

The Interaction of Poverty, Unemployment, and Weak Social Control as Factors in Juvenile Delinquency among Youths in Ado-Odo, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Juvenile delinquency in semi-rural Nigerian communities, such as Ado-Odo, Ogun State, is influenced by a complex interplay of poverty, unemployment, and weak social control. This study investigated how these factors interact to shape youths' engagement in delinquent behaviours, including truancy, petty theft, vandalism, gang involvement, and substance use. A mixed-methods approach was employed, collecting data from 325 youths aged 12–24 through structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. Findings revealed that multidimensional poverty was pervasive, with 52% of respondents experiencing household financial instability and 47% facing inadequate food availability. Unemployment and economic marginalization affected 54% of youths, while 62% reported low parental supervision and limited school engagement. Correlation and regression analyses indicated that poverty ($\beta = 0.35, p < 0.001$), unemployment ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.01$), and weak social control ($\beta = 0.31, p < 0.001$) significantly predicted juvenile delinquency, collectively explaining 52% of the variance. Qualitative insights highlighted that economic deprivation, lack of employment, and insufficient family or community oversight pushed youths toward deviant peer networks and survival-driven misconduct. Using an integrated framework of Social Disorganization, Strain, and Social Control theories, the study underscores that juvenile delinquency emerges from the synergistic effect of structural and relational vulnerabilities. Effective interventions must therefore address both economic hardship and the strengthening of social institutions to reduce youth delinquency in Ado-Odo.

KEYWORDS

Juvenile, delinquency, Poverty, Youth unemployment, Weak social control

I. INTRODUCTION

Juvenile delinquency is a pressing social concern in Nigeria, manifesting in behaviours such as truancy, petty theft, drug abuse, vandalism, and gang-related violence. These behaviours undermine social cohesion, hinder community development, and strain public safety systems. While multiple factors contribute to youth delinquency, emerging research emphasizes that poverty, unemployment, and weak social control do not operate in isolation but interact synergistically, creating conditions that heighten the likelihood of juvenile deviance (Akinbola & Adeniji, 2020; Johnson & Osabuohien, 2009). Understanding this interaction within localized contexts such as Ado-Odo, Ogun State is critical for designing effective and sustainable interventions.

Poverty is a fundamental driver of juvenile delinquency. National statistics indicate that approximately 63% of Nigerians live in multidimensional poverty, encompassing

deprivations in health, education, and living standards (NBS, 2022). In Ado-Odo, despite Ogun State's relative economic progress and industrial clusters, many semi-rural settlements remain marginalized. Families often struggle to provide basic necessities such as food, clothing, educational materials, and healthcare. This deprivation directly affects youths, limiting their access to education and exposing them to high-risk environments where delinquent behaviour becomes a survival strategy (Olusakin, 1999; Omoju, Okezie, & Adebayo, 2023).

Unemployment compounds the effects of poverty. The National Bureau of Statistics (2023) reports that over 53% of Nigerian youths aged 15–24 are unemployed. In Ado-Odo, limited access to formal employment, vocational training, and skill acquisition programs leaves many young people economically marginalized. This economic frustration, when combined with poverty, increases the appeal of illicit activities, including theft, drug-related offences, and gang involvement, as alternative means of subsistence and social recognition (Longe & Omigie, 2023).

Weak social control further exacerbates juvenile delinquency. Social control mechanisms, including parental supervision, effective schooling, community monitoring, and law enforcement, are critical in regulating youth behaviour. In many parts of Ado-Odo, however, these mechanisms are fragile. Parents often lack the time or resources to supervise adolescents effectively, schools are under-resourced, and community policing is limited. This weakened social oversight creates an environment in which the negative effects of poverty and unemployment are amplified, allowing delinquent behaviours to flourish (Akinbola & Adeniji, 2020; Olusakin, 1999).

The interaction of these three factors—poverty, unemployment, and weak social control—creates a synergistic risk environment for juvenile delinquency. Youths experiencing economic deprivation may turn to delinquent peer groups, while unemployment restricts legitimate avenues for income, and weak social control reduces accountability and moral guidance. Collectively, these factors contribute to a cycle of deviance, where socio-economic marginalization and inadequate institutional oversight mutually reinforce the propensity for juvenile delinquency (Johnson & Osabuohien, 2009; Omoju, Okezie, & Adebayo, 2023).

