

Youth Unemployment and Socio-Economic Development in South East Nigeria: The Nexus

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Abstract

Youth unemployment is a critical challenge in Nigeria, particularly in the South East region, where it poses significant threat to socio-economic development. The study explores the multifaceted implications of youth unemployment on various aspects of society, including drug abuse, life expectancy, illiteracy, poverty, and criminality. Through an empirical investigation, the study examines the socio-economic impact of unemployment on young people in South East Nigeria, highlighting the region's unique cultural, economic, and political dynamics. The findings revealed that youth unemployment hampers economic growth, exacerbates social inequalities, perpetuates poverty, and fosters socio unrest. The study concludes with policy recommendations to address the root causes of youth unemployment and foster inclusive socio-economic development in the region.

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1. Introduction

The relevance of youth in the socio-economic development of a nation cannot be overstated. As the future leaders and workforce of a country, youth play a crucial role in shaping its economic landscape and social progress. Their energy, creativity and adaptability are vital assets that drive innovation, entrepreneurship and productivity, thereby contributing significantly to economic growth and development (World Bank, 2019). One key aspect of youth's impact on socio-economic development lies in their potential to drive technological advancement. In today's rapidly evolving digital age, young people are often at the forefront of technological innovation, leveraging their familiarity with digital tools and platforms to create new solutions, products, and services (UNESCO, 2017). This technological innovation not only enhances productivity and efficiency but also opens up new opportunities for economic growth and employment generation. Moreover, youths are agents of social change, advocating for inclusivity, equality, and sustainable development.

Youth unemployment poses a significant challenge to the socio-economic development of Nigeria, impacting both individuals and the nation as a whole. With a youth population that comprises a significant portion of its demographic makeup, Nigeria faces the risk of losing out on the potential contributions of this vital segment of its population (UNICEF, 2019). One of the most notable effects of youth unemployment is its impact on economic growth. High levels of unemployment among the youth mean a loss of productive capacity and human capital, leading to lower levels of output and investment in the economy (Oluwatobi, Efobi and Olurinola, 2017).

Onyekwere (2021) is of the view that youth unemployment with the glaring evidence of joblessness in every nook and cranny of society has become one of the fundamental Developmental challenges facing Nigeria at the moment. Kayode (2014), argues that there was no time in Nigeria's chequered history when unemployment is as serious as now. Regrettably, one can conclude that the government has not done anything substantial enough to reduce unemployment in Nigeria. Unemployment is one of the most serious micro-economic variables that a responsive government not only tries to control but ensures that it is as low as possible. Unfortunately, Nigeria with all its abundant natural resources is currently battling with the high rate of youth unemployment. Unemployment appears to be the root cause of violence in Nigeria. Research suggests that unemployed youths are disproportionately more likely to be perpetrators, as well as victims of crime and violence. The self-employed are in a dilemma as scant infrastructure makes it impossible for them to ply their trade (Okafor, 2011). This is worsened by political corruption, poverty, poor governance, increasing population, social unrest, and lack of policy initiatives and implementation to some extent encouraged criminal groups to thrive across Nigeria. The research is therefore the study evaluated the effect of youth unemployment on the socio-economic development of South East, Nigeria.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study was to determine the effect of youth unemployment on the socio-economic development of South East, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study were to:

- i. Evaluate the effect of youth unemployment on drug abuse in South East, Nigeria;
- ii. Appraise the effect of youth unemployment on the level of criminality in South East Nigeria.

1.2 Research Questions

The following research questions were made to guide the study.

- i. To what extent do youth unemployment affect drug abuse in South East, Nigeria?
- ii. How does youth unemployment affect the level of criminality in South East Nigeria?

2. Conceptual Review

Youth Unemployment

Defining youth has always been a challenging task. The international community through its organisations such as the United Nations has attempted to fix a particular age group as representative of youth. At the same time, it gives member nations the freedom to define youth as they fit. The United Nations has defined youth as a period of transition between the dependence childhood to adulthood's independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community and for statistical consistency across regions. It defines 'youth' as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by member states (UNESCO, 2016). According to Louize and Dhruv (2021), youth is defined as a time of transition from dependent childhood to independent adulthood and the important aspect of this transition which is economic independence is often achieved through employment. National Youth Policy (2001) cited in Emerole, Chikwe & Joel (2018) viewed youths as individuals between the age brackets of 18 – 35. Youth unemployment refers to the situation where individuals within this age bracket are actively seeking employment but are unable to secure suitable jobs.

An unemployed person as defined by the International Labour Organization is a person aged 15 or over who simultaneously meets three conditions: being unemployed for a given week, being available to take a job within two weeks; having actively sought a job in the last four weeks or having found one starting in less three weeks (ILO, 2024). In Nigeria, the labour force participation level is measured in terms of the country's working-age population such as those above 15 years that engage actively in the labour market, either by working or looking for work. It indicates the size of the supply of labour available to engage in the production of goods and services, relative to the population of working age (NBS, 2020).

Abdullahi, Ogu and Abdulsalam (2019) defined unemployment as unemployed workers who are currently not working but are willing and able to work for pay, are currently available to work and have actively searched for work. Wayas, Selvadurai & Awang (2019) "a situation in which persons capable and willing to work are unable to find suitable paid employment", while Ejo-Orusa (2020) defines unemployment as "the facts of some people not having a job; the number of people without a job; the state of not having a job". Unemployment may also be defined as a condition that exists when there is an individual who can work, is wishing to work, and is dependent on work for survival but is unable to obtain employment. According to International Statistical Standards, the term unemployment should in principle satisfy the three criteria of (i) being without work (ii) being available for work, and (iii) seeking work.

