6 Slum Suburban Scattered Dwellers and Crimes in Contemporary Nigeria

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Introduction

In contemporary Nigeria, the rapid urbanization and population growth have led to the expansion of slums and suburban settlements. These informal communities, characterized by inadequate housing, poor infrastructure, and limited access to social amenities, often become hubs of socioeconomic struggles. Among these challenges, crime has emerged as a significant concern, disproportionately affecting slum dwellers and suburban scattered settlements. The interplay between poverty, marginalization, and crime in these areas' sheds light on the structural issues facing Nigeria's urban planning and governance.

Slums, as defined by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat, 2020), are areas where residents lack one or more essential services, such as access to clean water, sanitation, and durable housing. In Nigeria, slums like Makoko in Lagos and Ajegunle have gained international attention for their precarious living conditions. Despite the resilience and resourcefulness of residents in these areas, the lack of formal governance structures and law enforcement presence creates an enabling environment for crime. Studies have shown that crime rates in slum and suburban areas are often higher than in more affluent neighborhoods due to socioeconomic deprivation and limited access to education and employment opportunities (Okeke, 2021; Akinyele & Usman, 2023).

Suburban scattered settlements, often located on the fringes of urban areas, share similar vulnerabilities with slums. These communities are usually inhabited by low-income earners who cannot afford housing within the city. The physical isolation of these settlements exacerbates issues of social exclusion and neglect by state authorities, leaving residents to grapple with inadequate security infrastructure. According to Eze and Ogbuagu (2022), the spatial layout of these areas characterized by haphazard construction and poorly lit streets provides a fertile ground for criminal activities, including theft, drug trafficking, and gang violence.

The relationship between poverty and crime in slums and suburban scattered settlements is multifaceted. Poverty not only drives individuals into criminal activities but also fosters an environment where crime becomes a survival strategy.

For instance, Adebayo (2024) highlights that many youths in slums are drawn into organized crime syndicates as a means of coping with unemployment and financial hardships. Additionally, the lack of trust between residents and law enforcement officials, often stemming from systemic corruption and police brutality, further complicates efforts to curb crime (Oluwafemi, 2023).

Despite these challenges, slum and suburban dwellers often demonstrate remarkable resilience and community solidarity. Informal networks and grassroots organizations play a pivotal role in addressing crime through community policing and conflict resolution mechanisms. However, sustainable solutions require a holistic approach that addresses the root causes of crime, including poverty, unemployment, and inadequate infrastructure.

This book chapter seeks to explore the dynamics of crime in slum and suburban scattered settlements in Nigeria, with a focus on understanding the socio-economic and environmental factors that contribute to criminal activities. By drawing on current literature and empirical evidence, the study aims to provide insights into potential policy interventions that can improve the lives of residents in these marginalized communities while mitigating crime.

Conceptualization
Slum: slum refers to an overcrowded urban settlement where residents live in substandard conditions, often characterized by poverty, inadequate housing, lack of basic services (e.g., water, sanitation, and electricity), and vulnerability to environmental and health risks. These areas typically arise due to rapid urbanization, economic inequality, and insufficient urban planning.

Suburban: A suburban area is a residential zone located on the outskirts of a city or urban center. Suburbs are often less densely populated than city centers and characterized by single-family homes, green spaces, and local amenities. They offer a quieter lifestyle with proximity to urban infrastructure, catering to those seeking a balance between urban and rural living.

Scattered Dweller: scattered dweller describes individuals or households living in sparsely populated, often rural, areas without forming concentrated settlements. These dwellings are dispersed over a broad geographical region, where residents may rely on subsistence farming or natural resources and often face limited access to social and economic infrastructure.

Crimes: In Nigeria crime encompass various forms of illegal activities, including armed robbery, kidnapping, cybercrime, human trafficking, drug trafficking, and terrorism. Contributing factors include socio-economic inequalities, high unemployment rates, political instability, and weak law enforcement systems.

Urbanization and population growth have also intensified organized and petty crimes, particularly in metropolitan areas.

Methodology

The methodology used in this study was a desk-based library method where the knowledge gained from various sources, as well as conceptual, theoretical, and empirical studies reviewed, has been presented and analyzed to weigh the evidence they provide with reference slum suburban scattered dwellers and crimes in contemporary Nigeria.

