Addressing the Root Causes of Youth Gangsterism in Nigeria: A Call for Strategic Intervention

Adamu Ahmed, Adamu Abba, Arafat Ibrahim
Department of Sociology, Gombe State University, Gombe, Nigeria
Corresponding Author:neoahad@gmail.com

Abstract
Youth gangsterism is one of the most significant social problems facing Nigerian society. Since the return of democracy in 1999, this issue has taken on a new dimension. The phenomenon manifests through the formation of gangs that engage in acts such as vandalism, rape, arson, burglary, murder, robbery, ethno-religious militancy, and kidnapping. At times, politicians manipulate the youth into violence for political advantage. The study's objective was to explore the types of gang activities in Nigeria, examine the factors responsible for the formation of youth gangs, and identify the major superior violence prevention, intervention, and suppression approaches to address the challenges of gangsterism in Nigeria. The study adopted ecological theory by Robert Park (1922), Burges (1928), and Shaw and McKay (1942) to explain the problem under study. Methodologically secondary data sources were used to source information on gangs, gang activities, types of gang activities, and factors responsible for gang activities in Nigeria. The findings revealed that youth violence poses a serious threat to collective security. Factors such as unemployment, poverty, substance abuse, poor upbringing, and political support appear to be the primary causes of youth involvement in violent gang activities in Nigerian cities. Youth gangs contribute to the decline of moral values in society and have numerous consequences. To address this persistent issue, it is recommended that employment opportunities, youth empowerment, and poverty alleviation programs be implemented across the country. Additionally, good parental care and guidance from faith-based organizations should be prioritized to help mitigate the rising trend of youth violence.

Keywords: Gang, Gangsterism, Poverty, Violence, Youth

Introduction
The history of youth gangs is as old as human society, as gangs have been an integral part of different civilizations since the beginning of human history (Decker et al. 2013). Gangs have been defined as social networks that get their members into deviant routines while excluding these members from societal norms (Okafor, 2011). Gangs may, therefore, be described as a group of individuals who engage in anti-social behavior that is antithetical to social norms. A youth gang is, therefore, an association of peers, sharing an identity and exhibiting certain distinctive characteristics like continuity in the organization and involvement in delinquency (National Youth Gang Center, 2018). A common denominator of gang culture is delinquent behavior organized around a subcultural value system, which is contrary to generally acceptable means of achieving cultural goals (Ogunmefun & Olawunmi, 2024)

The recurrence of global violent activities among youths in developed and developing countries cannot be relegated to the background because of the negative threats posed by the menace. According to Okafor (2011), Das (2019), Decker et al. (2013), among others, violent activities are frequently linked to high rates of crime and delinquency in both developing and developed countries. The uncontrollable reoccurrence of violent activities causes fear and tension among the populace, reduces social cohesion, and negatively impacts businesses. Therefore, preventive interventions should be planned to concentrate on social prevention and capacity building through the use of community policing to actively prevent or eliminate crime or violence among kids before it occurs. These preventive strategies can involve keeping young people out of gangs that will push them toward destructive behavior down on recidivism or working to rehabilitate gang members outside of the criminal justice system.

In Africa, numerous social vices have emerged as a result of the fast urbanization, including crime, which has spread to urban areas in both Nigeria and other African countries. The rise in crime was ultimately directly related to rapid urbanization since unemployment rates have been rising, driving up living costs and causing housing issues (homelessness). All of these societal issues also contribute to a variety of urban crimes. (Usman et al., 2012; Ajaegbe, 2012; Soh, 2012; Abdullahi, 2016; Okafor, 2011). Urban environments, where conformity and criminal behavior can be found, are exceedingly varied in all of their socio-cultural and economic repercussions. According to Matzopouls et al. (2019), all types of deviance thrive in urban settings because more people support these subculture practices to satisfy their desires. This will have an impact on the generally accepted culture of urban development.

Studies conducted by past scholars emphasized the importance of community involvement in security success. For example, Animashaun (2011), Agaebe (2012), and Das (2019) explained that transience weakens voluntary organization, reducing formal and informal sources of social control. But Anger (2021) asserts that in maintaining effective security, membership in voluntary organizations, including churches and mosques, vigilante groups, and landlord-tenant associations, depends on attachments, which weaken in areas with high rates of transience. Ogunmefun & Olawunmi (2024) posit that once there is or is a decrease in the level of community monitoring, the safety of its members or neighborhoods lacking community support will affect effective social control within the neighborhood. This is because the neighborhoods will continue to welcome visitors, making it difficult for the locals to recognize when someone doesn't reside in a building they are entering. In addition, the occupant of a room or apartment may not be able to tell the exact number of other occupants of the same apartment. However, in a more stable neighborhood, it will be fairly simple to spot newcomers as long-term inhabitants can generally recognize one another.

