Unemployment, Social Exclusion and Emerging Social Vices in Nigeria

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Abstract

Unemployment in Nigeria is alarming, and the active workforce is lamenting. The over-saturation of the Nigerian labour market, the socio-economic and political policies seem to make employment a mirage, causing emotional and physical distress, and subjective feelings of social exclusion. This paper assesses the effects of unemployment and social exclusion on the emerging social vices in Nigeria. The paper uses secondary data from the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Annual Report on unemployment, and the various reported crimes and social vices attributed to unemployment and the survival strategies of the unemployed. The results show that unemployment has very damaging effects on the subjective perception of social integration, access to economic resources, mental health, life or psycho-social goal fulfilment and higher self-efficacy of the unemployed. It was discovered that social vices like fraud, drug trafficking, kidnapping, ritual killing, armed robbery, banditry, fuel-pipe vandalism, prostitution, and desperation for offshore migration among others are the survival strategies of many of the unemployed. The paper suggests social inclusive policies that will improve the socio-economic and political situation of the country, which will reduce unemployment and the emerging social vices, enhance talent re-orientation, and utilization of the youth for individual fulfilment and national productivity.

Keywords: unemployment, social exclusion, social vices.

Introduction

Unemployment is defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) as situations where persons ready to work within the next two weeks and seeking work during the last four weeks, including people who have lost their jobs and those who have voluntarily left work (World Bank, 2012, ILO, 2021). Unemployment is also described as the condition of people who are without jobs (Okafor, 2011). Unemployment is a global phenomenon with social, economic, political, and psychological attendant.

There are various strands of unemployment which include but are not necessarily limited to the following - structural, frictional, seasonal, cyclical, residual, voluntary, and disguised (Alao, 2005, Fajana, 2008, Adesina, 2013). Structural unemployment occurs as a result of structural changes of an industry or the economic activities of a country due to people’s change, occupational immobility and changes in technology with a resultant effect on products or services. This phenomenon will
result in skill mismatch, and occupational vacancies due to deficiency of human capital resources. Frictional unemployment is temporary as it happens when an individual exits his/her current job in search of another or due to industrial friction, where the individual is unskilled unaware of the available job. Seasonal unemployment emanates from seasonal variations that affect the activities of some industries, such as hospitality and tourism, fruit picking, and catering industries. Economic recession that causes decrease in demand for goods and services and eventual demands for labour, result in cyclical unemployment. The cyclical unemployment situation gives room for retrenchment due to reduction of output and many unskilled and surplus labour will become unemployed. Personal factors like old age, disability, poor and inadequate training, and poor work attitude result in residual unemployment. Some people voluntarily remain unemployed when they are bent on securing a particular job either for the status or for particular benefits accrued to such a job. Disguised unemployment also referred to as underemployment, is a situation when an individual is involved in a job that is not making full use of or not being paid enough for his/her skills and abilities.

Youth unemployment is one of the causes of the rising social disorder and social insecurity currently permeating the various regions of Nigeria. Oftentimes, unemployment is traceable to poor and untimely economic policy measures that have hitherto failed to achieve their purpose. The problem of youth unemployment is far more complex (Okafor, 2011) with negative multiplier effects on the individual and the society at large. Youth’s unemployment is a major problem that gives rise to other criminal tendencies among the youths and these threaten the social-economic peace and stability of the continent (Ajufo, 2013). This portends immense dangers for the country because the youths are the next generation of potentially productive economic and social actors (Adebayo, 2013).

The unemployment situation in Nigeria is of great concern. Members of the active workforce, especially the youths are victims of the over-saturation of the Nigerian labour market and the socio-economic and political policies that seem to make the issue of employment a mirage (Abdulmusawwir, 2017, Adebowale, 2019, Plecher, 2020). Loss of jobs due to the various economic and political policies is stressful, resulting in a subjective feeling of social exclusion among the unemployed. Unemployment can be classified into two. The first concerns the new entrants into the labour markets, who have never had any job after graduation and are seeking their first jobs. The others are those who have lost their jobs to voluntary termination of their employment or involuntary disengagement by their employers (Fajana, 2008).

