya, 2009). Human Rights Watch (2021) estimated that more than 15,000 youths have been killed in hooliganism and youth related violence since Nigeria transitioned to civilian rule in 1999. The activities of militia groups, especially in the northeast, which is dominated by the youths, haveresulted in the deaths of thousands of Nigerians.

Several attempts have been made by researchers to decipher this trend. The phenomenon of street gangs, known as "area boys" in Lagos (the country's commercial nerve center), has been the attention of some studies (Omitoogun, 1994; Adisa, 1994). "Area boys", according to Adisa (1994) are youths who graduate from petty thievery to drug pushing and charged with drug delivery to consumers. These are known as "pickets". Adisa (1994), in his argument explained that area boys once conditioned are fools of others and are used for extortion, organized street violence, political campaigns, and enforcers by operators of night clubs, restaurants and brothels. Rival outfits engage each other in gang warfare on the streets. They are strongly associated with the drug trade and many of the area boys end up as users. Albeit, youth movements could be positive or negative, but as far as the government concerns, any kind of youth movement either positive or negative would affect the government of the day's interest. Because it reminds the government that some policies were not properly implemented or executed, asking to change the entire policy like IPOB protests, EndSARS youth movement among others. For instance, EndSARS protesters were a group of Nigerian youths under the umbrella of the New Nigerian Youth Movement (NNYM) that demanded the restructuring or disbandment of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) unit, as well as, other reforms in the Nigerian Police Force (NPF). At the beginning of the EndSARS saga,

their demands were very clear and straightforward urging the government to abolish SARS, offer justice to victims of police brutality and reform the police. The origin of the protest was a "video clip of police officers who were supposed to be members of the SARS unit, allegedly killing an unarmed young man" (Ukpe, 2020). What took off as a peaceful demonstration by thousands of youths in some of the states in Nigeria, degenerated into chaos after the protests were hijacked by hoodlums. Unpatriotic set of youths who were believed to be sponsored by the government or their agents took over the protest to achieve self-centered interest contrary to law and changed the narrative of the movement. Citizens' rights were interfered with, loss of lives, property worth billions of naira were stolen and destroyed due to hooliganism and youth violence.

Consequently, the occurrence of hooliganism and youth's violence in present Nigeria is on the increase and it has generated public worries as the violence is seen as anti-thesis to individual's and national development. Nigeria has become a violence-prone nation with the youths at the centre of most of it. No part of Nigeria is immune from one form of violence or the other, ranging from Boko Haram insurgency, herdsmen-farmer's crisis, ethno-religious crises, kidnapping, armed robbery, terrorism, and EndSARS protest among others. Meanwhile, while the killings and mayhem were going on in several parts of Nigeria, Anambra, the home for all, had been relatively peaceful following the peaceful nature of the people and the entire society. Onitsha, the State commercial hub, has been so peaceful that even individuals from the crisis-laden northern states often see the city as a safe haven to pick up the pieces of their ruined lives. From 2003, the ancient city of Onitsha started experiencing violence as a result of clashes between young people commonly known as Freedom Agitators and the security agents. The widely reported cases of violence are in sharp contrast to the wide-held belief that Onitsha is a peaceful city. There are several reported cases of violence to support this claim (Alanamu, 2005; Fagbemi, 2015).

Eventually, the electoral process in Anambra in particular has witnessed an unprecedented build-up of armed youths, recruited and trained by politicians to win elections with violence. Recruited thugs are usually school dropouts and unemployed youth, who turn to the impulses and whims of power-hungry politicians in exchange for some gains, political appointments and lucrative government contracts or tenders. Parenthetically, politically motivated street hooliganism and youth violence has been widely reported by Alanamu (2005). This was heightened between 1999 and 2003 during the administration of the Governor Chinwoke Mbadinuju and Dr. Chris Ngige. It was during this time that the manipulation of the youth for settling political scores became entrenched, setting the stage for subsequent violent acts in the State Capital. This became apparent during the political face-off between the then Governor, Dr. Chris Ngige and his political 'god-father', Chris Uba. In this face-off, the two political figures were accused of recruiting, arming and deploying youth gangs for electoral malpractice and fraud. At this time, youth violence became widely pronounced, as it crept into the political terrain to settle political scores (Agere et al., 2012).It is against this background that the current study attempts to examine the predisposing and enabling factors responsible for the proliferation of hooliganism and youth violence among youths in major cities and their streets in Anambra State and Onitsha in particular and to develop intervention that will promote sustainable peace in Onitsha.

