

Income inequality and social exclusion in Cross River State: Implications for individual involvement in crime

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Abstract

This study assessed income inequality and social exclusion in Cross River State, implications for individual involvement in crime. From a total population of 632,125 adults who are either 18 years or above, a sample of 1130 was selected for the study. Two instruments were used for data collection including a questionnaire and the in-depth interview (IDI) methods. The hypotheses of the study were tested at .05 level of significance using the One-Way analysis of variance. From analysis, it was found that: level of income inequality and rate of social exclusion were not significantly related with individual involvement in crime in Cross River State. On the basis of the findings of this study, the study concluded that, while income inequality and social exclusion were unusually high in Cross River State, they do not induce individual involvement in crime. On the basis of that conclusion, the study recommended that the State Government should establish a comprehensive Social Security Agency coordinated by men of proven integrity, where the pension funds of retired workers are received and managed incorruptibly, and the three tiers of government should contribute at least 5% of their yearly budgets into the agency's coffers for the welfare of the disabled, orphans, and the unemployed; There is a need to generate political commitment to social protection in Nigeria. A starting point would be to initiate some measure of social equity through income re-distribution, particularly from the political office holders for investment in social protection programmes.

Keywords: Income inequality; Social Security; Criminality; Cross River State; Social Exclusion

Introduction

Cross River State, once known for its serenity and peaceful nature, has suddenly become a hub for crime in Nigeria. Evidence of this can be found in the National Bureau of Statistics (2018), where, out of the 134,663 crime cases that were reported to the Nigerian Police in 2017, no fewer than 2,163 took place in Cross River State (NBS, 2018), which ranks the State 21st in crimes committed in the country. While crime cannot be completely ruled out in any society, a sudden surge in the rates of crime usually suggests that things may have gone wrong.

Cross River State which used to be a bubble of economic activities, particularly in Calabar Metropolis the capital, is now majorly deserted with many businesses moving base to neighbouring states. This situation is as a result of the increased rates of armed robbery, cult clashes and rampages on the streets of the State, kidnapping of university dons and other influential members of the society, political assassinations, the “*skolombo*” children and many other vices, which have ended up stifling the economic growth and development of the State. Nowadays, most economic activities in the area are brought to a close before 7pm for fear of being attacked, and those who are bold enough to stay open adopt very strong security measures. This has contributed to making Cross River State a public and civil service state, where once it was known for its burgeoning industries. Infact, the situation has even threatened the tourism sector which has come to be identified as the mainstay of the State's source of internally generated revenue (Ofem et al., 2024). Many have blamed this situation of crime in Cross River State on the large and yet expanding levels of income inequality and social exclusion (Ukwayi, Angioha & Nwagboso, 2018; Ukwayi & Okpa, 2017; Ukwayi et al., 2017; Inyang, Arikpo & Ndiyo, 2015).

Jorge (2011) defines income inequality as the unequal distribution of income among individuals in the society, while Oviasuyi and Omoregie (2014) view it simply as the gap that

exists between the rich and the poor. Income inequality is a problem that is not peculiar to Cross River State, but is in fact a part of the Nigerian society, and Africa at large. Using the Gini Index as the measure of income inequality, Africa has been identified as the second most unequal region in the world after Latin America by Klasen (2016), while Nigeria ranks as one of the world's most unequal countries, with inequality levels comparable only with those in Brazil, where the richest 5% have the same amount of income as the remaining 95% (Oxfam, 2019).

The relationship between income inequality and crime is of interest to various disciplines, including Social work, sociology, economics, psychology and epidemiology (Nnana et al., 2023). Although in all of these disciplines, there is an agreement that there exists a relationship between income inequality and crime, there is however no agreement on the explanation of why this relationship exists. One of those who have argued in support of the positive relationship between income inequality and crime is Fajnzylber, Lederman and Loayza (2002). They made the argument that; "crime rates and inequality are positively correlated within and between countries, with this correlation reflecting causation from inequality to crime rates, even after controlling for other crime determinants". However, the sociologists and economists who argue in favour of this position, still have some level of disagreement as to what may be the cause of such relationship (Stewart, 2013). On the one hand, the sociologists see it from the perspective of the "sociology of crime". They argue that there is a tendency for collective action for social control which is usually undermined in unequal societies (Stewart, 2013; Ofem, 2023). Also, the relative deprivation theory has been used to explain how income inequality relates with crime. For example, Rufrancos et al. (2013) made the argument that income inequality leads to an increase in the feelings of dispossession and unfairness. This makes poorer individuals take to crime in order to reduce the perceived economic injustice. They further argued that crime is as a result of status competition, the implication of which is that "people at the bottom of the income distribution are particularly sensitive to inequality and this leads to risk-seeking behavior (such as crime) when low-risk activities offer poor returns to the individual"