When analyzing the concerns of violent crime committed by youths and its effects on community safety, opinionated. Ogunmefun et al (2022) assert that when violence permeates daily life, trauma frequently occurs, and people start to alter their routines. For fear of being victimized, they may restrict their mobility or their investment in commercial ventures. If individuals feel unsafe engaging in some forms of solidarity, particularly about their economic activity, they may also stop doing so (Anger, 2021). Trauma can also develop a life of its own, spawning brand-new social norms in which victims re-enact the trauma by using violence against other members of their families or communities. The most fundamental trust in any general framework of shared values that may have existed is undermined and eroded by these cycles of violence. People who experience trauma frequently describe sentiments of being lost or losing faith in the fundamental rules of society (Lederach 2010). The end outcome is frequently a reduction in community involvement, especially in collective action.

Conceptual clarifications
Gangs: Gang, as a social science concept, has no single meaning. However, Mundia et al (2016) reviewed some definitions of gang given by the police, such as the Metropolitan Police (2007), which defined 'gang' as a relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of people who see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group for whom crime and violence are integral to the group's identity'. Similarly, Sharp, Okafor (2012) defined gangs in their study as a group of three or more people that spend a lot of time in public spaces, have existed for a minimum of three months, have engaged in delinquent activities in the past 12months and has at least one structural feature, i.e., a name, leader, or code/rules. This is clear when looking at youths gangs in Nigeria for instance 'Yan sara-suka in Bauchi, Area Boys in Lagos, Kalare in Gombe, Jagaliya or yandaba in Kano, Banu-Isra'il and Yan-shinla in Taraba and Adamawa, Swagger boys in Niger States, etc. who have existed for long, bearing different names like sparticles and waju boys, they have their leaders among them

and engaged in delinquent behaviors. Majbahin (2017) used the term Daba to represent youth gangs. Daba is derived from Hausa, which means "group"; such a group would consist of people of the same age, trade, or profession who gather in a particular place. However, with time, the literal meaning of daba in Kano has changed as it is now associated with social vices in the society. It is institutionalized with individuals under it as the role actors- Dandaba. Madaki (2002) pointed out that: "It is a deviant institution like any other institution with subculture proscriptive norms governing the behavior of its members".

Methodology

Secondary sources of data were used to source information from government reports (police, juvenile justice system reports, national statistics on crime), academic research (studies on gang behavior, youth crime, social dynamics), NGO reports (reports from organizations working with at-risk youth or combating gang violence), and crime data (crime statistics, reports on arrests, convictions related to gang activities) on the youths violence, types of gangs activities and factors responsible youths gangs activites

Types of Youth Gang Activities

According to Soh (2012), five different types of youth gangs exist. They are: youth groups, youth movements, criminal groups, criminal business organizations, and street gangs. These types of gangs are briefly explained as follows.

Youth groups: They are small groups of friends who mostly hang out in public places without harming or committing any criminal activities. They are concerned about being with their fellow gang members and are mutually respecting themselves and even the parents of their friends.

Youth movement: They are a group of friends who dress distinctively and cooperatively in the process of performing their activities. The youth in such a movement can share certain codes of behavior that are typical of a subculture. For example, some groups of young people are into the 'ass down' subculture or listening to some types of music like Nigerian pop and rap singers.

This attitude by youth gangs is not harmful to society.

Criminal group: They constitute a group of friends that engage in different types of criminal activities. This group mostly consists of adult individuals. Criminal groups, as a type of gang, are to some extent relevant to this study as Kalare, in Gombe, Daba in Kano, Ecomog in Borno, and Area Boys in Lagos 'Yan sara-suka in Bauchi. Yan Kalare in Gombe. Yan Shila in Adamawa. Yan Daba in Kano State. Swagger boys in Niger and other violent gang groups in other parts of the country have some characteristics of this type of gang.

Criminal business organization: This is also a group of friends, usually adults and youths, that participate in criminal behaviors mostly for financial gain. Many organized criminal syndicates fall under this type of gang.

Street gangs: They are a group of youths or people who form semi-organized groups for profit. They are violent and usually identify themselves through a unique dress and give their gang a street name. Therefore, 'swagger boys' members fall under this category since they have a unique name (such as waju boys, sparticles, etc.). They can terrorize, harm, maim, and commit other types of violent criminal acts.

