

## **Residents' Perception of Youth Gangsterism and Socioeconomic Life in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria.**

**Etuk, Grace Reuben<sup>1</sup>, Ihejiamazu, Grace Chinonye<sup>2</sup> & Obaji, Nyambi Obaji<sup>3</sup>**

### **Abstract**

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Nigeria has a large youthful population. However, a large proportion of these youths have remained jobless owing to the high unemployment rate in the country. Unfortunately, for many of these unemployed youths, frustration has become unavoidable. As a result, a number of them cannot help but express their frustrations through antisocial means like participating in gang activities and lifestyles. In Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria, gangs and gang activities are among major social vices residents have to put up with on a day-to-day basis. This study investigates this gang situation in Calabar South, seeking to find out residents' perception of the effects of these gangs and their activities on socioeconomic life in the area. Guided by the survey type of research design, a total of 356 respondents were selected for the study using accidental sampling. Data were obtained from subjects via the use of a four-point Likert-scale questionnaire. Based on the responses supplied by subjects, three hypotheses were tested using the Chi-square, to determine the effect of gangs and their activities on three aspects of socioeconomic life in Calabar South. Results revealed that gangsterism is a significant factor to three aspects of socioeconomic life in the area namely: school dropout, loss of lives and property and the level of preference of the area for residential and business purposes. However, of the three aspects of socioeconomic life examined, it emerged that gang influence on the extent of preference of Calabar South for residential and business purposes came out the strongest, having the highest Chi-square Test value. The study recommends among other things the need for government to intensify its fight against gangs, cultism and similar vices, as well as step up its job creation efforts, so as to get jobless youths off the streets and gainfully employed

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**Keywords:** Youth, Gangs, Gangsterism, Socioeconomic Life, Area Boys

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<sup>1</sup>Department of Sociology, University of Calabar, P.M.B. 1115 Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Sociology, University of Calabar, P.M.B. 1115 Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.

<sup>3</sup>Department of Sociology, University of Calabar, P.M.B. 1115 Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.

## Introduction

A national baseline youth survey in 2012, by Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics shows that 64.1 million out of about 167 million Nigerians are youths aged between 15 and 35. This is an indication that the Nigerian population is largely youthful.

The need to equip this population group with skills, education, and opportunities for self-reliance and social relevance has attracted the attention of successive governments in Nigeria, but only little has been done so far. Amidst efforts to better their opportunities, these youths are faced with lack of social infrastructure, poor leadership, trafficking, as well as early/forceful marriage and teen pregnancy in the case of girls. Above all, there is the general scourge of unemployment, poverty and corruption. Unfortunately, these unpleasant social situations according to Merton (1957), as Giddens (2006) acknowledged, put some measure of strain on individuals in society, making some to disregard both society and a number of its values. Thus, based on Merton's analysis, youths who take to gangsterism and similar vices are merely resorting to rebellion; a rejection of both existing social values and means of realizing them. For such youths, gang lifestyles and activities become replacements for the societal values they have rejected.

Rebellion by youths in the way of gangsterism is not entirely a strange phenomenon in Nigeria. Known generally as 'Area Boys', these youths, in localities where they exist, indulge in organized delinquent lifestyles. Precisely, they extort money from passersby, act as informal security, perform odd jobs in return for compensation and even sell illegal drugs (Momoh, 2000). According to a report by UNDP (2001), the coercive and persuasive requests, petty crimes and sometimes violent offences by the so-called area boys to acquire resources, generally cash, in the urban main business and crowded areas have disturbed the civil society and defied civil authority.

Like a number of other cities in Nigeria, Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State, has its own share of these youth gangs or area boys as they are commonly described. Their presence and activities have become so registered that for many residents of Calabar Metropolis, the term 'area boys' has become synonymous with Calabar South and vice versa.

