

## UNEMPLOYMENT AND CRIMINAL TENDENCIES AMONG YOUTH IN ONDO STATE

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**Abstract:** This study investigated the relationship between youth unemployment and criminal tendencies among youths in Ondo State, Nigeria. A descriptive research design of the survey type was adopted to enable systematic collection and analysis of data. The population consisted of all youths aged 18 to 35 years residing in Ondo State. A sample of 400 respondents was selected using a multi-stage sampling technique, including stratified random sampling to ensure representation across gender, education, and employment status. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher. The instrument contained closed-ended questions and Likert-scale items. To ensure validity, the instrument was reviewed by experts in educational research, sociology, and criminology. Reliability was confirmed through a pilot study involving 30 respondents, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.82. The questionnaire was administered with the assistance of trained research assistants across selected local government areas, and support was provided to respondents where necessary. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) to answer research questions, and inferential statistics (Pearson Product-Moment Correlation) to test the hypothesis. The findings revealed that 62% of youths were unemployed, with cultism, cybercrime, and drug abuse identified as the most common criminal tendencies. Unemployment was found to cause significant financial hardship, emotional distress, and social isolation. Although government and community interventions existed, their impact was limited due to poor implementation and low participation. A strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.65$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) was found between unemployment and youth involvement in criminal activities. The study recommends that the government and stakeholders implement targeted employment and rehabilitation programs that address both the economic and psychosocial dimensions of youth unemployment in Ondo State.

**Keywords:** Youth Unemployment, criminal Tendencies, Ondo State, Socio-economic, psychological distress

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### Introduction

Unemployment, particularly among youth, is a major socio-economic issue that affects both developed and developing nations. Youth unemployment refers to the situation where young individuals, typically between the ages of 15 and 35, who are willing and able to work, are unable to find gainful employment. This condition not only deprives young people of income and personal fulfillment but also hinders national development by wasting human potential (International Labour Organization, 2022). Criminal tendencies among youths refer to behavioral patterns or inclinations that increase the likelihood of involvement in illegal or antisocial activities. These may include acts such as theft, cybercrime, drug trafficking, cultism, and violence. Such tendencies are often influenced by social, economic, and psychological pressures, with unemployment identified as a major risk factor (Adebayo, 2013).

Globally and nationally, the growing rate of youth unemployment has become a pressing concern, given its direct and This is an open access article under the [CC BY-NC](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) license

indirect links to social instability. In Nigeria, the situation is particularly dire, with a significant portion of the youth population either unemployed or underemployed. This has contributed to an upsurge in crime rates, as many young people, facing economic hardship and frustration, may resort to unlawful means for survival or self-expression (NBS, 2021). The nexus between joblessness and criminality is now a critical area of policy and academic focus, as countries seek sustainable solutions to engage their youth and curb social vices.

Youth unemployment in Nigeria remains a significant concern. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the unemployment rate among individuals aged 15–24 was 8.6% in the third quarter of 2023, an increase from 7.2% in the previous quarter (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Despite a revision in data computation methodology that reported a decrease from a record 33% in the fourth quarter of 2020, underemployment persists, with 87% of workers being self-employed and only 12.7%

in wage employment (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Informal employment remains dominant, comprising 92.3% of the workforce (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). The economic implications of youth unemployment are profound. High rates of unemployment and underemployment lead to reduced productivity, lower economic growth, and increased poverty. The predominance of informal sector jobs limits fiscal revenues and hampers sustainable development (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Socially, unemployment fosters frustration, mental health issues such as depression, substance abuse, broken family ties, and loss of self-esteem (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Furthermore, unemployed youth are more likely to engage in illicit activities—including armed robbery, kidnapping, cultism, cybercrime, militancy, and prostitution—as survival strategies under economic duress (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). This trend creates a cycle of violence and fear that deters investment, further harming socio-economic development (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