Issues and problems of slum suburban scattered dwellers and crimes in contemporary Nigeria

The proliferation of slums and suburban scattered settlements in contemporary Nigeria presents a critical socio-economic and security challenge. As Nigeria continues to urbanize at an unprecedented rate, inadequate urban planning and governance have led to the emergence of informal settlements characterized by overcrowding, poor infrastructure, and inadequate access to basic services. These conditions create a fertile ground for various forms of crime, threatening the well-being of residents and undermining broader societal stability.

Nigeria's population is projected to surpass 400 million by 2050, making it the third most populous country in the world (United Nations, 2022). This rapid growth has resulted in the expansion of urban areas and the creation of slums on the outskirts of cities like Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt. However, urban planning has failed to keep pace, leading to informal settlements where governance structures are weak or nonexistent. The absence of state presence in these areas often fosters lawlessness and crime. Akinyele and Usman (2023) report that these unplanned settlements become breeding grounds for criminal activities such as burglary, drug abuse, and gang violence due to poor surveillance and limited law enforcement. Thus, the high prevalence of poverty and unemployment among slum and suburban dwellers exacerbates the crime problem. Over 40% of Nigerians live below the poverty line, with slum residents disproportionately represented (World Bank, 2021). Youths in these areas often lack access to education and job opportunities, pushing many into illicit activities as a means of survival. Adebayo (2024) highlights that economic deprivation drives individuals, especially young people, to engage in petty theft, armed robbery, and drug peddling. These crimes not only destabilize local communities but also strain the already overwhelmed criminal justice system.

Suburban scattered settlements, typically located on the fringes of urban areas, lack critical infrastructure such as adequate lighting, paved roads, and secure housing. These deficiencies create an environment conducive to criminal activities. According to Eze and Ogbuagu (2022), the spatial disorganization of these

settlements makes it difficult for security forces to monitor and respond to criminal activities effectively. Additionally, poor waste management and environmental degradation in these areas contribute to a sense of neglect and hopelessness, further fueling social unrest and crime.

Furthermore, law enforcement in slum and suburban areas is often characterized by inefficiency, corruption, and brutality. Residents frequently view the police as adversaries rather than allies, leading to low levels of cooperation in crime prevention efforts. Oluwafemi (2023) underscores that this mistrust hampers effective policing and allows criminal networks to flourish. Furthermore, the lack of formal justice systems in these areas often forces residents to rely on informal and sometimes violent means of conflict resolution, perpetuating cycles of crime and violence.

By and large, the prevalence of crime in slums and suburban scattered settlements undermines community development and social cohesion. Fear of crime discourages investment in these areas, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and underdevelopment. Women and children are particularly vulnerable, as they face heightened risks of gender-based violence and exploitation. Okeke (2021) notes that the psychological toll of living in crime-prone areas contributes to a range of mental health challenges, further marginalizing these communities.

Empirical Review

slum, suburban, scattered dwellers, and crimes in Nigeria highlights significant findings from various studies on these phenomena. Slums in Nigeria, as described by UN-Habitat, are densely populated areas characterized by inadequate housing, poor sanitation, lack of basic amenities, and high levels of poverty. Studies, such as Olajide (2010), reveal that slums in Nigerian cities like Lagos, Ibadan, and Port Harcourt result from rapid urbanization, rural-urban migration, and insufficient government interventions in housing and infrastructure. These slum settlements are often associated with health risks, environmental degradation, and high crime rates. Research by Akinyemi and Ogunode (2020) indicates that slum areas tend to harbor criminal activities such as drug trafficking, theft, and gang-related violence due to socio-economic disadvantages and weak law enforcement. On the other hand, suburban areas, as identified by Fishman (1987), serve as transitional zones between rural and urban spaces, offering residential benefits with proximity to city centers. In Nigeria, suburban growth has been fueled by middle-class aspirations for better living conditions and reduced urban congestion. Studies such as Egunjobi (1999) argue that suburbanization in Nigeria has led to socio-spatial segregation, with wealthy populations residing in gated communities, while lower-income groups remain in urban slums or rural peripheries. However, suburbs are not immune to crime, as rising cases of burglary and vandalism have been reported in suburban neighborhoods, often attributed to inadequate policing and growing inequalities.

