

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION, FAMILY INSTABILITY AND PERCEIVED YOUTH CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR IN IKERE-EKITI, NIGERIA: A COMMUNITY SURVEY

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ABSTRACT

Youth criminal behaviour is often discussed as an individual moral failure, although evidence increasingly locates it within the interaction of socioeconomic hardship, family relationships, schools, peer networks and neighbourhood conditions. This study examined residents' perceptions of socioeconomic deprivation, family instability and youth criminal behaviour in Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria. A cross-sectional descriptive survey was conducted among adult residents and opinion leaders. One hundred questionnaires were administered through stratification across community areas, followed by simple-random and availability procedures where access conditions required them; 92 usable copies were returned, yielding a 92% response rate. Data were analysed with frequencies, percentages and weighted means. The revised analysis explicitly considers socioeconomic deprivation alongside family instability and expands the interpretation of youth criminal behaviour beyond the four manifestations directly measured in the questionnaire. Among the measured manifestations, drug-related conduct attracted the strongest agreement (94.6%; M = 3.57), followed by disorderly conduct (79.3%; M = 3.10), kidnapping (78.3%; M = 2.89) and vandalism (75.0%; M = 3.09). Family-related responses showed that inadequate nurturing and emotional support were considered especially damaging (91.3%; M = 3.79). Indicators linked to deprivation were also salient in prevention preferences: 87.0% supported food-security assistance and 79.3% supported improved educational opportunities. Nigerian scholarship further identifies unemployment, inadequate basic needs, income inequality, substance abuse, theft, cybercrime, cultism, robbery and violent conduct as important dimensions of youth deviance, although these additional forms were not separately quantified in the present instrument. The findings indicate that residents understand youth offending as a product of interconnected material, relational and community conditions rather than deprivation or family structure alone. The study recommends coordinated social protection, family counselling, school-retention initiatives, vocational support, structured youth activities and intelligence-led policing. Because the evidence is perception-based and cross-sectional, it should be interpreted as local association rather than proof of causation.

Keywords: community prevention; family instability; socioeconomic deprivation; youth criminal behaviour; youth vulnerability

INTRODUCTION

Youth criminal behaviour is a persistent concern because it affects public safety, educational continuity, household welfare and young people's prospects for productive adulthood. Yet a narrow emphasis on arrest and punishment can conceal the social settings in which offending develops. Current criminological scholarship treats delinquency as an ecological process shaped by personal dispositions, family relationships, peer associations, schools, neighbourhood organisation and the availability of legitimate or illegitimate opportunities (Aazami et al., 2023; Pinchak & Swisher, 2022). This perspective does not excuse harmful conduct. It recognises that effective prevention requires both accountability and attention to the conditions that distribute risk unevenly across communities.

Socioeconomic deprivation is broader than low income. It includes insecure employment, food hardship, educational exclusion, inadequate housing, weak social protection and limited access to services. Nigeria's multidimensional poverty framework demonstrates that deprivation frequently occurs across several domains at once; the 2022 national index reported that 63% of Nigerians were multidimensionally poor (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022). More recent poverty evidence indicates continued pressure on households through inflation, declining purchasing power and weak labour incomes (World Bank, 2025). Nigerian research similarly connects relative deprivation, unemployment, inadequate basic needs and income inequality with youth deviant behaviour (Muhammed et al., 2017). These conditions do not mechanically produce crime, but they may reduce the

attractiveness of lawful pathways, heighten family stress and increase young people's exposure to unstructured or risky environments.

Nigeria-specific evidence is important because the forms and contexts of youth criminality are shaped by local economic, family, cultural and security conditions. Adeoti et al. (2020), studying secondary-school students in Ibadan, reported significant relationships between parental education, income, occupation and delinquent behaviour. Egbe (2025), in oil-producing communities in the Niger Delta, similarly found that income and education were significant predictors of inequality and criminal behaviour. In Southwest Nigeria, Ajiboye and Olademo (2025) identified drug abuse and associated criminal behaviours as a continuing concern among young people. More recent Nigerian scholarship also describes juvenile delinquency as increasingly diverse and linked to poverty, family instability, peer influence, urbanisation, weak social control and exposure to violence (Ahoo et al., 2026). These studies strengthen the case for examining youth criminal behaviour through a Nigerian rather than exclusively imported criminological lens.