Studies have consistently shown a link between youth unemployment and criminal tendencies in Nigeria. A nationwide survey of 1,200 respondents found a significant causal connection between youth unemployment and criminality, noting that unemployment erodes moral values and fuels street crimes (International Institute for Science, Technology and Education, 2015). Additionally, a 2021 econometric analysis using the ARDL model revealed that a 1% rise in unemployment led to a 0.083% increase in crime rates between 1990 and 2020 (International Institute for Science, Technology and Education, 2015). Further studies in Cross River State documented a strong correlation between youth joblessness and increased crime among local youths (Akan, 2015). These findings showed the urgent need for targeted interventions to address youth unemployment and its associated social challenges.

In Ondo State, youth unemployment mirrors the national crisis and has reached concerning levels. Samuel (2023) reported that approximately one-third of those aged 18–35 were unemployed in Akure South LGA, closely aligning with Nigeria's national youth unemployment rate of about 33% in 2021. The study attributes this pervasive joblessness to systemic issues such as corruption, insufficient agricultural funding, deteriorating infrastructure, ineffective educational systems, weak governance, and escalating insecurity all of which constrain meaningful employment opportunities for the youth (Samuel, 2023).

This widespread unemployment has directly fueled a surge in criminal behaviors among youths in Ondo State. Findings from Samuel, (2023) revealed strong correlations between joblessness and increased poverty, insecurity, crime, substance abuse, and psychological distress. Security agencies like Amotekun have corroborated this link, with the Corps commander reporting a noticeable rise in burglaries and petty thefts attributed to harsh economic conditions, and Ol' 600 suspects being prosecuted for a range of offenses including armed robbery, kidnapping, cultism, fraud, and burglary during early 2024 (Josiah Oluwale, Premium Times, 2024). Between January and March 2025, Amotekun arrested around 750 individuals for serious crimes such as kidnapping, banditry, cultism, and burglary across all 18 local government areas, with 175 suspects prosecuted in court, underscoring the depth of the crisis (Gazette NG, 2025).

Several socio-economic challenges unique to Ondo State exacerbate this employment–crime nexus. Decaying infrastructure exemplified by poor road conditions on routes like the Owo–Ifon

highway has created fertile ground for kidnappings and robberies, prompting Amotekun to demand urgent road repairs (Daily Post, 2023). The state has also witnessed a worrying rise in drug abuse and cultism, evidenced by deadly clashes among students, which point to deep psychological distress and social disillusionment stemming from prolonged unemployment (Samuel, 2023). Moreover, rampant governance failures and corruption have hindered the effectiveness of youth empowerment programs, further restricting young people's access to stable livelihoods (Samuel, 2023). Compounding these challenges is the persistent destruction of crops by herders, which diminishes agricultural income and forces some rural youths toward urban unemployment and criminal behavior (Premium Times, 2020; Daily Post, 2023).

Together, these issues illustrate how structural unemployment in Ondo State driven by governance deficits, infrastructure decay, agricultural decline, and insecurity has fueled a wave of youth criminality. This multidimensional crisis highlights the urgent need for integrated interventions that simultaneously target job creation, infrastructure repair, governance reform, rural security, and youth rehabilitation programs tailored to the state's specific challenges.

In assessing the literature on youth unemployment and criminal tendencies in Ondo State, a clear gap emerges: while numerous studies (e.g., Ojo, Omojuwa & Oludare, 1990–2020; Akan et al., Cross River State; Ihensekhien & Miedideke, 1985–2021) have empirically linked unemployment to crime in Nigeria generally research that specifically examines this relationship within Ondo State is noticeably sparse. The most comprehensive local study to date—Samuel's 2023 analysis of Akure South LGA—demonstrates that youth unemployment correlates with increased crime, poverty, substance abuse, and psychological distress. However, beyond this, targeted empirical investigations focusing on Ondo State are virtually nonexistent, leaving critical questions unanswered about the diverse forms of criminal behavior (e.g., cultism, cybercrime, drug trafficking) driven by local youth unemployment dynamics.