Effects of Youth Unemployment

Youth unemployment in Nigeria has profound effects on both individuals and society as a whole. With a significant portion of the population comprising young people, the challenges posed by

unemployment among this demographic are particularly acute. The effects of youth unemployment in Nigeria are multifaceted and encompass various aspects of economic, social, and political life.

Economically, youth unemployment contributes to reduced productivity and economic growth, as a large segment of the workforce remains underutilized or unemployed. This leads to a loss of human capital and potential output, hindering the country's overall development trajectory (ILO, 2020). Socially, youth unemployment worsens poverty and inequality, as young people struggle to meet their basic needs and access essential services such as education, healthcare, and housing. It also fosters feelings of alienation, frustration, and hopelessness among young people, increasing the risk of social unrest and crime (Okafor, 2019).

Politically, youth unemployment undermines social cohesion and political stability, as disenfranchised and disenfranchised youth become susceptible to radicalization and extremist ideologies. Addressing youth unemployment is therefore crucial for promoting inclusive growth, reducing poverty, and fostering sustainable development in Nigeria. Unemployment takes a doomsday scenario in Nigeria as it developed a decade after Nigeria had her independence. Nwigbo & Imoh-Ita, (2016) opine that the rate of unemployment rises from 4.3% to 6.4% and further rose to 7.1% in 1987. This rise in the unemployment rate came as a result of economic depression which engulfed the nation and spread its effects that resulted in the massive closure of businesses and retrenchment of workers. This was followed by the placement of an embargo on recruitment which further worsened the situation. Basse & Atan, (2012) opined that the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) had a salutary effect on job creation leading to a sharp fall in unemployment figure from 7.1% in 1987 to 3% in 1994. However, the rate of unemployment in Nigeria kept on increasing. Okafor (2011) asserted that Nigeria's unemployment can be grouped into two categories: first, the older unemployed who lost their jobs through retrenchment, redundancy, or bankruptcy; and second, the younger unemployed, most of whom have never been employed. In the words of Awogbenle & Iwuamadi (2016), a statistic from the Manpower Board and the Federal Bureau of Statistics indicated that Nigeria has a youth population of 80 million, representing 60% of the total population of the country. Also, 64 million of them are unemployed, while 1.6 million are underemployed.

Causes of Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

Numerous scholars, in their work on youth unemployment in Nigeria, have observed the major reasons for youth unemployment crisis in Nigeria. Known examples in this regard include Alanana, (2003); Echebiri, (2005); Ayinde, (2008); Morphy, (2008); Awobgenle and Iwuamadi, (2010); Emeh, (2012); Olukayode, (2017). Anyanwu & Duru, (2020). Several factors including poor quality education, rapid rural-urban migration, rapid population growth and small private sector, were identified by Okojie (2003:5) as the main causes of high youth unemployment in Africa. Other important factors include:

- (i) **Lack of Steady and Sustainable Power Supply:** The investment climate in Nigeria is not as friendly, as a result of the high cost of doing business. This is caused by the absence of regular and sustainable power supply. All the resources expended by the government to revive the power sector did not achieve the desired result. This had forced many firms to rely on generators for their business, with the attendant high cost of buying, fueling and maintaining these generators. As was observed by Uddin and Uddin (2013:399-400), the high and manifold levies and taxations borne by these companies complicate the matter, thereby adding to the excessive cost of doing business in Nigeria. This had led to closure and

relocation of many factories and industries to other countries where the investment climate is conducive. This often results in laying off of workers, with the possibility of new recruitment completely ruled out. The youth unemployment crisis in the labour market is exacerbated by these factors (Adeloye, 2010; Onifade, 2011).

- (ii) **Rapid Expansion of the Educational System:** By contributing to increase in the supply of graduates of institutions of higher learning beyond the demand for them, the fast expansion of the educational system worsens the problem of youth unemployment in Nigeria. For instance, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (2010), the overall number of graduates produced by the higher institutions in Nigeria, which stood at 514,214 in 2003 rose to 754,100 in 2007. In the contention of Utomi (2011), this, ordinarily, should not have amounted to a problem, but the truth remains that the huge number of graduates cannot be absorbed by the Nigerian economy that is epileptic.
- (iii) **Corruption:** Nigeria has not been able to develop a strong economic base as a result of corruption that had pervaded its overall economic and social structure. Misappropriation, embezzlement and diversion of funds earmarked for developmental projects are rampant in Nigeria. Some of these funds are hidden in banks in Switzerland and banks in other foreign countries. Also, the treasury of some Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) are often liquidated by dishonest administrators in the public service. For instance, as was observed by Uddin and Uddin (2013:399), Nigeria was denied the creation of jobs in various sectors of the economy for the youths that would have resulted through a vibrant economy occasioned by estimated oil revenue sale in the past 50 years in excess of \$500 billion that went down the drain through inflated contract amounts orchestrated through alliance of the political leaders, resident and foreign contractors. In the contention of Okafor (2005), the substitution of dream, policy and plan with award of contract and other everyday activities that have monetary undertone led to the failure of the political class, as each consecutive government abused and exploited goodwill, public power, utilities, personal gains and resources to target the wealth of the country. Hence, the unemployment situation worsened, breeding frustration, hunger and abject poverty as a result of the downturn in the economy.
- (iv) **Rural-Urban Migration:** Rural-urban migration is one of the root causes of youth unemployment in Nigeria. There is always mass migration of young people from rural areas to the urban areas of the country, in search of imaginary white-collar jobs. This is considered a subtle revolt against the poor socio-economic conditions that characterize the rural areas. Due to the increasing rate of rural-urban migration, the problem of youth unemployment has become more of an urban than a rural issue in the country. Hence, youth unemployment has become very critical in Nigerian urban areas as a result of rural-urban migration. The number of job seekers in urban areas is raised by internal migration. As was observed Youth Unemployment in Nigeria: Implications for Development | 77 by Todaro (1997), the creation of urban job is more difficult to realize than the creation of rural job on the demand side.
- (v) **Low Standard of Education:** In the contention of some scholars and critics, the average graduate in Nigeria is unemployable and by implication lacks the skills required for employment in the formal sector by the employers of labour (Uddin and Uddin, 2013, :399). After all, employers do not need people to pay or spend their money on but people that will help their organization grow and make more profit as the primary goal of every enterprise is to make a profit. This has often been attributed to the educational system in Nigeria. The ingredients of entrepreneurial contents needed to make graduates in Nigeria creators of a job instead of seekers of the job is missing in the course contents of the greatest number of

tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Besides, graduates of entrepreneurial training activities such as incubation, tailoring and computer are constrained by lack of access to credit to start their businesses. As was stated by Henrik (2006), violence problem occasioned by the absence of job and idleness results from little opportunities for young graduates (Onah, 2011). However, in the absence of employment, the useful role expected from them in the society would be compromised.

- (vi) **Rapid Population Growth:** Evidence from the National Population Census conducted in Nigeria in 2006 revealed that the population of the nation was 140,431,790 million and it was projected that the population could be more than 180 million by 2020, provided there is a growth rate of 3.2 per cent annually (National Population Commission and ICF Macro, 2009). This population places Nigeria as the most populous country in Africa. Uddin and Uddin (2013:399) claimed that the labour force grew at a fast rate as a result of the high rate of the growth of the population, thereby surpassing labour supply. The effect of faster population growth on unemployment problem in Nigeria is multi-layered. Its effect on the supply side of the economy is through a high and fast rise in the labour force compared to the economy's absorptive capacity.

Implications of Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

Youth unemployment in Nigeria has far-reaching consequences that affect not only individuals but also communities, the economy, and the overall social fabric of the nation. One of the primary consequences is the perpetuation of poverty and economic inequality. With a significant portion of the youth population unable to find gainful employment, there is a loss of productivity and human capital, hindering economic growth and development.

The effects of youth unemployment in Nigeria have been documented in several studies, including Fajana, (2000); Nwogwugwu and Irechukwu, (2015); Emeh, (2012) and Olukayode, (2017), Anyanwu & Duru, (2020) amongst others. Some of these implications include:

- (i) **The Tourism Sector:** This sector has been affected indirectly by the youth unemployment crisis in Nigeria through the activities of militants in the Niger Delta, Boko Haram and kidnapers, among others. These social vices were bred by the crisis of youth unemployment. As was observed by Uddin & Uddin (2013:400), some N80 billion accrues to this sector annually and it is among the employers of labour in Nigeria. Hence, the expected contribution of this sector to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is severely hampered by youth unemployment and its consequences.
- (ii) **Increase in Social Vices and Crimes:** The rate at which young people are getting involved in violent activities and crimes across Nigeria is alarming. In this connection, Enwuchola, Adekunle & Udaw (2013:1-2), observed that those paraded as criminal gangs' members in the country before the mass media are mainly young people. Also, more of youth are employed by terrorist groups for suicide missions. In addition, most of those who are involved in youth restiveness and militancy in the Niger Delta fall into the youth age bracket of the. If these youths were in remunerative employments in the economy or have other ways of livelihood, the majority of them would not indulge in criminal activities. According to them, the involvement of educated youths in these crimes is what constitutes the scaring dimension of the phenomenon. The involvement of the educated citizens of a country in crimes such as advanced fee frauds, cyber-crimes, among others is the worst thing that could ever occur to it. This is premised on the fact that unemployed young people that are frustrated could be a fertile ground to conscript economic saboteurs, armed robbery, smuggling, prostitution and drug trafficking etc. (Anyanwu & Oaikhenan, 1995, p.196). The increasing

army of unemployed youths roaming the streets of Nigeria captures the challenge of youth unemployment. Besides, the prevalence of armed robbery, kidnapping, rape, prostitution and other types of violent activities has been attributed to the crisis of youth unemployment in Nigeria.