Causes of unemployment include rapid population growth, inappropriate school curricula, the rapid expansion of educational system, corruption, decline in manufacturing sectors (Adebayo, 2013), poor policy, inadequate budgeting, nepotism, lack of long term vision, poor technological investment among others.
Objective

This paper assesses the phenomenon of unemployment in Nigeria with its antecedent social exclusion and the emerging social vices among the Nigerian youth. Specifically, the paper will:

a. assess the youth unemployment rate in Nigeria between 2016 to 2018
b. examine the nexus between youth unemployment and social exclusion in Nigeria.
c. discuss the consequences of youth unemployment in Nigeria

Theoretical Perspectives

Social exclusion can be conceptualised in a number of ways from the sociological perspective (Silver 1994). Sociologists recognize the relational nature of social exclusion as preventing interaction, as institutional barriers to access and membership, or as a condition of insufficient social integration, cohesion, or solidarity (Silver, 2019).

The perspective of social exclusion is seen in Durkheim’s theories on social cohesion and solidarity, as well as collective values and norms, and the risk of social alienation. Social exclusion is a potential consequence of many risk factors with a call on society to ensure equal opportunity for all (Jehoel-Gijsbers and Vrooman (2007). The work of Runciman (1966) and Townsend (1979) opined that social inequality and relative deprivations resulting in unequal access to income, citizenship rights as well as basic goods and services are the initial points for research into social exclusion. Actions and negligence of the afflicted persons, other individuals, institutions, and corporate actors are responsible for social exclusion. Social exclusion relates to processes or dynamics and the conditions of being socially excluded relating to both material and non-material characteristics (Jehoel-Gijsbers and Vrooman, 2007; Loktieva 2016).

Liberal theorists of social exclusion are used to the language of discrimination. The liberal theorists see society as a system of cross-cutting networks and voluntary associations where individuals make exchanges with their significant others out of personal interests and sympathy. Illegitimate impediments to restrictions on individual opportunity are considered exclusionary, protectionist, and discriminatory (Silver, 2019). Weber’s theory of social closure explains the situation where the excluders limit access to resources of various kinds, control access to spaces, activities, resources, and information, thereby reproducing inequality (Silver, 2019).

Unemployment Rate in Nigeria

The Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2018) recorded that the economically active or working-age population of Nigeria (15 – 64 years of age) increased from 111.1 million in Q3, 2017 to 115.5 million in Q3, 2018. Also, the number of persons in the labour force, that is, people who are able and willing to work increased from 75.94 million in Q3 2015 to 80.66 million in Q3 2016 to 85.1 million in Q3, 2017 to 90.5 million in Q3, 2018. The NBS further stated that the total number of people in part-time employment (or underemployment) decreased from 13.20 million in Q3 2015
to 11.19 million in Q3 2016 but increased to 18.02 million in Q3 2017 and 18.21 million in Q3 2018. The total number of people classified as unemployed, which means they did nothing at all or worked few hours (under 20 hours a week) to be classified as employed increased from 17.6 million in Q4 2017 to 20.9 million in Q3 2018. Of the 20.9 million persons classified as unemployed as of Q3 2018, 11.1 million did some form of work but for too few hours a week (under 20 hours) to be officially classified as employed while 9.7 million did absolutely nothing. NBS (2018) further stated that 8.77 million were reported to be unemployed and doing nothing because they were first-time job seekers and have never worked before. On the other hand, 9.9 million that were unemployed lost their jobs at some point in the past which is why they were unemployed. Of the 9.7 million that were unemployed and did nothing at all, 35.0% or 3.4 million have been unemployed and did nothing at all for less than a year, 17.2% or 1.6 million for a year, 15.7% or 1.5 million had been unemployed, and did nothing for 2 years, and the remaining 32.1% or 3.1 million unemployed persons had been unemployed doing nothing for 3 and above years. (NBS, 2018). As bogus as these figures are, there are very many unemployed individuals that are not captured in the statistics.

Figure 1: % Rate of Unemployment vis-à-vis Labour Market

Source: National Bureau of Statistics 2018
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Social exclusion is a complex and multi-dimensional process that involves the denial of resources, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural, or political arenas. It affects both “the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole” (Levitas et al. 2007, p. 9). Social exclusion is a situation where individuals are unable to participate fully in economic, social, political, and cultural life, are excluded from the process leading to and sustaining such a state (Poorest Areas Civil Society, 2016, United Nations, 2016).