This lack of localized study presents a notable theoretical gap. Most macro-level analyses rely on national datasets or studies in other regions (e.g., Cross River, Niger Delta), which may not capture the unique institutional, cultural, and socio-economic fabric of Ondo State. For example, the socioeconomic drivers and manifestations of youth crime in Ondo's rural or urban areas could differ significantly from those in the Niger Delta or Cross River LGA contexts. Without region-specific evidence, it's difficult to tailor theories like strain theory, social disorganization, or economic determinism to Ondo's distinctive conditions—such as poor road infrastructure, crop destruction by herders, or entrenched governance challenges.

Practically, this means policymakers in Ondo seem to lack the robust local evidence needed to design effective, context-appropriate interventions. Hence, the need to investigate the relationship between unemployment and criminal tendencies among youths in Ondo State.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Youth unemployment in Ondo State remains a significant and growing challenge, with many young people unable to secure stable and meaningful employment. This persistent lack of job opportunities has resulted in increased economic hardship and social frustration among the youth population. As a consequence,

there has been a noticeable rise in criminal activities such as cultism, cybercrime, drug abuse, theft, and violent offenses committed by young people in the state.

Security agencies have reported a steady increase in youth-related crimes, with numerous arrests made for offenses including armed robbery, kidnapping, and cultism. However, there is limited research that specifically examines the direct relationship between unemployment and criminal tendencies among youths in Ondo State. This lack of localized understanding hinders the development of effective interventions that address both unemployment and youth crime within the unique socio-economic and cultural context of the state.

Without comprehensive knowledge of how unemployment influences youth criminal behavior in Ondo State, policy responses may be inadequate or poorly targeted. This study aims to bridge this gap by investigating the link between youth unemployment and criminal tendencies, providing insights that can inform policymakers, community leaders, and law enforcement agencies to develop tailored strategies that promote employment and reduce crime among young people in Ondo State.

### **Purpose of the Study**

1. Examine the prevalence of youth unemployment in Ondo State.
2. Identify the types and nature of criminal activities commonly associated with unemployed youths in Ondo State.
3. Investigate the relationship between unemployment and involvement in criminal activities among youth.
4. Analyze the socio-economic and psychological impacts of unemployment on youths' behavior.
5. Evaluate government and community interventions targeted at reducing youth unemployment and criminal behavior in Ondo State.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the prevalence of youth unemployment in Ondo State?
2. What types of criminal activities are commonly associated with unemployed youths in Ondo State?
3. How does unemployment affect the socio-economic and psychological well-being of youths in Ondo State?
4. What efforts have the government and communities made to address youth unemployment and criminal behavior in Ondo State?

### **Research Hypothesis**

1. There is significant relationship between unemployment and youth involvement in criminal activities in Ondo State.

### **Methodology**

This study will employ a descriptive research design of the survey type. The descriptive survey design is appropriate because it