- (iii) **Increased Rural-Urban Migration:** Rural-urban migration of youths in search of jobs is exacerbated by the crisis of youth unemployment. This has continued in Nigeria for decades unabated, thereby mounting pressure on social amenities that exist in the cities. These skilled and unskilled young people move in mass from the rural areas to towns and cities searching for job opportunities that are mostly not available. These youths are motivated by differentials in wage, the unattractiveness of the rural economy and opportunities for a job that is skewed towards the urban areas. This has increased the percentage of the urban poor. Harvey (2009:207-208) noted that there would be a major demographic transition as a result of rural-urban migration in the African continent by 2020, with more than half of the African population becoming urban dwellers in 30 years to come based on the projections of the UN. However, and on the positive side, Smith (2003), observed that the mass exodus of the greatest number of the youth from the rural areas of the African continent is responsible for city growth in Africa.
- (iv) **Potential sources of political instability:** The army of the unemployed young people serve as a conscripting ground for disenchanting, discontented and rebellious elements among the people in a country. The development of any economy could be affected unfavourably by such social and political instability.
- (v) **Brain Drain:** The inability of policymakers to control the explosion in youth unemployment through effective measures has resulted in the migration of youths, particularly the educated ones to the developed economies of America and Europe in search of greener pastures. The FMOYD (2008) observed that around 20,000 doctors from Nigeria and associated health professionals alone were estimated to be practising in the United States. Also, Northern American countries, the Gulf States and Europe are the major destinations of the other emigrants. However, others migrated to such countries as Libya and South-Africa with the attendant positive and negative consequences that resulted from such migration. Economic migrants from other African countries see South Africa as their main destination (AFP, 2019). The xenophobic attack in South Africa resulted in the loss of property worth millions of dollars and loss of lives of some people. For instance, AFP (2019) observed that 67 people died as a result of xenophobic attacks between 2000 and March 2008. Besides, 62 people died due to a series of 80 attacks in May 2008. However, 21 South Africans were among those killed. Furthermore, not less than 12 people died as a result of a surge in xenophobic attacks in the financial capital of South Africa in 2019. The xenophobic attacks of 2019 heightened diplomatic tension between South Africa on the one hand and Nigeria and other countries in Africa whose citizens were affected on the other. This led to the airlifting of many and willing Nigerians back to their fatherland from South Africa (AFP, 2019). Besides, some youths were killed in Libya and others were subjected to all kinds of inhuman treatment. In terms of security implications for African countries, Unowa (2005) observed that the youths are victims of syndicates for illegal migration, criminal gangs and warlords. Highly educated and skilled manpower is normally lost through brain drain.
- (vi) **Boko Haram:** Youth unemployment has aggravated frustration, hunger and abject poverty among the young people in Nigeria. Hence, some youths join extremist groups such as Boko Haram as a way out of their social exclusion. The United Nations Conference on Trade and

Development's (UNCTADs) investment report on the world stated that Nigeria's foreign direct investment declined in 2009 from USD 8.65 billion to USD 6.1 billion in 2010 as a result of Boko Haram activities. Also, the rate of Boko Haram activities and many other crimes in the affected northern states, especially those in North-East and North-West, were heightened by unemployment. As a result of these activities, schools were closed down, often leading to disruption of academic activities.

- (vi) Low Investment and Low National Income: Savings depends mainly on disposable income. On the other hand, disposable income is the income that accrues to a worker after deduction of tax. Since an unemployed youth cannot earn income, let alone save, savings is extremely reduced, leading to a reduction in investment. Again, the low investment would result in low national income through the multiplier process. Hence, the reduction in income that resulted in the process of multiplier, would engender a vicious cycle of poverty.

Interface between unemployment and youth restiveness in South-East Nigeria

Globally, unemployment is a serious national challenge which every responsible government is working round the clock to address so as to prevent its damaging consequences. As averred by Louise & Dhruv (2021), the pattern of unemployment in Sub-Saharan Africa is not totally out of place as its rate tends to be highest in middle-income countries but unemployment among the young people is typically higher than the country-wide average. Contributing to the discourse of unemployment especially among the young people, Rise network cited in Adedokun (2014) revealed that Nigeria's youth unemployment was over 50% of the total unemployment rate (23.9%) in 2011. Former Minister of Youth Development, Mallam Bolaji Abdullahi in Osakwe (2013) stated that 67 million young people in the country were unemployed as at 2012, when the total national population was about 140 million people. The youth population increased to about 80 million in 2016 and more than 70 percent of this population was unemployed (Gonyok, 2016). The unemployment among the young people in the country is unbearably undesirable to the extent that more than 100, 000 youths could jostle for just 25 vacant positions (Bakare cited in Adedokun, 2014). According to Anyanwu & Duru (2020), statistical report from Nigeria indicates that the phenomenon of youth unemployment has reached a worrisome state. For instance, NBS (2018) showed that the unemployment rate in the country in 2017 and 2018 were 20.42% and 23.13% respectively. However, the number of youths that were unemployed in 2017 constituted 26.58%. It increased to 29.72% in the third quarter of 2018.

Narrowing it down to South East. Ndukwe (2016) observed that unemployment is evident in Ebonyi State in that it was ranked 15th State with unemployed persons across the country and 1st in South-East in 2018. Its manifestation is a high number of young people clustering from morning to noon around Spera-in-Deo Junction, Kpirikpiri opposite Abakaliki Township Stadium and Opposite Affia Ofu market among others. These unemployed youths are always ready for menial jobs such as mixing of sands and cement for building and clearing of grasses etc. meanwhile, the country's unemployment rate currently stood at 33.3% with the young people having 42.5% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). South-east as a whole has a reasonable share of this challenge as a state (Imo) in the region currently has the highest rate of unemployment in the country. Putting it in a specific and wider context, unemployment rate for Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states currently stood 50.07%, 44.22%, 40.16%, 31.62% and 56.64% respectively (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). The unemployment in the region knows no boundary as it is found both in urban and rural areas. Chioke et al cited in Okoh, Onwe & Ofoma (2022) observed the

high level of unemployment in the rural communities of Enugu East Local Government Area of Enugu state in the South-East.