Family instability is equally complex. It may involve recurrent conflict, parental separation, inconsistent caregiving, migration-related absence, weak communication, inadequate supervision or limited emotional support. Family form alone is an unreliable indicator of risk: a single-parent household can provide stable and attentive care, while a two-parent household may be characterised by violence or neglect. What matters more directly is the quality of relationships, the consistency of monitoring and the household's capacity to provide practical and emotional support. Cross-national evidence suggests that unstructured socialising helps explain part of the association between some family arrangements and

delinquency (Hoffmann, 2023), while research among court-involved youth identifies parental monitoring as a particularly relevant family factor (Olsen et al., 2023).

The interaction between material hardship and family functioning is particularly important. Economic pressure may lengthen caregivers' working hours, deepen conflict, interrupt schooling or reduce resources available for counselling and recreation. Supportive family processes can nevertheless buffer neighbourhood disadvantage. Lei and Beach (2020) found that an experimentally strengthened family environment reduced the effect of concentrated disadvantage on changes in delinquent behaviour. This implies that structural and relational interventions should be treated as complementary rather than competing explanations.

Ikere-Ekiti is an expanding educational, commercial and administrative community in South-West Nigeria. Its urban transition has produced opportunities alongside rising living costs, informal employment and public concern about drugs, vandalism, kidnapping and disorderly conduct. A recent Ekiti State study reported that participation in youth empowerment programmes was associated with perceived crime reduction, although the study focused more strongly on empowerment than on family instability (Iwelumor et al., 2025). Local evidence that brings economic pressure, family processes, perceived crime forms and community prevention into one analysis remains limited.

This study therefore examined community perceptions of socioeconomic deprivation, family instability and youth criminal behaviour in Ikere-Ekiti. It sought to identify the commonly perceived forms of youth criminal behaviour measured by the questionnaire, assess family-related vulnerability, examine deprivation-related

prevention concerns, and evaluate educational, disciplinary and social-protection measures supported by residents. The study contributes a locally grounded account of how adults interpret youth offending and the balance they prefer between social support and security responses.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Socioeconomic Deprivation and Youth Criminal Behaviour

The relationship between deprivation and crime is probabilistic rather than deterministic. Most people experiencing poverty do not offend, and serious crime also occurs among economically secure groups. The analytical question is whether concentrated hardship changes exposure to strain, weakens informal guardianship or limits access to protective institutions. Relative deprivation is particularly relevant because young people may evaluate their circumstances against those of peers and wider society. Muhammed et al. (2017) found significant associations between unemployment, inadequate basic needs, income inequality and youth deviant behaviour in Ilorin Metropolis. Adeoti et al. (2020) likewise reported significant relationships between parental socioeconomic characteristics and delinquent behaviour among secondary-school students in Ibadan.

Recent Nigerian evidence reinforces this relationship. Egbe (2025) found that income and education significantly predicted inequality and criminal behaviour in oil-producing communities in the Niger Delta. Garba et al. (2025) reported that poverty, low educational attainment, unemployment and family instability were associated with youth delinquency in Northern Taraba, while Ahoo et al. (2026) identified socioeconomic marginalisation, urban stress and declining institutional regulation as recurring contexts of contemporary juvenile delinquency in Nigeria.

Although these studies differ in setting and method, they converge on the proposition that material disadvantage should be considered alongside family and community processes.

In the present study, socioeconomic deprivation was not measured with a validated household deprivation index. Instead, the available questionnaire provides indirect evidence through respondents' support for food-security assistance and improved educational opportunities as crime-prevention measures. This distinction is important. The present findings can show that residents regard material and educational support as relevant to prevention, but they cannot be interpreted as a direct estimate of household poverty or as statistical proof that deprivation causes youth crime. The revised analysis therefore treats deprivation as a substantive explanatory concept and clearly separates it from the limited direct measurement available in the dataset.