They constitute a major social nuisance in the area, just as they do in other parts of Nigeria where they are found. The basis for this study therefore, is need to investigate the dimensions and effects of these gangs and their activities in Calabar South, with a view to proffering ways of tackling the menace they pose to socioeconomic life in the area.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria, the phenomenon of youth gangsterism is a very familiar one. It is common in this area to hear expressions like 'Idang boys', Agaba boys', Nsidung boys', bayside boys', and a host of others. These are not mere fraternities but organized gang groups. Their activities which can be very organized sometimes, and at other times random and sporadic, range from minor offences like pick pocketing and snatching of bags, to more serious crimes like rape, murder and robbery.

A major characteristic feature of gangsterism in Calabar South is frequent clashes between rival gangs. Periods of such clashes usually become opportunity for gang members to break into surrounding homes and shops to loot and steal. In addition, non-gang members often become victims of assaults and attacks by clashing gang members. These situations have over the period made Calabar South somewhat restive, with residents living in constant fear and uncertainty.

The gang situation in Calabar South is disturbing, and many urban areas in Nigeria share this same youth gang problem. Many cities across the nation are littered with these unemployed youths, who as Ogunbiyi (1978) in Abanyam (2012) noted do nothing but indulge in different social vices. The emergence and growth of gangs in Nigeria generally, and Calabar South in particular is traceable to diverse social factors. First, there is the general problem of unemployment and youth unemployment in particular across the nation. Citing the then honorable Minister of finance, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the Sun Newspaper on April 9 2014 reported that no fewer than 5.3 million Nigerian youths are unemployed. Faced with little or no alternative, a number of these youths according to Inyang (2004) graduate into serious delinquents as area boys(street boys) whose activities include intimidation of motorists, snatching of bags, pick pocketing and sometimes even more serious criminal activities like robbery.

Secondly, as Abanyam (2012) further observed, there is an absence of a comprehensive youth policy in the nation. The available ones are not only sketchy but also suffer from ineffectiveness and poor implementation. In effect, there is no strong system in place in Nigeria to accommodate these youths and channel their energies appropriately. The National Youth Service Scheme unfortunately is open only to University and Polytechnic Graduates. For those who are unable to attain these levels of education, there is hardly any structure in place to carry them along. Even for the ones who are Graduates, there are not enough vibrant industries to absorb them after the one year National service, and job creation on the part of government has been at a snail pace. The result has been that many of them become open to different vices, including gangsterism.

Furthermore, joining gangs meet the social and psychological needs of troubled youths (Spergel, 1995). Many youths yearn for acceptance and belongingness, but in place of these, they are faced with cruelty and social injustice. For some, when these conditions become unbearable, they feel compelled to give in to acts of violence towards others through avenues like gang membership.

In addition, traditional structures that kept people together are fast eroding as Aderinto (1994) in Oruwari (2006) noted. Amidst weakening traditional ties, a number of youths turn to their peers, some of whom may lure them into gangs and gang lifestyles. Thus, Spergel, (1995) stressed that gangs recruit youths without a background of adequate family caring, and become a basic support system for them; noting that it is a spontaneous street social unit that fills the void left by families under stress. Moreover, as Maphalala and Mabunda, (2014) citing Hirschi, (1969) noted, decrease in social capital i.e. the weakening of an individual's bond with society, increases the likelihood for involvement in delinquent lifestyles like gang membership.

Modern media and entertainment have not helped matters with the issue of gangsterism. A number of them portray a lot of violence, brutality, torture and even gang cultures as normal part of daily life. In fact, many television stars are portrayed as being involved in these lifestyles. As such, youths do not need to learn gangsterism by personal experiences before they can become gangsters. These are freely made available daily through television movies and the internet.

The foregoing and numerous other factors have interacted to promote gangsterism in Nigeria generally and Calabar South in particular. Being antisocial, gangsterism is not without consequences, for both the individuals involved and the society at large. This study is thus an attempt to find out the socioeconomic dimension of these consequences in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

## **Methodology**

This study adopted the survey type of research design. Samples amounting to 356 were selected using accidental sampling. Respondents consisted of residents of three randomly selected localities in Calabar South namely: Anantigha, Nsidung and Bayside. To obtain data, the study utilized a four-point Likert scale questionnaire, with 21 items covering both respondents' demographic data and their perception of gangsterism and its effect on socioeconomic life the study area. Data obtained were analyzed using various descriptive statistics, while the study hypotheses were tested using the Chi-square.