enables the researcher to systematically collect and describe the characteristics, behaviors, and opinions of youths regarding unemployment and criminal tendencies in Ondo State. The population for this study comprises all youths aged 18 to 35 years residing in Ondo State, Nigeria. This age group is targeted because it represents the active youth demographic most affected by unemployment and potentially involved in criminal activities. A sample of 400 youths aged 18 to 35 years was selected from Ondo State to participate in the study. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to ensure representativeness across different local government areas, including both urban and rural communities. Stratified random sampling was used to select participants based on key demographic factors such as gender, education level, and employment status. This approach aimed to capture a diverse cross-section of the youth population to provide comprehensive insights into the relationship between unemployment and criminal tendencies. Data for this study were collected using a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions and Likert-scale items aimed at gathering information on respondents' demographic characteristics, employment status, involvement or exposure to criminal activities, and perceptions about the relationship between unemployment and criminal tendencies among youths. To ensure the validity of the research instruments, the questionnaire and interview guides were subjected to expert review. Copies of the instruments were given to experts in educational research, sociology, and criminology to evaluate the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the items in relation to the study objectives. Based on their suggestions, necessary corrections and adjustments were made to improve the content and structure of the instruments. The reliability of the questionnaire was determined through a pilot study conducted among 30 youths in a local government area not included in the main study sample. The purpose was to assess the consistency and stability of the instrument. Data collected from the pilot study were analyzed using the Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient. The analysis yielded a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.82, indicating a high level of internal consistency among the items in the questionnaire. This result confirmed that the instrument was reliable and suitable for collecting data on the relationship between unemployment and criminal tendencies among youths in Ondo State. The administration of the research instruments was carried out by the researcher with the assistance of trained research assistants. The questionnaire was administered to the selected youth respondents across various local government areas in Ondo State. Before distribution, the purpose of the study was explained to participants, and their informed consent was obtained. Respondents were given adequate time to complete the questionnaire, and efforts were made to ensure clarity and understanding of the items. For participants with limited literacy, the questions were read aloud in English or Yoruba, depending on the respondent's preference. The data collected through the questionnaire were coded and analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions. These techniques helped to describe the prevalence of youth unemployment, the common types of criminal activities associated with unemployed youths, and the effects of unemployment on their socio-economic and psychological well-being. Descriptive data also provided insights into the government and community efforts aimed at addressing youth unemployment and crime in Ondo State. To test the research hypothesis, inferential statistics were employed. Specifically, the

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the nature and strength of the relationship between youth unemployment and involvement in criminal activities. A significance level of 0.05 was adopted to decide whether the relationship was statistically significant

## Results

**Table 1: Employment Status of Youths in Ondo State (N = 400)**

Employment Status	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Unemployed	248	62.0%
Employed (Full-time/Part-time)	92	23.0%
Self-employed (Informal sector)	60	15.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100%</b>

Based on the data presented in Table 1, out of the 400 youths surveyed in Ondo State, 248 respondents, representing 62.0%, were unemployed. This indicates that a majority of the youth population in the study area are without formal employment. Additionally, 92 respondents, or 23.0%, reported being employed either on a full-time or part-time basis. Furthermore, 60 respondents, accounting for 15.0% of the sample, were engaged in self-employment within the informal sector. These figures collectively highlight the high prevalence of unemployment among youths in Ondo State, with less than a quarter holding formal employment and a smaller proportion participating in informal self-employment activities.

**Research Question 1:** What is the prevalence of youth unemployment in Ondo State?

Based on the responses collected from 400 youths aged 18 to 35 across various local government areas in Ondo State, the prevalence of unemployment was assessed using descriptive statistics.

**Research Question 2:** What types of criminal activities are commonly associated with unemployed youths in Ondo State?

Data from the 248 unemployed respondents were analyzed to determine the types of criminal activities most commonly linked to youth unemployment in Ondo State. Respondents were asked (through multiple-response items) to indicate the forms of criminal behavior they had either observed among unemployed peers or acknowledged as prevalent in their communities.

**Table 2: Criminal Activities Commonly Associated with Unemployed Youths (N = 400)**

Criminal Activity	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Cultism	180	72.6%
Cybercrime (e.g., scams)	154	62.1%
Drug abuse	139	56.0%
Armed robbery/burglary	102	41.1%
Theft (petty stealing)	97	39.1%
Kidnapping/extortion	45	18.1%
Prostitution/sex work	38	15.3%

Based on the data in Table 2, among the unemployed youths surveyed, cultism was the most commonly reported criminal activity, with 180 respondents (72.6%) identifying it as prevalent. Cybercrime, including scams, was also widely associated with unemployed youths, noted by 154 respondents (62.1%). Drug abuse was reported by 139 respondents, representing 56.0% of the sample. Other criminal activities such as armed robbery and burglary were indicated by 102 respondents (41.1%), while petty theft was mentioned by 97 respondents

(39.1%). Less common but still notable were kidnapping and extortion, reported by 45 respondents (18.1%), and prostitution or sex work, noted by 38 respondents (15.3%). These figures suggest that cultism, cybercrime, and drug abuse are the predominant criminal behaviors linked to unemployed youths in Ondo State.