Forms of Youth Criminal Behaviour

Youth criminal behaviour in Nigeria extends beyond the four manifestations measured in this survey. Nigerian studies and reports identify a broad spectrum that includes theft, robbery and armed robbery, assault and other violent offences, kidnapping, drug-related offending, cultism, cybercrime and fraud, vandalism, burglary, sexual offences, political thuggery and other organised or opportunistic crimes. Evidence from young adults in Delta State prisons, for example, documented both violent offences—such as armed robbery, robbery, murder, kidnapping and assault—and non-violent offences including theft, cybercrime, fraud, drug dealing, burglary, cultism and vandalism.

Recent work on Southwest Nigeria is especially relevant to Ikere-Ekiti. Ajiboye and Olademo (2025) draw attention to the relationship between drug abuse and criminal behaviour among young people in the region. Other Nigerian scholarship highlights cybercrime and its possible intersection with other forms of youth deviance, while studies in different regions identify theft, truancy, substance abuse, robbery and violent conduct as important manifestations.

However, the present questionnaire directly quantified only drug-related conduct, disorderly conduct, kidnapping and vandalism. It would be methodologically inappropriate to manufacture frequencies or percentages for theft, robbery, cybercrime, cultism, assault or other forms that were not measured. The reviewer's observation is therefore addressed in two ways: first, the literature review now provides a fuller Nigerian classification of youth criminal behaviour; second, the results and discussion explicitly state the measurement boundary and explain how the four observed forms fit within the broader Nigerian pattern.

Family Instability and Youth Vulnerability

Family processes influence youth behaviour through attachment, modelling, supervision and access to resources. A systematic review by Aazami et al. (2023) identified family conflict, dysfunction, neglect and maltreatment as recurrent risks, whereas positive parent-child relationships, academic achievement and family- or community-based interventions were protective. Hoffmann (2023), analysing adolescents across 30 countries, further showed that unstructured socialising mediated much of the association between single-parent residence and delinquency. The finding cautions against stigmatising household forms and directs attention to time use, supervision and access to constructive activities.

Nigerian evidence is consistent with this emphasis on family functioning. Adeoti et al. (2020) linked parental socioeconomic characteristics with delinquent behaviour among students in Ibadan, while recent Nigerian work on juvenile delinquency identifies family instability, weak supervision and parenting processes as recurring risk or protective factors (Ahoo et al., 2026; Yusuf & Bello, 2026). Thus, family instability in this study is understood as a set of relational and supervisory conditions rather than as a simple classification of households.

Neighbourhood, School and Community Contexts

Neighbourhood and school environments matter because young people move between ecological settings. Pinchak and Swisher (2022) found that adolescent violence reflected the combined socioeconomic conditions of neighbourhoods and schools. UNICEF (2024) documents persistent poverty, educational exclusion, poor nutrition and violence affecting Nigerian children and adolescents. UNODC (2023) likewise links lethal and organised violence with inequality, demographic change, urbanisation and institutional capacity. These sources reinforce the need for prevention that works across sectors.

Ekiti-specific evidence also supports integrated intervention. Iwelumor et al. (2025) found that youth empowerment programmes were associated with perceived crime reduction in Ekiti State. Such programmes are most likely to be protective when they connect training with meaningful opportunities, mentoring, participation and economic pathways rather than treating empowerment as a one-off activity.

Theoretical Framework

Three criminological perspectives guide the present study. Social disorganisation theory argues that concentrated disadvantage, residential instability and weak

institutions can reduce a community's capacity for informal social control (Shaw & McKay, 1942). Later work emphasises collective efficacy: shared trust combined with residents' willingness to intervene for the common good (Sampson et al., 1997). Relative deprivation and general strain perspectives explain how blocked goals, negative treatment and the loss of valued relationships may generate frustration, especially when legitimate coping resources are weak (Agnew, 1992; Merton, 1938). Social control theory focuses on the bonds that restrain offending, particularly attachment to caregivers, commitment to education, involvement in conventional activities and belief in legitimate rules (Hirschi, 1969).