## **Results**

A scrutiny of respondents' demographic variables in Table 1 reveals some notable trends. First, the largest proportion of respondents, (61.5%) is aged between 20 and 24, implying that Calabar South has a large youthful population. This explains to an extent the prevailing gang situation in the study area, being that gangsterism is predominantly a youth-directed social vice.

Secondly, in terms of religion, the largest percentage (62.1%) indicated being of the African traditional religion. Considering how widespread Christianity is in Southern Nigeria in general, and the fact that Calabar South in particular hosted some of the earliest Christian Missionaries, it comes as a surprise to find that such a large proportion of respondents are still adherents of the African Traditional Religion. This trend however provides some degree of explanation to the gang situation in the study area. The Christian religion condemns gangsterism in very strong terms. As such, its adherents would not want to be seen indulging in such a vice. This is unlike the African Traditional Religion, which even provides 'protection' by way of talisman and charms to aid gang members in their gang activities.

In a study on contact crime in Calabar by Ikoh, (2007), traditional medicine, which is part and parcel of the African traditional religion, was found to be a crucial in the preparation of charms which many criminals patronize very strongly. Subjects in Ikoh's study believe that these charms help weaken crime victims, make the criminals disappear, as well as protect them from being hurt by machetes or guns. Therefore, with many respondents in this study being of the African Traditional Religion, it is an indication that an inegligible proportion of in Calabar South residents, including youths are of this same religion, and have the likelihood to patronize traditional medicine to aid them in gangs related activities.

The last demographic variable worthy of note is occupation. 41.9% of respondents indicated being students, while 24.2% were unemployed. These two groups put together make up 66.1% of the entire population of respondents. It is important to observe that students and unemployed youths are easy targets for gang recruitments because as Short (1996) pointed out, many youths join gangs as a way of ending joblessness. In the case of students, their gang activities start with cultism which canbe regarded more or less as school gangs, which also thrive very much in Nigerian schools and campuses. In fact, in Nigerian universities, cultism, even as Robert (2003) reported is an open act; and according to Spergel (1985), it is difficult to separate school-based gang problems from community gang problems. Therefore, if a large proportion of Calabar South residents are either students or unemployed, the likelihood will be for gang related activities to thrive in the area, due to easy participation and widespread involvement by these population groups.

**Table I: Demographic Variables of Respondents**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	212	59.6
Female	144	40.4
<b>Age</b>		
15-19	48	13.5
20-24	219	61.5
25-29	25	7.0
30-34	26	7.3
35-39	28	7.9
40 and above	10	2.8
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	84	23.6
Married	190	53/.4
Divorced	82	23.0
Widowed	0	0
<b>Religion</b>		
Christianity	130	36.5
Islam	5	1.4
African tradition Religion	221	62.1
<b>Occupation</b>		
Student	149	41.9
Civil servant	33	9.3
Self employed	88	24.7
Unemployed	86	24.2
<b>Locality of Residence</b>		
Nsidung	118	33.1
Bayside	119	33.4
Anantigha	119	33.4

(Source: Researchers' Fieldwork, 2014)

### **Test of Hypotheses**

To determine residents' perception of the extent gangsterism affects socioeconomic life in Calabar South, three hypotheses were formulated for testing.

**Hypothesis one Hi: Gangsterism is a significant determinant factor of school dropout in Calabar South Local Government Area.**

