



A Study of Youth Crime and Delinquency in Kuje Area Council, Abuja, Nigeria

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Abstract

This investigation examines youth crime and delinquency in Kuje Area Council, Abuja, Nigeria, emphasizing unemployment, peer influence, and family instability. The target population comprised youths aged 15–35, representing approximately 60% of Kuje's 170,000 residents. A sample of $n = 385$ was drawn using multi-stage stratified sampling across urban and rural wards. Data collection employed structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Reliability of instruments was confirmed with Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.79–0.87$ ($\alpha \geq 0.70$). Quantitative analyses included descriptive statistics, Chi-square tests (χ^2), and Pearson correlation (r), while qualitative data were thematically coded. Results indicated significant associations between predictors and youth delinquency. Unemployment was significantly related to youth crime ($\chi^2 = 32.7$, $df = 3$, $p < .05$). Peer influence showed a positive correlation with delinquent behaviour ($r > 0$, $p < .05$), and family instability was linked to offences including theft, cultism, truancy, and drug abuse. These findings demonstrate that youth crime in Kuje is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by structural, social, and relational factors. Integrated interventions such as employment programmes, strengthened family support, and community-based crime prevention are recommended to mitigate youth involvement in crime.

Keywords: Youth delinquency; Unemployment; Peer influence; Family instability; Nigeria.

Introduction

Youth crime and delinquency have become pervasive social challenges across many societies, particularly in developing nations like Nigeria where rapid urbanization, unemployment, and weak social institutions converge to create fertile grounds for deviant behaviour. Globally, the phenomenon of youth delinquency is recognized as a major public policy concern because it not only disrupts social order but also threatens long-term development and security (UNODC, 2021). In sub-Saharan Africa, young people constitute more than 60% of the population, and many face structural disadvantages such as poverty, limited access to education, and exclusion from the labour market (African Union, 2019). These conditions contribute to increased vulnerability to crime, substance abuse, and gang activity.

Nigeria, with its youthful population of over 70% under the age of 35 faces acute challenges in managing youth restiveness and delinquency (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022). Rising unemployment, political marginalization,

and family disintegration have been repeatedly cited as drivers of deviant youth behaviour (Okonkwo, 2018). In urban centres, youth crime is often linked to theft, drug abuse, cultism, cybercrime, and violent crimes, while in peri-urban and rural communities, youth delinquency may manifest through gang fights, assaults, and property-related offences (Musa, 2020).

Kuje Area Council, situated in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Nigeria, provides a relevant case for examining these issues. The area is experiencing rapid population growth due to migration into Abuja, leading to increased urban pressure on resources, high unemployment, and strained social institutions. Anecdotal evidence suggests rising incidences of petty theft, burglary, drug use, and cult-related activities among young people in Kuje, yet systematic academic research on the subject remains limited. This study therefore investigates the causes, prevalence, and correlates of youth crime and delinquency in Kuje Area Council.



Statement of the Problem

Youth crime in Nigeria has escalated in both frequency and complexity. The emergence of cybercrime “Yahoo Yahoo”, gang violence, and drug abuse are among the most visible manifestations of delinquent youth culture (Eze & Okorie, 2021). Although government interventions such as the National Youth Policy and employment programs have been introduced, their impact on reducing youth delinquency has been minimal (Adebayo, 2019).

In Kuje Area Council, despite its relatively small population compared to urban Abuja, police records and community reports indicate growing concern over youth-related offences, particularly theft, burglary, and drug-related crimes. Families and community leaders attribute this trend to high unemployment, peer group pressure, and broken homes, while law enforcement agencies highlight weak parental supervision and the lure of fast, illicit income as drivers. However, empirical data on the magnitude and determinants of youth delinquency in Kuje remain scarce. This research therefore addresses the problem of limited scholarly investigation into youth crime in Kuje, providing evidence-based insights that can guide community, policy, and law enforcement interventions.

Research Questions

This study seeks to provide answers to the following questions:

- a) What types of crimes are most prevalent among youths in Kuje Area Council?
- b) What is the relationship between unemployment and youth crime in Kuje?
- c) To what extent do broken homes and family instability correlate with youth involvement in crime?
- d) How does peer influence affect youth delinquency?