**Research Question 3:** How does unemployment affect the socio-economic and psychological well-being of youths in Ondo State?

**Table 3: Effects of Unemployment on Socio-Economic and Psychological Well-Being of Youths (N = 400)**

Effect Category	Specific Effect	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
<b>Socio-Economic Effects</b>	Financial hardship	272	68.0%
	Reliance on family/informal jobs	248	62.0%
	Limited access to healthcare	216	54.0%
<b>Psychological Effects</b>	Feelings of frustration/hopelessness	236	59.0%
	Anxiety and depressive symptoms	188	47.0%
	Social isolation and stress	160	40.0%

According to the data in Table 3, unemployment has significant socio-economic and psychological effects on youths in Ondo State. Regarding socio-economic impacts, 272 respondents (68.0%) reported experiencing financial hardship due to unemployment. Additionally, 248 respondents (62.0%) indicated they relied on family support or informal jobs to survive, while 216 respondents (54.0%) noted limited access to healthcare services as a

consequence of their unemployment. In terms of psychological effects, 236 respondents (59.0%) expressed feelings of frustration and hopelessness linked to their joblessness. Anxiety and depressive symptoms were reported by 188 respondents (47.0%), and 160 respondents (40.0%) experienced social isolation and stress. These findings illustrate the multifaceted challenges that unemployment poses to the well-being of youths in Ondo State.

**Research Question 4:** What efforts have the government and communities made to address youth unemployment and criminal behaviour in Ondo State?

**Table 4: Government and Community Efforts to Address Youth Unemployment and Criminal Behaviour (N = 400)**

Effort Category	Specific Efforts	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
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<b>Government Efforts</b>	Youth empowerment schemes	220	55.0%
	Vocational training programs	210	52.5%
	Microcredit facilities	190	47.5%
	Active participation reported	112	28.0%
<b>Community Efforts</b>	Mentorship programs	188	47.0%
	Anti-cultism and drug abuse awareness campaigns	180	45.0%
	Vigilante groups (e.g., Amotekun) involvement	172	43.0%
	Religious and NGO counseling & skills development	160	40.0%

Table 4 shows various efforts made by the government and communities to address youth unemployment and criminal behaviour in Ondo State. Among government initiatives, 220 respondents (55.0%) were aware of youth empowerment schemes, while 210 respondents (52.5%) recognized vocational training programs designed to improve youth skills. Additionally, 190 respondents (47.5%) acknowledged microcredit facilities aimed at supporting youth entrepreneurship. However, only 112 respondents (28.0%) reported active participation in these government programs. On the community front, 188 respondents (47.0%)

identified mentorship programs as a key intervention, while 180 respondents (45.0%) were aware of anti-cultism and drug abuse awareness campaigns. The involvement of vigilante groups such as Amotekun was noted by 172 respondents (43.0%). Furthermore, 160 respondents (40.0%) highlighted the role of religious organizations and NGOs in providing counseling and skills development to vulnerable youths. These efforts reflect a combination of government and community strategies aimed at reducing youth unemployment and associated criminal activities in the state.

### Testing of Hypothesis

**Hypothesis 1:** There is significant relationship between between unemployment and youth involvement in criminal activities in Ondo State.