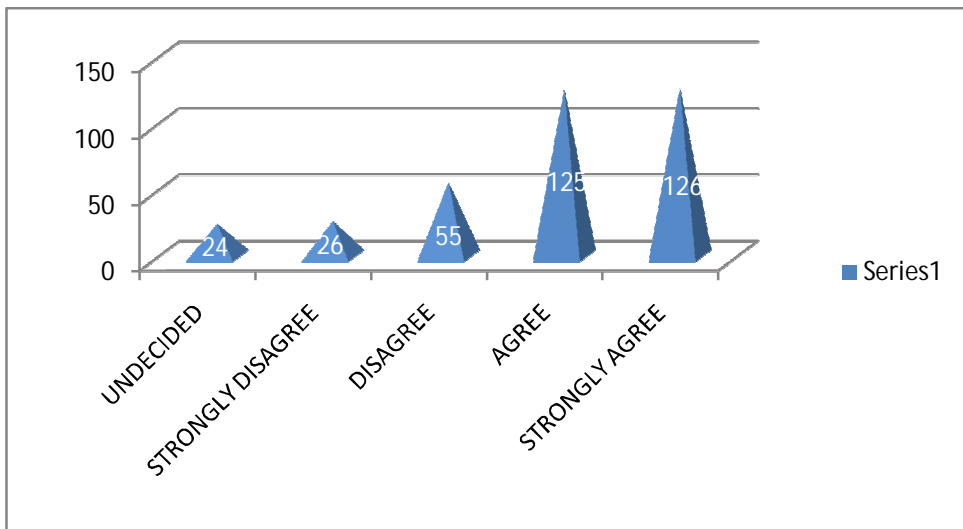
**Table 2: Respondents' Perception on School Dropout and Gangsterism**

RESPONSES		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	UNDECIDED	24	6.7	6.7
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	26	7.3	7.3
	DISAGREE	55	15.4	15.4
	AGREE	125	35.1	35.1
	STRONGLY AGREE	126	35.4	35.4
	Total	356	100.0	100.0

(Source: Researchers' Fieldwork, 2014)

Table 2 shows an overwhelming perception of gangsterism as a cause of the school dropout rate which is high in Calabar South. This is reflected in the proportion of respondents (35.4% and 35.1%) who strongly agreed and agreed respectively with this view. The stacked pyramid in Figure 1 provides further clarification in this regard.

**Figure 1: Stacked Pyramid Chart on School Dropout and Gangsterism**



(Source: Researchers' Fieldwork, 2014)



To determine the strength of this finding, hypothesis one was subjected to a Chi-square analysis as displayed in Tables 3 and 4.

**Table 3: Observed and Expected Chi-Square Values on School Dropout and Gangsterism**

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
UNDECIDED	24	71.2	-47.2
STRONGLY DISAGREE	26	71.2	-45.2
DISAGREE	55	71.2	-16.2
AGREE	125	71.2	53.8
STRONGLY AGREE	126	71.2	54.8
Total	356		

(Source: Researchers' Fieldwork, 2014)

**Table 4 Test Statistics**

	School Dropout and Gangsterism
Chi-Square	146.500a
Df	4
Sig.	.05

(Source: Researchers' Fieldwork, 2014)

The Chi-square test results as shown in Tables 3 and 4 indicate that the calculated  $\chi^2$  value of 146.5 is far greater than the Table value of 9.49 at 0.05 level of significance. This leaves the conclusion that gangsterism is a significant determinant factor of school dropout among youth in Calabar South.