As a result, there is youth restiveness in the region characterized by kidnapping, vandalization of public facilities, killing of security personnel and violent demonstration among others. According to Ajufor (2013), the frustration and desperation faced by unemployed youths creates a fertile ground for criminal activities to flourish. A consequence of unemployment among young people is particularly exemplified by increasing kidnapping, restiveness and political instability. In a similar vein, Gonyok (2016) observed that a situation where young people after several years of acquiring education are unable to secure jobs, necessitate some of the social vices the country has continued to witness such as armed robbery, cultism, prostitution, drug addiction, hostage taking and gangsterism etc. To Eze (2012), unemployment in Nigeria is responsible for most of the criminal activities carried out by young people. There are so many young people whose energy is still seeking for work to dissipate and earn with it. They are poor and idle and this is responsible for the prevailing kidnapping in the country (Thom-Otuya, 2010). More so, Zakaria (2006) inferred that absence of employment opportunities in developing countries such as Nigeria is responsible for youth restiveness with disastrous consequences. The increase in criminal activities such as kidnapping and thuggery by the young people is an indication of lacuna in the society (Ajaegbu, 2012). There are expectations for individuals as well as established means of achieving them but when there are limitations as youth unemployment stood at 46.5% (Sanusi, 2012), people especially the young ones become compelled to realize the objectives illegally thereby fulfilling the societal expectations.

This foregoing is the nature of restiveness among the young people in the South-east. As aptly revealed by Nwanunobi in Okorie, Aja & Okpan (2018), one of the prominent cases of victims of high-profile kidnapping in Southeast is the kidnapping of the father of a famous novelist. Also, Ukoki & Okolie (2016) posited that in Nigeria, apart from River and Delta states, Abia, Anambra and Imo states are the states that have highest number of recorded cases of kidnapping. In Ebonyi state, Punch (2021) revealed that a village head and three others were kidnapped. It was also reported that two Chinese expatriates working in a mining site in Ihietutu, Ishiagu in Ivo Local Government Area of the state were kidnapped by unknown gunmen (Daily Post, 2020). In a similar development, an eight-month-old pregnant Internally Displaced Person at Effium Community in Ohaukwu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State was abducted (Punch, 2021).

Additionally, the 2020#EndSars# protest in the country which later took violent dimension is an aspect of youth restiveness which apart from police brutality can be blamed on unemployment among the young people. As asserted by Ezeji (2020), 2020#EndSars# in Nigeria is a form of youth restiveness. In the South-east, public facilities were set ablaze, security personnel killed with economic activities greatly disrupted. Daily Post (2020) reported that police divisions in Amichi, Osumeyi, Enifite and Ukpor, all in Nnewi South Local Government Area of Anambra state were burnt while the Osumeyi DPO and two other officers were fatally wounded leading to the death of the DPO and one other. It was also recorded that Nworieubi Police Divisional Headquarters in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo state was set on fire following the violent dimension of the #Endsars# protest. Furthermore, Daily Post (2020) revealed that two police stations (Ekeaba and Kpirikpiri Police Divisions) in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State were burnt down by hoodlums in the guise of #EndSars# protest. A Police Officer was killed and office of the Divisional Police Officer and Administrative building burnt at a police facility in Obiozara, Ohaozara Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. On 30th October, 2020, Ohaneze Youth Council (OYC) while reacting to

the #EndSars# protest in Ebonyi State pointed out that the #EndSars# movement was the tipping point adopted by the young people to register their anger, dissatisfaction and frustration against police brutality and unemployment among others; lamenting the nature of youth restiveness in Ebonyi state and urging the State Government to avoid its future occurrence by immediately commencing the rehabilitation and dredging of Ozizza River in Afipko that will connect Ebonyi and its environs to the Atlantic Ocean so as to create jobs and business opportunities to numerous Igbo youths (Elombah,2020).

We now have faceless violent young people tagged “Unknown Gunmen” going about looting people’s properties, attacking security formations, killing security personnel and even other citizens in the South-east. It was reported that about 175 persons including soldiers, police officers and civilians were killed within six months in 2021. Specifically, in Imo State, 49 policemen and civilians were killed and about 11 vehicles burnt, Anambra State had about 24 security agents, including Police, Navy, army, DSS and NSCDC, and about 52 civilians killed with 15 buildings and 28 vehicles set ablaze, in Enugu State, 23 persons were gunned down with four Independent National Electoral Commission Offices and two police stations burnt. Ebonyi State recorded 32 killings with three arson cases and Abia State witnessed seven attacks (Punch, 2021). More so, on 14th January, 2022, raiders invaded Mgbidi Divisional Police Headquarters in Imo State killed an inspector and injured another officer. Similar incidence had happened in the State a week to the attack when gunmen stormed Ideato South Local Government Area police Headquarters in Dikenafai destroying the building with explosives and setting free detained persons (Punch, 2022). The above picture illuminates the relationship between unemployment especially among the people and youth restiveness in the South-east. The youths in the region have aspirations as well as ambitions and are determined to actualize them. Therefore, any frustrating atmosphere to the actualization of these aspirations compels them to use illegal means to change the status quo. When the young people are not meaningfully engaged to utilize their skills for their individual development and that of society at large, they come out to the street to register their frustration and disappointment in a manner that is inimical to the society. The result of such a scenario in the South-east is general unsafe environment ranging from kidnapping to vandalization of public facilities.