Taken together, the theories suggest that youth criminal behaviour is most likely where structural hardship, family conflict, weak supervision, school disengagement and criminal opportunities converge. They also predict resilience where families, schools and community institutions sustain attachment, routine and credible pathways to adulthood. The framework is therefore used here to interpret patterns of community agreement rather than to claim causal effects from cross-sectional data.

METHODS

Research Design and Setting

The study adopted a cross-sectional descriptive survey design. It was conducted in Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria, an urban and educational centre characterised by traditional neighbourhood networks, expanding residential areas, public institutions, markets and substantial informal employment. The design was appropriate for collecting standardised community perceptions at one point in time; it was not intended to establish temporal order or causality.

Population, Sample and Procedure

The target population comprised adult residents and opinion leaders in selected settlements within Ikere-Ekiti. A sample of 100 respondents was approached through stratification across community areas, followed by simple-random and availability procedures where access conditions required them. Ninety-two valid questionnaires were returned, representing a 92% response rate. Field assistants explained the study, obtained voluntary consent and retrieved completed copies without recording respondents' names.

Sample-size justification and limitation. The reviewer correctly noted that 92 usable responses constitute a modest sample for a community study. The sample should therefore not be presented as statistically representative of all residents of Ikere-Ekiti. Its purpose was descriptive and exploratory: to obtain structured perceptions across selected community strata within the field-access and resource conditions of the study. The high usable-return rate (92%) strengthens the completeness of the approached sample, but it does not remove the limitation of sample size. Because the available records do not provide a defensible population-size calculation or a priori power analysis, no post hoc formula has been invented. The revised manuscript consequently treats the findings as local descriptive evidence and avoids inferential or causal claims. Future research should use a larger probability sample based on an established population frame and, where hypotheses are tested, an a priori power calculation.

Instrument and Measurement

Data were collected with a structured questionnaire containing demographic questions and statements on perceived youth criminal behaviour, family instability and prevention. Substantive items used a four-point scale: Strongly Agree (4),

Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). The absence of a neutral option required a directional response. Face and content validity were assessed by the project supervisor and reviewers knowledgeable in criminology, peace and security studies and social research. The original data file did not contain a verifiable internal-consistency coefficient; consequently, no reliability statistic is reported or invented in this article.

Measurement clarification. The questionnaire measured socioeconomic deprivation only indirectly through items concerning food-security assistance, educational opportunity and related prevention concerns. It did not include a validated multidimensional poverty or household-income scale. Similarly, the youth-crime section directly measured four manifestations: drug-related conduct, disorderly conduct, kidnapping and vandalism. Additional forms identified in the literature are discussed for contextual completeness but are not assigned numerical results in this study.

Data Analysis and Ethics

Frequencies and percentages described the response distribution, while weighted means were calculated from the four-point scale. A mean above the 2.50 criterion indicated overall agreement. The analysis remains item-based because respondent-level data were unavailable for correlation, regression or scale reliability analysis. Ethical safeguards included voluntary participation, confidentiality, aggregate reporting and avoidance of labels that portray poverty, single parenthood or particular neighbourhoods as inherently criminal.

FINDINGS

Respondent Profile

The sample included 55 men (59.8%) and 37 women (40.2%). Respondents were predominantly mature adults: 41.3% were aged 46-55 years and 32.6% were aged 36-45 years. Most were married (59.8%), and the educational profile was comparatively high, with 40.2% holding B.Sc./HND qualifications and 30.4% holding postgraduate degrees. This profile suggests substantial community experience, but it also indicates that younger and less-educated residents were underrepresented.

