



# Socio-economic Factors, Street Cultism, Streetism and the Rise of Homeless Children in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.

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## Abstract

This study examines the relationship between socio-economic factors, street cultism, streetism and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. The study consisted of 3 research questions and 3 hypotheses. The design of the study was a correlational research design. The Population of the study consisted of all the children on the streets and found in market places that have been brought into the rehabilitation center/orphanage home. Simple random sampling technique was used to obtain 60 homeless children. The instrument used for data analysis was a structured questionnaire titled "Social Economic Factors, Street Cultism and Streetism Questionnaire" with reliability index of 0.82 using Cronbach alpha statistics. The data collected was analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis to answer research questions and test the hypotheses. Findings of the study showed that there was a significant negative relationship between socio-economic factors, street cultism and the rise of homeless children. But there is no significant relationship between streetism and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area. Based on the findings of the study it was recommended among others that there should be establishment of partnerships among community stakeholders, law enforcement agencies, educational institutions, and local enterprises to foster safer communities and enhance community relations. Public awareness campaigns targeted to challenge stereotypes and reduce stigma associated with homelessness and involvement in street cults should be introduced by NGOs and concerned citizens.

**Keywords:** *Socio-economic factors, Street cultism, Streetism, Homeless children, Uyo*

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## Introduction

The interaction between socio-economic factors and urban crime dynamics presents a complex and multi-faceted challenge in contemporary society. Among the myriad issues arising from this intersection is the phenomenon of street cultism and the concomitant rise of homeless children (Ikiyei Donkemezuo & Precious (2022), who often find themselves enmeshed in criminal activities. These children are exploited, abused, and are involved in criminal activities such as drug trafficking, prostitution, and begin to form within themselves gangs to survive the streets. Hansen (2016) observed that this makes them prime targets for recruitment into fanatical religious groups like Boko Haram and other political/criminal gangs. This act often affects children's physical, mental and psychological wellbeing.

Limited access to education, and insufficient social services are key to comprehending the emergence of street cultism and the participation of homeless children in criminal activities. Gwadz, et, al, (2009). Lack of access to basic education in Nigeria leads to millions of out-of-school children, resulting in negative consequences for the child, society, and the country at large. (Ikiyei Donkemezuo & Precious, 2022).

Street cultism is often times characterized by the formation of organized gangs engaging in various illicit activities. And this gang membership, according to Matsuda, et, al, (2013), facilitates greater adherence to street code-related attitudes and emotions, partially mediating the relationship between gang joining and increased violent offending.



This ugly trend has burgeoned in many urban areas, exacerbating the plight of homeless youth who are particularly vulnerable to its influence. The impact of crime on urban areas is further influenced by a complex interplay of socio-economic conditions, mobility patterns, and the physical characteristics of neighbourhoods (Oyelade 2019). The population of male unemployment rate, and poverty rate have a positive and significant effect on crime rates in the country. Nwaogu, Weli, and Mbee (2020) found that youths in the Niger Delta region join cult gangs for protection and influence, resulting in violent crimes and increased criminal activities.

Raufu and Mendie (2021) found that urban gang culture in Nigeria is driven by multi-dimensional risk factors, including economic dislocation, foreign culture adoption, and predatory political elites, leading to increased crime rates. Abul, Nkpoyen and Eteng (2016) found that poverty and unemployment significantly increase youth involvement in criminal activities. Afolayan et al. (2020), explored the impact of rapid urbanization and rural-to-urban migration on street cultism in Nigerian cities such as Lagos, Kano, and Abuja. Investigating how urban poverty, inadequate housing, and the influx of rural migrants create a fertile ground for cult activities, especially among homeless youth. Afolayan et al. (2020), established that many homeless children in Nigerian cities are migrants from rural areas who, due to a lack of social networks and resources, become easy targets for cult recruitment.