## Hypothesis two

**Hi: Gangsterism significantly influences the loss of lives and property in Calabar South.**

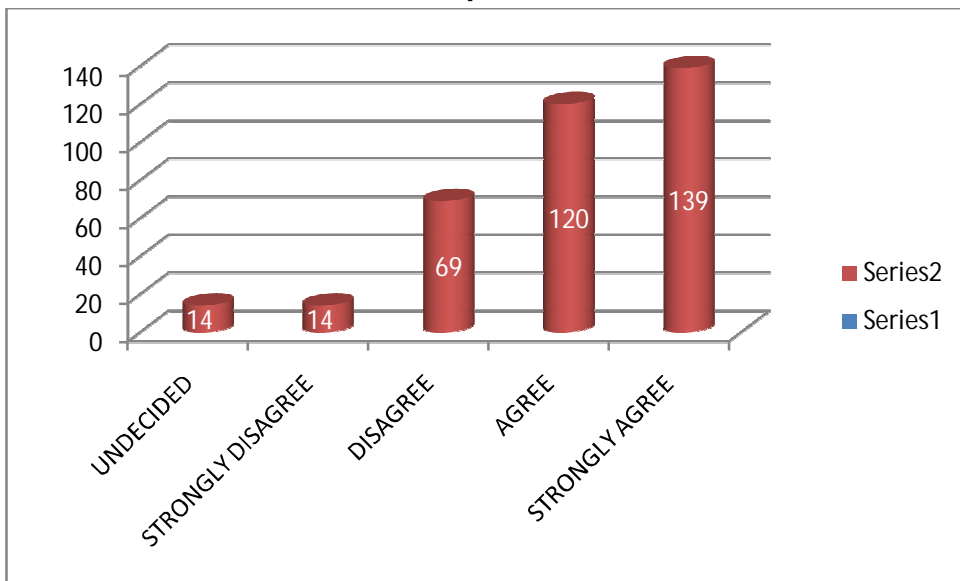
On gangsterism as a cause of loss of lives and property in Calabar South, respondent's perception also came out strong with 39% and 33.7% strongly agreeing and agreeing respectively. Table 5 and Figure 2 provide further clarification on this.

**Table 5: Respondents' Perception on Gangsterism and Loss of Lives and Properties**

RESPONSES		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	UNDECIDED	14	3.9	3.9
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	14	3.9	3.9
	DISAGREE	69	19.4	19.4
	AGREE	120	33.7	
	STRONGLY AGREE	139	39.0	39.0
	Total	356	100.0	100.0

(Source: Researchers' Fieldwork, 2014)

**Figure 2: Stacked Cylinder Chart on Gangsterism and Loss of Lives and Properties**



(Source: Researchers' Fieldwork, 2014)

To find out the strength of the perception that gangsterism influences the loss of lives and property in Calabar South, hypothesis two was also subjected to a Chi-square analysis. The results as displayed in Tables 6 and 7 reveal a  $\chi^2$  value of 189.98 which is turns out to be far higher than the Table value of 9.49, at 0.05 level of significance. This result upholds the second hypothesis, implying that gangsterism contributes significantly to loss of lives and property in the study area.

**Table 6: Observed and Expected Chi-Square Values onGangsterism and Loss of Lives and Properties**

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
UNDECIDED	14	71.2	-57.2
STRONGLY DISAGREE	14	71.2	-57.2
DISAGREE	69	71.2	-2.2
AGREE	120	71.2	48.8
STRONGLY AGREE	139	71.2	67.8
Total	356		

(Source: Researchers’ Fieldwork, 2014)

**Table 7: Test Statistics**

	Gangsterism and Loss of Lives and Properties
Chi-Square	189.983a
d.f	4
Sig.	.05

(Source: Researchers’ Fieldwork, 2014)

**Hypothesis Three**

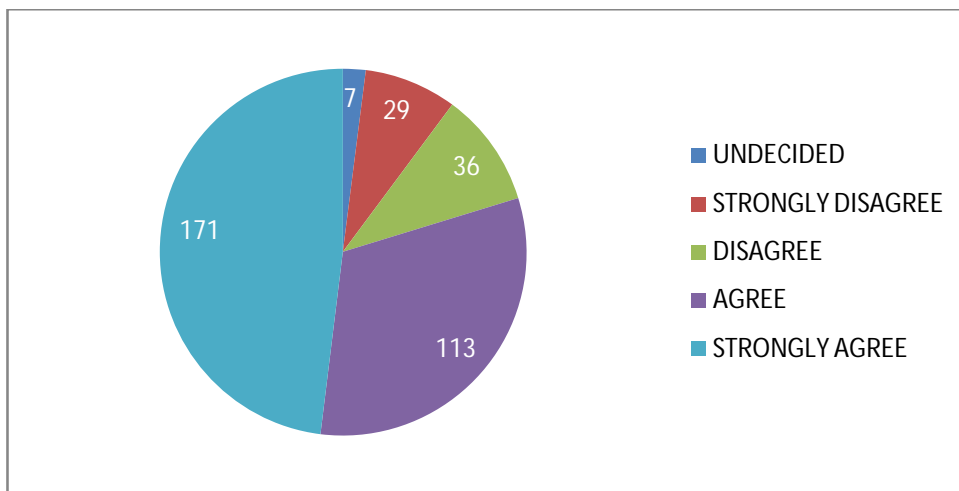
**Hi: Gang activities significantly influence peoples’ choice of Calabar South as a preferred residential and business location.**