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this research is to examine the nature, determinants, and prevalence of youth crime and delinquency in Kuje Area Council, Abuja, with a view to generating evidence-based insights that can inform effective crime-prevention policies

and youth-focused social interventions. The **specific objectives of this study are:**

- a) To identify the prevalence and patterns of youth crime in Kuje Area Council.
- b) To examine the influence of unemployment on youth delinquency in Kuje.
- c) To investigate the relationship between family instability (broken homes) and youth delinquency.
- d) To assess the role of peer group influence on youth involvement in crime.

Research Hypotheses

The following null (H_0) hypotheses guide the study:

- a) H_0 : There is no significant relationship between unemployment and youth crime in Kuje Area Council.
- b) H_0 : There is no significant positive correlation between family instability (broken homes) and youth crime in Kuje Area Council.
- c) H_0 : There is no significant relationship between peer influence and youth delinquency in Kuje Area Council.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on youths aged 15–35 years, in accordance with the age classification of the National Youth Policy of Nigeria. Geographically, the research is delimited to Kuje Area Council, one of the rapidly urbanizing administrative units within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Substantively, the study investigates both criminal behaviours including theft, burglary, drug abuse, cultism, and physical assault and non-criminal delinquent behaviours, such as truancy, experimental substance use, and aggressive peer-group conduct. These categories were selected to capture the full spectrum of youth deviance within the study area.

The temporal scope of the study is the year 2025, during which data were collected and analysed. The empirical analysis is based on responses from 400 participants, whose insights form the foundation for understanding the prevalence, determinants, and patterns of youth crime and delinquency in Kuje Area Council



Literature Review

Youth crime and delinquency remain pressing global challenges, with their causes and patterns shaped by complex social, economic, and cultural factors. This section reviews theoretical, empirical, and conceptual contributions that provide insight into the dynamics of youth delinquency, with a focus on Nigeria and comparable contexts.

Conceptual Review

This subsection clarifies the key concepts of youth, crime, and delinquency, providing the foundation for understanding their interconnections within the context of Kuje Area Council.

a) **Youth:** Youth is a socially constructed category, often defined by age, cultural expectations, and political context. In Nigeria, the National Youth Policy defines youths as individuals between 15 and 35 years (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019). The United Nations typically categorizes youth as those aged 15–24 years (UN, 2020). Youths are considered the most dynamic segment of society, but also the most vulnerable to deviant behaviour due to transitional challenges such as identity formation, peer influence, and socioeconomic exclusion.

b) **Crime:** Crime refers to any act or omission that violates established laws and is punishable by the state (Clinard & Meier, 2016). Crimes are typically classified into violent crimes (e.g., assault, robbery), property crimes (e.g., theft, burglary), drug-related offences, and public order offences. In Nigeria, the Criminal Code (applicable to the South) and the Penal Code (applicable to the North) provide the legal frameworks for defining and punishing crime.

c) **Delinquency:** Delinquency refers to a broader spectrum of deviant behaviours among youths, not all of which may be criminal in nature. These include truancy, substance abuse, gang involvement, and aggressive behaviour (Agnew, 2019). While crime is legally defined, delinquency captures the sociological dimension of youth misbehaviour, which may or may not be sanctioned by law.

d) **Nigerian Context:** Nigeria's youth delinquency problem is shaped by a combination of structural and cultural factors: high unemployment (over 40% youth unemployment rate in 2022), rapid urbanization, breakdown of traditional family structures, and exposure to negative peer cultures (NBS, 2022; Adebayo, 2019). Emerging forms of youth crime include cybercrime (popularly known as "Yahoo Yahoo"), cultism, kidnapping, and drug trafficking.