Streetism can be seen as the existence of young children always hanging on the streets, for reasons such as parental neglect, exhibiting truancy and poverty situation. Endris, S., & Sitota, (2019). It refers to the desperate situations of children working, living, or surviving on the street, often involving harmful and risky behaviours, as these children, according to Abera, (2022), are seen suffering from the burden of handling responsibilities at an early age, making their situation both economic and social.

The existence of poverty hampers the availability of opportunities for attaining suitable

employment and education, Silva-Laya, et, al, (2020), thereby leading individuals to engage in illicit activities for financial gain and Family breakdown, whether due to divorce, death, or abandonment, leaves children without a support system, putting them at risk of becoming homeless and going on the street and potentially joining street gangs.

Adeyemi and Oluwaseun (2012) opined that self-financed, economic pulling factor, parental caring attitude, and family poverty levels are the most significant factors predicting streetism. Hansen (2016) found that economic deprivation in Northern Nigeria leads to a vulnerable underclass, prime for recruitment into fanatical religious groups like Boko Haram and political/criminal gangs. Emeri and Adelanwa (2019) concluded that street hawking significantly impacts secondary school students' social adjustment, with parents' socio-economic status, gender, and age playing significant roles. This paper seeks to examine the relationship between socio-economic factors, street cultism, streetism and the rising of homeless children in Uyo local Government of Akwa Ibom State.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The intersection of socio-economic factors with urban crime has led to a disturbing increase in street cultism and the involvement of homeless children in criminal activities. Despite numerous efforts by social services and law enforcement agencies, the prevalence of street gangs continues to rise, drawing in vulnerable children who are often left without adequate support or opportunities. These children, facing dire socio-economic conditions such as extreme poverty, lack of education, family breakdown, and limited access to essential services (Hansen, 2016; Afolayan et al., 2020) find themselves susceptible to the influence of organized street cults that offer a semblance of belonging and survival.

This situation poses significant challenges for urban safety, social stability, and the well-being of the affected children. Current interventions have proven insufficient in addressing the root causes



or providing sustainable solutions for the rehabilitation and integration of these children into society.

Thus, there is an urgent need to thoroughly examine the socio-economic factors that contribute to this issue and to develop comprehensive strategies that address both the immediate and underlying causes. By understanding the relationship between socio-economic drivers of street cultism and child homelessness, we can create more effective policies and interventions to curb the rise of crime among homeless children and promote their long-term well-being and societal integration.

### **Research questions**

1. What is the relationship between socio-economic factors and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State?
2. What is the relationship between street cultism and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government area of Akwa Ibom State?
3. What is the relationship between streetism and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State?

### **Research Objectives**

1. To determine the relationship between socio-economic factors and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.
2. To examine the relationship between street cultism and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government area of Akwa Ibom State.
3. To ascertain the relationship between streetism and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.

### **Research Hypotheses**

1. There is no significant relationship between socio-economic factors and the rise of

homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.

2. There is no significant relationship between street cultism and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.
3. There is no significant relationship between streetism and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Social Disorganization Theory (1929)**

Social disorganization theory refers to the loss of social control, organizational chaos, and the disregard for social norms in institutions, leading to decreased efficiency. Maluku, (2021). This theory, developed by Shaw and McKay, in 1929, suggests that socio-economic disadvantages disrupt community structures and the social bonds that regulate behaviour, leading to increased criminal activity. Social disorganization theory helps explain why some urban areas, marked by poverty and weak institutions, become places where gangs thrive. Homeless children often lack family and community support, making them more vulnerable to gangs as they look for social connections and protection.

#### **Strain Theory (1939)**

Strain theories suggest that negative emotions lead to crime as a possible response when people lack the ability to cope legally, with the costs of criminal coping being low and a disposition for criminal coping. Jang, & Agnew, (2015). Formulated by Robert K. Merton, strain theory argues that societal pressures and the inability to achieve culturally approved goals through legitimate means lead individuals to engage in deviant behaviour. When legitimate avenues for success are blocked due to socio-economic barriers, individuals may turn to crime as an alternative. The disadvantaged circumstances of homeless children often prevent them from accessing education and stable jobs. This frustration and pressure push them toward streetism, to cultism, where they perceive an



opportunity to attain material needs, status, and a sense of belonging.