**Table 8: Gangsterism and People's Choice of Residence and Business Location**

RESPONSES		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	UNDECIDED	7	2.0	2.0
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	29	8.1	8.1
	DISAGREE	36	10.1	10.1
	AGREE	113	31.7	31.7
	STRONGLY AGREE	171	48.0	48.0
Total		356	100.0	100.0

(Source: Researchers' Fieldwork, 2014)

**Figure 3: Pie Chart on Gangsterism and People's Choice of Residence and Business Location**



(Source: Researchers' Fieldwork, 2014)

The third issue investigated in this study is the relationship between gangsterism and people's choice of Calabar South as a preferred location for residence and business.

Results as shown in Table 8 and Figure 3 reveal a huge gap between those who accept that gangsterism negatively affects people's choice of Calabar South as a preferred location for residence and business and those who do not accept. Specifically 48% strongly agreed with this, view while 31.7% agreed. Only a minute proportion of respondents; 8.1% and 10.1% strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. Further analysis using the Chi-square test as shown in Tables 9 and 10 reveals a  $\chi^2$  value of 264.73 which overwhelmingly exceeds the Table value of 9.49 at 0.05 level of significance. This leads to the conclusion that gangsterism significantly influences peoples' choice of Calabar South as a preferred location for business and residence.

**Table 9: Observed and Expected Frequencies on Gangsterism and People's Choice of Residence and Business Location**

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
UNDECIDED	7	71.2	-64.2
STRONGLY DISAGREE	29	71.2	-42.2
DISAGREE	36	71.2	-35.2
AGREE	113	71.2	41.8
SRONGLY AGREE	171	71.2	99.8
Total	356		

(Source: Researchers' Fieldwork, 2014)

**Table 10: Test Statistics**

Gangsterism and People's Choice of Residence and Business Location	
Chi-Square	264.730a
Df	4
Sig.	.05

(Source: Researchers' Fieldwork, 2014)

## Discussion

Based on the data analyzed in this study, it has been established that gangsterism is a significant contributory factor to:

- School dropout rate in Calabar South;
- Loss of lives and property which is occasionally experienced in Calabar South and
- The extent of preference of Calabar South for business and residential purposes.

Results however revealed significant variations in the degree to which gangsterism contributes to these social conditions. The Chi-square test results for the third hypothesis had the highest value of 264.73. This implies that a major area of socioeconomic life that gangsterism affects strongly is the preferability of Calabar South for residence and business. Frequent gang activities, coupled with random harassment and assault of people by gang members create fear and panic among people living in the area. As such, many are skeptical about moving into live or do business in the area. In fact, housing in Calabar South is much less competitive in price compared to Calabar Municipality. An average apartment in Calabar South can even be twice lower in cost compared to what it will cost in Calabar Municipality. This simply reflects the extent of preference placed on both areas by people for accommodation; and for Calabar South, the fear of gangs and gang activities is a major factor to the trend observed in people's housing preferences with regards to the area.

In the case of businesses, Calabar South has far less business presence than Calabar Municipality. For instance, most shopping centres, banks, and major eateries are concentrated in Calabar Municipality. The few found in Calabar South are located in the parts that have proximity with Calabar Municipality and not in the very heart of Calabar South like the localities where samples for this study were drawn. The major reason for this trend is still the fear for the safety and security of these businesses. Usually, during gang clashes, these businesses become easy targets for stealing and looting by clashing gang members.

Besides, some business outfits, especially the ones that operate into the night, are often targeted for robbery by gang members. These situations have very strong negative implications for cash flow and employment, as well as standard of living and general well being of people in the area.