Theoretical Framework

Understanding the causes of youth crime and delinquency requires a multidimensional theoretical lens. This study draws upon three established criminological theories: Strain Theory, Social Disorganization Theory, and Differential Association Theory.

a) **Strain Theory (Merton, 1938):** Strain Theory argues that deviant behaviour emerges when individuals are unable to achieve socially approved goals such as wealth, education, or social mobility through legitimate means. In contexts where structural inequalities are pervasive, individuals may resort to illegitimate avenues to achieve these goals. Within Nigeria, persistent unemployment and poverty create "blocked opportunities," which push many youths toward crime as an alternative strategy for survival and success (Okonkwo, 2018). Strain Theory thus provides a structural explanation for youth delinquency by linking economic deprivation to deviant adaptations.

b) **Social Disorganization Theory (Shaw & McKay, 1942):** Social Disorganization Theory emphasizes the role of community structures in regulating behaviour. It posits that neighbourhoods characterized by poverty, residential instability, and weak institutions are less able to exert social control, thereby fostering higher rates of crime. In Kuje Area Council, rapid urbanization, population inflows, and inadequate social infrastructure have eroded traditional community oversight and family cohesion. This weakening of social bonds provides fertile ground for the growth of youth delinquency, including theft, drug abuse, and violent behaviour.



c) Differential Association Theory (Sutherland, 1947): Differential Association Theory explains crime as a learned behaviour transmitted through interaction with delinquent peers and groups. According to this perspective, individuals adopt criminal values, techniques, and motivations through socialization within deviant subcultures. In Nigeria, the rise of peer pressure, cultism, and gang involvement among students in secondary schools and universities exemplifies how youths are socialized into criminal networks (Musa, 2020). This theory highlights the importance of social learning and peer influence in perpetuating delinquent behaviour.

Synthesis of Criminological Perspectives on Youth Delinquency in Kuje

Together, these three theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding youth crime in Kuje. Strain Theory underscores the role of structural barriers and economic deprivation; Social Disorganization Theory highlights the breakdown of community and institutional controls; while Differential Association Theory explains how delinquent behaviours are transmitted through peer networks. By integrating these perspectives, the study captures the interplay of structural, communal, and social-learning dynamics that drive youth crime and delinquency in Kuje Area Council

The conceptual model illustrates the interaction of the three criminological perspectives employed in this study. Strain Theory emphasizes the role of structural barriers such as poverty and unemployment, which create “blocked opportunities” that push youths toward delinquency. Social Disorganization Theory highlights how weak institutions, rapid urbanization, and poor social infrastructure undermine community oversight, thereby fostering environments conducive to crime. Differential Association Theory adds a social-learning dimension by showing how peer influence, cultism, and gang activity transmit criminal behaviours among youths.

Together, these theories converge on the central phenomenon of youth crime and delinquency in Kuje Area Council, demonstrating that delinquent behaviour is not caused by a single factor, but rather by the interplay of structural deprivation, community breakdown, and peer socialization. This integrative model provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the drivers of youth crime in the local context.

Empirical Review

A substantial body of Nigerian literature links youth crime and delinquency to socioeconomic deprivation, weak family structures, and peer influence. Okonkwo (2018) found that unemployment and poverty remain primary drivers of youth delinquency in Lagos, especially in cases involving petty theft and cybercrime. Similarly, Musa (2020), in a study of youth gangs in Kano, identified peer group influence as a major catalyst for cultism and gang-related violence among young men. In addition, Eze and Okorie (2021) reported that drug abuse combined with inadequate parental supervision significantly increases the likelihood of violent and repeat offending among adolescents.

More recent empirical studies reinforce these patterns. Adewale and Hassan (2022), using a mixed-methods approach in Oyo State, demonstrated that economic hardship and unstable home environments were the strongest predictors of youth engagement in drug-related

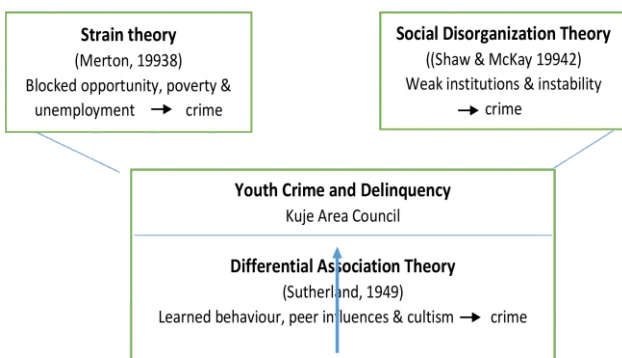


Figure 1. Theoretical framework of youth crime and delinquency in Kuje Area Council, showing how strain, social disorganization, and differential association contribute to criminal behaviour among young people.