Youth unemployment and Drug Abuse

Drug abuse refers to the excessive and maladaptive use of substances that alter the mind, often leading to significant negative consequences. This behavior can include the use of illegal drugs such as heroin and cocaine, as well as the misuse of prescription medications, like opioids and benzodiazepines. Drug abuse often starts as voluntary use but can quickly evolve into compulsive behavior driven by changes in the brain, particularly in areas related to judgment, decision-making, and self-control (National Institute on Drug Abuse [NIDA], 2023). The misuse of drugs is primarily driven by the desire to achieve a pleasurable effect, relieve stress, or improve performance in various areas of life. However, the consequences can be dire. Short-term effects might include impaired judgment and coordination, which can lead to accidents and injuries. Long-term abuse can result in severe health issues such as heart disease, liver damage, and mental health disorders, including depression and anxiety (NIDA, 2023; Britannica, 2024). Moreover, drug abuse poses significant societal problems, contributing to increased healthcare costs, lost productivity, and higher crime rates. It also has profound effects on families and communities, leading to social and economic instability (Britannica, 2024)

Youth unemployment and drug abuse are interlinked crises in South East Nigeria, exacerbating social and economic challenges. High unemployment rates among young people lead to frustration and hopelessness, driving many to substance abuse as a coping mechanism. Drugs like methamphetamine, known locally as "Mkpulummiri," are increasingly abused, leading to severe health and social consequences (Insight.ng, 2023). The region's economic instability and poor education system contribute to these issues. Strikes and underfunding of educational institutions result in high dropout rates, limiting job prospects for many youths. Consequently, the lack of opportunities pushes them towards drug abuse, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and addiction (Dumbili, 2023). Addressing these problems requires a multifaceted approach, including job creation, education reform, and improved mental health services. Effective policies must focus on equipping youths with practical skills, promoting entrepreneurship, and ensuring access to rehabilitation services to break the link between unemployment and drug abuse (Insight.ng, 2023; Dumbili, 2023).

Youth unemployment and criminality

Criminality refers to behavior that violates established laws and regulations within a given society, often resulting in legal sanctions or punishment by authorities. It encompasses a wide range of activities considered unlawful, including but not limited to theft, assault, fraud, drug trafficking, and vandalism. Criminal behavior can vary in severity and complexity, from minor offenses such as petty theft to serious crimes such as murder or terrorism.

The heightened rate of crime in Nigeria in recent times is worrisome and disturbing. This is evident in daily news report of various crime such as robbery, pilfering, burglary, car theft, rape, kidnapping, internet scam and other social media crimes (Ibrahim, 2019). South Eastern Nigeria, in the yesteryear, was known for peaceful and tranquil atmosphere with adequate protection of lives and properties but in recent times, the spate of insecurity has taken another dimension (Ibrahim, 2019). To Adebayo (2013) crime is a threat to the fabric of society. It instills fear into the populace and causes unnecessary pain, agony, loss of lives and properties. It's also a threat to the security and stability of society. Crimes must be reduced drastically for any country to enjoy sustainable security. Many scholars have attributed the heightened crime rate among youths in Nigeria to unemployment. Indeed, chronic youth unemployment is evident in thousands of graduate youths produce ever year with no jobs for majority of them (Adebayo, 2013; Ajaegbu, 2012; Kostadis, 2017). Inability to be gainfully engaged has turned many youths to devil's workshop. Adebayo (2013) observed further that most Nigerian youths are either underemployed or unemployed. As a result, some of them opt to perpetrate various crime. Unemployment is one of the major challenges in Nigeria today. In spite of thousands of graduates produced every year and an abundance of natural and human resources, the rate of unemployment is increasing at an alarming rate daily. Kazeem (2016) revealed that Nigerian tertiary education institutions produce up to 500,000 graduates every year besides Nigerian graduates who study abroad and return home to compete for jobs (Kazeem, 2016). The federal tax agency in November, 2016 received 700,000 applications for 500 advertised positions.

Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) recorded 14.2% level of unemployment in the last quarter of 2016 compare to 13.9% in the preceding quarter (Kazeem, 2017). According to Trading Economics (2019) unemployment rate increased to 23.10 per cent in the third quarter from 22.70 percent in the second quarter of 2018. The unemployment rate in Nigeria averaged 12.31 percent between 2006 and 2018, reaching an all high time of 23.10 percent in the third

quarter of 2018. The lowest record was 5.10 percent in the fourth quarter of 2010 (Akwagyiram, 2018). The growing rate unemployment in Nigeria, especially among the youths is a major challenge to national security. The high unemployment rate among youths in Nigeria has been attributed to many factors including rapid rural urban migration, rapid population growth, inappropriate school curricula, corruption, decline of the manufacturing sector, perception of policy makers and the youths themselves on employment and poor governance (Adebayo, 2013; Ekeji, 2019).

According to Ajufu (2013), desperation as a result of unemployment can drive many people into living outside the law to survive and as a means of expressing dissatisfaction with the apparent neglect of their very existence. She noted further that the negative consequences include poverty, psychological problems, and all manner of criminal behaviours causing general insecurity of life and businesses across the nation.

The level of criminality is significantly linked to youth unemployment. With a high rate of unemployment among young people, many are forced to engage in criminal activities such as armed robbery, kidnapping, cultism, drug trafficking and fraud. Youth unemployment has identified as a major driver of criminality, as many young people feel they have no other option but to engage in illegal activities to survive.

Theoretical Framework

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory, propounded by economist Theodore Schultz in the 1960s, posits that investments in education, training, and health are essential for enhancing individuals' productivity and increasing their economic output. The theory emphasizes that individuals are not only passive recipients of education and training but also active agents who can invest in themselves to improve their skills and knowledge, thereby increasing their human capital. This theory posits that investments in education, skills training, and health among the youth population can enhance their productivity and employability, leading to higher incomes and overall economic growth. Human capital theory suggests that reducing youth unemployment requires improving access to quality education, vocational training, and healthcare services to equip young people with the skills and capabilities needed to contribute effectively to the economy.

The application of Human Capital Theory provides valuable insights into understanding the effect of youth unemployment on socio-economic development in the South East region of Nigeria. According to Schultz (1961), Human Capital Theory emphasizes the importance of investing in education, training, and health to enhance individuals' productivity and economic outcomes. In the context of the South East region, where youth unemployment rates are significant, Human Capital Theory suggests that addressing unemployment requires investments in human capital development initiatives.