In social exclusion, individuals are deprived of various rights, opportunities, and resources available to members of a different group, which are fundamental to social integration and human rights within that particular group. Social exclusion is also seen as an overall process of material deprivation, social disintegration, lack of control over decisions, and feelings of alienation and inferiority (United Nations, 2016). One could also be socially excluded in participation if the individual’s rights of being heard, of interaction with others, of dignity, of equal respect and protection are being denied.

Groups affected by social exclusion vary by context and over time. Exclusion may be condoned; institutionalized by government, religion, community, or other authorities; and/or unsanctioned among members of society. An individual may be socially excluded based on age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, or economic or another status for two reasons which could be based on the group of people with common membership and shared value and other people with shared characteristics rather than shared values and ways (Puja ?, United Nations, 2016). Issues of “indigenes” and “non-indigenes”, ethnicity, language, federal character, quota systems, zoning, religion, and others have robbed many people of citizenship rights, albeit, employment and such exclusions are causes of conflict and instability (Khan, Combaz and McAslan, 2019:34, Birchall, 2019a, 2019b).

Nigeria has witnessed social and economic dislocations, especially from the time of military rule to the present political dispensation. These economic dislocations and prevalent social exclusion in Nigeria are products of years of neglect of qualitative education expected to enhance high-level human capital, adequate health facilities for a healthy and productive populace, real and incorruptible democratic space that ought to involve all and sundry and bring about political change for rapid development. Also, there are complex developmental approaches, devoid of adequate participation, which eventually raise a lot of dissatisfaction with exclusion among the deprived (Aderinola, 2010, Adebowale, 2019, Prashad, 2020). Geo-Jaja, (2010) described such complex developmental approaches as the emphasis laid on political rights and the rule of markets, complex neo-liberalism and its attendant on poor human capital development. The social issues include the de-legitimisation of the idea of State institutions and the introduction of the economic policies of austerity and neo-liberalism. These result in the sheer collapse of social institutions under privatization, and private organisations operate to minimize costs and maximise profit. Our economic system has been tilted
in favour of the financial sector and its plutocracy, ignoring the growth of large-scale and permanent precarious employment, underemployment, and unemployment (Prashad, 2020).

Unemployment is one of the keys of social exclusion. In modern society, paid employment is the principal source of income and fount of an individual’s identity and feeling of self-worth. The workplace serves as the source of a social network, identity, and sense of belonging for most people. Many indicators of social exclusion like poverty, illness, homelessness among others are dependent on monetary income derived in most cases from work. The unemployed are deprived of normal social life. Unemployment limits social relations and results in the denial of providing equal and living opportunities. The unemployed is unable to participate actively in the basic political, economic and social functioning of society. His or her access to resources is restricted and can lead to deprivation, isolation, shame, and other social insults.

Factors accounting for social exclusion in Nigeria

There are many actions, activities, policies, and power asymmetries in Nigeria that contribute immensely to exclude many youths from getting adequate and desired employment. Bradley (1994) and Annu, (2015) identified geographical location, intimidation, physical violence, as barriers to entry, and corruption as processes that contribute to social exclusion. In addition, state of origin, age, gender, educational qualification, class of degree, quota system, political godfatherism, discrimination between First Degree and Higher National Diploma (HND) holders, political affiliation, religion, institutional policies, processes of recruitment and others are peculiar to Nigeria. These have astronomically increased the rate of unemployment in Nigeria. The unemployment rate was 4.01% in 1999 and it rose to 4.6% in 2003, but later reduced to 3.44% in 2008. In 2013, the unemployment rate rose from 3.7% to 10.4% in January and 13.3% in June, 2016. It rose from 14.2% in January to 18.2% in June 2017. Unemployment rate also rose from 20.4% in January to 23.1% in July 2018 (NBS, 2018b, NBS, 2018c; Plecher, 2020).

The consequences of unemployment are as follow:

a. Economic deprivation: An unemployed person will have no economic power to meet up with his/her day-to-day personal needs. This makes it difficult for such an individual to take financial decisions on many things that affect his/her life.

b. The Impoverishment of human life: Where an individual is deprived economically, he/she becomes impoverished and denied human and material needs. Such situation will make the individual vulnerable, desperate and despicable and eventually affects the quality of life of the unemployed.

c. The Development of a poorsense of well-being: The psychological effect of unemployment can better be imagined than experienced, especially if the person has health challenges and is unable to cope with the cost of health based on impoverishment as a result of economic deprivation. The poverty status of the unemployed will be escalated.
Cultural and social deprivation: Every individual has a role to play in society. The individual’s role is accomplishable based on his/her financial capacity and capability. Where one is unemployed, it is difficult to meet up such cultural and social roles.