From the sociological perspective of relative deprivation, Stucky et al. (2015) argued that income inequality induces the feelings of "relative deprivation" for those who have fewer resources in the society. The result of this is the setting in of crime due to resentment or anger on the part of the "have nots" against the "haves". Also, in line with the routine activities theory, the author suggests that crime occurs when motivated offenders encounter suitable targets in the absence of capable guardians. Inequality as such could lead to crime by increasing the pressure for the poor to obtain goods and thereby increasing the number of motivated offenders (Nnana et al., 2023). It might also lead to increased crime by reducing guardianship because those with few resources might be less able to take appropriate security measures.

On the other hand are the economists who have argued that the relationship between income inequality and propensity for crime is due to the "economics of crime". In their view, more poor people are given greater incentives to rob the rich in unequal societies. Economic theory characterize criminality as an occupational choice arising from low risks of being caught. For example, Ehrlich (1973) has shown that the effects of deterrence have modified the 'price' of crime through imprisonment. In this view, "income inequality is an indicator of the incentives to crime, so that crime will be higher in communities with higher income inequality".

The second factor that this study will examine is social exclusion. Social exclusion, which is sometimes called social inequality, can be defined as the exclusion from the prevailing social

system and its rights and privileges, typically as a result of poverty or the fact of belonging to a minority group. In Cross River State, social exclusion occurs on the basis of identities, including gender, disability, ethnicity and religious identity. Social exclusion has an undeniable impact on the poverty status of a socially excluded individual or community. Those who belong to socially excluded groups face particular discrimination in gaining access to certain resources.

Social exclusion has been defined by Warwick-Booth (2013) as “a shorthand label for what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems, such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown”. Gerometta, Haussermann and Longo (2005) view it as “‘disaffiliation’ or non-integration into social and labour relations that is understood as the absence of interdependence, and, on the other hand, as the absence of participation in various dimensions of social life.” Social exclusion as a concept is a multidimensional and all-encompassing social variable that can predispose individuals to crime and criminality (Agboti & Nnam, 2015). Some of the factors that constitute social exclusion which have direct bearing on crime causality include limited or unequal employment and educational opportunities, lack of proper medical care, lack of empowerment resources, poor housing, and other forms of deprivation (Nnana et al., 2024).

There are many scholars who view social exclusion as a major cause of problems in the society. Among them is Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) who believed ill health, crime and violence are common denominators in societies that are riddled with social exclusion and inequality, particularly among the groups that are less economically well-off within the society. As such, they argued that, the more equal a society the better. In agreement, Agboti and Nnam (2015) observed that, social exclusion has been implicated as a leading cause of individual involvement in crime. They further aver that, when people are socially excluded, that is, deprived of certain goods and services which should be their basic rights, it may cause frustration and depression, which will invariably lead to acting out and aggression through every means available to them, including crime and violence. They referred to this phenomenon as “Anomy of Justice”, as coined by Anthony Giddens, “a situation whereby realistic aspirations are faced with inequitable opportunities and or a distinction between high aspirations and limited opportunities”. In line with this, Agboti and Nnam (2015) blamed the high rate of crime in Nigeria today on social exclusion experienced in the country. The aim of this study is therefore to ascertain the rates of income inequality and social exclusion in Cross River State, and find out what implication this can have on the level of criminality in the society.

Research methodology

This study adopted the mixed-methods research methodology that involved collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. The sample for the study was 1,200 persons drawn from the population of the eighteen local government areas of Cross River State using a multistage sampling method that comprises of the cluster sampling, accidental sampling and the purposive sampling techniques. The researchers divided the State into three clusters based on the three senatorial districts. Two clusters were randomly selected from these, which are the Southern and Northern Senatorial Districts of Cross River State. Accidental sampling was then used to select respondents upon whom the questionnaire was administered, while the purposive sampling technique was used to select participants for the in-depth interview (IDI). For this purpose, the researchers enlisted four lecturers at the rank of Senior Lecturer or above, of tertiary institutions across the Southern Senatorial District of the State, as well as two senior ranked Police officers of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), located in Ogoja and Ikom.

