

Rural Folks Perception of Effect of Activities of Miscreants on Agricultural Production in Rural Communities of Delta State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study assesses the nefarious activities of societal miscreants as they affect agricultural activities and rural communities in Delta State, Nigeria. The results indicated that societal miscreants were in the main perceived to be involved in stealing, raping of women and cult activities. Perceived causes of deviant behaviours were mainly poor education/ignorance (90.6%), unemployment (48.9%), belonging to a gang (48.9%) and drugs (45.3%). Perceived main activities of miscreants were a decrease in agricultural production (93.4%); loss of farm labour (87.5%) and the study recommends among others, the establishment of rehabilitation centers, addressing the challenge of drug addiction, and creating of job opportunities.

Keywords: Deviant behaviour; Rural society; Nefarious activity; Rural folk

INTRODUCTION

According to one dictionary definition, a miscreant is someone who behaves badly or does not obey rules (The Cambridge English Dictionary). By this definition, a miscreant is thus a deviant in society. These miscreants are everywhere in our society – both in rural and urban areas. Studies on activities of miscreants in Nigeria tend to focus on their general effect on the society at large with more emphasis on the urban areas or cities.

The present political dispensation in Nigeria gave rise to several challenges. One

of these challenges is the emergence of a group of social miscreants. This situation has been exacerbated by several factors. The different political parties and their members usually wield control over many thugs. These thugs are mostly young men (and sometimes women) who are ready tools in the hands of politicians to be used for their defense and even to carry out attacks on their opponents. They can murder, destroy properties, maim or totally obliterate their opponents.

Condemning the political violence and thuggery that arise in the northern parts of Nigeria after the presidential elections of the 16th of April, 2011, Usman (2010) casts a sharp aspersion on the political class in the North. He asserted that the political leaders engage the services of jobless youths, who are mainly uneducated or semi-illiterates are miscreants, as thugs purposely to intimidate political opponents and their supporters during elections. He clamours for the redirecting of attention to the social needs of the region such as the problem of excruciating poverty, mass unemployment, infrastructural gap, decay education system, “almajiri” syndrome and emerging youth restiveness, the political leaders are promoting the excesses of political thugs” (Usman, 2010).

The present political system should usher in social and economic progress and complete peace and tranquillity, instead of perpetrating the activities of societal miscreants. A major way to achieve this is

by curbing the excesses of these thugs, who are social miscreants, deviants in the society. It is only then that the present political dispensation can be truly celebrated by all and sundry and the supposed dividends adequately appropriated (Omomia, 2015).

The youth who are used as thugs, organize themselves into violent groups. Zdun (2005), in his research, came out with the finding that: "one of the major strategies of legitimizing violence in youth groups is based on solidarity. It is not only interpreted as conventional but also necessary to fight for the group and failure to do so carry threat of social sanctions, for instance being kicked out of the clique for not caring enough about the groups' solidarity". No doubt, through these fights, juveniles and deviants "risk conflict with the norms of respected others, such as their families" (Foglia, 1997). No matter how these acts are condemned, the perpetrators still attempt to justify their actions. Zdun (2007) focused on street-level violence. His findings proved "guilt neutralization" and "offending legitimization," before, during and after violent crimes. This attitude has continued to catalyze the tendency to commit all forms of crime by these social miscreants.

According to Omomia (2015), The theory of social disorganization was said to have been developed by Shaw and McKay in their study of juvenile delinquency in urban areas in the 1930s. This theory refers to the "inability of local communities to realize the common values of their commonly experienced problems". The theory proposes that "social order, stability and integration are conducive to conformity, while disorder and segregation facilitate crime and deviance". A social system is said to be "organized" if it has "internal consensus on its norms and values, a strong cohesion among its members and there is an orderly social interaction. On the other hand, a system is "disorganized", "if there is a breakdown in social control, a disruption in its cohesion or a lack of integration".