High levels of youth unemployment can hinder socio-economic development by limiting young people's access to employment opportunities, income generation, and social mobility. According to World Bank (2020), youth unemployment in Nigeria has been attributed to factors such as inadequate educational attainment, mismatch between skills acquired and labor market demands, and limited access to vocational training programs.

3.Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey design, which offers the flexibility to integrate both quantitative and qualitative approaches. It also enabled the analysis of multiple variables, including the independent variable (youth unemployment) and the dependent variable (social development). This design is ideal for investigating attitudes, perceptions, opinions, behaviours and values within a population with diverse settings and similar characteristics. By selecting a representing sample, this study can make generalizations that can be applied to the larger population, providing valuable insights into the relationship between youth unemployment and socio-economic development. The study was conducted in South East Nigeria with special emphasis on Youth unemployment and the socio-economic development in South East Nigeria. South East of Nigeria is one major geopolitical zones in the country. There are five states in the South East geopolitical zone: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo and are the native lands of the Igbo people. All the states in Nigeria are grouped according to regions into six different geopolitical zones. This work was conducted in three states in South East Nigeria namely Abia, Anambra and Enugu as representative sample. The study utilized primary and secondary sources to achieve its objectives. The sample of the study was selected using the stratified sampling procedure. The population of the study are the residents of the three States of South East Nigeria which according to the 2023 Nigeria Census projection was **13,666,200**.

Table 1: Population distribution

State	2006 Population	Population projection	Percentage
Abia	2,845,380	3,727,300	27
Anambra	4,177,828	5,527,800	41
Enugu	3,267,838	4,411,100	32
Total	10,291,046	13,666,200	100

Source: NPC 2006, and Population projection for 2023

Determination of the Sample Size

Freund and Williams's (1986) statistical sampling formula was used to obtain a sample size from a finite population in the study areas. The formula was given thus:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 Npq}{Ne^2 + Z^2 pq} \dots \dots \dots - - - 1$$

Where;

- n = Sample size
- N = Population of the study
- P = Probability of Success /Proportion
- q = Probability of Failure /Proportion
- Z = Standard error of the mean given under 95% reliability
- e = Limit of tolerable sampling error
- n = ?
- N = 13666200
- P = 0.6
- q = 1-p
- z = 1.96
- e = 4%

$$\begin{aligned}
n &= \frac{(1.96)^2 (13666200) (0.6)(0.4)}{13666200 (0.04)^2 + (1.96)^2 (0.6) (0.4)} \\
n &= \frac{3.8416 (13666200) (0.24)}{13666200 (0.0016) + (3.8416)(0.24)} \\
&= \frac{12600017.7408}{21865.92 + 0.921984} \\
&= \frac{12600017.7408}{21866.841984} \\
&= 576.216 \\
&= \cong 576
\end{aligned}$$

Data Presentation and Analysis

Data Analysis

Research Question One: To what extent does youth unemployment affect the drug abuse of South East, Nigeria.

Table 4.2: The extent to which youth unemployment effect the drug abuse of South East, Nigeria

s/n		VHE	HE	U	LE	VLE	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
1	Youth with no employment have more free time, making them susceptible to experimenting with drugs.	417	46	19	46	29	4.3232	1.25795	Accepted
2	Financial difficulty from unemployment leads to stress and depression, prompting drug use as an escape mechanism.	444	39	11	43	20	4.3932	1.19569	Accepted
3	Prolonged unemployment often leads to mental health problems, which can increase vulnerability to drug use.	362	137	13	29	16	4.5153	1.08879	Accepted
4	Without jobs, youths may feel a lack of direction or purpose, making drug use seem like a coping strategy.	217	147	39	82	81	4.4363	.97541	Accepted
5	Unemployment can diminish self-esteem and self-worth, leading some youths to turn to drug for temporary relief.	382	74	16	29	46	3.6050	1.47954	Accepted
	Valid N (listwise)		557						

Source: Field Survey 2024 and SPSS Result Output 23.0

The mean distribution of respondents' thoughts on the extent to which unemployment effect the drug abuse of South East, Nigeria is shown in Table 4.2.

In item number one, the data shows that 417 respondents asserted Very High Extent, 46 respondents asserted High Extent, 19 respondents were undecided, 46 respondents asserted Low Extent and 29 respondents asserted Very Low Extent.

Based on item number one and the variable Youth with no employment have more free time, making them susceptible to experimenting with drugs, the mean score value of respondents was 4.3232. The standard deviation of 1.25795, showing that the respondents' opinion was on the higher side.

On item two, 444 respondents asserted Very High Extent, 39 respondents asserted High Extent, 11 were undecided, 43 respondents asserted Low Extent and 20 respondents asserted Very Low Extent. With regards to the construct on item two, financial difficulty from unemployment lead to stress and depression, prompting drug use as an escape mechanism, the mean score value of the respondents was 4.3932. The standard deviation of 4.3932 indicates that the respondents' opinion was on the higher or lower side.

With reference to item three, 362 of the respondents asserted very high extent that prolonged unemployment often leads to mental health problems, which can increase vulnerability to drug use, 137 respondents asserted High Extent, 13 respondents Undecided, 29 respondents asserted Low Extent while 16 respondents asserted Very High Extent, with mean score values of 4.5153. The standard deviation of 1.08879 is a strong indication that the respondents were positive in their responses.