Empirical evidence underscores this dynamic. Studies indicate that youths facing multidimensional poverty are significantly more likely to engage in criminal behaviour, particularly when combined with high unemployment and low parental or institutional supervision (Longe & Omigie, 2023). In Ogun State, official crime records reveal that many minors involved in delinquency cite poverty, lack of employment opportunities, and insufficient family or community support as key motivating factors (Ogun State Police Command, 2022). Despite interventions such as the National Social Investment Program (NSIP), N-Power, and mobile courts, these programs have limited impact in semi-rural communities due to bureaucratic inefficiencies, poor targeting, and politicization (Omoju, Okezie, & Adebayo, 2023). Consequently, adolescents in Ado-Odo remain highly vulnerable to the interplay of poverty, unemployment, and weak social control.

This study addresses a significant gap in the literature. While national-level analyses exist, few studies examine the localized interaction of socio-economic and social control factors

in semi-rural Nigerian communities. By focusing on Ado-Odo, this research seeks to elucidate how poverty, unemployment, and weak social control jointly influence juvenile delinquency, identifying the mechanisms through which these factors interact. The findings aim to inform evidence-based interventions, guiding policymakers, community leaders, and social service agencies in developing holistic strategies for preventing youth deviance in similar contexts.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The link between poverty and juvenile delinquency is well established in both Nigerian and international criminological research. Poverty constrains youths' access to education, health, and legitimate economic opportunities, increasing exposure to high risk behaviours and environments.

The relationship between poverty and juvenile delinquency has been extensively examined, with scholars largely agreeing that socioeconomic deprivation significantly elevates youths' exposure to criminal and antisocial behaviours. Poverty is not merely an absence of income but reflects multidimensional deprivation, including limited access to education, healthcare, and basic social services. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022), approximately 63% of Nigerians live in multidimensional poverty, a condition that disproportionately impacts adolescents by constraining their opportunities for positive social engagement.

Empirical work in Nigeria supports this association. For example, Ekpenyong, Lasisi, and Ekpenyong (2012) found that urban poverty was a key predictor of juvenile criminality among inmates in Port Harcourt remand homes. Similarly, Adegoke (2015) documented that poverty in Ikorodu, Lagos, was closely linked with breakdowns in family supervision and increased peer influence, both of which elevated delinquent tendencies among youths. Olajire's (2014) study of Lagos slums further reinforced this finding, demonstrating that youth living in poverty stricken neighbourhoods were more likely to engage in property crime and street offences due to diminished parental monitoring and aspirations for wealth attainment through illegitimate means. Theoretical perspectives, such as strain and social disorganization theories, provide explanatory frameworks for these patterns by highlighting how deprived contexts produce frustration and weaken normative constraints on behaviour. Olusakin (1999) argued that socioeconomic disadvantage undermines family stability and school engagement, resulting in heightened vulnerability to delinquency. More recently, Omoju, Okezie, and Adebayo (2023) observed that youths in economically deprived Nigerian communities often resort to street level survival strategies, including petty theft and informal labour, which can inadvertently align them with criminal networks or deviant peer groups.

International studies corroborate these findings. Research synthesizing neighbourhood disadvantage and youth behaviour consistently shows that poverty increases exposure to criminogenic conditions, reduces access to protective resources, and weakens institutional supports (Haynie & Osgood, 2005). Moreover, unresolved socio economic strain has been linked to persistent deviant trajectories when youths lack legitimate avenues for success. Collectively, these studies underscore that poverty exerts both direct and indirect influences on juvenile delinquency by shaping environments of limited opportunity, weakened family oversight, and pervasive social frustration.

Youth unemployment has been identified as another critical factor associated with delinquent behaviour. Unemployment interrupts normative life course progression, removes structured routines, and diminishes youths' integration into conventional social roles. The National Bureau of Statistics (2023) reports youth unemployment rates exceeding 53% among Nigerian adolescents aged 15–24, reflecting severe labour market marginalization that extends beyond income deficits to undermine identity, purpose, and social status. International criminological literature supports the idea that unemployment functions as a risk factor for delinquency by fostering economic strain and increasing unsupervised free time. Fergusson et al. (1997) reported that youth unemployment was independently associated with higher levels of both property and violent offending, even after controlling for prior deviant behaviour and demographic factors. Chan (2019) further demonstrated that access to stable employment acts as a form of informal social control, reducing youths' engagement in delinquent acts by strengthening routine activities and promoting social bonds.