Gangsterism as a factor to the occasional loss of lives and property in Calabar South ranked next in the analysis in this study, with a Chi-square test result of 189.98. Where a social vice like gangsterism prevails, loss of lives and property is expected. As such, this result does not come as a surprise. Apart from rival gang members clashing and killing each other, innocent citizens can also be caught up in these killings. Again, in the cause of their clashes, properties in the neighborhoods where these clashes occur at any given time also suffer destruction. This factor of gang activities causing loss of lives and property functions to make Calabar South to be regarded as unsafe, hence the low preference of the area for residential and business purposes.

This study also established a strong influence by gangsterism on school dropout, although the Chi-square test result on this ranked lowest. This implies that gangsterism is more a factor to the low preference on Calabar South for residence and business, as well as the occasional loss of lives and property than it is to school dropout in the area. However, a high Chi-square test result shows that gangsterism has an association with school dropout in Calabar South that should not be swept under the carpet. Students do sometimes face intimidation in the hands of gang members to join them. Others may face bullying by gang members. Pressures from these directions can force an individual to quit school. Thus, a study in 1984 showed that gang intimidation is a major reason for the dropout rate of more than 40% in Chicago public schools (Gratteau, 1985).

In the case of girls, some of them come under pressure to be date gang members who threaten them with gang rape if they turndown their advances. In fact, some girls have been out rightly gang raped by gang members. These and related gang violence and threats force a number of these girls to temporarily or permanently quit schooling. Above all, some notorious gang members cease schooling because of expulsion by their school authorities.

Notwithstanding, it must be acknowledged that other factors like teenage pregnancy and poverty both of which are observable in Calabar South also contribute to school dropout in the area. However, the role of gangs and gangs activities in this regard cannot be ignored, hence the significance observed in the result of the Chi-square analysis.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions for Change**

Nigeria recently concluded one of the most fiercely contested elections in its democratic history. During campaigns that preceded the elections, the party presently in power presented Nigerians with an agenda of 'change', which was supported overwhelmingly, as the election results showed.

For Calabar South, the restiveness owing to gang activities, that has come to characterize the area, which makes life very edgy for resident needs to be addressed. This is a major way forward if the area must have a taste of the change experience Nigerians are eagerly expecting. Moreover, Cross River State has become a hub for tourists, whose activities now constitute a major revenue source for the State Government. As such, every part of the State, including Calabar South, which is part of the Metropolis where the seat of government is, must be peaceful, conducive, and safe for tourists. One sure way of achieving this is by bringing the activities of gangs to a halt or under control at least.

To checkmate gang activities in Calabar South, the Government on whose shoulders the responsibility for the much expected change rests needs to make decisive and concerted efforts. First, the fight against cultism, which facilitates the existence and proliferation of gangs in Calabar South, must be intensified. A major challenge has been that a number of cults, some of which are mother bodies to gangs in Calabar South, secretly receive support from political office holders and government officials who patronize them for political thuggery. Government must insist on having these politicians and government officials denounce these cults and renounce their secret membership and support. In fact, association with these groups should be criminalized. This will deter these individuals from funding cults. This will in turn stifle their activities, most of which promote gang formation and membership.



Secondly and most importantly, government must take pragmatic actions towards getting youths off the streets. The only way to realistically achieve this is by job creation. Youth unemployment is currently at an alarming level. Young people have lots of energies which if not appropriately harnessed can be expended in anti-social activities. Many youths in Calabar South are involved in gangs because there are no jobs to occupy them. However, if the government makes available jobs and youth-oriented programmes, these youths will become gainfully occupied, having no time to spare for vices like gangsterism and cultism.

Lastly, there is need for a comprehensive youth policy with a framework designed to empower youths, particularly the unemployed ones. Such a policy must create opportunities for vocational training and capacity building for these youths, as well as make provision for take-off funding. With these and other youth-friendly conditions in place, Nigerian youths, including those in Calabar South will be presented with options that guarantee them a better future than whatever gratifications involvement in gangs and gang activities can offer.

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