From item number four (4), the total sample of respondents' opinions was dispersed towards the higher side of the standard rating scale of 3.0, the mean score of 4.4363 and the standard deviation of .97541 depict the respondents asserted that without jobs, youths may feel a lack of direction or purpose, making drug use seem like a coping strategy.

The results obtained from item number five revealed that the mean score is 3.6050 and the standard deviation is 1.47954, and the sum of 3.6050, this affirmed the fact that there is positivity in the view of the respondents on the item. The overall mean score of the variable and standard deviation indicates that the respondents accepted that Unemployment can diminish self-esteem and self-worth, leading some youths to turn to drug for temporary relief.

Research question Two: How does youth unemployment affect the level of criminality in South East Nigeria?

Table 4.6: How youth unemployment affect the level of criminality in South East Nigeria

s/n		VHE	HE	U	LE	VLE	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
1	Unemployment pushes young people towards criminal activity, fueling a rise in criminality and perpetuating s cycle of violence and recidivism.	217	147	30	82	81	3.9785	1.25788	Accepted
2	Unemployment leaves youth vulnerable to exploitation by gangs, who prey on their desperation and lure them into life of crime and violence.	297	124	21	59	56	3.6032	1.47845	Accepted
3	Lack of opportunities pushes youth to engage in crime for survival	331	77	22	85	42	3.9820	1.37933	Accepted

4	Unemployed youth turn to illicit activities, escalating level of criminality in the society.	181	209	23	77	67	4.0215	1.38838	Accepted
5	Prolonged unemployment can lead to feelings of social isolation and disconnection, pushing young people to the margins society and increasing their likelihood of engaging in criminal behavior.	261	98	30	99	69	3.6984	1.39844	Accepted
Valid N (listwise)		557							

Source: Field Survey 2024 and SPSS Result Output 23.0

Table 4.6 displays the descriptive statistics of respondents' responses on how youth unemployment affect the level of criminality in South East Nigeria. The breakdown of the items and responses are as follows:

The responses obtained from item number one revealed that the mean score is 3.9785 and the standard deviation is 1.25788, which is a strong signal that the reactions of the respondents tend towards positive results. This confirms that the respondents agreed that Unemployment pushes young people towards criminal activity, fueling a rise in criminality and perpetuating a cycle of violence and recidivism.

The results of item number two indicated that the mean score is 3.6032 and the standard deviation is 1.47845. This is expressive of the fact that there is positivity in the view of the respondents. The overall mean score and standard deviation is a pointer that the respondents agreed that Unemployment leaves youth vulnerable to exploitation by gangs, who prey on their desperation and lure them into life of crime and violence.

The results obtained from item number three revealed that the mean score is 3.9820 and the standard deviation is 1.37933, this affirmed the fact that there is positivity in the view of the respondents on the item. The overall mean score of the variable and standard deviation indicates that the respondents are firmly convinced that Lack of opportunities pushes youth to engage in crime for survival

The results obtained from item number four indicated that the mean score is 4.0215 and the standard deviation is 1.38838, demonstrating that the respondents are much more positive about the item. The overall mean score of the variable and standard deviation goes to shows that the respondents agreed that Unemployed youth turn to illicit activities, escalating level of criminality in the society.

The results of item number five with the mean score of 3.6984 and the standard deviation are 1.39844, are a strong indication that the respondents are firm in their conviction. It is a strong indication the respondents trusted that prolonged unemployment can lead to feelings of social isolation and disconnection, pushing young people to the margins society and increasing their likelihood of engaging in criminal behavior.

4. Summary of Findings

The following were the findings from the study:

- i. The study revealed that youth unemployment has a significant negative effect on drug abuse in South East Nigeria. This suggests that the lack of employment opportunities contributes to idle time, which can increase susceptibility to drug-related activities.
- ii. Finally, it was discovered that youth unemployment has a significant negative effect on level of criminality in South East Nigeria. This is a strong indication that without legitimate sources of income, many youths may turn to crime as a means of survival.

Conclusion

The study concluded that youth unemployment significantly and negatively affects the socioeconomic development of South East Nigeria, presenting a multifaceted challenge that impedes progress and stability. The lack of job opportunities for young people results in economic hardship, driving many into poverty and limiting their access to essential services such as education and healthcare. This economic instability fosters a cycle of poverty that is difficult to break. Moreover, youth unemployment contributes to higher crime rates and social unrest, undermining community safety and deterring investment. The psychological impact of unemployment, including feelings of hopelessness and frustration, exacerbates these issues, leading to greater social instability. Educational attainment and literacy rates are also negatively impacted, as economic pressures force many youths to abandon their studies, perpetuating illiteracy and limiting future opportunities for socioeconomic advancement. The overall economic output of the region suffers as a significant portion of the population remains unproductive, hindering growth and development. Addressing youth unemployment through targeted job creation, education, and skills development initiatives is crucial for fostering a more prosperous, stable, and resilient South East Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- i. To combat the significant negative effect of youth unemployment on drug abuse in South East Nigeria, it is recommended to implement targeted job creation programs, vocational training, and entrepreneurship support for young people. Additionally, providing accessible mental health services and substance abuse prevention programs can help address underlying issues, while community engagement initiatives can foster a supportive environment, reducing the inclination towards drug abuse.
- ii. To mitigate the negative impact of youth unemployment on criminality in South East Nigeria, implementing proactive measures is essential. Focus should be on creating sustainable job opportunities through economic development projects and vocational training. Additionally, investing in youth empowerment programs, including mentoring and skills enhancement, can redirect energies towards constructive activities. Strengthening community policing and promoting social cohesion initiatives will also contribute to reducing crime rates and fostering a safer environment.

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