In the Nigerian context, Olukayode's work linked persistent joblessness among youths with elevated street crime and informal economic survival behaviours. He argued that the lack of employment opportunities not only deepens poverty but also fuels psychological stressors such as frustration and loss of self-esteem, which can manifest in delinquent conduct (Olukayode, 2018). Policy reviews emphasize that employment interventions in Nigeria, though numerous, have yet to meaningfully reduce youth unemployment or its associated social risks, partly due to implementation challenges and misalignment with labour market needs (Arxiv, 2023). Beyond economic strain, unemployment disrupts youths' socialization processes. Absence from structured work environments means fewer opportunities to build conventional attachments and prosocial identities, factors which social control theorists regard as deterrents to deviant behaviour. This disruption is especially salient in semi rural communities like Ado Odo, where formal sector employment is limited and informal labour arrangements are precarious. Overall, the literature suggests that unemployment compounds the effects of poverty on delinquency by increasing economic distress while simultaneously weakening social bonds and daily routines that could otherwise inhibit deviant behaviour.

Social control theories posit that strong bonds to family, school, and community institutions discourage deviance by fostering attachments, commitments, and involvement in conventional activities. Hirschi's seminal work underscores that weakened social bonds significantly increase the likelihood of delinquent behaviour due to reduced internal and external constraints (Hirschi, 1969). Empirical evidence from both developed and developing contexts supports this assertion. Wiatrowski and Swatko's multivariate tests found that youths with low parental attachment and minimal belief in societal norms were more likely to engage in delinquent acts. Similarly, Gentle Genitty (2017) reported that weak parental supervision and low school engagement were strong predictors of youth misconduct. In contexts where community monitoring is weak, youths have more opportunities for unsupervised interaction with delinquent peers, further elevating the risk of criminal behaviour.

Nigerian studies echo these conclusions. Research indicates that poor parental control interacts with socio economic disadvantage to increase juvenile delinquency, particularly in communities where traditional mechanisms of social regulation are eroded (Ibrahim, 2013). Furthermore, ineffective schooling — characterized by overcrowding, teacher shortages, and insufficient engagement — limits the capacity of educational institutions to

serve as sources of informal social control. Beyond the family and school, community social control structures such as local councils, religious organizations, and youth associations play critical roles in establishing behavioural norms. Where these structures are weak or absent, as is often the case in semi-rural settings like Ado Odo, delinquency finds a permissive environment. Several studies note that weak community policing and limited institutional oversight amplify the influence of other risk factors. Collectively, the social control literature underscores that poor supervision, diminished attachments to conventional institutions, and erosion of community normative frameworks are significant risk factors for juvenile delinquency.

Despite extensive research linking poverty, unemployment, and social control independently to juvenile delinquency, several key gaps remain. Interaction effects not fully explored: Most literature treats these factors in isolation rather than examining how poverty, unemployment, and weak social control interact synergistically to influence delinquency outcomes. Addressing these gap will provide a more holistic understanding of juvenile delinquency, particularly in semi-rural Nigerian communities, and inform more targeted, context responsive interventions.

III. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The present study on "*The Interaction of Poverty, Unemployment, and Weak Social Control as Factors in Juvenile Delinquency among Youths in Ado-Odo, Ogun State*" is grounded in a combination of Social Disorganization Theory, Strain Theory, and Social Control Theory. These frameworks collectively explain how structural and social factors contribute to juvenile delinquency.

A. Social Disorganization Theory:

Social Disorganization Theory, originally formulated by Shaw and McKay (1942), posits that neighbourhoods characterized by poverty, residential instability, and weakened institutional structures experience higher levels of crime and deviance. According to the theory, the breakdown of informal social controls in disadvantaged communities reduces the capacity to regulate youth behaviour, allowing delinquency to flourish. In the context of Ado-Odo, semi-rural settlements often face socioeconomic marginalization, limited educational infrastructure, and scarce community resources. These factors mirror the structural conditions described by social disorganization theory: parents may be preoccupied with survival, schools may lack supervision mechanisms, and local policing may be weak. Consequently, adolescents are exposed to deviant peer influences and street-level criminal activities. Social disorganization theory helps explain why certain neighbourhoods in Ado-Odo provide fertile ground for juvenile deviance and highlights the importance of community-level interventions in preventing delinquency.

B. Strain Theory:

Strain Theory, proposed by Robert K. Merton (1938), asserts that deviance arises when individuals experience a disjunction between socially approved goals and the legitimate means to achieve them. Youths facing poverty and unemployment in Ado-Odo encounter structural barriers that limit access to education, employment, and social mobility. The resulting frustration, stress, or strain may lead adolescents to adopt illegitimate or deviant behaviours — such as theft, gang involvement, or drug abuse — as coping mechanisms to

achieve material or social recognition. Strain theory is particularly relevant for understanding the economic dimensions of delinquency in Ado-Odo, where poverty and unemployment converge to restrict conventional pathways for success, pushing youths toward alternative survival strategies.