Sampson and Groves (1989) in his study of 238 localities in Great Britain, observed that communities characterized by sparse friendship networks, unsupervised teenage peer groups and low organizational participation, had disproportionately high rates of crimes and delinquency. The data supported the theory that "low economic status, ethnic heterogeneity, residential mobility and family disruption lead to community disorganization, which leads to an increase in crime and delinquency rates" (Criminal Theories, part I, 2011). Reduction in the level of deviant activities by miscreants will lead to remarkable economic and social progress. Lewis (2011) argued: "decrease levels of deviance aid in bringing about social order, increase in the likelihood that businesses will expand into local areas and bring economic opportunities, and decrease government expenditure into programmes and institutions that reduce, punish, and compensate for deviance". While responding to questions from newsmen at the opening of "Britain in Nigeria Exhibition," in Lagos, Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu (former Governor of Lagos State), condemned the activities of social miscreants. He admitted that they pose a serious problem and threat to the nation's foreign investment inflow drive (Tinubu, 2000). He further asserted that a high level of unemployment among them could be adduced for their deviant behaviour.

Social miscreants engaged themselves in all kinds of criminal activities that are antagonistic to the general wellbeing of society. In rural areas, these deviants in the community pose a serious threat to agricultural and other rural economic activities. However, even though activities of social miscreants have been assessed by some scholars (Omomia, 2015; Lewis; 2011; Zdun, 2007) in general, how their activities affect agriculture and rural community in Delta State, Nigeria, remains an issue unattended to. On this note, it becomes imperative that the deleterious activities of social miscreants in rural areas

and the effect of these activities be examined. These miscreants cause a lot of devastating harms in rural communities. They steal, create fear in the heart of rural dwellers and even murder people at times. The economic harm perpetrated by these rural social miscreants has a far-reaching effect on the entire wellbeing of the rural communities. This definitely would have a devastating effect on rural dwellers. Despite these arguments, studies focussing on the activities of social miscreants, and especially how these activities affect rural dwellers are lacking. Previous studies only attempt to examine the activities of these miscreants in the political arena or their influence in the society at large. The literature on how these deviants in the society influence agriculture and rural social order is almost non-existent in Nigeria at large and Delta State in particular. Thus examining the activities of miscreants in the rural set up in Delta State is necessary as this can assist extension agents, rural development workers or even policymakers to better address problems peculiar to the rural areas. Having said all these, the following questions thus arise: what is the socioeconomic characteristic of rural folks? What devastating activities do they carry out in rural areas? What are the folks' perceptions of the causes of the activities of these miscreants? What are the effects of the activities of these miscreants? The study's objectives were to: determine rural folks' socioeconomic characteristics; ascertain the devastating activities of social miscreants in rural communities; rural folks' perception causes of activities of societal miscreants; and determine the effects of social miscreants on agricultural production and rural communities. The following null hypothesis was tested: there is no relationship between the rural folks' perceived selected variables of miscreants and their deviant behaviours.

The Study Area

Delta state, which is the study area, is situated in the South-South geopolitical

zone of Nigeria. It is an oil-rich state, but also endowed with a lot of other natural resources and human resources; agriculture, trading and civil service are major economic activities in the State. The State has a total land area of about 17,698 km². The population figure of the State is 4,112,445 (National Population Commission). It has an Atlantic Ocean coastline of 160km. There are twenty-five Local Government Areas (LGAs) which are grouped into 3 agricultural zones, namely, Delta South, Delta Central and Delta North.

A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed in obtaining the sample needed for the study. The first stage involves the selection of three Local Government Areas randomly from each of the three agricultural zones. The three (3) LGAs that were randomly selected from Delta South were Bomadi, Patani and Isoko North; Ughelli South, Sapele and Udu were selected in Delta Central Zone while Ika South, Oshimili North and Ndokwa West were selected in Delta North zone. Four rural communities were selected from each local government area by means simple random sampling technique (ballot method),

These communities are similar in their socioeconomic situation as agriculture predominates. From each rural community, 5% of the rural folks were selected; a total of 722 farmers was actually selected. However, only 711 copies of the questionnaire were returned (as some were not retrieved) and used for the study. Apart from the questionnaire, triangulation had also been employed to seek valid information from the respondents. This was to ensure that the responses obtained are reliable.