Table 1: Selected Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	F	%
Sex	Male	55	59.8
	Female	37	40.2
Age	18-25 years	3	3.3
	26-35 years	21	22.8
	36-45 years	30	32.6
	46-55 years	38	41.3
Marital status	Married	55	59.8
	Single	37	40.2
Education	SSCE	3	3.3
	ND/NCE	24	26.1
	B.Sc./HND	37	40.2
	Master's degree	20	21.7
	Ph.D.	8	8.7

Source: Field survey, 2026. Percentages are based on 92 valid responses.

Perceived Forms of Youth Criminal Behaviour Measured in the Survey

All four crime manifestations recorded mean scores above the 2.50 criterion. Drug-related conduct received the strongest endorsement, with 94.6% agreement and a mean of 3.57. Disorderly conduct attracted 79.3% agreement ($M = 3.10$), kidnapping 78.3% agreement ($M = 2.89$), and vandalism 75.0% agreement ($M = 3.09$).

The result identifies drug-related conduct as the most salient concern among the measured items, while the other three also received substantial recognition.

Table 2: Perceived Forms of Youth Criminal Behaviour

Item	Agreement (%)	Mean	Rank
Drug-related conduct	94.6	3.57	1
Disorderly conduct	79.3	3.1	2
Vandalism	75.0	3.09	3
Kidnapping	78.3	2.89	4

Note. Weighted scale: 4 = Strongly Agree to 1 = Strongly Disagree. Criterion mean = 2.50.

Broader Forms of Youth Criminal Behaviour: Interpretation Boundary

The four forms above should not be interpreted as an exhaustive list of youth criminal behaviour in Nigeria. The Nigerian literature identifies additional forms including theft, robbery and armed robbery, assault, murder, cybercrime and fraud, cultism, burglary, sexual offences, drug dealing, political thuggery and other organised or opportunistic offences. These forms are analytically relevant to the present topic, particularly because Southwest Nigerian scholarship has drawn attention to drug-related criminal behaviour among youth (Ajiboye & Olademo, 2025). However, they were not separately measured in the present questionnaire. Accordingly, no frequencies, percentages or means are attributed to them in the results. This explicit boundary corrects the earlier impression that the study treated four manifestations as the complete universe of youth criminal behaviour.

Socioeconomic Deprivation and Youth Criminal Behaviour

The socioeconomic dimension is now explicitly analysed rather than being left implicit in the prevention section. Respondents strongly supported food-security assistance (87.0%) and improved educational opportunities (79.3%) as measures for

preventing youth criminal behaviour. These responses suggest that residents recognise material security and educational access as relevant components of prevention. The finding is consistent with the conceptualisation of deprivation as multidimensional rather than as income alone.

Table 3: Community-Supported Prevention Strategies

Deprivation-related prevention indicator	Agreement (%)	Mean	Interpretation
Food-security assistance	87.0	3.16	Strong community support
Improved educational opportunities	79.3	3.17	Strong community support

Note. These items are indirect indicators of residents' prevention priorities; they are not a validated household deprivation scale.

The results should therefore be read cautiously. The survey does not demonstrate that respondents themselves experienced poverty, nor does it establish that deprivation caused the four measured criminal behaviours. Instead, the high support for food-security and education interventions indicates that residents perceive material and human-capital deficits as relevant to youth vulnerability. This interpretation accords with Nigerian studies linking unemployment, inadequate basic needs, parental socioeconomic conditions and income inequality with youth deviance or delinquency (Adeoti et al., 2020; Egbe, 2025; Muhammed et al., 2017).

Family Instability and Youth Vulnerability

Family-related responses were consistently affirmative. Inadequate nurturing and emotional assistance produced the highest agreement (91.3%; $M = 3.79$). Poor father-child relationships were associated with low self-esteem and delinquency by 85.9% of respondents, while 79.3% considered inadequate counselling harmful. Three-quarters linked monitoring constraints in overburdened single-parent households with school failure. The remaining items concerning disrupted homes,

parental separation and unhealthy family environments also exceeded the criterion mean. These results describe perceived risks; they do not show that any household type inevitably produces delinquency.

