

Socio-Economic Impact Of Crime In Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria

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Abstract: This study examines the socio-economic impact of crime in Jalingo Local Government Area (LGA) of Taraba State, Nigeria, with a focus on the forms, consequences, and responses to criminal activities within the community. Anchored on Robert K. Merton's Strain Theory, the research investigates how structural inequalities, youth unemployment, and weakened institutions contribute to rising crime rates and how these, in turn, affect economic and social development. The study adopted a descriptive survey design using a mixed-methods approach. A total of 399 respondents were selected through stratified random sampling and data were collected via structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews with key informants such as traders, youth leaders, and local security actors. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency tables and percentages, while qualitative data were thematically interpreted. Findings reveal that the most common crimes in Jalingo include armed robbery, kidnapping, youth cultism, and theft, which significantly disrupt market operations, education, healthcare services, and public mobility. The study also discovered that crime erodes social cohesion, causes fear and displacement, and exacerbates poverty, particularly among vulnerable groups like women and the youth. While community vigilantes and police patrols have been introduced as control measures, the responses remain largely reactive, with minimal focus on prevention through youth empowerment, public education, or institutional reform. The study concludes that crime in Jalingo LGA is both a consequence and a cause of socio-economic instability. It recommends a multidimensional strategy that includes community policing, youth-oriented development programs, and stronger institutional collaboration to effectively mitigate the impact of crime and promote sustainable development.

Keywords: crime, socio-economic impact, youth unemployment, community policing

1. Introduction

Crime remains one of the most persistent threats to societal stability globally, economic development, and human security. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2021) reports that crime, including violent offenses and organized criminal activities, continues to challenge the security apparatus and economic resilience of both developed and developing countries. Nations such as the United States, Mexico, Brazil, and South Africa have experienced surges in violent crimes such as homicide, kidnapping, and armed robbery, which have resulted in substantial economic losses and weakened public trust in governance (World Bank, 2022). In developing nations, particularly across sub-Saharan Africa, crime has become increasingly organized and often intersects with socio-economic deprivation, political instability, and weak law enforcement institutions.

In Africa, countries like South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of Congo have reported alarming crime rates with serious socio-economic consequences. South Africa, for instance, grapples with high levels of violent crime, which has directly undermined business operations and investor confidence (Bhorat et al., 2017). In Nigeria, the situation is further exacerbated by widespread poverty, youth unemployment, and political corruption, which collectively fuel a range of criminal activities such as armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling, and communal violence (Adewumi & Adeola, 2020; Okpuvwie et al., 2021). According to the Global Peace Index (2022), Nigeria ranks among the least peaceful countries in Africa, with internal conflicts and crime contributing significantly to the deteriorating security landscape.

Taraba State, located in the northeastern region of Nigeria, has not been spared from the effects of rising crime. The state has witnessed frequent incidents of kidnapping, armed robbery, and communal clashes, often resulting in displacement and destruction of livelihoods (Shalangwa & Iwuamadi, 2021). These criminal activities have been linked to factors such as poverty, limited access to education, and weak institutional capacity to prevent and respond to crime (Musa, 2022). Within Taraba State, Jalingo Local Government Area (LGA) serves as both the administrative capital and a commercial hub. Despite its strategic significance, Jalingo LGA has increasingly become a hotspot for criminal activity, with reports of violent attacks, youth gang operations, and property crimes becoming common (Taraba State Humanitarian Situation Report, 2020).

The socio-economic impact of this criminality is profound. Market activities are disrupted, public gatherings are curtailed, and the fear of violence has caused both internal displacement and capital flight. Economic sectors such as trade, transport, and agriculture have been particularly hard hit, resulting in increased poverty and a decline in local productivity (Eze & Obiekwe, 2019). Moreover, the social fabric of communities is eroded, with rising mistrust, breakdown in communal relations, and reduced civic participation

(Okoye & Ojo, 2021). These dynamics underscore the need to examine the localized effects of crime, particularly how it affects daily socio-economic life in communities like Jalingo LGA.

Therefore, this study is designed to explore the socio-economic impact of crime in Jalingo Local Government Area of Taraba State, with a view to providing empirical insights that can inform policy, community action, and future research. The specific objectives in include;

- i. To examine the forms and prevalence of criminal activities in Jalingo Local Government Area.
- ii. To analyze the socio-economic effects of crime on businesses, public services, and community life in Jalingo.
- iii. To assess the responses of government and community stakeholders in mitigating the impact of crime in the study area.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Clarifications

2.1.1 Socio-Economic

The term socio-economic refers to the interconnection between social and economic factors that shape the conditions of individuals and communities. It encompasses the ways in which social experiences and economic realities influence each other and jointly affect human behavior, development outcomes, and community well-being (OECD, 2018). In essence, socio-economic activities include all the processes and functions that facilitate social interaction and economic productivity, such as trade, employment, education, healthcare, transportation, and cultural events. These activities serve as indicators of societal progress and development and are often measured by factors like income levels, employment rates, literacy levels, access to social services, and quality of life (UNDP, 2022).

Moreover, socio-economic impacts are not evenly distributed; marginalized groups such as women, youth, and the elderly often bear a disproportionate burden during times of insecurity. According to Aremu and Aramide (2018), crime-induced displacement and market closure tend to push women in informal trade out of business, increase household poverty, and expose children to educational discontinuity. Therefore, understanding the socio-economic dimensions of crime is critical for developing inclusive security policies and community interventions.