### Social Learning Theory (1977)

Social learning theory combines psychoanalytic and stimulus-response learning theory to explain human behaviour, with Albert Bandura emphasizing cognitive and information-processing capacities. Grusec, (2020). Jin, (2022), also submitted that social learning theory explains the learning process of individuals in a social environment through imitation, observation, and modelling. According to this theory, in the case of homeless children, the streets serve as the primary social environment. And exposure to street cults and their activities provides a model for behaviour that these children may adopt.

### Methodology

The design adopted for the study was a correlational research design. The researcher is adopting this design because it is the most appropriate for collecting data on occurring issues/problems in the society. Correlation research design is used when the population of study cannot be accessed in totality. Nevertheless, information is needed upon which certain statements could be made about the whole population. Data was collected on the socio-economic backgrounds of homeless children in Uyo and their involvement in street cultism. The population of the study consisted of all the homeless children on the streets and found in place market places that have been brought into the rehabilitation center/orphanage home. A simple random sampling technique was used to obtain 60 homeless children from different streets within the city. The instrument used for data analysis was a structured questionnaire titled "Social Economic Factors, Street Cultism and Streetism Questionnaire (SEFSCSQ)". The instrument consisted of two sections. Section A focused on bio-data of respondents while Section B solicited information on socio-economic factor, street cultism and streetism. The questionnaire was scored using a 5point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (5points), Agree (4points), Undecided (3points), Disagree (2points) & Strongly

Disagree (1point). The instrument was validated and reliability of instrument was found to be 0.82 using Cronbach alpha reliability statistics to test the internal consistence of the instrument after administering and interviewing 10 children randomly in Uyo. The data collected after the field studies was analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis (PPMC).

### Results

**Research Question One:** What is the relationship between socio-economic factors and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State?

**Table 1: Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between socio-economic factors and the rise of homeless children (N=60)**

| Variable                  | Mean  | SD   | R      |
|---------------------------|-------|------|--------|
| Socio-economic factors    | 22.87 | 4.55 | -0.223 |
| Rise of homeless children | 19.00 | 4.72 |        |

The information in Table 1 shows that there is a moderately low negative relationship between socio-economic factors and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State ( $r=0.233$ ).

**Research Question Two:** What is the relationship between street cultism and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State?

**Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between street cultism and the rise of homeless children (N=60)**

| Variable                  | Mean  | SD   | R      |
|---------------------------|-------|------|--------|
| Street cultism            | 20.70 | 5.57 | -0.127 |
| Rise of homeless Children | 19.00 | 4.72 |        |





The information in Table 2 shows that there is a low negative linear relationship between street cultism and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. ( $r=0.127$ )

**Research Question Three:** What is the relationship between streetism and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State?

**Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between streetism and the rise of homeless children (n=60)**

| Variable                  | Mean  | SD   | R    |
|---------------------------|-------|------|------|
| Streetism                 | 19.80 | 5.35 | .043 |
| Rise of Homeless Children | 19.00 | 4.72 |      |

The information in Table 5 shows that there is a very low positive linear relationship between streetism and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.

#### Testing of Hypotheses

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant relationship between socio-economic factors and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.

**Table 4: Correlation analysis of the relationship between socio-economic factors and the rise of homeless children (n=60)**

| Variable                  | Mean  | SD   | R      | p-value |
|---------------------------|-------|------|--------|---------|
| Socio-economic factors    | 22.87 | 4.55 | -0.223 | 0.000   |
| Rise of Homeless Children | 19.00 | 4.72 |        |         |

*Significant at the 0.05 level of significance.*

The information in Table 4 shows that there is a significant negative relationship between socio-economic factors and the rise of homeless children ( $r=0.233$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). This means that the rise of homeless children decreases with increase in socio-economic factors in Uyo Local

Government Area. Hence the null hypothesis state that there is no significant relationship between socio-economic factors and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State is rejected.

**Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant relationship between street cultism and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.