For scattered dwellers, Tacoli (2003) and Adedayo (2013) highlight their prevalence in rural Nigeria, where households are dispersed across large tracts of land, often relying on subsistence farming and limited access to social amenities like healthcare, education, and electricity. This dispersal poses challenges for government service delivery and exacerbates their socio-economic vulnerabilities. Studies by Madu (2007) suggest that scattered dwellers face unique security risks, including conflicts over land resources and susceptibility to criminal gangs exploiting their isolation. Crimes in Nigeria, as reviewed by Akin (2021), encompass diverse forms, including armed robbery, cybercrime, kidnapping, human trafficking, and terrorism. Factors such as unemployment, poverty, political instability, and weak judicial systems are consistently identified as major drivers of crime. Urban areas, especially those with slums, are hotspots for criminal activities due to population density and economic disparities. Conversely, suburban and rural regions are not exempt, as criminal networks exploit the lack of adequate policing in these areas. Okoro and Aderinto (2011) underscore the impact of Boko Haram insurgency and banditry in Northern Nigeria, which have led to increased displacement of scattered dwellers and heightened insecurity. The empirical review thus underscores the interconnectedness of settlement patterns and crime, revealing the urgent need for policy interventions to address housing, socio-economic inequalities, and effective law enforcement in Nigeria.

Causes of Slum Suburban Scattered Dwellers in Contemporary Nigeria
Rapid Urbanization: Nigeria's urban population has grown exponentially due to rural-to-urban migration driven by the search for better economic opportunities. However, this rapid urbanization is not matched by adequate urban planning and housing development, resulting in the emergence of slums and scattered suburban settlements on the fringes of cities.

Poverty and Unemployment: The high rate of poverty in Nigeria, with over 40% of the population living below the poverty line, forces many individuals to reside in informal settlements where housing is affordable but substandard. Unemployment, particularly among the youth, exacerbates economic desperation, pushing some individuals toward criminal activities as a means of survival.

Inadequate Housing Policies: Housing policies in Nigeria have historically failed to meet the needs of low-income earners. The lack of affordable housing schemes and proper land-use policies has left many citizens to fend for themselves, resulting in the construction of informal settlements and scattered dwellings.

Inefficient Governance and Corruption: Weak governance structures and corruption in urban planning authorities have contributed to the proliferation of slums. Land meant for public housing is often misappropriated, and regulatory agencies fail to enforce zoning and building codes, allowing the unchecked growth of informal settlements.

Population Explosion: Nigeria's population growth, which is one of the fastest globally, has put immense pressure on existing urban infrastructure. Overcrowding in cities forces individuals and families to settle in poorly serviced suburban areas, often leading to the emergence of scattered dwellings lacking basic amenities.

High Cost of Urban Living: The rising cost of living in urban centers, particularly in cities like Lagos and Abuja, has made it difficult for low-income earners to afford housing within city limits. This economic exclusion pushes them to reside in unplanned suburban areas where land and rent are cheaper but less secure.

Neglect of Rural Development: The lack of investment in rural areas, including poor infrastructure, limited job opportunities, and inadequate access to healthcare and education, drives migration to urban centers. This influx overwhelms cities and contributes to the creation of slums and suburban scattered settlements.

Social Inequality: Growing disparities between the wealthy and the poor have left slum and suburban dwellers with limited access to resources such as quality education, healthcare, and job opportunities. This inequality fosters resentment and frustration, leading to higher incidences of crime in these areas.

Environmental Disasters and Displacement: Environmental issues such as flooding, erosion, and desertification have displaced many rural residents, forcing them to migrate to urban areas. Without affordable housing options, these displaced populations often settle in slums or on the outskirts of cities.

Lack of Security Presence: Suburban scattered settlements often lack adequate security infrastructure, such as police stations and surveillance systems. This creates a conducive environment for criminal activities, as offenders perceive low risks of apprehension.

Cultural and Communal Factors: Some suburban scattered dwellers belong to migratory communities that prioritize settling in unregulated areas due to cultural or communal ties. These settlements, often formed without government approval, lack the infrastructure to support growing populations and are prone to crime due to limited law enforcement.