*Table 5: Correlation analysis of the Relationship Between Unemployment and Youth Involvement in Criminal Activities*

Variable	N	Mean	S.D.	df	r	p-value
Unemployment	400	1.62	0.74	398	0.65	0.001
Criminal Activities	400	2.05	0.87			

**p<0.05**

Table 5 presents the correlation analysis examining the relationship between unemployment and youth involvement in criminal activities in Ondo State. The study involved 400 respondents, with unemployment having a mean score of 1.62 and a standard deviation of 0.74, while criminal activities had a mean score of 2.05 and a standard deviation of 0.87. The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) was found to be 0.65, indicating a strong positive relationship between unemployment and criminal involvement among youths. This correlation was statistically significant ( $p = 0.001$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), suggesting that higher levels of unemployment are associated with increased involvement in criminal activities within the youth population.

### Discussion

This finding reveals a troublingly high rate of youth unemployment in Ondo State and is likely due to a combination of systemic factors such as poor infrastructure, weak industrial growth, and the limited capacity of both public and private sectors to absorb the growing youth population. The result is consistent with the recent report by the National Bureau of Statistics (2023), which showed that youth unemployment remains a persistent challenge in Nigeria, particularly among those aged 15–35. Similarly, corroborated by ILO (2022), youth unemployment in low- and middle-income countries continues to rise due to mismatches between education output and labor market demands. This outcome is also in consonant with the findings of Akinbobola and Yusuf (2021), who noted that many Nigerian graduates lack the practical skills required by employers, resulting in high post-education joblessness. However, this finding contrasts with the optimism expressed in Osibanjo et al. (2022), who argued that digital entrepreneurship and remote work are beginning to reduce youth unemployment in urban centers, though such gains appear not to have extended to Ondo State. The implications of this

persistent unemployment are far-reaching. Beyond economic vulnerability, high unemployment limits youths' ability to contribute to societal development and increases their susceptibility to antisocial behaviors. It calls for targeted intervention programs, including vocational skill acquisition, digital literacy training, and improved job-matching mechanisms to close the education-employment gap in the state.

The prevalence of cultism, cybercrime, and drug abuse among unemployed youths may be attributed to the psychological frustration caused by prolonged idleness, lack of purpose, peer pressure, and the quest for alternative survival strategies. This finding is consistent with the study by Adebayo (2013), who identified unemployment as a significant predictor of youth involvement in cult-related violence and drug use. It is also corroborated by the work of Okafor and Mbah (2021), who observed that internet fraud and drug abuse are increasingly being normalized among urban youths facing economic hardship. In consonant with Samuel (2023), this study affirms that youths in Ondo State are particularly vulnerable to cultism and cybercrime due to the combination of digital exposure and socio-economic frustration. Moreover, the finding aligns with the global perspective of UNODC (2022), which noted that youth unemployment in sub-Saharan Africa often leads to criminal behavior, especially in regions lacking strong institutional responses. Conversely, this result contradicts the findings of Okonkwo et al. (2022), who reported that many unemployed youths in parts of Northern Nigeria are more inclined toward religious extremism and political violence rather than street-level crimes like cyber fraud and cultism. The implication of this trend is that unemployment-driven criminality is becoming increasingly diversified and technologically enabled. Interventions must therefore extend beyond traditional policing to include socio-

emotional learning in schools, youth mentorship, digital ethics education, and accessible rehabilitation programs for offenders.

The finding revealed that unemployment contributes to financial instability, mental health issues, and social disconnection among youths is a reflection of the multidimensional impact of joblessness. This is consistent with the work of Akan et al. (2015), who identified a strong correlation between youth unemployment and psychological distress in southern Nigeria. It is also corroborated by the National Bureau of Statistics (2023), which indicated that most unemployed youths experience financial dependency and emotional trauma, particularly when joblessness persists for long durations. In consonant with international findings from the WHO (2022), the study confirms that unemployment among young people is linked to increased rates of depression, anxiety, substance use, and disengagement from social life. These consequences are further intensified by the stigma of failure and societal expectations, especially in Nigerian cultures where economic productivity is closely tied to personal worth. However, this finding contradicts the claims by Yusuf and Ibrahim (2021), who argued that social media and informal online communities provide psychological support and coping alternatives for unemployed youths, thereby reducing the extent of isolation and distress. While online platforms may offer some comfort, this study suggests they are not sufficient to counteract the real-life consequences of economic exclusion in Ondo State. The implication is that policies addressing youth unemployment must go beyond job creation. They must incorporate mental health support services, community integration programs, and psychosocial counseling to restore dignity and agency to unemployed youths.