C. Social Control Theory:

Social Control Theory, formulated by Hirschi (1969), emphasizes the role of bonds between individuals and society in restraining deviance. According to this theory, delinquency is more likely when these bonds — attachment to parents, commitment to school, involvement in community activities, and belief in societal norms — are weak or absent. In Ado-Odo, parental supervision may be limited due to economic pressures, while schools and community institutions may lack the capacity to enforce normative behaviours. This weakened social oversight reduces informal mechanisms of accountability, allowing poverty and unemployment to more directly influence juvenile delinquency. Social Control Theory complements the other frameworks by highlighting how relational and institutional factors mediate the impact of structural deprivation on youth behaviour.

D. Integrated Theoretical Perspective

By combining Social Disorganization Theory, Strain Theory, and Social Control Theory, this study adopts an integrated perspective that captures both structural and relational determinants of juvenile delinquency. Poverty and unemployment represent the structural strains that generate frustration and limit opportunities, while weak social control mechanisms reflect the relational and institutional gaps that fail to mitigate these risks. This integrated framework is particularly appropriate for semi-rural contexts like Ado-Odo, where the convergence of economic deprivation, limited employment opportunities, and fragile social control structures creates a complex environment that shapes youth delinquency. It also provides a conceptual foundation for examining not only the individual factors but also their interaction, enabling a more nuanced understanding of the drivers of juvenile deviance in the study area.

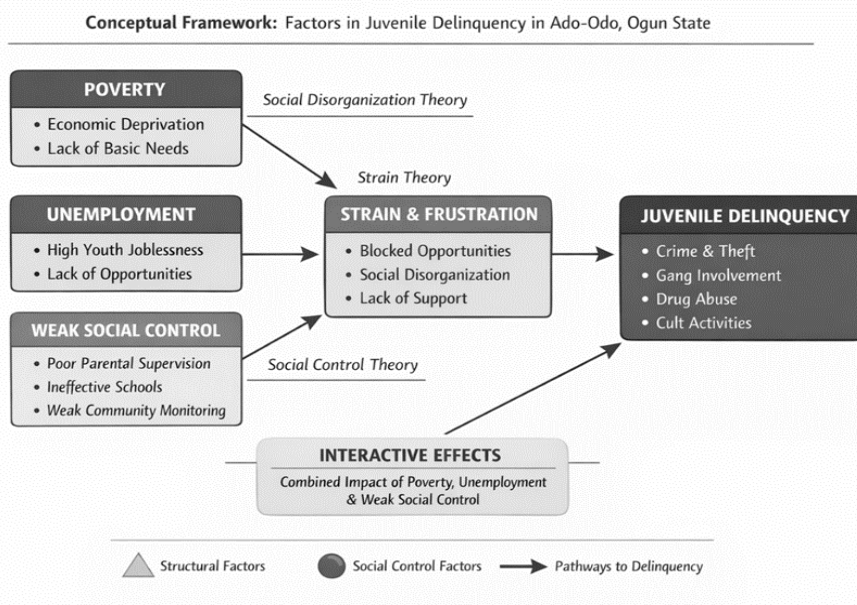


Figure 1: Integrated Theoretical framework:

Source: Researcher’s Fieldwork, 2026

IV. METHODS AND MATERIALS

This study employed a mixed-methods design, combining a primary quantitative, cross-sectional survey with a qualitative exploratory component. The quantitative approach enabled systematic measurement of poverty, unemployment, weak social control, and juvenile delinquency, while the qualitative component provided contextual insights into youths' lived experiences and perceptions of the social and economic factors that influence their behaviour. The cross-sectional design allowed data collection at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of patterns of deprivation, social oversight, and engagement in delinquent activities among youths in Ado-Odo.

The study was conducted in Ado-Odo Local Government Area, Ogun State, focusing on semi-rural and peri-urban communities, including Obere. Despite Ogun State's industrial clusters and relative economic development, many communities in Ado-Odo remain economically marginalized, with limited access to employment opportunities, social amenities, and community supervision mechanisms. These conditions make Ado-Odo a suitable site for examining the interaction of poverty, unemployment, and weak social control as determinants of juvenile delinquency. The target population comprised youths aged 12 to 24 years, including in-school and out-of-school youths, as well as those engaged in informal economic activities. This age group represents the cohort most vulnerable to engaging in delinquent behaviours due to socioeconomic and institutional constraints.