Violence: The term violence means different things to different people, and therefore, public health researchers defined violence as "threatened or actual use of physical force against a person or group that results or is likely to result in injury or death" (Cook & Gottfredson, 2010). Also, Das (2019) sees violence as an attempt by human beings to act with the intent to physically or mentally harm one another. However, Carmichael (n.d) sees violence as a behavior that is an uncontrolled response to some form of stimulation. According to the study, violent behavior is more likely to be a physical response to the perception that the 'self', i.e., one's sense of identity, is threatened. Being violated either emotionally or physically appears to result in a violent response. Violent behavior can be seen as

a mask that protects the self from pain and memories of traumatic experiences. The common denominator in all the definitions has to do with aggression, the use of force, or otherwise inflicting pain on an individual or group.

Factors Responsible for the Formation of Youth Gangs

Poverty and unemployment have led many youths to engage in gang activities. Poverty is a situation of lacking something. Depending on the severity of the deprivation, it can be absolute or relative. The former is abject poverty, and the latter is a deprivation based on prevailing socio-economic standards in the environment in one's life. In the European Union (EU), people are considered poor if their living standards are below those regarded by society as acceptable. Individuals whose income is less than 40% of the income of one equivalent consumer can be considered extremely poor, while those whose income does not exceed 60% of the income of one equivalent consumer are considered poor (Pouligny 2010). People who live in poorer areas, such as the inner city, may have to rely on strength, threats, or violent acts to gain their peers' respect. Every gang-dominated neighborhood engaging in violence is part of the lifestyle of the subculture of violence Das, 2019). For Soh (2012), popular concerns in both developed and developing worlds show youth crime is on the increase because they are (among others) being exposed to gangs, extreme poverty, and violence. She adds that the social and emotional needs of the youth compound the issues; the majority of them in Nigeria live among groups and neighborhoods where it is common to experiment with drugs and alcohol at an early age. For Totten (2024), unemployment and financial difficulties have led to a large number of "jobless youths, some of whom are graduates, into various deadly crimes." Okafor (2012) found that unemployment is the key factor contributing to "corruption and the escalation of crimes in urban areas throughout Nigeria." According to Soh (2012), unemployment and crime are inextricably linked, regardless of where in the world you are. He also contends that factors such as poverty, uncertain employment, high living expenses, financial hardships, a lack of educational possibilities, poor health and sanitation, and substandard housing have an impact on urban crime (Amado, 2024). Additionally, they go on to explain that the weakening of the legal system makes it more likely for crimes to be committed in most developing nations.

Cohen (as cited in Soh, 2012) argued that youth in the lower working class are frustrated with the position they found themselves in life, and these in turn lead many youths from lower-class family backgrounds to join the delinquent subculture, such as youth gangs. It was argued by Abdullahi and Issah (2016) that youth who cannot achieve in life according to social norms and do well in school or find good jobs create subcultures. The idea was that youth who are school dropouts create their way of behaving in their societies, which may include smoking, substance abuse, and engaging in various types of violent crime. Unemployed youths are, in most cases, at the forefront of the violence that erupts in the oil-producing areas between oil-producing companies and their host communities. The youths usually hold oil company workers hostage because they feel the oil companies must provide solutions to all their problems.

Poor or improper upbringing or non-socialization has been considered one of the reasons behind youth restiveness. A study by Ogunmetun (2020) on youth involvement in crime revealed that young people from single-parent families are more likely to engage in criminal acts than those from two-parent homes. This clearly shows that children from single-parent homes have less or no supervision than those from two-parent homes. He further adds that youth from lower-class families were more likely to view their offenses as a result of poor supervision or lack of proper role models. Agaegbe (2012) states that: The rise in violent crimes (robbery, kidnapping, thuggery, terrorism) committed by youths is a sign of a gap in society. The society already has expectations for individuals and established means of achieving them. When the means are limited, as youth unemployment was 46.5% in 2019, people are forced to achieve their goals through illegal

means to fulfill societal expectations. Kidnappings are on the increase across Nigeria, and the unemployed youths view the business as lucrative. (Allan, 2024).

When the means are limited, such as youth unemployment, they are forced to achieve the goals through illegal means to fulfill societal expectations (Alexander, 2022). Some of the youth who ultimately chose gangs as the best lifestyle are products of broken homes. Cohen (1965) observes that they have background problems. Some, most especially hawkers and almajirai (child beggars from Qur'anic schools), take to the streets because their parents are poor, and there is no alternative other than to go to the street and beg for their survival. The almajirai grow without enjoying the warmth of their mothers and fatherly care. Hence, they lack proper socialization to become cultured youth, people of good manners and/or character, and they are susceptible to taking part in youth violence. For example, virtually all the members of the Maitatsine movement in Kano then and the majority of Boko Haram members in the North East were previously almajirai. For Okafor (2011), the family process and parent-child relations in particular influence risky behavior. Thus, the influence of parents, friends, and peers is the most important source of socialization among youths.