Source: Researcher's construct, 2025.



and street crimes. Likewise, Umar and Shehu (2023), in a multisite study across Abuja, revealed that unemployed youths were disproportionately involved in cybercrime and burglary, with social media peer networks serving as major recruitment channels. Collectively, these findings indicate that structural conditions such as unemployment, poverty, and limited social mobility interact with social environments such as peer pressure and weak family structures to perpetuate delinquency in Nigeria.

Empirical evidence from other African contexts reflects similar trajectories. In South Africa, Mkhize (2017) argued that youth unemployment, persistent poverty, and the long-term socio-spatial effects of apartheid constitute the root causes of township crime. Mwangi (2019) found in Kenya that adolescents from broken or unstable homes were more likely to engage in truancy, petty theft, and violent confrontations.

More recent African studies continue to highlight structural constraints. Tetteh and Yeboah (2022), in Ghana, observed that neighbourhood disorganization and exposure to community violence significantly predicted youth involvement in robbery and substance use. Taken together, these studies show that socio-historical, economic, and familial conditions exert powerful influences on youth offending across the continent.

Globally, longitudinal and cross-sectional studies provide further insight into the drivers of youth crime. Thornberry (2018), through the Rochester Youth Development Study in the United States, demonstrated that delinquent behaviour often begins in early adolescence, particularly among youths exposed to gangs and substance-abusing peers. In the United Kingdom, Smith and Ecob (2017) found that neighbourhood disadvantage, weak parental monitoring, and low educational engagement were strongly associated with persistent offending.

More recent global evidence has deepened this understanding. Garcia and Porter (2023), in a U.S. nationwide panel study, found that economic

precarity and digital peer influence significantly increased youths' involvement in cyberbullying, online fraud, and coordinated group violence. Similarly, Lopez and Chen (2024) reported that community disorganization and family conflict were the strongest predictors of youth violence across 12 urban centres in Europe and North America. Together, the global literature highlights the universality of key risk factors social disorganization, peer influence, family neglect, and economic insecurity while also emphasizing the importance of tailoring interventions to contextual realities

Synthesis and Research Gap

The reviewed studies reveal commonalities across Nigeria, Africa, and the wider global context: unemployment, poverty, peer influence, and weak family or community supervision are recurrent drivers of youth crime. While structural and economic challenges dominate in developing contexts, neighbourhood disadvantage and social disorganization are equally significant in developed societies. This comparative evidence emphasizes that youth crime is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by intersecting socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional factors.

Although several studies have examined youth delinquency in Nigeria, most focus on large urban centres such as Lagos, Kano, Port Harcourt etc. Few empirical studies specifically investigate smaller but rapidly urbanizing areas like Kuje Area Council, which face unique dynamics of migration, unemployment, and weak community structures. This study fills that gap by providing systematic, data-driven insights into the prevalence, causes, and correlates of youth crime in Kuje, thereby contributing to both local policy design and comparative criminological research.

Methodology

The study used a descriptive survey design with qualitative interviews to examine youth crime and delinquency in Kuje Area Council, Abuja. The target population was youths aged 15–35 years, representing about 60% of Kuje's 97,367 residents (NPC, 2006). A sample of 385 respondents was



drawn using a multi-stage sampling technique (stratification, purposive, and random selection). Data collection employed a structured questionnaire (covering demographics, crime involvement, unemployment, peer influence, and family instability) and a semi-structured interview guide. Instrument validity was ensured through expert review, while reliability was confirmed via pilot testing (Cronbach's Alpha: 0.79–0.87).

Data were collected through face-to-face surveys and interviews with ethical approval and informed consent. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS (descriptive statistics, chi-square, Pearson correlation), while qualitative data were examined using thematic analysis. Ethical safeguards included confidentiality, anonymity, and minimisation of harm.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents both the quantitative survey findings (385 respondents) and qualitative interviews (15 participants). The section also interprets the results obtained from the analysis of 385 valid responses and situates them within the broader theoretical and empirical context of youth crime and delinquency research. Data analysis combines descriptive statistics, Chi-square tests, and Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) to test the study's hypotheses.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This section presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents to provide essential context for interpreting the study's findings.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	210	54.5
	Female	175	45.5
Age	15–19 years	96	24.9
	20–24 years	152	39.5
	25–29 years	89	23.1
	30–34 years	48	12.5
Education	No formal education	34	8.8
	Primary education	59	15.3
	Secondary education	152	39.5
	Tertiary education	140	36.4
Employment Status	Employed	102	26.5
	Unemployed	283	73.5

Source: *Field Survey, 2025*

The table shows that most respondents were aged 20–24 (39.5%), a majority had secondary or

tertiary education (75.9%), and 73.5% were unemployed, which may influence delinquent behaviour.