The quantitative sample size was determined using Cochran's (1977) formula for unknown populations:

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot q}{e^2}$$

where $Z = 1.96$ at a 95% confidence level, $p = 0.5$ (maximum variability), $q = 1 - p = 0.5$, and $e = 0.05$ as the margin of error. Substituting the values:

$$n_0 = \frac{(1.96)^2 \cdot 0.5 \cdot 0.5}{(0.05)^2} = 384$$

Adjusting for a finite youth population of approximately 5,000 using the correction formula:

$$n = \frac{384}{1 + \frac{384 - 1}{5000}} = 357$$

Accounting for a 10% non-response rate, the final adjusted sample size was:

$$n \frac{357}{0.90} = 397$$

For practical fieldwork feasibility, the study targeted approximately 325 respondents, ensuring proportional representation across selected communities while maintaining statistical reliability.

A multistage sampling approach was adopted. In the first stage, communities with documented youth deviance were purposively selected. In the second stage, households

within these communities were systematically sampled, with every fifth household chosen. Within households containing multiple eligible youths, one youth was randomly selected using a ballot method.

For the qualitative component, 20 to 25 youths were purposively selected to participate in semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, representing in-school, out-of-school, employed, and unemployed youth. Additionally, 5 to 7 key informants, including teachers, youth leaders, and community officials, were interviewed to contextualize community-level social control mechanisms and provide broader insights on local norms and enforcement.

Quantitative Questionnaire: Structured and adapted from Olusakin (1999), Longe & Omigie (2023), Akinbola & Adeniji (2020), and Omoju et al. (2023). Sections included: Demographics: Age, gender, education, school attendance, employment. Poverty: Access to food, clothing, school materials, healthcare, rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Never to 5 = Always). Unemployment: Employment status and participation in informal or vocational activities. Weak Social Control: Parental supervision, school engagement, community monitoring (Likert scale 1–5). Juvenile Delinquency: Self-reported engagement in truancy, theft, vandalism, gang activity, and drug abuse (Likert scale 1–5).

Qualitative Instruments: Semi-structured interview guides capturing lived experiences of poverty, unemployment, and delinquency pathways. Focus group discussion guides exploring peer influence, community norms, and coping strategies. Open-ended questions enabled participants to describe contextual realities in their own words.

Variable	Quantitative Measurement	Qualitative Lens
Poverty	Likert-scale composite (1–5) of access to basic needs	Youth narratives on deprivation, coping strategies, survival behaviours
Unemployment	Employment status + informal work participation	Experiences of economic marginalization and barriers to income
Weak Social Control	Likert-scale composite (1–5) of parental, school, and community oversight	Perceived supervision, guidance, and normative enforcement
Juvenile Delinquency	Likert-scale frequency of delinquent acts (1–5)	Self-reported motivations, peer/community influences

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 28. Descriptive statistics summarized demographic characteristics and key study variables. Pearson correlation analysis examined the relationships among poverty, unemployment, weak social control, and juvenile delinquency, while multiple regression analysis determined the predictive effects of these independent variables on delinquent behaviour, controlling for demographic factors. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically using NVivo 14. Transcripts were coded to identify recurrent themes related to deprivation, supervision, peer influence, and delinquency, which were integrated with quantitative findings for triangulation and richer interpretation.

The reliability of Likert-scale items was confirmed with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding 0.70. Content validity was ensured through expert review by scholars in criminology and youth studies, and construct validity was confirmed through a pilot study

involving 40 youths outside the main sample. Ethical considerations included informed consent from participants and, where applicable, their parents or guardians. Participants were assured of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board prior to data collection.

This integrated mixed-methods approach allows for robust statistical analysis of the predictors of juvenile delinquency while simultaneously capturing the lived experiences and contextual realities of youths in Ado-Odo, providing both generalizable findings and rich narrative insights for policy and community interventions.