According to Ajaegbu (2012), financial hardships, the reasons why young people and adults engage in criminal behavior differ. However, compared to adults, many young people have more economic needs and criminal activity interests (Lochner, 2011; Das, 2019). However, there may be many other factors that determine youths' involvement in criminal activity, such as enjoyment, excitement, entertainment, and pleasure (Ogunmefun 2020). Although adolescents tend to report that the main motivation for their involvement in criminal activity is economic and financial benefits

Drug and substance abuse among Nigerian youths has contributed to the upsurge in youth violence. Hard drugs such as heroin, marijuana, and cocaine are often found in the possession of youths. Violent clashes often occur under the influence of drugs and other mind-disturbing substances. Davies & Macpherson (2011) are of the view that abuse of drugs, such as cocaine, and overindulgence in alcoholic drinks, such as gin and whisky, alter the state of the user's mind and predispose them to violence. Most of the youths who engage in violent activities in Nigeria use drugs before carrying out their activities (Das, 2019).

Political activities are one of the predisposing factors that lead many youths to join violent gangs in Nigeria. The deviant activities of many gangs must be interpreted as an open manifestation of protest against the surrounding injustice and corruption with which they have to contend daily. Such gangsters, as noted by Matzopoulos & et al (2019), often do not see anything wrong in what they do. They rationalize their activities by bending the general rules of society to suit their circumstances, which, of course, negates the accepted standards. Soh (2012) concluded that the availability of firearms under the auspices of unscrupulous politicians gives opportunity to many youths to engage in violent gang activities. As Okafor (2011) suggested in his study, politics is associated with violence in the African region and Nigeria in particular. Thus, Nigeria witnessed unprecedented violence in the first Republic, culminating in its collapse. The Second and Third Republics were not better either. The fourth Republic turned out to be worse, where armed youths were manipulated and used for violence, killing, maiming, electoral fraud, etc. Nigeria's 2003 elections witnessed serious violence, political assassinations, criminal intimidation, and electoral fraud never seen before in Nigeria's political history. The atrocities were perpetrated by gullible youths who have become political thugs, recognized in Nigeria's political lexicon.

Abdullahi & Issah (2016) state that one of the key elements that can contribute to growth and development in Nigeria is the amount of time parents invest in the moral and academic upbringing of their kids. They also assert that factors like family income, status, and prestige

should have an impact on the behavior that kids exhibit at all levels. Therefore, it can be said that a child's attitude toward receiving a high-quality education is positively correlated with the educational level of their parents. When trying to learn about moral behavior, children from low socioeconomic backgrounds may be at a disadvantage due to differences in their parents' parenting techniques (Decker & et al, 2013). Power, status, and social position are also taken into consideration in another review. According to Anger (2021), social class is determined by factors like behavior, money, occupation, education, and lifestyle, all of which have significant effects on parents' ability to raise their children in any given culture. However, rather than getting involved in a criminal act or crime scene, children of illiterate parents may come to grips with themselves and create circumstances that will finally alter their living situations to a better footing in terms of education.

Theoretical Framework: Ecological Theory
Ecological theory is associated with different scholars, notable among them are Robert Park (1922), Burgess (1928), and Shaw and McKay (1942). According to Park, a city should not be examined as buildings in a particular geographic location nor as an institution. He further explains the importance of the ties between people and their community and how the interaction brings about togetherness for the survival of all. For Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (1942), ecological factor theory adopts human ecology to study the relationship between urban ecological factors and crime or delinquent acts. They added value to the work of the ecological theory when they advanced and measured the official levels of juvenile crime rates and records of the environment where delinquent actors lived, but not where the crime or delinquent activities were committed. On this premise the tenets of the theory were listed: They can find that the rate of delinquency was consistent with an ordered spatial pattern; This is because the higher rate of delinquency or crime was prevalent in the city center of the city or industrial locations; Spatial pattern in the urban centers was revealed by various other indexes of the social problem;

Spatial pattern of delinquency rates is more stable in the industrialized environment through the structure of the population in the inner-city area; In the inner-city areas, delinquent behavior will increase through the development of network of interpersonal relationships from either the family, gangs, and the neighborhood.