Research Question One: What types of crimes are most prevalent among youths in Kuje Area Council?

Table 2: Prevalence of Common Delinquent Acts

Type of Crime/Delinquency	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Drug abuse	110	28.6
Cultism/Gang violence	89	23.1
Petty theft/shoplifting	132	34.3
Cybercrime (“Yahoo Yahoo”)	76	19.7
Truancy/School dropout	144	37.4
Physical assault/street fights	98	25.5

Source: *Field Survey, 2025*

Survey findings indicate that youth involvement in crime and delinquency is pervasive in Kuje Area Council. Quantitative data reveal that truancy and school dropout (37.4%) and petty theft/shoplifting (34.3%) are the most commonly reported delinquent acts, followed by drug abuse (28.6%), physical assault/street fights (25.5%), and cultism/gang violence (23.1%). Cybercrime (“Yahoo Yahoo”) was comparatively less frequent (19.7%). These patterns suggest that non-violent, school-related, and property offenses are more widespread than technologically-mediated crimes.

Qualitative data reinforce these trends and provide insight into the social dynamics underpinning youth delinquency. A community leader (Male, 54 years) observed: “The problem here is not just that young people are idle; they are also drawn into groups where they learn bad habits quickly. Once they join these groups, it is hard to pull them back.” Similarly, a youth participant (Male, 22 years) reflected: “Most of my friends who got into trouble started with drugs. Some of them had no jobs, so they turned to stealing just to get by.”

These narratives align with Differential Association Theory (Sutherland, 1947), which posits that criminal behavior is learned through interaction with others who model and reinforce



delinquent conduct. The findings suggest that peer influence, group membership, and socio-economic challenges such as unemployment significantly contribute to youth engagement in crime. Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative evidence underscores the need for interventions that target both social environments and structural conditions to reduce delinquency among young people in Kuje

Hypotheses Testing

This section presents and interprets the statistical tests conducted to evaluate the stated research hypotheses.

Hypothesis One

H₀: There is no significant relationship between unemployment and youth crime in Kuje Area Council.

Table 3: Chi-square Test on Unemployment and Youth Crime

Variable	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	(O-E) ² /E
High unemployment & high crime (Yes)	150	120	7.5
High unemployment & low crime (No)	80	110	8.2
Low unemployment & high crime (Yes)	70	95	6.6
Low unemployment & low crime (No)	85	60	10.4
Total	385		32.7

Source: *Field Survey, 2025*

Result: $\chi^2 = 32.7, df = 3, p < 0.05$.

The Chi-square analysis produced a statistically significant result, $\chi^2 = 32.7, df = 3, p < 0.05$, indicating a clear association between employment status and youth delinquency in Kuje Area Council. Since $p < 0.05$, the relationship is unlikely to have occurred by chance; therefore, the null hypothesis (H₀) states that employment status has no significant influence on youth delinquency is rejected. The statistical outcome demonstrates that unemployed youths were disproportionately represented among those engaged in theft, fraud, drug-related offences, and other deviant activities. In mathematical terms, the observed frequencies O_{ij} for unemployed respondents across delinquency categories markedly exceeded the expected frequencies E_{ij}.

This result confirms that joblessness is a strong predictor of delinquent behaviour within the study population. Qualitative evidence from the field corroborates the quantitative result. As one 21-year-old male participant explained: “I tried to get work but there was nothing. When my friends started hustling with Yahoo [internet fraud], I joined. What else was I supposed to do?” This testimony illustrates the structural pressures confronting many youths and aligns with Merton's Strain Theory (1938), which argues that when legitimate pathways to socially approved goals such as income, status, or upward mobility are blocked by unemployment and poverty, individuals may adopt illegitimate means to achieve those goals.