Weak Education Systems: The poor quality of education in many slum areas limits opportunities for social mobility. A lack of education often correlates with higher incidences of crime, as uneducated youths are more likely to be involved in criminal activities due to a lack of viable alternatives.

Theoretical framework
Broken Windows Theory provides a framework for understanding how the visible neglect of slum and suburban areas in Nigeria contributes to the prevalence of crime. It emphasizes the need for proactive measures to restore order and improve living conditions to reduce criminal activities effectively. The theory was ppropounded by James Wilson and George Kelling (1982) the theory posits that visible signs of disorder and neglect, such as broken windows, litter, graffiti, and abandoned properties, create an environment that encourages further disorder and crime. The theory suggests that when minor issues are left unaddressed, they signal a lack of social control, leading to an escalation of criminal activities. In essence, the theory highlights the importance of maintaining order and addressing small problems to prevent more serious crimes.

Relevance of the theory to the Situation of Slum and Suburban Scattered Dwellers in Nigeria:
1. **Physical Disorder and Crime:** In Nigerian slums and suburban scattered settlements, poor infrastructure, uncollected waste, and abandoned buildings are common. These physical signs of neglect align with the "broken windows" metaphor, creating an environment that fosters criminal behavior.
2. **Social Disorder and Marginalization:** Slums and suburban settlements often lack law enforcement presence and formal governance structures, leading to a breakdown of social order. This aligns with the theory's idea that unchecked minor offenses (e.g., vandalism or petty theft) create a permissive environment for more serious crimes.
3. **Impact on Community Behavior:** The theory also underscores how disorder lowers community morale and increases fear among residents, reducing their willingness to report crimes or participate in community initiatives to combat criminal activities.
4. **Policy Implications:** Addressing the root causes of physical and social disorder such as providing adequate housing, improving waste management, and increasing law enforcement presence can help mitigate crime in slum and suburban scattered settlements, as suggested by the theory.

Conclusion
The phenomenon of slum and suburban scattered dwellers in contemporary Nigeria reflects the broader challenges of rapid urbanization, socioeconomic inequality, and weak governance. These settlements, marked by inadequate infrastructure, poor housing, and limited access to basic services, create an environment where crime thrives. Factors such as poverty, unemployment, social exclusion, and inefficient law enforcement further exacerbate the vulnerability of these communities to criminal activities.

Addressing the issues requires a multifaceted approach that combines effective urban planning, economic empowerment, and social inclusion. Strengthening governance structures, improving law enforcement, and fostering community engagement are crucial to breaking the cycle of neglect and crime. Additionally, targeted policies aimed at providing affordable housing, enhancing education and job opportunities, and mitigating environmental challenges will significantly improve living conditions and reduce the propensity for criminal behavior.

The plight of slum and suburban scattered dwellers is not merely a localized issue but a reflection of systemic failures that require urgent attention. A collaborative effort by government agencies, civil society, and the private sector can transform these marginalized areas into safe, vibrant, and productive communities. By addressing the root causes and prioritizing sustainable development, Nigeria can reduce crime, promote social equity, and create an inclusive urban future.

Recommendations

1. **Improve Urban Planning and Housing Policies:** The government should prioritize the development of affordable housing schemes and enforce zoning regulations to reduce the proliferation of slums and scattered suburban settlements.
2. **Strengthen Law Enforcement:** Deploy more security personnel and resources to slum and suburban areas, while fostering trust between law enforcement and residents to encourage cooperation in crime prevention.
3. **Promote Economic Empowerment:** Create job opportunities, especially for youths, through skill acquisition programs, microfinance initiatives, and support for small businesses to reduce economic desperation that drives criminal activities.
4. **Enhance Community Engagement:** Encourage active participation of community members in decision-making processes and neighborhood security initiatives to build a sense of ownership and collective responsibility for crime reduction.
5. **Invest in Education and Social Services:** Provide accessible quality education, healthcare, and social amenities to slum and suburban dwellers to improve their living conditions and reduce vulnerability to crime.
6. **Adopt Technology for Crime Prevention:** Leverage technological tools, such as CCTV surveillance, mobile reporting systems, and geospatial mapping, to identify crime hotspots and improve security management in underserved areas.

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