The instruments for data collection included a close-ended questionnaire and an In-depth Interview (IDI) guide. The questionnaire was divided into three sections – A, B and C. Section ‘A’ was designed to obtain the socio-demographic information of the respondents, including their sex, age, marital status, religion, and place of residence. Section ‘B’ collected data on the income inequality and social exclusion status of the respondents which are the independent variables of this study, and Section ‘C’ collected data to measure individual involvement in crime. The In-depth-Interview (IDI) guide, served as the instrument for the qualitative data collection. There were six IDI sessions, one for each of the six IDI participants selected for the study. The items were created to meet the specific objectives of the study. Printed guides for the IDI included a structured set of questions intended to elicit opinions on the major research questions. The guides consisted of major topical questions with suggested follow-up questions to address predictable responses. One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was adopted for testing the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results and discussion

Socio-demographic data of respondents

TABLE 1: Characteristics of respondents

Independent Variables	Level	Frequency	Percent
Sex	Male	786	69.6
	Female	344	30.4
Age	Below 40	328	29.0
	41 – 50	584	51.7
	51 and above	218	19.3
Marital status	Single	388	34.3
	Married	479	42.4
	Divorced	72	6.4
	Separated	88	7.8
	Widowed	103	9.1
Level of income inequality	High	458	40.5
	Moderate	390	34.5
	Low	282	25.0
Rate of social exclusion	High	498	44.1
	Moderate	321	28.4
	Low	311	27.5
Dependent Variable	Sum	Mean	SD
Individual involvement in crime	13388	22.26	9.09

The sex distribution of the respondents as contained in Table 1, shows that a huge majority, 786 (69.6%), of the respondents were male while the minority of 344 (30.4%) of the respondents were female. Also, only 218 (19.3%) of the respondents were aged above 50 years, with 328 (29.0%) below the age of 40, and 584 (51.7%) between the ages 41 and 50 years. The information on the marital status as derived from the Table 3, shows that majority of the respondents (n = 479, 42.4%) were married, while the next highest population was that of the singles (n = 388, 34.3%). Only 72 (6.4%), 88 (7.8%) and 103 (9.1%) of the respondents were divorced, separated and widowed respectively. The information on the income level of the respondents presented in Table 3 shows that as much as 431 (38.1%) of the respondents of this study earn below N480,000 per year which equates to less than N40,000 per month which is just above the benchmark of \$2.19/N901 per day or \$65.7/N27,033 per month set by the World Bank as the extreme poverty level. 385 (34.1 %) of the respondents claimed they earn in the range of N480,001 – N960,000

annually, while the remaining 314 (27.8%) of the respondents earn N960,000. This data reveals the high rate of poverty among the population, with only a small percentage (27.8%) of the population being well above the level of absolute or abject poverty set by the World Bank. This further shows that Nigeria is indeed a majority middle class population. Other information provided by the Table 3 are the level of income inequality (High = n - 458, 40.5%; moderate = n - 390, 34.5% and low = n-282, 25.0%), and rate of social exclusion (High = n – 498, 44.1%; moderate = n-321, 28.4% and Low = n-311, 27.5%).

Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis 1: Level of income inequality does not significantly influence individual involvement in crime in Cross River State.

In this hypothesis, the independent variable is level of income inequality while the dependent variable is individual involvement in crime. The independent variable was categorized into three levels – High, moderate and low. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to test the null hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2: One-way ANOVA result of the influence of income inequality on individual involvement in crime in Cross River State (n = 1130)

Income inequality	N	Mean	SD	SE	
High	458	25.32	8.78	1.01	
Moderate	390	26.19	9.12	0.47	
Low	282	24.29	8.99	0.85	
Total	1130	25.27	8.96	0.78	
Source	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	125.19	2	62.66	0.41	0.49
Within Groups	43572.26	1127	82.67		
Total	43697.45	1129			

The result presented in Table 2 showed that individual involvement in crime is higher among individuals with high level of income inequality, followed by those with moderate income inequality levels and then the low income inequality in that order respectively. However, the ANOVA section of Table 2 shows that there is no significant difference in individual involvement in crime among the three categories of individuals based on their income inequality, $F[2,527] = 0.41$, $p > 0.05$. This implies that the observed mean differences in individual involvement in crime among individuals of different income inequality levels is not significant and is only a product of chance. Consequently, the null hypothesis was upheld while the alternate hypothesis is rejected. By implication, there is no significant influence of income inequality on individual's involvement in crime in Cross River State, Nigeria.