The finding is also consistent with recent Nigerian studies, which demonstrate a strong correlation between youth unemployment and increased involvement in cybercrime, drug abuse, cultism, and petty theft (Adebayo, 2013; Otu, 2015). Collectively, both the statistical evidence and narrative accounts highlight the central role of economic marginalisation in shaping pathways into youth crime and delinquency in Kuje Area Council.

Table 4.4: Chi-square Test on Community Disorganization and Crime

Variable	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	(O-E) ² /E
Disorganized community & high crime	160	130	6.9
Disorganized community & low crime	75	105	8.6
Stable community & high crime	65	90	7.0
Stable community & low crime	85	60	10.4
Total	385		32.9

Source: *Field Survey, 2025*

Result: $\chi^2 = 32.9, df = 3, p < 0.05$

The chi-square test yielded a value of $\chi^2 = 32.9$ with 3 degrees of freedom and a significance level of $p < 0.05$, indicating that the observed association between community characteristics and youth delinquency is statistically significant. This result allows the rejection of the null hypothesis, confirming that variations in social infrastructure, institutional strength, and neighborhood stability are meaningfully related to differences in youth crime rates. In other words,



communities with weaker social institutions and poor infrastructure experience higher prevalence of delinquent acts among youths.

This finding aligns closely with Social Disorganization Theory (Shaw & McKay, 1942), which emphasizes that neighborhoods characterized by low social cohesion, ineffective informal social control, and fragmented community networks are more susceptible to criminal behavior. The quantitative significance is reinforced by qualitative data: for instance, a 47-year-old female parent remarked, “We no longer know our neighbours; before, the community corrected children together, but now everyone minds their business. That is why these boys misbehave.” Such testimony illustrates the erosion of collective efficacy, showing how weakened communal bonds and diminished social oversight facilitate youth delinquency.

Together, the statistical and narrative evidence underscores that structural and social deficiencies in Kuje Area Council directly contribute to elevated rates of youth crime, demonstrating the interplay between environmental factors and behavioral outcomes.

Hypothesis Three

H₀: There is no significant positive correlation between peer influence and youth delinquency in Kuje Area Council

Table 4.5: Pearson's Correlation between Peer Influence and Youth Delinquency

Variables	Mean	SD	r-value	p-value
Peer influence	3.84	0.77		
Youth delinquency	3.92	0.81	0.62	0.000

Source: *Field Survey, 2025*

Result: **r = 0.62, p < 0.01.**

The Pearson’s Product-Moment Correlation analysis reveals a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between peer influence and youth delinquency in Kuje Area Council. This indicates that as peer influence intensifies, the probability of delinquent involvement correspondingly increases. These

results are consistent with Sutherland’s Differential Association Theory (1947), which asserts that criminal behaviour is acquired through sustained interactions with deviant peers. An interview with a 19-year-old male youth vividly illustrates this process: “I joined a group because my friends were there. At first, it was just fun, but later we started stealing bikes. Honestly, I don’t think I would have done it if not for them.”

This narrative underscores the pivotal role of peer networks as both entry points and reinforcement mechanisms for delinquent behaviour. What begins as social bonding within peer groups often escalates into the normalization and adoption of criminal practices. Thus, the qualitative evidence complements the statistical findings, reinforcing the conclusion that peer influence is a powerful driver of youth delinquency in Kuje.

Summary of Major Findings

The combined quantitative results and qualitative insights provide strong and convergent evidence supporting the relevance of Strain Theory, Social Disorganization Theory, and Differential Association Theory in explaining youth crime in Kuje Area Council. Structural constraints such as unemployment and poverty, weakened family and community controls, and peer-driven learning of delinquent behaviour all emerged as significant contributors. These findings demonstrate that youth delinquency in Kuje arises not from a single cause but from the interaction of economic pressures, social disorganization, and influential peer networks. In addition, the major findings reveal the following:

- a) Unemployment shows a significant association with higher involvement in youth crime.
- b) Peer group influence positively correlates with delinquent behaviour.
- c) Truancy, petty theft, and drug abuse are the most prevalent forms of youth crime in Kuje Area council.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal complex but interconnected factors that drive youth crime and delinquency in Kuje Area Council of Abuja. Both the quantitative and qualitative analyses highlight



the significant influence of structural strain, weak community institutions, and peer dynamics in shaping youth criminality.