They claimed that the crime rate of a particular area over time remained constant despite the vast changes in the inhabitants of that area. The central zones retained their high crime rate even when the ethnic origins of the inhabitants were completely changed. The implication is that the individuals who live in high-crime-rate zones become more law-abiding as they move away from the center. From all these, they concluded that the delinquency rate was more a result of economic position and living environment than of racial or ethnic characteristics. In making this claim, they were not saying that the cause of criminality was location, but instead that it is prone to happen in certain types of areas or neighborhoods. They certainly did not claim that all members of a neighborhood would be criminals. They realized that factors other than the area affected individual decisions about participation in the crime.

About Nigeria, Decker & et al (2013) identified five aspects of urban neighborhoods that characterize high deviance areas of cities, which are population density, poverty, mixed-use, transience, and dilapidation. The application of neighborhood characteristics to Nigerian urban areas as regards the causes of deviance is one of the aims. The urban areas in Nigeria, inadvertently, attract more manpower than they can control and care for in terms of human development. This is seen as a breeding ground with a surge in urban deviance, because of the desperate actions of some able-bodied youths for survival, which may degenerate into criminality and a high level of insecurity in the country.

In Nigeria, able-bodied youths are willing to work but face the challenges of scarce jobs to maintain survival. Such anomic situation may increase the individual's tendency to engage in crime or delinquent actions. Evidence gathered from past

and recent publications suggests that Nigeria, as a country, is unable to maintain proper statistical records of its population size and distribution of societal resources equally to its societal members. The anomie situation will, hence, provide cases of how congestion in the cities can facilitate the incidences of criminality and deviance within specific geographic environments. This is mainly due to the politicization of several attempts by the government to initiate processes that would ensure that all citizens are registered and data on all persons are compiled. Consequently, there is very little knowledge of the spatial distribution of the country, leading to the perennial failures of the government in checking the rural-urban migration, as the urban areas now accommodate a greater percentage of the population of the country. Not only are there no reliable statistics that document the precise residency of people within the urban areas, but the pattern of inter-city movements is hardly factored into projections (Depedro & et al, 2016).

The central argument of the ecological theory in the study is that gang violence activities were tied to some neighborhood orientation rather than the personal characteristics of people who live in them. This is because, in some communities in Lagos state, Nigeria, some community elders and members gave support to some of the reasons behind the violence carried out by the youths in their various communities. This is because it is perceived as a community's right to fight against dominance and oppression by other communities in their various localities. Others may observe gang violence from an ethnic point of view in their various cultural environments daily. It shows that in some areas, communities tied with youths sometimes encourage criminal activity where the criminal or delinquent act of gang violence would not be considered as criminal or wrong within the cultural environment, where such activities were committed. To buttress this assertion, Ordway and Omede & Odiba (2010) posit that the consequence of an urban population whose size and composition are unknown is the development and growth of urban deviance and criminality, as welfare measures of the state will be grossly inadequate in such areas. Consequently, the

creation of a criminogenic atmosphere as an outcome of unrecorded urban inhabitants, who have high rates of unemployment, heterogeneity, crowding, and conspicuous consumption, is inevitable (Ogunmefun, 2020). It is pertinent to also note that, within the Nigerian urban centers, there is a close relationship between children raised in densely populated slums and low levels of education. This is a factor that maintains the cycle of poverty and, by extension, the strengthening of the criminogenic atmosphere. In conclusion, the people who reside in dense neighborhoods will serve as inferior role models to one another, while, if they were to reside in less dense areas, they would be more respectable, as their embarrassing 'secrets' will not become public knowledge. The most likely deviant behaviors that the kids can be exposed to as a result of such moral crisis include bullying, violent fights, use of abusive words, foul language, lack of respect for elders, and low moral standards.

Pathways to Violent Gang Involvement
There are five main pathways to violent gang involvement, each is briefly described below; the first pathway into gang violence is Family background violentism, the process through which survivors of extreme physical child maltreatment and neglect of proper parental upbringing become predators and prey gangsterism in adolescence. Das (2019) noted that when children suffer these forms of harm, they are at high risk for reduced academic attainment, neurological impairment, and restricted language development. They are more likely to have personality disorders, impaired psycho-social development, and internalizing and externalizing symptoms.

The family background of a nonchalant attitude to child care due to ignorance or poverty also leads to suffering from chronic and repeated sexual trauma throughout childhood, which is also a key driver into gang life. Typical victims experience multiple types of exploitation within a single year, including sexual abuse. These children are most often abused by male family members or men who know them. Aborisade (2022) noted that

more girls are victims, although many male youth who participate in violent gang activities report having been sexually abused. This betrayal of trust and abuse of relationships by family members, further aggravated by community members, has been a potent pathway into violent gang life.