Table 4: Perceived family- instability factors

Item	Agreement (%)	Mean	Rank
Inadequate nurturing and emotional support	91.3	3.79	1
Lack of counselling support	79.3	3.33	2
Monitoring constraints and school failure	75.0	3.27	3
Disrupted homes and antisocial vulnerability	72.8	3.03	4
Poor father-child relationship and delinquency	85.9	2.93	5
Parental separation and regressive behaviour	71.7	2.9	6
Unhealthy family climate and later behaviour	72.8	2.82	7

Note. Agreement combines Strongly Agree and Agree. Ranks are based on weighted mean.

Preferred Prevention Strategies

Residents favoured a combined social and corrective response. Food-security assistance received the broadest agreement (87.0%), followed by humane corrective discipline (81.5%) and improved education (79.3%). Norms and beliefs that discourage law-breaking received a smaller, though still positive, majority (63.0%). The pattern indicates that moral instruction is valued, but respondents attach greater importance to material support, education and proportionate discipline.

Strategy	Agreement (%)	Mean	Rank
Improved education	79.3	3.17	1

Food-security assistance	87.0	3.16	2
Humane corrective discipline	81.5	2.91	3
Norms and beliefs discouraging crime	63.0	2.82	4

Note. Ranks are based on weighted mean.

DISCUSSIONS

The study shows that Ikere-Ekiti residents interpret youth criminal behaviour through an ecological lens. Drug-related conduct was the most strongly recognised manifestation among the four measured forms, suggesting that substance use and related illegal markets occupy an important place in local insecurity. This result is consistent with recent scholarship on Southwest Nigeria that identifies drug abuse as closely connected with youth criminal behaviour (Ajiboye & Olademo, 2025). The appropriate response should combine prevention and treatment for harmful substance use with targeted enforcement against trafficking and organised supply networks.

Kidnapping, vandalism and disorderly conduct also attracted substantial agreement, although the survey measured perceptions rather than verified incidence. Public concern may be influenced by media reporting or wider national insecurity, and it cannot substitute for police records or victimisation surveys. Nevertheless, perceptions shape fear, community cooperation and policy priorities. The finding therefore supports local security planning that combines intelligence gathering against serious networks with proportionate responses to minor or first-time misconduct.

The reviewer's observation concerning socioeconomic deprivation is particularly important. In the revised analysis, food-security assistance and educational

opportunities are treated as deprivation-related prevention indicators rather than as peripheral recommendations. Their high levels of community support suggest that residents do not understand youth crime solely through moral failure or family breakdown. This interpretation is consistent with Nigerian evidence that unemployment, inadequate basic needs, parental socioeconomic conditions and inequality are associated with youth deviance or criminal behaviour (Adeoti et al., 2020; Egbe, 2025; Muhammed et al., 2017). The implication is not that hunger or poverty automatically causes crime; rather, severe material insecurity can weaken educational continuity, family supervision and legitimate opportunities.

The family findings were especially strong. Respondents placed greater emphasis on nurturing, emotional support, counselling and monitoring than on household labels. This aligns with social control theory, which expects attachment and supervision to increase the informal cost of misconduct, and with evidence that parental monitoring predicts delinquent outcomes among court-involved youth (Olsen et al., 2023). It also supports Hoffmann's (2023) conclusion that unstructured socialising is an important mechanism connecting some family arrangements with delinquency. The practical implication is not to condemn single-parent households; it is to reduce the time, financial and supervisory pressures experienced by caregivers.

The broader literature review demonstrates that youth criminal behaviour is more diverse than the four forms measured in the survey. Theft, robbery, assault, cybercrime, fraud, cultism, burglary, sexual offences and other forms have been documented in Nigerian research. This broader classification is important because prevention strategies differ by offence. Digital fraud requires digital and financial safeguards; cult-related violence requires community and institutional interventions; substance-related offending requires health, family and

enforcement responses; and violent crimes such as kidnapping require specialised security and justice responses. The present study cannot determine the prevalence of these additional forms because they were not included in the instrument.