Involuntary migration and immigration: The unemployed to get engaged or scout for an employment opportunity, moves from place to place. This is also risky in many ways. The desperation to migrate outside the country under despicable conditions is also one of the survival strategies of many of the unemployed. This is done through several illegal means that have endangered the lives of many of the migrants who became slaves, or were killed and humiliated in other countries of destination. The experience of the Nigerian migrants rescued from Libya is a point to note. The attendant negative effects of this type of migration go beyond general problems not only within the family of the migrants but to the nation at large (Zwysen, 2018, Baker, 2019, Wallis, 2019).

Stigmatization and marginalization: The unemployed experience some level of marginalization and stigmatization from friends, family, and the society at large.

Restriction on activities: Unemployment causes a lot of restrictions on the unemployed and his/her full participation in various activities will be affected. This could result in social isolation and a social gap between the unemployed and friends, family members, and other social groups.

Life parenting: The unemployment situation has turned many parents into life parenting as they are still responsible for the day-to-day provisions for their unemployed adult children.

Methodology

The study adopts a secondary or desk research method. It is based on secondary data which consists of the following - the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) 2017 to 2020, and Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) 2017 Annual Reports. In addition, previous data closely related to the study were also sourced, with credibility evaluation from commercial information – journals, magazines, and newspapers. The population of the study is the unemployed youth in the thirty-six states and the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria. The data were analysed in two parts; unemployment and crime rates and both were corroborated with existing literature.

Unemployment and Emerging Social Vices

Social vices are extremely bad immoral behaviours that constitute nuisances to society. Unemployment in Nigeria is a pathway for poverty, crime, and terrorism. Crime is a violation of the rules meant to be respected by all members of the society, with sanctions for the violators. Social vices erode the sense of safety and security as they undermine the social fabric. The unemployment situation in Nigeria has resulted in the involvement of youths and other categories of the unemployed in various
social vices. Unemployment and attendant discrimination have compelled many people into committing crimes to meet their basic human needs (Abdulmusawwir, 2017). The sum of $9bn was spent between 1999 and 2016 to curtail crime and terrorism in Nigeria (Abdulmusawwir, 2017). Investing such an amount in job creation will reduce unemployment.

Unemployment when compared to other variables, is the major cause of crime, and the relationship between unemployment and the various categories of crime is positive, that is an increase in unemployment will lead to an increase in crime. For example, 12% increase in the unemployment rate between 1980 and 1981, led to a 57% increase in the crime rate. Also, between the year 1990 and 1991, an 11% reduction in the unemployment led to a 16% reduction in crime rate, while 5% increase in the unemployment rate between 2006 and 2007 led to a 97% increase in the crime rate (Aderinola, 2010).

Hunger and poverty have made several unemployed youths to become spies for the insurgent groups, who use financial incentives to recruit members (Abdulmusawwir, 2017). Such incentives breed loyalty and encourage such youth to volunteer information on security activities for such insurgent groups. This is due to the fact that policy makers in Nigeria in most cases care less for people at the lower rungs of the economy unless when election approaches. United Nations (2016) identified discrimination between the children of the poor and that of the business tycoon as a source of vandalism in Nigeria. The poor go for vulnerable employment opportunities because unemployment affects the youths’ well-being, weaken their emotions and make them suffer from a lot of discriminations or involved in social vices. Many also resort to violence or any form of illegality to get what is due to them, since getting them through due process proves impossible.

Negative survival strategies have also emerged. Cyber-crimes have increased greatly and these come in different dimensions. Fake banking communications, fake internet, and links, unsolicited text messages are the various ways devised to defraud unconscious individuals or those that are avaricious. Fake advertisement or recruitment are also some of the social vices emerging in Nigeria. The example of the 2014 Nigerian Immigration Service recruitment scam where about 6.5 million people applied for 4,000 vacant positions with the pre-payment of N1,000 (one thousand Naira) refers. A point to note is that during the recruitment exercise, 16 job seekers died with many sustaining various degrees of injuries (Abdulmusawwir, 2017).