The second key pathway into violent gang life is experiencing poor and non-correlation of basic facilities and amenities to the needs of the youths (Alexander, 2022). These basic amenities include the provision of adequate schooling facilities and motivation to complete higher education, which tends to support nation-building. The inadequacy of the availability of this basic amenity breeds a haven for gangs who are ready to translate their actions into violence at any time. Poor recruitment opportunities also culminate in a recruitment zone for gangs to build up a formidable violence-readiness force.

This class of unemployed or semi-skilled employed Nigerian youths clusters to form a ready troop of violent gangs, mostly employed by political actors against some perceived target enemies. Other neglect forms a tributary to this pathway as severe poverty and poor housing facilities. Youths growing up with all these noncorrelating amenities to a good living and future often result in behavior disorders, which manifest from the impact of childhood neglect and maltreatment by parents and therefore become adulthood violent gang involvements (Totten, 2024).

The third pathway reflects the permanent impact of brain and mental development on learning. This means the level of education and enlightenment of the youths, which predisposes them to the option of being violent or to retrace their step back to community development prowess. The level of education of Nigerian youths varies from the skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled levels. It is observed that the bulk of the gang violence cuts across the education levels, but the majority and the key players in the violent adventures are at the semi-skilled level. They believe they have nothing or little to lose in the violent gang breeding and violent endeavors (Ajaegbu 2012).

The fourth pathway revolves around the level of political accessibility, social exclusion, and devaluation relating to social class, family background, sexual orientation, and gender. Any organized youth group with little political access will tend to emasculate other competing groups' opportunities to secure their political largesse. A way to weaken other groups' chances of political recognition is through gang violence. The higher the gang's political accessibility, the higher the gang violence exhibited. The loss of cultural identity, combined with social and economic marginalization, also fuels gang violence. Pouligny (2010) noted that gang-related activities offer employment and income for many members. Some Aboriginal girls are vulnerable to gang involvement and can become sexually exploited and trafficked in urban settings because they cannot meet their basic needs. A relatively deprived person will be driven by the wind of a large group, therefore becoming easy prey for gangs.

The final pathway reflects the lifelong impact of brain and mental health disorders that result from prolonged or easy access to (hard) drugs. These range from weeds to alcohol. This leads to mental trauma and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), as well as developmental impairments and emotional vulnerability. Due to the psychological drive of strength derived from the drugs to enhance daily performance, many youths easily drift into gang making. The impact of these on Nigerian youth is suffering from severe abuse related to experiencing mental health problems such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Borderline Personality Disorder, Depression, and Bipolar Disorder. The majority of the Nigerian gang members who engage in violence have a state of extreme thinking that leads them to focus on survival only, Aborisade (2022). Many young gang members hide behind the pretense of violence and emotional detachment; their sense of security, safety, and trust is never developed. These pathways can intersect to form compounding challenges for some youth. The

fourth Pathway, for example, can be associated with all other pathways.

Superior Violence Prevention, Intervention, and Suppression Approaches
Although there are many Nigerian gang prevention, intervention, and suppression initiatives, few have proved futile, and most have not been adequately evaluated. It is hoped that this situation will change shortly, provided that the National security services improve their funding of the research into youth violent causes and prevention, and come up with a robust evaluation design. Some designs have been adopted by the Nigerian Police and other related security forces, which have proven inadequate for gang violence prevention. Nevertheless, some suggested programs have the prowess to succeed in mitigating gang violence in Nigeria, Nigeria at large, and other countries with such a menace. A set of failed approaches that had been invoked will be examined to find a better one.

In Nigeria, the force approach has won out over evidence-based treatment and prevention, and scarce resources are usually spent on this angle. The approaches described are proven to be ineffective and should be stopped. For example, imprisoning gang members does not reduce future criminal behavior. Studies across the world demonstrate that locking up gang members increases the chances of re-offending and staying in the gang (Abdullahi & Issah, 2016). Enclosing high-risk youth together increases the negative attraction among members and leads to even more entrenched anti-social and criminal behavior. Individualized approaches in facilities work best with long-term transition into the community following release.

Evaluations have found relatively low results on "gang suppression initiatives." These programs seek to prosecute and convict gang members, especially gang leaders. It fails to prosecute and convict the sponsors, who are mostly political actors in the respective communities. Although it decreases gang-related crime in the short term, it fails to address psychosocial issues such as child maltreatment, mental health, substance abuse, education, and employment. This should be a last resort or a coupled initiative utilized to complement a range of interventions (Amado, 2018).