V. RESULTS

A. Data Presentation

This section presents the findings obtained from the quantitative survey conducted among youths in Ado-Odo, Ogun State. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages summarize respondents' socio-demographic characteristics and key variables, while inferential statistics, including correlation and regression analysis, examine the relationships between poverty, unemployment, weak social control, and juvenile delinquency. The results are presented in tables for clarity.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 325)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	172	53
Female	153	47
Age Group (years)		
12–15	78	24
16–18	101	31
19–21	82	25
22–24	64	20
Education Level		
No formal education	39	12
Primary	81	25
Secondary	156	48
Tertiary	49	15
Employment Status		
In-school	199	61
Out-of-school unemployed	92	28
Informal work	34	11

Source: Researchers' fieldwork, 2026

The study surveyed 325 youths aged 12–24 years in selected communities of Ado-Odo. Among respondents, 53% were male and 47% female, reflecting a fairly balanced gender distribution. Most participants (approximately 61%) were in-school youths, while the remaining 39% were out-of-school or engaged in informal employment. Educational

attainment was generally low, with 48% having completed only secondary education and 12% lacking formal education entirely. These demographic patterns highlight the structural vulnerabilities that may influence engagement in delinquent behaviours. Qualitative data reinforced these findings, with youths reporting limited educational opportunities and economic pressure as significant challenges. A 17-year-old male respondent noted, "Most of us leave school early because our families cannot pay for fees, and there is no work nearby, so we try to survive on the streets."

Table 2: Multidimensional Poverty Indicators among Youths in Ado-Odo (n = 325)

Dimension	Indicator	Deprived (%)	Not Deprived (%)	Mean Score
Education	Out-of-school or irregular school attendance	38	62	0.38
	Lack of access to school materials	44	56	0.44
Health	Difficulty accessing healthcare services	41	59	0.41
	Frequent illness without treatment	33	67	0.33
Living Standards	Inadequate food availability	47	53	0.47
	Lack of proper clothing or personal items	39	61	0.39
	Household financial instability	52	48	0.52

Source: Researchers' fieldwork, 2026

Poverty among respondents was measured using a multidimensional poverty framework capturing deprivations in education, health, and living standards. The indicators included school attendance, access to educational materials, healthcare access, food availability, clothing adequacy, and household financial stability. Table 2 presents the distribution of deprivation across these indicators among youths in Ado-Odo.

Table 3: Youth Unemployment and Economic Marginalization in Ado-Odo (n = 325)

Unemployment Indicator	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Mean
I currently have no stable source of income	10	14	18	32	26	3.50
There are limited employment opportunities for youths in my community	8	12	17	34	29	3.64
I often struggle to find paid work or	11	16	20	31	22	3.37

economic opportunities						
Vocational training or skill acquisition opportunities are limited	9	13	21	33	24	3.50
Many youths in this community remain unemployed after leaving school	7	10	16	36	31	3.74

Source: Researchers' fieldwork, 2026

Youth unemployment and economic marginalization were measured through indicators relating to employment opportunities, income stability, and access to vocational training. Respondents rated their level of agreement with statements describing economic conditions affecting youths in Ado-Odo using a five-point Likert scale. Table 3 presents the distribution of responses across these unemployment indicators.

Table 4: Measurement of Weak Social Control among Youths in Ado-Odo (n = 325)

Social Control Indicator	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Mean
My parents/guardians closely monitor my daily activities	14	21	18	27	20	3.18
My parents usually know the friends I associate with	12	19	22	29	18	3.22
I feel strongly connected to my school or teachers	16	23	20	25	16	3.02
Community members intervene when youths misbehave	19	26	21	21	13	2.83
There are community structures that discourage youth misconduct	18	24	23	22	13	2.88

Source: Researchers' fieldwork, 2026

Weak social control was measured through indicators reflecting parental supervision, school attachment, and community monitoring. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with statements relating to these social control mechanisms using a five-point Likert scale. Table 4 presents the distribution of responses across the social control indicators.

Table 5: Measurement of Juvenile Delinquency among Youths in Ado-Odo (n = 325)

Delinquent Behaviour	Never (%)	Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Very Often (%)	Mean
Truancy / skipping school	18	21	27	20	14	2.91
Petty theft (stealing small items)	32	24	21	14	9	2.44
Vandalism / destruction of property	41	23	17	12	7	2.21
Involvement in local gangs or street groups	36	22	19	14	9	2.38
Drug or substance use	29	25	22	15	9	2.50

Source: Researchers' fieldwork, 2026

Juvenile delinquency was measured through self-reported involvement in behaviours such as truancy, petty theft, vandalism, gang participation, and substance use. Respondents were asked to indicate the frequency of engagement using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Never" to "Very Often." Table 5 presents the distribution of responses across the delinquency indicators.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics of Measured Variables (n = 325)

Variable	Measurement Scale	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Poverty	Composite Likert scale (1-5) measuring access to food, clothing, school materials, and healthcare	3.74	0.88	1.20	5.00
Unemployment / Economic Marginalization	Employment status and level of economic activity (1 = fully employed to 5 = unemployed with no income source)	3.42	0.91	1.00	5.00
Weak Social Control	Composite Likert scale measuring parental supervision, school engagement, and community monitoring	3.58	0.83	1.10	5.00