The IDI session held to discuss this topic was really intriguing. The interviewee reasoned that:

“If we blame income inequality on the involvement in crime, I tell you more than ninety percent of the Nigerian population will have been involved in crime, particularly against the few remaining ten or so percent,

because the income inequality in Nigeria is so high that I doubt any other country is experiencing such height of inequality. So in my humble opinion I don't think income inequality is a major motivating factor for involvement in crime. If you really look at it, majority of the criminals or suspects caught in the act of crime will tell you that they did it to be able to feed themselves and their family, and you will also notice that such crimes are committed against other relatively poor victims like them. You will find that crime against the rich in this country is very scarce, and when it happens, such cases are quickly handled and the perpetrated caught and dealt with."

The implication here is that the interviewee fully agrees with the result of this analysis. Relative Deprivation and Aggression/Frustration Theories are used in hypothesis four.

Hypothesis 2: Rate of social exclusion has no significant influence on individual involvement in crime in Cross River State, Nigeria.

The independent variable of this hypothesis (rate of social exclusion) was operationalized into three nominal categories (high, medium and low) while the dependent variable was measured continuously, and the most appropriate statistical technique to test the hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance was the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The result that emanated from the analysis is presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3: One-way ANOVA result of the influence of social exclusion on individual involvement in crime in Cross River State (n = 1130)

Social exclusion	N	Mean	SD	SE	
High	498	29.93	8.12	0.84	
Moderate	321	38.16	8.97	0.42	
Low	311	23.18	8.69	0.53	
Total	1130	30.42	8.49	0.29	
Source	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	124.42	2	68.74	0.54	0.11
Within Groups	43631.31	1127	78.94		
Total	43755.73	1129			

Table 3 revealed that individual involvement in crime is higher among individuals with high level of social exclusion, followed by those with moderate level of social exclusion and then low level of social exclusion respectively. Also, the ANOVA section of Table 3 shows that there is no significant difference in individual involvement in crime among the three categories of individuals based on their social exclusion level, $F = 0.54$, $p > 0.05$. This implies that the observed mean differences in individual involvement in crime among individuals of different social exclusion levels is non-significant and is a product of chance. Consequently, the null hypothesis was retained while the alternate hypothesis which states that there is a significant influence of social exclusion on individual's involvement in crime in Cross River State, Nigeria, is rejected.

The IDI participant who addressed this issue of social exclusion and individual involvement in crime had the following to say:

“The answer to this question (on whether social exclusion makes an individual get involved in crime) is not very straightforward, but I will discuss it in two parts”.

“The first part is that, at an individual level, I strongly do not believe social exclusion can or has led an individual to commit crime. The Nigerian society as we know it today is one that is riddled with a high level of social exclusion. At an ethnic level, if you ask people of many ethnic groups today, even the Hausas, whether he/she feels socially excluded, I tell you that majority will say ‘Yes’. Has this caused them to wreak mayhem on their fellow citizens? No!” What is the actual problem, the actual reason individuals get involved in crime is want or self-aggrandizement”.

“However, at a collective level, if you look into the history of Nigeria up till this day, you will find many instances of people who have galvanized themselves into groups to protest what they consider to be marginalization, or as you call it social exclusion. Examples include the Niger Delta militant groups, the Bakassi boys, and now the skolombo boys here in Calabar. On the basis of this, it is not difficult to see how social exclusion leads to involvement in crime.”

“I therefore stand on my first statement that the relationship between social exclusion and involvement in crime is not a straightforward one”.

From this account therefore, it is clear that this interviewee agrees with the result of the analysis of the hypothesis which states that there is no significant influence of social exclusion on individual involvement in crime.

Discussion of results

Income inequality and individual involvement in crime

The result of this hypothesis reveals that individual involvement in crime is to a greater extent among the individuals with higher levels of income inequality than those with lower levels of income inequality by a mean difference of 13.05. However, the difference in the observed mean was found to be statistically not significant, but was caused by chance. Based on this evidence, the null hypothesis was retained while the alternative hypothesis was rejected. As a result, it was concluded that level of income inequality did not significantly influence individuals' involvement in crime. This interviewee who spoke on the issue of the influence of income inequality on individual involvement in crime aligned with the result of this analysis. She held the view that if indeed income inequality influenced individuals to enter into crime, then the magnitude of people in Nigeria that would have been involved in crime would have been extremely large because, in her view, the level of income inequality in Nigeria is extremely high. Durante (2012), who found from his own study no significant relationship between income inequality and crime on a state and county level within a nation, is certainly in alignment with this finding.