Likewise, community development (CD) approaches founded on the premise of political support to a territorial group and the sustenance of family background hegemony as a singular cohesion do not work. In reality, there are many competing interests in most reserves and urban neighborhoods. There are divisions reflecting religious and spiritual lines, access to income and wealth, gender, clans and ethnicities, and family and gang allegiances. Programs, therefore, must effectively engage these subgroups and address the concerns and priorities of groups (Okafor, 2011).

Evidence-based approaches are collaboration and problem-solving partnerships, sustaining community capacity, and concentrating on investments in the highest needs. These programs, such as the Community Collaboration and Problem-Solving Partnerships, have to do with the creation of age-targeted Projects, such as Community Anti-Gang Service (CAGS). The program should target 12-20-year-old gang members and youth at high risk of gang membership. Also, target 16-28-year-old gang leaders and their partners and family members are another group. The program should be meant to educate and recycle the youth for community development. Community-wide, cross-sectoral strategies are required to address the multiple factors related to gang violence (Allan, 2024).

The Rejuvenation of Youth Criminal Justice Act should also be adopted because it has a special set of criteria and measures for curbing youth violence, but communities are not always implementing the Act as intended. If well implemented, there will be a dramatic reduction in the number of youths who are imprisoned, and gang violence will drastically decrease. The new collaboration and problem-solving partnerships must be culturally and gender sensitive (Totten, 2024).
According to Amado (2018), the Concentrating

Investments on Highest Needs, which priority of needs should be on the education of the youths. Schooling might be expensive for most families to afford, but the government and the organized private sectors should salvage the future of society by making schools look attractive to youths and lowering the major cost of entrance and furtherance of quality education. Little encouragement, however, might go a long way to persuading primary and secondary school leavers to further into higher schools (Alexander, 2022). The cultural competencies of schools can be enhanced by increasing the number of Indigenous teachers and administrators, teaching in traditional language, reducing the suspension and expulsion of Indigenous students, teaching and implementing quality violence and suicide prevention programs, and reshaping the curriculum to reflect Indigenous approaches to knowledge and teachings. Crenshaw & Garbarino (2007) noted that primary schools are excellent places where children can safely work on grief and trauma; creative art techniques and play therapy are proven interventions.

According to Anger (2021), we must acknowledge that gang-related activities offer employment and a good income to the gang perpetrators; we therefore cannot reduce gang violence without replacing the lost income and jobs that gangs provide to compatriots. Quality and compact programs include those that confront low educational attainment, unstable and crowded housing conditions, poverty, unemployment, untraceable residential addresses, and substance abuse. Totten (2009a) noted that programs must respond to the many competing interests in many Reserves and urban neighborhoods. Efficient settlement of land and (political) jurisdiction claims is directly related to improving the overall standard of living for people in Nigeria.

Money should be reinvested in proven school-based programs involving specially trained security personnel, such as the intensive mentoring, supervision, and support of very high-risk students and their families, beginning from elementary school (Das, 2019). Although the most effective method of preventing youth gang involvement is reducing child maltreatment (Aborisade, 2022). The welfare funds' strategies of unnecessary placements in residential facilities have failed. Money can be saved by closing some facilities and investing the savings in intensive, home-based programs.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The scourge of gangsterism is a pervasive phenomenon with serious implications for the social functioning of Nigerian society. This study identifies several fundamental causes of gangsterism in Nigeria, including poverty, the lack of a comprehensive youth policy, peer group influence, weak parental control within the home, and a high rate of illiteracy among the youth. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the government, parents, the mass media, religious leaders, policymakers, and national orientation agencies to develop and implement a well-articulated youth policy aimed at addressing the root causes of gangsterism in Nigeria. Employment opportunities, youth empowerment, and poverty alleviation programs should be implemented across the country. Additionally, good parental care and guidance from faith-based organizations should be prioritized to help mitigate the rising trend of youth violence. Finally, Public engagement against crime should be further supported and propagated through schools. National Crime Prevention Centre (NCPC) and Institutes should be founded, and funding for gang prevention projects far beyond 2025, and ensure that other prevention initiatives have long-term funding and robust evaluations.

References
Aborisade, R.A (2016). Crime and Delinquency: A Sociological Introduction. Ibadan. Ibadan University Press

Aborisade, R.A (2022). Pandemic policing and police sexual misconduct: Voices of women sexually abused by COVID-19 enforcement officers. Women and Criminal Justice 1-19

Abdullahi, A.A & Issah, M (2016). Theorising Youth Violence in Socially Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods in Nigeria. Perspectives on Global Development and Technology

15pp363-390

Ajaegbe O.O. (2012), Rising youth unemployment and violent crime in Nigeria. American Journal of Social Issues and Humanities 2(6) pp315-321

Allan, E. L. (2024). Civil gang abatement: the effectiveness and implications of policing by injunction, LFB scholarly publishing LLC; USA.