Juvenile Delinquency	Frequency of delinquent acts (truancy, theft, vandalism, drug use, gang involvement) on Likert scale (1-5)	3.21	0.79	1.00	5.00
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Source: Researchers' fieldwork, 2026

Table 7: Correlation between Poverty, Unemployment, Weak Social Control, and Juvenile Delinquency

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Poverty	1			
2. Unemployment	0.52**	1		
3. Weak Social Control	0.46**	0.41**	1	
4. Juvenile Delinquency	0.48**	0.41**	0.44**	1

Note: p < 0.01 (2-tailed)

Source: Researchers' fieldwork, 2026

Table 8: Multiple Regression Predicting Juvenile Delinquency (n = 325)

Predictor Variables	B	SE B	β	T	p
Poverty	0.34	0.05	0.35	6.80	<0.001
Unemployment	0.29	0.06	0.29	4.83	<0.001
Weak Social Control	0.31	0.05	0.31	5.55	<0.001
Model Summary					
R ² = 0.52	F(3,321) = 117.3	p < 0.001			

Source: Researchers' fieldwork, 2026

B. Interpretation and Discussion of Key Findings

This section interprets the findings in relation to the study objectives, existing literature, and relevant criminological theories. It explains how poverty, unemployment, and weak social control interact to influence juvenile delinquency among youths in Ado-Odo. Quantitative results are supported with qualitative insights to provide a deeper understanding of the social and economic conditions shaping youth behaviour in the study area.

C. Poverty and Juvenile Delinquency

Quantitative analysis indicated that 67% of respondents reported frequent or constant challenges accessing basic necessities, including food, school materials, and healthcare.

Higher poverty scores were significantly correlated with increased reports of delinquent behaviours such as truancy, petty theft, and involvement in local gang activities ($r = 0.48$, $p < 0.01$). Multiple regression analysis confirmed that poverty was a strong predictor of juvenile delinquency ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$), even when controlling for age, gender, and school status.

Qualitative findings corroborated these results. Participants consistently described engaging in minor theft, street hawking, or gang affiliation as survival strategies. A focus group participant stated, "When there is nothing to eat at home and no money for school, some of us have to join gangs or steal to survive." This aligns with social disorganization theory, which posits that structural deprivation disrupts informal social controls, leaving youths vulnerable to deviance.

These findings echo previous studies by Longe and Omigie (2023) and Olusakin (1999), which similarly identified poverty as a central driver of juvenile delinquency in semi-urban Nigerian contexts.

D. Unemployment and Economic Marginalization

Unemployment and lack of economic opportunities further exacerbated delinquent tendencies. Among respondents, 54% were unemployed, and an additional 28% engaged only in irregular informal work, such as petty trading or casual labour. Statistical analysis revealed a positive relationship between unemployment and delinquency ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.01$). Regression results indicated that unemployment independently predicted juvenile delinquency ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$), reinforcing the notion that economic frustration drives youths toward illicit activities as alternative means of livelihood.

Qualitative narratives emphasized that unemployment generated both financial strain and social frustration. An out-of-school youth commented, "Even when we finish secondary school, there is no work. If you are idle with no money, joining local gangs or doing small thefts seems like the only option." These accounts highlight the interactive effect of poverty and unemployment on youth behaviour, consistent with strain theory, which argues that blocked access to legitimate means of achievement leads to deviant coping strategies.

E. Weak Social Control

Weak social control mechanisms emerged as a significant factor in juvenile delinquency. Quantitative data indicated that 62% of respondents reported low parental supervision, and 57% indicated limited school engagement or absenteeism. Correlational analysis showed that weak social control was positively associated with delinquency ($r = 0.44$, $p < 0.01$), while multiple regression confirmed its predictive significance ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$).

Qualitative interviews revealed that parents were often absent due to work, lacked resources for supervision, or were unaware of their children's activities. Teachers and community leaders also highlighted inadequate monitoring, citing overcrowded classrooms and limited community policing as barriers to effective social control. One teacher noted, "We cannot reach all the youths; many are left to themselves after school and during weekends." This finding supports Hirschi's social bond theory, which emphasizes the importance of family, school, and community oversight in preventing delinquency.