Kidnapping is another means by which some unemployed or deprived youths find solace. The situation has become problematic and endemic that the security agents are finding it difficult to deal with, probably due to the network of the culprits. The ransom being paid to the kidnappers by the relations of the victim(s) for fear of getting the victim(s) eliminated, is making this act fashionable among the youths. This phenomenon is a national issue and cuts across every socio-economic class. Apart from Anambra State that witnessed no kidnapping in 2017, every other State including
the Federal Capital Territory witnessed one form of kidnapping or another. In 2017, Abia State had 104 kidnapping cases, Ebonyi and Lagos State had 98 cases each, Rivers 82, Benue 67, Kaduna 64, and the FCT 49. Other States have between 1 and 45 kidnapping cases (NBS, 2017).

The urge to meet with the necessary financial needs and be inclusive in society could also be said to be the root of the acts of ritual killings that are also emerging in Nigeria. Employment gives the employees the financial power to carry out several social responsibilities. The unemployment situation and the idleness that is invoked, have motivated many of the unemployed to look for alternate means of getting rich. This situation has led several youths into ritual killings, the belief of using human parts to get quick money. The victims include commuters, virgins, men, and women, young and old (Shiinihost, 2015).

Armed robbery is also a problem that is traceable to some extent to unemployment. Several armed robbers have confessed that they were pushed into the act because of a lack of jobs. This phenomenon is prevalent in all the states of the Federation. Many of the states in 2017 have between 29- and 100-armed robbery records. Rivers had 564, FCT Abuja had 384, Ebonyi and Lagos had 370 cases respectively, Bayelsa 148, and Cross River had 112 (NBS, 2017). Armed banditry is also classified under this. Many people are visited in their homes and villages and get their properties stolen and their homes destroyed (Kilishi et al., 2014; Longe, 2016; Nwigbo, & Imoh-Ita, 2016).

Pipe-line vandalism is one of the major problems that is also traceable to unemployment. Many of the unemployed youths feel aggrieved that they are not beneficiaries of the wealth from crude oil because of their unemployment status. Many are involved in the pipeline vandalism and Nigeria is losing over 300,000 barrels per day which amount to billions of dollars (Umar and Othman, 2017).

Prostitution in Nigeria is also seen as one of the social vices emanating from the problem of unemployment. Though in many societies, it is being referred to as commercial sex work. Prostitution involves both males, and females in society. Many youths are found in hotels and nightclubs, especially in major cities, where this trade flourishes. It must be noted that informal prostitution also exists where the perpetrators do not advertise their trade but do it purposely to meet up with financial needs. Though there is no provision in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (As Amended) against prostitution, except the Penal Code Act of FTC 1999 and section 223 of the Criminal Code (Adebowale, 2019) that are being used to justify the illegality of the trade, prostitution is condemned in Nigerian society based on religious and cultural beliefs of the people.

**Concluding Remark**

Unemployment has very damaging effects on the subjective perception of social integration, access to economic resources, mental health, life or psycho-social goal fulfilment like social status, higher self-efficacy of the unemployed. Unemployment as social exclusion, with its antecedent social vices will continue to be a social issue that needs urgent attention. Crime and other social vices are threats
to the social fabric and stability of any given society. They symbolise the breakdown of social order and erode the sense of safety and security. To eliminate or reduce crime and other social vices in Nigeria, concerted efforts must be put in place by the government to solve the problems of unemployment. Social inclusive policies that will improve the socio-economic and political situation of the country, reduce exclusion and focus more on labour market and make individuals more employable should be put in place. These will reduce the unemployment situation and the emerging social vices to the barest minimum and enhance talent re-orientation and utilization of the youths for individual fulfilment and national productivity.

To reduce the rate of unemployment and social vices among the youths in Nigeria, the educational curriculum at all levels should be revised, properly funded, and include well-structured entrepreneurial activities. Agriculture, micro, small and medium enterprises should be encouraged through soft loans. The economic gap between the political office holders and the working class should be reduced. Citizenship and level-playing ground for all souls be encouraged. The government at all levels should invest in social amenities and improve on the existing ones. Other social activities like sports that can gainfully engage the youths should be improved upon. Abhorrence of corruption, payment of gratuity and pension for retirees, and consideration for the payment of unemployment allowance will redress some social anomalies. Poverty alleviation and the various youth empowerment programmes by the government at all levels should be taken beyond political applause and made impactful.

References


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