However, on the other hand, previous studies such as Lederman, Fajnzylber and Loayza (2000) and Fajnzylber, Lederman and Loayza (2002) have made contrary findings to the effect that income inequality has a positive effect on crime rates across different nations, while Kelly (2000) and Pickett and Wilkinson (2010) established a connection between inequality and violent crime. Also, in trying to explain why income inequality might be a cause of involvement in crime, Stucky et al. (2015) argued that income inequality induces the feelings of “relative deprivation”

for those who have fewer resources in the society. As a result, crime may set in due to resentment or anger on the part of the “have nots” against the “haves”. It would therefore imply that there is also an inconsistency in the finding on the influence of income inequality on individual involvement in crime.

Social exclusion and individual involvement in crime

The result of this hypothesis showed that, with a mean difference of 1.29, individual involvement in crime was greater among individuals with high rate of social exclusion than those with lower rates. However, at 1128 degrees of freedom, the p-value of 0.11 linked with the analysis was determined to be higher than the alpha level of 0.05. This means that there is no discernible difference in individual involvement in crime between individuals with high and low rates of social exclusion. As a result, the observed mean difference had to be attributed to chance. The null hypothesis was upheld due to the statistical support it received as a consequence of this finding. Therefore, it was concluded that the rate of social exclusion does not significantly influence individual's involvement in crime.

The result of analysis of this hypothesis was in alignment with the account of interviewee. The interviewee did not believe that social exclusion influenced individual involvement in crime. However, he made the argument that, at the collective level, there have been various instances where the feelings of exclusion have led certain groups to take up arms against the government of the day, and even against other members of the society. Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) disagrees with this finding. They believed that ill health, crime and violence are common denominators in societies that are riddled with social exclusion and inequality, particularly among the groups that are less economically well-off within the society. Also in disagreement is Agboti and Nnam (2015) who claimed that when people are socially excluded, that is, deprived of certain goods and services which should be their basic rights, it may cause frustration and depression, which will invariably lead to acting out and aggression through every means available to them, including crime and violence. Instances of this include the Niger Delta militancy and spate kidnapping in the South East of Nigeria.

Conclusion

This study has shown that there is indeed high levels of income inequality and social exclusion in Cross River State. However, they were not found to be significant enough to induce individuals to get involved in crime. This leads the researchers to the conclusion that the relationship between income inequality and social exclusion with individual involvement in crime is a complex one because there are very many mediating factors that can alter such influences. For instance, although social exclusion was not found to be a direct cause of involvement in crime by individuals, it has been found to lead groups to galvanise and tackle what they may perceive as marginalization, which could then lead to crime. There are many cases of this in Nigeria, and particularly in Cross River State, including the Bakassi boys, Skolombo, cultism, and a host of others. Same outcome has been reported for income inequality.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of this study.

1. It is quite clear that government employment opportunities are very unavailable, which is why the unemployment rate currently stands at about 32.5% as of 2021 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Therefore, there is need for Government to establish vocational learning centers across the federation, where youths can learn certain skills that will help

them earn enough income to meet their basic needs. The cost of enrolling in these vocational centers should be brought down to the minimum, or even provided free in order to encourage as many youths as possible to get enrolled. The significance of this is that it will keep many of these youths off the streets, and help them to earn a good income to cater for themselves and their families.

2. The Federal Government should establish a comprehensive Social Security Agency coordinated by men of proven integrity, where the pension funds of retired workers are received and managed incorruptibly, and the three tiers of government should contribute at least 5% of their yearly budgets into the agency's coffers for the welfare of the disabled, orphans, and the unemployed.
3. Agricultural incentives and machineries should be provided for registered farmers either in cash or kind, through Agricultural Extension Officers resident in the community, after a thorough investigation and snapshot of each farmer's farmland has been ascertained. This will help to improve the food security of the nation, while at the same time providing beneficial employment opportunities for youths of the nation, particularly in the rural areas of the country.
4. There is a need to generate political commitment to income inequality in Nigeria. A starting point would be to initiate some measure of social equity through income re-distribution by stopping the direct giving of constituency project allowances to houses of assemblies members but constitutes constituencies committees to handle the constituency project funds for constituency development.
5. Abject poverty can be eliminated if the federal, state and local governments promulgate policies that inform couples to only have the number of children they can comfortably take care of by themselves, not to say that having many children without adequate care for the children is a gift from God, Communities chiefs can be empowered to enforce these policies at the rural communities and assistant chiefs at sub-urban communities levels..

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