Statement of the Problem

The phenomenon of hooliganism and youth related violent in Onitsha, Anambra State seems to have various origins and foundations. It can be difficult to grasp the difference without first

understanding and analysing their motives. However, the study attempts to understand to what extent, in an ancient environment not previously dominated with crises, suddenly became affected by the phenomenon of violence? These fragile and vulnerable youth would be tempted to join groups or networks within which violence is religiously motivated. Similarly, in the quest to unravel the cause of their indulgence, this study seeks to determine if these young people can engage in acts of violence based on socio- economic, political or religious motives, and if they themselves justify their acts of violence by a religious commitment.

So far, most of the studies on insecurity or on the sense of insecurity in Onitsha have focused on conventional violence. For researchers, the ideal field to analyse the causes of these offensive behaviors are the areas in which young people are organized in groups having different ideologies. The neighborhoods are the most relevant territorial framework to analyse these regulation methods. As a matter of fact, starting the research from the neighborhoods' level allows taking into account factors, such as the sociocultural components, the housing type and social networks.

Based on the aforementioned, the study intends to find out factors that contribute to hooliganism and youth related violence in the city of Onitsha in Anambra State of Nigeria and as well, develop intervention that sustains peace in Onitsha.

Theoretical Framework

This study will be underpinned with two related theories, Social disorganization and Social learning theories respectively.

Social Disorganization Theory (SDT)

The idea of Social Disorganization Theory (SDT) was first proposed by Thomas and Znaniecki in 1918 towards the end of the First World War. However, the theory was popularized in sociological circles at the Chicago School by Robert Park in 1924. The theory suggests that social disorganization within a society, especially in urban centers, is a consequence of industrialization, migration flows, neighborhood deterioration and the absence of social control (Rubington & Weinberg, 2010). Social disorganization proposes that criminal behavior is caused by disorganized neighborhood and therefore it also explain that socially disorganized neighborhood is the cause of crime. Therefore, it can be stated that the theory makes sense and its assumptions are logically consistent. According to Shaw and Mckay (1942), socio-economic structures, residential mobility and ethnic heterogeneity are important factors for measuring the level of social disorganization in any neighborhood. During the early years of the theory, Shaw and McKay (1942) contended that social order requires that community members oversee and control teenage groups, neighborhood kinship systems formed and active participation in formal and voluntary associations. However, the more complex a society becomes the more social control becomes difficult to instil. Poverty, residential mobility, ethnic heterogeneity and weak social networks decrease a neighborhood's capacity to control public conduct of a people, and hence increase the likelihood of violence (Kubrin & Weitzer 2003). It is argued that where people persistently move in and out of a particular neighborhood, it becomes difficult for residents to know who to trust which consequently hampers social cohesion and erodes informal social control to prevent violence (Kubrin & Weitzer 2003; Sampson & Groves 1989; Bursik & Grasmick 1993). Shaw and McKay (1942) noticed that, beside the absence of behavioral regulation, socially dispersed neighborhoods tend to create "criminal conventions" that could be passed to progressive eras of adolescents.

Social Learning Theory

Andrew (2021) state that Social learning theory posits that people learn their behavioral responses by observing others or through direct experience. It focuses on how a person interprets events and is learned and is important in determining how the person reacts to those events. This expert explains that social learning theory places particular emphasis on the important role of indirect symbolic and self-regulatory processes, which have received relatively little attention even in most theories learning theory. According to psychlotron.uk.org, social learning theorists share many assumptions with behaviorists, especially the belief that people are fundamentally shaped by their environment through the process of learning practice. Social learning theorists also acknowledge that classical conditioning and operant conditioning have important influences on human behavior. However, they add a third dimension to this learning process: learning by observation. They believe that people learn by observing others and that, therefore, other people (the social environment) have a particularly important influence on behavior

The emphasis on observational learning was accompanied by the belief that human behavior could not be explained without considering the role of internal mental processes in human behavior, which act of rejection. Social learning theories address the ability of learners to internalize and demonstrate behaviors demonstrated in their environment. In society, youth and adolescent are surrounded by many influential role models, such as parents in the family, social media/mass media figures, friends in the peer group, religion, other members of society and school which vice versa affect the behavior of their wards (Locke, 1987).

Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population of the research is all the people living in the Onitsha metropolis. The targeted population consists of 350 respondents from major cities in Onitsha between the ages of 18 and 45 years. 299 questionnaires were properly filled and returned which served as the sample size. The data was analyzed using simple percentage.