**Table 5: Result of Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between street cultism and the rise of homeless children (n=60)**

| Variable                  | Mean  | SD   | R      | P-value |
|---------------------------|-------|------|--------|---------|
| Street Cultism            | 20.70 | 5.57 | -0.127 | 0.002   |
| Rise of Homeless Children | 19.00 | 4.72 |        |         |

*Significant at the 0.05 level of significance*

The information in Table 5 shows that there is a significant negative relationship between street cultism and the rise of homeless children ( $r=0.127$ ;  $P=0.002$ ). This means that the rise of homeless children decreases with increase in street cultism. Hence the null hypothesis shows that there is no significant relationship between street cultism and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State is rejected at the 0.05 level of significance.

**Hypothesis Three:** There is no significant relationship between streetism and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State

**Table 6: Result of Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between streetism and the rise of homeless children (n=60)**

| Variable                        | Mean  | SD   | r     | P-value |
|---------------------------------|-------|------|-------|---------|
| Agreeableness                   | 19.80 | 5.35 | 0.043 | 0.295   |
| Academic Performance in Biology | 19.00 | 4.72 |       |         |

*Not significant at the 0.05 level of significance.*



The information in Table 6 shows that there is no significant relationship between streetism and the rise of homeless children ( $r=0.043$ ;  $P=0.295$ ). This means that the relationship between streetism and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State is not statistically significant. Hence the null hypothesis shows that there is no significant relationship between streetism and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State is retained at the 0.05 level of significance.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Findings on the relationship between socio-economic factors and the rise of homeless children showed that there is a moderately low negative relationship between socio-economic factors and the rise of homeless children. The findings of this study indicated that there is a significant negative relationship between socio-economic factors and the rise of homeless children. This is in line with the findings of Oyelade (2019); Nadai, Xu, Letouzé, González and Lepri (2020) who in their different studies identified factors such as poverty, unemployment, family disintegration, and inadequate access to education and social services, mobility patterns, and the physical characteristics of neighbourhood's impact significantly on the rise of homeless children.

The findings on relationship between street cultism and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State showed that there is a low negative linear relationship between street cultism and the rise of homeless children. These finding indicated that there is a significant negative relationship between street cultism and the rise of homeless children. The findings of this study are in contrast with Nwaogu, Weli, and Mbee (2020); Raufu and Mendie (2021); Abul, Nkpoyen and Eteng (2016) in that the studies identified urban gang culture and other socio-economic factors as reasons for street cultism thereby leading to increased crime rates. These studies did not indicate street cultism as a precursor to the rising of homeless children.

Findings on the relationship between streetism and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State showed that there is a very low positive linear relationship between streetism and the rise of homeless children. The findings of this indicated that there is no significant relationship between streetism and the rise of homeless children. This finding is in line with Emeri and Adelanwa (2019) whose study found that street hawking significantly impacts secondary school students' social adjustment, with parents' socio-economic status, gender, and age playing significant roles. Some consequence of streetism is detrimental leading to the rise of homeless children especially in situations where the children cannot meet up with the target, they are asked not to return without the said monitory target.

### **Conclusion**

The results of the study highlighted socio-economic factors, street cultism, and streetism in relation to the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. Based on the findings of the study it was concluded that there was a significant negative relationship between socio-economic factors, street cultism and the rise of homeless children. But there is no significant relationship between streetism and the rise of homeless children in Uyo Local Government Area

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study it was recommended that:

1. The establishment of partnerships among community stakeholders, law enforcement agencies, educational institutions, and local enterprises to foster safer communities and enhance community relations.
2. Public awareness campaigns targeted to challenge stereotypes and reduce stigma associated with homelessness and involvement in street cults should be introduced by NGOs and concerned citizens
3. Extended research efforts to cover diverse geographic locations, include populations, and socio-economic contexts to deepen



understanding and inform targeted interventions must be ensured

4. Government should provide vocational training, job placement programs, and micro-enterprise opportunities tailored to the specific needs of homeless youth.

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