Alexander, C. (2022). Rethinking the gangs, London; Runnymede Trust.

Amado P. (2018): West Africa Under Attack: Drugs, Organized Crime and Terrorism as the New Threats to Global Security. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime UNISCI Discussion Papers, Nº 16 ISSN 1696-2206

Anger, B. (2021). "The Place of Benue Youth in Contemporary Nigerian Politics". In Benue Journal of Sociology, Vol 3, No.1, Makurdi: Selfers Academic Press Ltd.

Animashaun R.A. (2011b). Development and validation of the Crime Behaviour Factor battery. International Journal of Psychology and Counselling Vol 3(8), pp. 137-153.

Awogbenle A.C & Iwuamadi K.C (2010), Youths Unemployment, Entrepreneurship Development Programmes as an intervention Mechanism. African Journal of Business and Marriage 4(6) pp831-836

Cook P.J, Gottfredson D.C Na C (2010), School Crime Control and Prevention. In M Tonry (Ed.) Crime and Justice... A Review of Research (pp 313-440), Chicago. University of Chicago Press

Das, T. K. (2019). New Age of Youth Involvement in Drug Abuse in Bangladesh. Retrieved April 17, 2020, from: http://www.newagebd.net/article/84035/gangs-of-teens-cause-concern September 09

Davies, P. & MacPherson, K. (2011). Why is crime in South Africa so Violent? A Rapid Evidence Assessment. Retrieved from http/www.pan.org.za.node/8682

Decker, S.H. & Pyrooz, D.C (2010). Gang Violence across the World. Small Arms Survey 2010

Decker, S.H., Melde, C, & Pyrooz, D.C (2013). What Do We Know About Gangs and Gang Members, and Where Do We Go from Here?

Justice Quarter 30(3), pp369-402

De-Pedro, K.T., Astor, R.A, Gilreath, T, Benbernishty, R, & Berkowitz, R (2016). Examining the Relationship between School Climate and Peer Victimization among Students in Military-Connected Public Schools. Violence and Victims 31 pp 751-767

Majbahin, P. (2017). Gang Membership Retrieved February 16, 2020, from The Daily Observer: https://www.observerbd.com/details.php?id=94664

Matzopoulos R, Bloch K, Lloyd S, Berens, C, Myers J. & Thompson, M (2019), Urban Upgrading linked to positive social outcomes in Cape Town. South Africa. pp69-89

Mundia, L., Matzin, R., Mahalle, S., Hamid, M. H.& Osman, R. S (2016). Contributions of Sociodemographic Factors to Criminal Behavior. Psychology Research and Behaviour Management, 9, 147-156. https://dx.doi.org/10.2147%2FPRBM.S95270

Ogunmefun F.M. & Okuneye, M. O. (2020) Youth Employment Insecurity and Development in Nigeria. Randwick International Journal of Social Science. 1(2) pp245-257

Ogunmefun F.M. (2020) Predictors of Violence among Drug Abusers in Selected Drug Joints in Mushin, Lagos Metropolis. Randwick International Journal of Social Science. 1(2) pp211-221

Ogunmefun F.M. Olawunmi, A.T. Aluko, E.T. Aborisade, AR, and Amosun O.D. (2022). Indicators of incidence of criminality in Mushin, Lagos: Role of community policing. Randwick International Journal of Social Science. 3(3) pp605-619

Ogunmefun F.M. (2024). The nexus between police-public participation and crime control in Ogun State. Sacouncil Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies 3(1) pp 14-22

Okafor, N. (2011). Law enforcement in postcolonial Africa: interfacing Indigenous and English policing in Nigeria, USA: International Police Executive Symposium (IPES) Working Paper No.7

Okafor, J.P. (2012), Description of Strategies for achieving National Stability in Nigerian

Society as expressed by Youth Professionals in North-central Nigeria. Nigerian Journal of Sociology of Education 6(1) pp 78-85

Omede J. & Odiba, P. (2010). Youth's Restiveness Across the Globe: Where the Adults May Have Gone Wrong. In J. Omede (Ed.). Higher Education and Global Challenges. Ankpa: ROMA computers

Pouligny, B. (2010). Resilience, Trauma, and Violence. Background Paper for Social Dynamics and Fragility Project. Social Development Department, World Bank. Mimeo.

Soh, M.B.C. (2012), Crime and Urbanisation: Revisited Malaysia Case. Procedia-Social and Behaviour Sciences 42(1) pp 291-299

Totten, M. (2024). Mentoring and Crime Prevention. RCMP Gazette, 66(4), 30-31.