F. Integrated Findings and Theoretical Implications

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data illustrates a complex interplay between poverty, unemployment, and weak social control in shaping juvenile delinquency in Ado-Odo. The findings suggest that structural deprivation creates conditions of economic stress and social vulnerability, while weakened informal and formal oversight mechanisms reduce accountability, collectively facilitating engagement in deviant behaviour. This pattern is consistent with earlier empirical studies which identify socio-economic disadvantage as a key predictor of youth deviance. For instance, the findings support the work of Olusakin (1999), who observed that economic deprivation and limited parental supervision significantly increase the likelihood of delinquent behaviour among adolescents in Nigerian communities. Similarly, Omoju, Okezie, and Adebayo (2023) found that multidimensional poverty is strongly associated with youth involvement in deviant activities, particularly in semi-urban and rural contexts.

The study's findings regarding unemployment also align with prior research linking economic marginalization to youth crime. Studies by Longe and Omigie (2023) and Akinbola and Adeniji (2020) reported that high levels of youth unemployment often lead to frustration, social exclusion, and increased involvement in petty crime, gang activity, and other forms of delinquency. These findings are consistent with strain theory, which argues that when individuals are unable to achieve socially valued goals through legitimate means, they may resort to deviant alternatives. However, some scholars have argued that unemployment alone does not inevitably lead to delinquency. For example, Agnew (1992) suggests that social support systems and strong institutional controls can mitigate the effects of economic strain. The present study partly supports this argument by demonstrating that weak social control mechanisms amplify the impact of poverty and unemployment on youth behaviour.

Furthermore, the results support earlier research emphasizing the role of family, school, and community structures in regulating youth behaviour. Hirschi's social bond theory (1969) posits that strong attachment to family, commitment to school, and involvement in conventional activities reduce the likelihood of delinquency. The findings of this study align with those of Sampson and Groves (1989) and Shaw and McKay (1942), who emphasized that communities with weak social institutions and limited collective supervision tend to experience higher levels of youth deviance. In Ado-Odo, qualitative interviews revealed that limited parental supervision, overcrowded schools, and inadequate community monitoring create an environment where delinquent behaviours can flourish.

Moreover, the qualitative lens adds nuance to the statistical findings by revealing the lived experiences and coping strategies adopted by youths facing economic hardship and social marginalization. Narratives from participants highlighted peer influence, the search for financial gain, and the need for social belonging as recurring motivations for engaging in delinquent behaviour. These insights are consistent with studies by Merton (1938) and Cloward and Ohlin (1960), which emphasize how structural inequalities and limited legitimate opportunities can push youths toward alternative pathways, including deviance.

Overall, the study demonstrates that juvenile delinquency in Ado-Odo cannot be attributed to a single factor but rather emerges from the interaction of economic deprivation, unemployment, and weakened social control structures. By confirming and extending existing scholarship, the findings reinforce the relevance of strain theory, social

disorganization theory, and social bond theory in explaining youth delinquency within semi-rural Nigerian contexts.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study found that juvenile delinquency in Ado-Odo is driven by the combined effects of poverty, unemployment, and weak social control. Youths experiencing economic deprivation and limited access to education or employment are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviours, while inadequate parental supervision, school engagement, and community oversight exacerbate the problem. The findings confirm that delinquency results from interacting socio-economic and institutional factors, supporting strain theory, social disorganization theory, and social bond theory. Effective interventions must therefore address both the structural causes of vulnerability and the strengthening of social and institutional controls. Overall, reducing juvenile delinquency in Ado-Odo requires coordinated efforts that address both the structural causes of youth vulnerability and the social institutions responsible for guiding youth development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

First, government and local authorities should implement targeted poverty alleviation programs in vulnerable communities within Ado-Odo. Social welfare interventions such as educational support, school feeding programs, and youth development initiatives can help reduce the economic pressures that push youths toward delinquent behaviour.

Second, youth employment opportunities should be expanded through vocational training and skill acquisition programs. Establishing community-based training centres and promoting entrepreneurship among young people will provide alternative and legitimate pathways for income generation, thereby reducing the attractiveness of delinquent activities.

Third, strengthening family and community social control mechanisms is essential. Parents and guardians should be encouraged to maintain closer supervision of adolescents, while community organizations and youth groups should actively promote positive behavioural norms and mentorship programs for young people.

Fourth, schools should play a stronger role in preventing juvenile delinquency by improving student engagement and providing counselling services for at-risk youths. Educational institutions can also collaborate with community leaders to identify and support students facing socio-economic challenges.

Finally, law enforcement agencies and community policing structures should enhance monitoring and intervention strategies aimed at preventing youth involvement in delinquent activities. Collaborative partnerships between community leaders, schools, and security agencies can create a more supportive and controlled environment that discourages deviant behaviour among youths.

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