The study was conducted in Onitsha Metropolis, (Onitsha North and South Local Government Areas) of Anambra State, Nigeria. Onitsha is a city located on the eastern bank of the Niger River, in Nigeria. A metropolitan city, Onitsha is known for its river port and as an economic hub for commerce, industry, and education. It hosts the Onitsha Main Market, the largest market in Africa in terms of geographical size and volume of goods. In the 2006 Nigerian census, Onitsha had an estimated city proper population of over quarter a million people. Its urban area has been projected to reach around 1,600,000 inhabitants in 2023 (World Population Review, 2023). The indigenous people of Onitsha are Igbo and speak the Igbo language. The Onitsha people are referred to as Ndi Onicha. Some of the villages in Onitsha are: Ogboli, Odojele, Ogboozala, Umudei, Umuaroli, Obikporo, Iyawu, Ogbeabu, Umuikem.

Discussion of Findings

From the findings and results of this research, it is clear that the major predisposing factors of that causes the involvement of youths within Onitsha metropolis into hooliganism and violence is

'family and the 'peer group'. But on the other hand. On the hypotheses that were tested, the results revealed that there was a remarkable indifference from the respondents' responses as far as the predisposing factors for youths' involvement into hooliganism and violence is concerned on the basis of the respondents' course level, Youths' hooliganism and violence is a very serious issue globally, the peculiarity of problems faced by the youth all over the nation attest to this. Such problems include unemployment and lack of viable/sustainable means of livelihood which gingered their frustration pushing them into deviancy (Johnson, 2005). The findings further observed that certain preceding factors must have caused the manifestation of violent traits in youths. This revelation counters the opinion of COECD (2011) that state that the individual traits such as poor behavior controls, impulsiveness, attention and hyperactivity as the major causes of youth violence. Finally, on the issues of death, depression, injury, anxiety, poor educational achievements, disability, isolation and imprisonment, Dawes (2010) study was in agreement as major youths' hooliganism and violence consequences.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has attempted to uncover the predisposing and enabling factors in the incidence and prevalence of hooliganism and youth violence in Onitsha, Anambra State focusing on empirical and theoretical expositions. The study adopted these principles not only to understand the complexity in the concepts of youth violence in Onitsha but to also suggest the way out of the predicament. The overall relevance and message of this study is that most violent activities do occur in neighborhoods that are socially and economically disadvantaged, where conventional institutions of social control, such as families, schools, and religious organizations are weak and unable to regulate the behavior of residents, especially the youth. Such neighborhood provides a fertile-ground for violence in various ways such as: lack of behavioral control mechanisms that could prevent youths from engaging in violent activities and the cultural transmission of violent values to the younger generations. It is in view of this that most youth violent activities and hooliganism occur mostly in socially and structurally disadvantaged neighborhoods of Onitsha characterizedby high concentrations of people living in poverty, substandard housing, poor community design, limited public services.

Based on the remarks outlined, the study however recommends youth related programmers such as capacity building workshops and skills for entrepreneurial leadership for the youth in these areas have become highly important. It is also important that political resources be evenly distributed, and the political class should desist from recruiting youths into violence. State security agencies should embark on strict measures to police violence prone areas to prevent the havoc of youth violence from transcending to the so-called socially, economically advantaged areas.

More importantly, the democratic governments which is the government of the people, by the people and for the people, should take the youth to heart. They should ensure that the young people are well taken care off. According to the report on youth engagement released by the United Nations, they stated that the responsibility for finding solution to the problems affecting young people such as unemployment, low representation in political processes, social exclusion lies largely with Governments (UN, 2016). On this, Governments should ensure that every intervention for the youth should be worthwhile. Schemes and projects against poverty and unemployment should be viable one that can have a lasting effect on the population. Any intervention that government of any level will implement for Nigerians should be germane and one that can offer good and secure employment for the youth and Nigerians. It should not be monthly cash transfer

of eight thousand naira (₦8,000) to poor families (not individuals) for some months proposed by Tinubu's Federal Government, which analysts faulted as a waste (Suleiman, 2023). Nigeria have been known for her notorious attitude towards the youth but are so generous with political spending. Therefore, government of all level should put a sincere programmes and policies that will help and lift majority of the teaming youth in Nigeria out of poverty. Through such intervention action, many will be drawn out of violence and hooliganism and thereby reduce the destruction and waste associated with them.

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