The data collection method was by the use of questionnaires and interview schedules. Data were collected on farmers' socio-economic characteristics. A Likert-type scale has been used as an instrument of data collection. Data were also collected on rural folks' perception of the activities of miscreants in rural areas, the perceived effects of their activities as they affect

agriculture and the community, perceived causes for deviant behaviours and their proposed panacea to activities of miscreants. Data analysis was by the use of percentages, frequency counts, mean scores, standard deviation and rankings. The Regression Model was used to test the stated hypothesis.

The logistic regression was used to test for the stated hypothesis. The logistic regression model is stated as:

$$\text{Logit } [{}_s(Y)] = \log [{}_s(Y) / 1 - (Y)] = b_0 + b_1 X_1 + b_2 X_2 + b_3 X_3 + \dots + b_i X_i + e_t \quad (1)$$

Or

Miscreant activity = Age + Gender + education + Marital status + family background + gang member + drug

addiction + isolation + unemployment + Error term.

Where X_1 = perceived age of miscreant measured in years

X_2 = Sex (Male = 1; 0, otherwise)

X_3 = Education attainment (no of years spent in schooling)

X_4 = marital status (Married = 1; 0, otherwise)

X_5 = family background (God fearing family = 1; 0, otherwise)

X_6 = gang member (membership = 1; 0, otherwise)

X_7 = drug addiction (addicted = 1; 0, otherwise)

X_8 = Isolation (Isolated = 1; 0, otherwise)

X_9 = unemployment (gainfully employed = 1; 0, otherwise)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Distribution of socioeconomic variables of respondents

S/N	Variable	Frequency distribution(711)	Percentage distribution (100%)	Mean/Mode
1.	Sex			
	Male	395	55.6	Male
	Female	316	44.4	
2.	Age			
	31 – 40	163	22.9	
	41 – 51	342	48.1	47.5
	51 – 60	132	18.6	
	> 60	74	10.4	
3.	Marital status			
	Never married	157	22.1	
	Married	466	65.5	Married
	Widow/Divorced	88	12.4	
4.	Education level			
	No formal	78	11.0	
	Primary	189	26.6	
	Secondary	377	53.0	Secondary
	Degree/Diploma/NCE	67	09.4	
5.	Household size			
	5 and below	76	10.7	
	6 – 10	599	84.2	
	11 and above	36	05.1	7
6.	Major occupation			
	Artisan	21	03.0	
	Trading	43	06.0	
	Civil servant	68	09.6	
	Farming	548	77.1	Farming
	Others	31	04.4	
7.	Monthly income (Naira)			
	< 51,000	624	87.8	45,669
	51,000 – 100,000	72	10.1	
	>100,000	15	02.1	

Source: Field Data

The resulting Table 1 showed that most of the rural folks interviewed were male (55.6%); females were 44.4%. The average age of the respondents was 47.5

years. The findings on marital status indicated that 22.1% of the respondents were never married, 65.5% were married, while only about 12.4% were

widowed/divorced. This finding is an indication that most of the folks were married and that marriage is well cherished in society. The educational level of respondents indicated that the majority of the respondents had one form of formal education or the other; only about 11.0% had no formal education. Secondary education was the modal educational attainment. Household size of 6 – 10 (84.2%) was predominant among the respondents, with a mean household size of 7 persons. The prevalent major occupation as presented in Table 1 was farming (77.1%); other major occupations by some of the respondents were civil servants (09.6%), trading (06.0%), and artisans (03.0%). The majority of the respondents were low-income earners as about 87.8% of them earn about ₦ 50,000 or less. The mean monthly income of the respondents was ₦45,669. The majority of the respondents were low-income earners and have mostly one source of income.

Devastating activities of societal miscreants in rural communities

Table 2: devastating activities of social miscreants

Devastating activity	Frequency (711)	Percentage (100)
Stealing/pilfering	711	100.0
Raping of girls/women	504	70.9
Cult activities	328	46.1
Desecration of shrines	214	30.1
Disrespect of societal norms and culture	202	28.4

Source: Field Data

The deleterious activities of social miscreants are presented in Table 2. The result in Table 2 shows that the rural folks perceived all societal miscreants to be involved in stealing; 100% of the rural folk perceived miscreants to be thieves. Moreover, 70.9% of the rural folks perceived miscreants to be involved in raping of females; 46.1% perceived them as being engaged in cult activities; 30.1% perceived them as engaging in the desecration of shrines and religious centres within communities; and 28.4% perceived them as not showing respect to societal norms values and culture. These findings are inconsonant with those of Usman

(2010), Tinubu (2000) and Omomia (2015) who observed that social miscreants engage in all sorts of deviant activities.