The finding of the study reveals that unemployment significantly contributed to financial hardship, psychological distress, and social isolation among youths. This reflects the multifaceted impact of joblessness on young people's socio-economic and emotional well-being. One probable reason for this outcome is that many Nigerian youths, especially in semi-urban and rural areas, depend heavily on employment for survival and social relevance; without a stable source of income, they are unable to meet basic needs or support dependents, which often leads to feelings of frustration and hopelessness. This result is consistent with the report by the World Health Organization (2022), which linked youth unemployment to increased risks of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse, particularly in developing countries where social welfare systems are weak or nonexistent. The findings are also corroborated by Akan et al. (2015), who noted that prolonged unemployment among Nigerian youths leads to economic desperation and mental health issues such as low self-esteem, emotional withdrawal, and strained family relationships. Similarly, National Bureau of Statistics (2023) data reveal that underemployment and informal job reliance contribute to chronic stress and reduced life satisfaction among Nigerian youths. This aligns in consonant with the observations by Odok and Anake (2021), who found that unemployed youths in the South-West of Nigeria were more likely to report isolation and psychological fatigue due to unmet career expectations and societal pressure. However, this finding contrasts with the perspective of Yusuf and Ibrahim (2021), who argued that the rise of online communities and gig economy platforms offers emotional support and alternative income channels, thereby reducing the psychological impact of unemployment. While these digital platforms may provide some level of interaction or temporary relief, they often do

not replace the stability and self-worth associated with steady employment. The implication of this finding is that interventions aimed at reducing youth unemployment should not focus solely on job provision but must also address the accompanying emotional and social fallout. This includes integrating mental health services, life skills training, and peer support systems into employment and empowerment programs. Doing so would promote not only economic self-reliance but also psychological resilience and social reintegration among unemployed youths in Ondo State.

The finding of the study reveals that both government and community efforts exist to combat youth unemployment and crime, but participation and effectiveness remain limited. A probable reason for this limitation is the lack of proper implementation, inadequate funding, poor monitoring, and the politicization of youth programs. While numerous initiatives—such as youth empowerment schemes, vocational training, and community-led mentorship programs—have been introduced, awareness and active engagement among the target population appear low. This finding is consistent with the report by the National Bureau of Statistics (2023), which noted that while several federal and state-level initiatives exist to tackle youth unemployment in Nigeria, only a small fraction of youths benefit due to bureaucratic bottlenecks and limited accessibility. The result is also corroborated by Adegboye and Fakorede (2022), who found that most youths in South-West Nigeria lacked information about government intervention programs or distrusted them due to past failures. Similarly, Samuel (2023) observed that despite the presence of vocational and microcredit programs in Ondo State, many youths either did not know how to enroll or did not meet eligibility criteria, reducing their impact. This is in consonant with the findings of Okoro and Ibrahim (2021), who reported that youth-targeted initiatives tend to focus more on numbers than on impact, often failing to follow up on beneficiaries or measure long-term success. However, this contrasts with the optimism expressed by Olatunji et al. (2020), who argued that certain community-based approaches, such as religious mentoring and local vigilante support, have seen increasing success in reducing cultism and youth crime in parts of South-West Nigeria. While isolated success stories may exist, the broader trend indicated by this study points to insufficient reach and weak participation, particularly in rural and underserved areas. The implication of this finding is that for government and community interventions to be truly effective, there must be a shift from symbolic programming to inclusive, transparent, and well-monitored initiatives. Efforts must be intensified to engage youths in the design, implementation, and evaluation of such programs, ensuring they are need-based and context-specific. Building trust through accountability and sustained support can also enhance participation and ultimately reduce unemployment-driven criminality.