a) Economic Strain and Youth Criminality

The Chi-square results established a statistically significant relationship between employment status and crime involvement. Specifically, unemployed youths were far more likely to be involved in criminal activities compared to their employed counterparts. This finding validates Merton's Strain Theory (1938), which posits that when legitimate means of achieving societal goals are blocked, individuals turn to illegitimate alternatives. In Kuje, limited employment opportunities, coupled with widespread poverty, create frustration among youths, leading them to crimes such as internet fraud, theft, and drug trafficking. This resonates with Okonkwo (2018), who argued that Nigerian youths are often compelled into crime as an alternative means of achieving status and financial success.

b) Community Disorganization and Delinquency

The study also found that rapid urbanization, weak family supervision, and overstretched community institutions foster environments conducive to crime. Interviewees emphasized how poor parenting, absence of community oversight, and failing social infrastructure create "spaces of neglect" where deviant behaviour thrives. These findings align with Shaw and McKay's Social Disorganization Theory (1942), which stresses that communities characterized by poverty and instability are less capable of regulating youth behaviour. In Kuje, the influx of migrants, poor housing, and inadequate recreational and educational facilities reduce community cohesion and increase crime vulnerability.

c) Peer Influence, Cultism, and Learned Behaviour

The qualitative interviews highlighted the critical role of peer pressure and cultism in initiating and sustaining youth involvement in crime. Young people reported being drawn into cult groups and delinquent behaviours largely through friends and peer groups. This

finding strongly supports Sutherland's Differential Association Theory (1947), which argues that criminal behaviour is learned through social interactions with deviant peers. In the context of Kuje, peer networks serve as both "schools of crime" and reinforcement mechanisms for delinquent lifestyles, particularly in secondary schools and informal youth gatherings.

d) Interplay of Structural and Social Factors

A central insight from this study is that youth crime in Kuje cannot be attributed to a single factor. Instead, it emerges from the intersection of economic hardship, community breakdown, and peer socialization. Strain caused by unemployment pushes youths toward delinquency, while social disorganization reduces informal controls, and differential association provides the mechanism through which deviant behaviours are transmitted and normalized. This integrated perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of youth crime in the Nigerian urban context.

Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings corroborate broader Nigerian studies linking youth crime to unemployment (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2011), social disorganization in urban centres (Otu, 2015), and peer influence (Musa, 2020). However, the specific case of Kuje demonstrates how peri-urban communities with mixed urban and rural characteristics face unique vulnerabilities: rapid urbanization without corresponding infrastructural development intensifies both strain and disorganization, thereby amplifying youth crime rates.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This study investigated youth crime and delinquency in Kuje Area Council, Abuja, and using data from 385 respondents. Findings showed that unemployment, peer influence, low educational attainment, and drug abuse significantly contribute to delinquent behaviors, with truancy, petty theft, and drug use being the most common offenses. These results affirm the relevance of Strain Theory, Social Disorganization Theory, and Differential



Association Theory in explaining youth crime in peri-urban Nigerian contexts. To address these challenges, multi-level interventions are recommended:

- a) Government should prioritize youth employment programs, vocational training, and educational reforms to reduce school dropouts.
- b) Community stakeholders need to establish mentorship schemes, recreational activities, and sensitization programs that strengthen family and peer support systems.
- c) Law enforcement should adopt community policing, preventive strategies, and stronger collaboration with schools and local groups.
- d) Drug control measures, including awareness campaigns and rehabilitation centers, should be intensified to reduce substance-driven delinquency.

In sum, tackling youth crime in Kuje requires an integrated approach that combines socio-economic empowerment, community engagement, and institutional strengthening, ensuring that young people are redirected toward productive and lawful paths.

Contribution of the Study

This research contributes to criminological knowledge by providing empirical evidence from a peri-urban Nigerian context, which has been relatively under-researched compared to metropolitan centers. It also bridges theoretical insights with local realities, showing that youth delinquency is a product of structural inequality, peer influence, weak institutions, and drug culture.

Suggestions for Further Research

Future studies should:

- a) Employ longitudinal designs to track the progression of delinquent behavior among Kuje youths.
- b) Investigate the role of digital platforms and cybercrime in shaping youth delinquency.
- c) Compare Kuje with other Area Councils in the FCT to understand regional variations in youth crime.

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