Causes of behavioural attitude of societal miscreants

The result in Table 3 showed that family background (98.3%) of the individual was perceived by the respondents as being the major culprit for deviant behaviour. Other perceived causes of deviant behaviours are poor education/ignorance (90.6%), unemployment (48.9%), gang member (48.9%), drugs (45.3%), Sign of being civilized and hard (39.1%) and social isolation/loneliness (26.3%). Usman (2010) asserted that joblessness, lack of education, semi-illiteracy can spark deviant behaviours of miscreants. Tinubu (2000) also linked unemployment to deviant behaviour. The effect of drug addiction and abuse is one of the main causes of the increase in deviant behaviour in rural areas. Social miscreants are commonly believed to subsist on drugs such as alcohol, marijuana, cocaine and others. The effect of these drugs is manifested in the deviant behaviours of miscreants (Omomia, 2015). Most of them, when under drugs, attack the law-abiding citizens. Zdun (2005) reported that youths who constitute miscreants form themselves into violent groups or gangs. These gangs perpetrate all sorts of evil deeds.

Social isolation/loneliness has wellbeing implications as it can lead to deviant behaviour (Klinenberg, 2016; Public Health England, 2014; Nyqvist et al., 2016). Social isolation is regarded as the ‘quality and quantity of the social relations someone has at an individual, group, community and societal levels’ (Scottish Government, 2018), while loneliness is an individual’s subjective feeling about the level of social relationships that they may have (De Jong-Gierveld et al., 2006). Loneliness can be situational, a phase of loneliness that may occur after a particular life event, such as bereavement or chronic, a long-term state in which a person has a continued inability to form satisfactory social relationships (Hart,

2016; Shiovitz-Ezra and Ayalon, 2010). The absence of social relationships and support networks have been found to impact on individual's social wellbeing, leading to deviant behaviour among others (Bernard and Perry, 2013; Cacioppo et al., 2006; Coyle and Dugan, 2012; Greaves and Farbus, 2006). Young people are socially isolated through unemployment and low education levels leading to deviant behaviour (Matthews et al., 2016, 2018).

Table 3: Causes of activities of miscreants

Cause	Frequency (711)	Percentage (100)
Family background	699	98.3
Lack of education/ignorance	644	90.6
Unemployment	348	48.9
Belonging to a gang/drugs	348	48.9
Drug abuse	322	45.3
Sign of civilization	278	39.1
Social isolation/loneliness	187	26.3

Source: Field Data

Perceived effects of social miscreants on agricultural production and rural communities

Table 4: Effects of the activities of societal miscreants in rural communities

Cause	Frequency (711)	Percentage (100)
A decrease in agricultural production	664	93.4
Loss of farm labour	622	87.5
Rural-urban migration	414	58.2
The proliferation of cult activities	410	57.7
Social insecurity	402	56.5
Increase in immorality	367	51.6
The impoverishment of rural households	355	49.9

Source: Field Data

The perceived effects of activities of social miscreants in rural society are shown in Table 4. The most serious effect is a decrease in agricultural production (93.4%). This is expected since it was mentioned previously that one of the devastating activities of miscreants is pilfering of farm produce. This can seriously reduce the output of farmers. Other devastating effects of the activities of social miscreants are loss of farm labour (87.5%), an increase of rural-urban migration from communities (58.2%), a proliferation of cultism (57.7%), social insecurity (56.5%), increased immorality

(51.6%), and impoverishment of rural families (49.9%). The findings of this study implied that the activities of these societal miscreants make life unbearable to most law-abiding citizens in rural areas. This finding corroborates the observation of Mehrabi et al. (2016) that drug addiction, poor education and unemployment promote deviant behaviours.