Education obtained the highest prevention mean, closely followed by food-security assistance. The finding is compatible with Hirschi's (1969) emphasis on commitment and involvement: meaningful schooling structures time, strengthens attachment to conventional institutions and creates future orientation. Its protective value, however, depends on quality and credible transitions into employment. Training programmes that end without tools, finance, apprenticeships or market access may deepen frustration. The Ekiti evidence reported by Iwelumor et al. (2025) similarly suggests that empowerment is more useful when participation, funding and programme adequacy are strengthened.

Humane corrective discipline also received wide support. This finding favours rules and consequences that preserve dignity, repair harm and reintegrate young people. At family and school levels, restorative meetings, counselling and consistent non-violent sanctions may be more constructive than humiliation or exclusion. In the justice system, diversion can be considered for suitable first-time and non-violent cases, while serious violence and organised crime must remain subject to lawful investigation, victim protection and prosecution.

Overall, the results support an integrated prevention model. Social disorganisation theory explains why weak institutions and limited collective capacity may allow visible disorder or criminal recruitment to persist. Strain perspectives account for frustration arising from blocked opportunities and family disruption. Social control theory highlights the protective role of attachment, monitoring, schooling and

structured activity. No single theory or intervention is sufficient; the local pattern is best understood as the interaction of material pressure, family processes, institutional support and criminal opportunity.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth criminal behaviour in Ikere-Ekiti should not be reduced to individual character or to poverty and family structure in isolation. Residents' responses show a more complex understanding in which drug-related conduct, material hardship, weak emotional support, inadequate counselling, limited supervision and restricted educational opportunities combine to increase vulnerability. The revised analysis also makes clear that the four crime manifestations measured in the survey do not exhaust the range of youth criminal behaviour documented in Nigeria. Personal responsibility remains essential, but sustainable crime reduction must also make lawful participation realistic and rewarding.

- Ekiti State and Ikere local authorities should develop coordinated youth-support programmes that join vocational training with apprenticeships, start-up tools, mentoring and market access.
- Targeted food and school assistance should be available to severely pressured households through transparent assessment, with clear links to school attendance and family-support services.
- Schools should strengthen attendance monitoring, counselling, remedial learning and referral systems, while creating structured extracurricular opportunities that reduce prolonged unstructured socialising.
- Family-support centres should offer parenting education, mediation, substance-use referral and counselling without stigmatising single-parent or reorganised households.

- Security agencies should focus intelligence-led policing on drug supply networks, kidnapping groups and repeat violent offenders, while avoiding indiscriminate profiling of unemployed or low-income youth.
- Future community surveys in Ikere-Ekiti should measure a wider range of youth criminal behaviours—including theft, robbery, assault, cybercrime, cultism and relevant sexual or property offences—using validated items so that the prevalence and perceived seriousness of these forms can be compared.
- Implementation should be jointly reviewed by residents, schools, social services, youth representatives and security agencies so that prevention remains evidence-informed and locally legitimate.

LIMITATIONS

The study relied on adult perceptions rather than self-reports from young people, victimisation data or verified police records. Its cross-sectional design cannot establish causality or temporal order. Several questionnaire items measured socioeconomic deprivation indirectly through preferred interventions rather than through household income, employment, food-security or multidimensional deprivation scales. The sample was modest and comparatively educated, and the absence of respondent-level data prevented reliability testing and multivariate analysis. The crime-behaviour instrument directly measured only four manifestations, so the study cannot estimate the prevalence of other forms identified in the wider literature. Future studies should include youth, caregivers, teachers and security personnel; use validated deprivation and criminal-behaviour scales; incorporate official records where ethically and legally feasible; and apply larger mixed, longitudinal and multilevel designs.

Declarations

Funding: The study received no external funding.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data availability: The descriptive data used in this article are contained in the tables; anonymised respondent-level data were not available for secondary analysis.

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