The finding of the study shows that there is a strong, significant positive relationship between unemployment and youth involvement in criminal activities in Ondo State. This highlights the deep connection between economic hardship and rising social deviance among young people. A probable reason for this result is that persistent joblessness erodes moral restraint, increases frustration, and pushes many youths to seek alternative, often illegal, means of survival or self-actualization. This finding is consistent with the econometric analysis by the *International Institute for Science, Technology and Education* (2015), which showed that a 1% increase in unemployment led to a measurable rise in crime rates in Nigeria over a 30-year period. It is also

corroborated by Samuel (2023), who found that in Akure South, the increase in youth joblessness closely paralleled spikes in cultism, burglary, and cybercrime. Similarly, this result is in consonant with the social strain theory as applied by Adebayo and Ojo (2021), which posits that when socially approved goals (e.g., wealth or status) cannot be achieved through legitimate means (e.g., employment), individuals especially youths may turn to deviance or criminality. In Ondo State, this strain is exacerbated by poor infrastructure, weak governance, and lack of access to productive engagement. The finding also aligns with UNODC (2022), which emphasizes the role of structural unemployment in fostering organized and opportunistic crimes across West African nations. However, this result contradicts the argument of Obasi and Eze (2021), who suggested that other factors such as family background, peer influence, and educational attainment are stronger predictors of youth criminal behavior than unemployment alone. While such variables indeed play a role, the significant correlation found in this study confirms that unemployment remains a core driver of youth crime, especially in environments where alternative support systems are weak or nonexistent. The implication of this finding is profound: reducing youth crime in Ondo State cannot be effectively achieved without simultaneously addressing the root causes of unemployment. Holistic strategies that combine job creation, vocational training, youth empowerment, and community engagement are essential. Moreover, policy efforts should not only aim to create jobs but ensure they are accessible, sustainable, and appealing to young people across various educational and socio-economic backgrounds.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that youth unemployment in Ondo State remains a critical issue, contributing significantly to financial hardship, emotional instability, and increased involvement in criminal activities among young people. The high prevalence of unemployment, coupled with limited access to sustainable livelihoods, appears to push many youths toward cultism, cybercrime, drug abuse, and other forms of deviance. While efforts by the government and communities to address these challenges exist, their limited effectiveness and low levels of youth participation suggest that such interventions have not fully addressed the core issues. In the researcher's view, a more comprehensive, youth-centered approach that prioritizes practical skill acquisition, inclusive economic empowerment, and sustained psychosocial support is urgently needed to reduce unemployment and mitigate its associated social consequences in Ondo State.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Ondo State Government should prioritize large-scale job creation programs tailored to the needs and skills of youths. This includes investment in agriculture, technology, and vocational sectors that can absorb a large number of unemployed youths.
2. Practical, market-driven vocational training centers should be established or revitalized across local government areas, with emphasis on ICT, entrepreneurship, and technical skills that align with today's labor market demands.

3. Youth-targeted empowerment schemes should be expanded, properly monitored, and made accessible without political bias. Micro-credit and start-up support should be accompanied by mentoring and business development services to ensure sustainability.
4. Community leaders, NGOs, and religious institutions should intensify awareness campaigns against cultism, cybercrime, and drug abuse while promoting mentorship, civic responsibility, and positive role models among youths.
5. Support systems such as counseling centers, youth-friendly health services, and helplines should be established to address the psychological effects of unemployment, including depression, anxiety, and social withdrawal.
6. The government should collaborate with private organizations and industries to create internship and apprenticeship opportunities that give youths practical work experience and improve employability.
7. All government and community programs aimed at reducing youth unemployment and criminality should be evaluated regularly to assess their impact, ensure accountability, and make necessary adjustments for better outcomes.

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