Folks perceived the relationship between selected variables and deviant behaviour

The relationship between the socioeconomic characteristics and the activities of miscreants is presented in Table 5. Logistic regression is used to identify the likelihood of being associated with a category from a binary dependent variable (either the individual i engage in a miscreant activity, i.e. $Y = 1$; 0, otherwise). To interpret the results of the logistic regression, the Exp (B) is also the odds ratio; that is, it is the predicted change in odds for a unit increase across the corresponding independent variables. Odds ratios greater than one (1) have a greater likelihood of being in the miscreant group on the dependent variable, while odds ratios less than one (1) have a greater likelihood of being associated with the non-deviant category on the dependent variable. Odds ratios close to or exactly at one (1) indicate little to no relationship to the deviant category on the dependent variable.

Deviant behaviour is associated with variables like Poor education (1.45); a family background that is poor (2.01); being a gang member (1.82); addiction to hard drugs (1.99); social isolation/loneliness (2.56); and unemployment (1.49). Accordingly, all these variables were significant at $P < 0.05$.

On the other hand, a greater likelihood of being engaged in non-deviant behaviour is associated with the age of the individual (0.76); gender of the individual (0.89); and marital status (0.61).

Thus result in Table 5 shows that poor educational attainment, poor family background of individual, membership of

gang, exposure to drugs, social isolation/loneliness and lack of employment have a significant relationship with the probability of an individual being a miscreant or engaging in deviant behaviour; in other words these fuelled deviant

behaviour. Conversely, age of individual, sex and marital status all have nothing to do with the probability of an individual being a miscreant.

Table 5 Perceived relationship between selected variables and deviant behaviour

Variable	B	S.E.	Exp (B)	Wald Stat.	Sig.
Age	0.08	0.02	0.76	0.341	0.341
Sex	0.88	0.02	0.89	0.249	0.249
Education	-0.10	0.04	1.45	0.007	0.007**
Marital status	0.36	0.16	0.61	1.768	1.768
Family background	0.02	0.13	2.01	0.001	0.001**
Gang member	0.57	0.41	1.82	0.000	0.000**
Drug	0.33	0.04	1.99	0.000	0.000**
Isolation	0.07	0.33	2.56	0.011	0.011**
Unemployment	0.54	0.27	1.49	0.050	0.039**

Model Chi-square = 7.042, Significance = 0.692, Log likelihood = 214.174, Cox and Snell $r^2 = 0.51$; Nagelkerke $r^2 = 0.74$; overall percentage of correct prediction = 84%; sample size = 711; **significant at $P < 0.05$

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

No doubt, the nefarious activities of societal miscreants have continued to affect the economic and social life of rural communities. Their devastating activities have brought untold hardships to rural dwellers. Their activities are usually fuelled by a family background of the individual, poor education/ignorance, unemployment, gang member, drugs and social isolation/loneliness. These miscreants, who are usually hopeless, would likely fall prey to anything that gives them seeming assurance of survival, hence their involvement in deviant behaviours. To usher in sustainable rural development in Delta State in particular and Nigeria in general, the nefarious activities of social miscreants must be curbed. The menace of rural societal miscreants can be reduced to the barest minimum by applying these recommendations

- i. Rehabilitation centres should be established by the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and religious institutions to take care of miscreants within the rural society, to assist these deviants to develop a new and progressive positive world-view, and thus become useful members of the society.
- ii. The issue of drug addiction should be tackled. This can be achieved by taking drastic measures like:
 - a. Organization of programs and advocacy geared towards dissuading youths and teenagers from inappropriate use of drugs.
 - b. Parents enlightening their children about the harm of drug abuse.
 - c. Establishment of programs/projects to enlighten equip youths and others on how to live healthy lifestyles.
 - d. Supporting, encouraging and providing guidance to the drug addicts by all stakeholders especially the society, religious community (church, mosques) and others.
- iii. The family is the unit of society; if the family is God-fearing then the society will be free of miscreants. To this end, the government, non-governmental organizations and religious organizations should intensify efforts in the rural community to dissuade youths from deviant behaviours. Parents should appreciate their role in training and inculcating the fear of God in their children.
- iv. People in the rural areas need to be enlightened on the dangers of using drugs.
- v. Since unemployment is a catalyst to deviant behaviour, the Government of

Delta State should establish skill acquisition centres in the State; also the enabling environment should be created to promote job creation.

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