2.1.2 Crime

Crime is broadly defined as an act or omission that violates a law and is punishable by the state. It includes a wide array of activities that are deemed harmful to individuals, property, or the social order and range from petty theft and assault to organized crimes like kidnapping, armed robbery, and terrorism (UNODC, 2021). Crime is a social construct, meaning its definition and interpretation vary across cultures and legal systems. What constitutes a crime in one jurisdiction may be legal or tolerated in another. Nonetheless, most societies criminalize behaviors that threaten life, property, and public peace.

From a sociological standpoint, crime is not merely a legal breach but a manifestation of social dysfunction. Theories such as strain theory, social disorganization, and labeling theory explain crime as an outcome of systemic inequalities, failed socialization, or stigmatization (Merton, 1938; Agnew, 1992). For instance, Merton's strain theory posits that crime arises when individuals are unable to achieve societal goals through legitimate means. In regions like Jalingo, where unemployment and poverty are widespread, criminal activity may appear to be the only viable path to economic survival (Okpuvwie et al., 2021).

Crime has far-reaching consequences not only on physical safety but also on psychological well-being, economic stability, and social trust. Communities affected by high crime rates often experience out-migration, loss of investment, weakened social ties, and declining educational outcomes (Uche & Agbulu, 2020). In localities such as Jalingo, the fear of crime discourages economic participation and erodes social interactions, thereby deepening poverty and social fragmentation. These impacts highlight the urgent need for holistic crime prevention strategies that go beyond policing and address root causes such as inequality, youth unemployment, and institutional failure.

2.2 Forms and Prevalence of Criminal Activities in Jalingo Local Government Area

Crime manifests in multiple forms, influenced by socio-economic conditions, urbanization, and institutional weaknesses. In Nigeria, and particularly in Jalingo Local Government Area (LGA), crime has become increasingly diverse and persistent. The most prevalent criminal activities include armed robbery, burglary, kidnapping for ransom, youth cultism, rape, cattle rustling, drug trafficking, and political thuggery (Shalangwa & Iwuamadi, 2021). These forms of crime are not only frequent but have become normalized in some parts of the state due to the absence of effective law enforcement and community resistance.

Jalingo, as the administrative capital of Taraba State, presents a unique security landscape where urban and rural dynamics intersect. According to Musa (2022), urban poverty, rising youth unemployment, and the influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs) have

compounded the local security situation. In many neighborhoods, criminal gangs—often made up of disillusioned youths—have taken control of streets, extorting residents and harassing traders. The Humanitarian Situation Report (2020) from Taraba State noted that over 65% of reported cases of violent crimes occurred in or around market areas and transport hubs.

Another rising trend is kidnapping, especially for ransom. Victims are often market women, professionals, or relatives of perceived wealthy individuals. The lucrative nature of this crime and weak prosecution rates encourage its persistence (Okoye & Ojo, 2021). Youth cultism has also emerged as a major threat to local peace, with rival groups engaging in violent clashes that disrupt school activities and community life (Okpuvwie et al., 2021). The growing involvement of school-age boys in cult groups reflects broader systemic issues in education and youth development across the region.

2.3 Socio-Economic Consequences of Crime in Jalingo Local Government Area

The socio-economic consequences of crime are both immediate and long-lasting, affecting individuals, businesses, and institutions. In Jalingo LGA, criminal activities have severely disrupted the daily functioning of markets, educational institutions, religious centers, and transport systems. According to Eze and Obiekwe (2019), one of the most direct impacts is the closure or relocation of businesses due to persistent insecurity. Traders have reported massive losses from theft, extortion, and property damage during violent episodes. Consequently, this has led to increased unemployment and capital flight.

Crime also diminishes access to education and healthcare. In areas where violence is frequent, schools and hospitals often shut down, depriving the population of basic services. Aremu and Aramide (2018) observed that girls are especially vulnerable, with rising cases of school dropouts due to rape fears and early marriages that are used as protective strategies. Healthcare services become understaffed or inaccessible during violent outbreaks, leading to higher maternal and infant mortality rates.

Moreover, crime erodes trust and social cohesion. Community rituals such as marriage ceremonies, religious festivals, and naming ceremonies are either suspended or held under heavy security. The communal spirit that once defined rural-urban relationships in Taraba State has deteriorated, replaced by suspicion, fear, and isolation (Adebayo, 2017). The cumulative effect is a decline in local productivity, an increase in poverty, and a rise in internally displaced persons who further burden urban resources (Uche & Agbulu, 2020).

Psychologically, communities living under constant threat experience chronic stress, anxiety, and a reduced sense of agency. This socio-psychological toll contributes to a culture of silence and resignation, weakening public resistance against criminal actors and making residents more vulnerable to victimization (Oluwatoyin & Adesina, 2020).

2.4 Institutional and Community Responses to Crime Mitigation in Jalingo

Efforts to address the rising crime in Jalingo LGA have involved both government-led and community-based strategies. However, these responses have often been reactive, fragmented, and inadequately resourced. The Nigerian government, through the Nigeria Police Force and other paramilitary units, has deployed personnel to crime-prone areas, increased patrols, and initiated surveillance in urban centers (Yahaya & Bello, 2020). Joint task forces involving the military, civil defence corps, and local vigilante groups have also been introduced, especially during market days and festive periods.

At the state level, the Taraba State government has made attempts to strengthen community policing through collaboration with traditional rulers, religious leaders, and youth organizations. The state has also facilitated peace dialogues in communities affected by communal violence and herder-farmer clashes (Shalangwa & Iwuamadi, 2021). However, these measures often suffer from poor coordination and inconsistent political will.

Community-based approaches, including vigilante groups, neighborhood watches, and religious peace committees, have played a significant role in intelligence gathering and conflict mediation. According to Manpa'a, Liberty, and Daksiri (2019), these informal institutions are more trusted by residents than formal security agencies, due to their cultural embeddedness and grassroots structure. Yet, concerns remain over the legality and professionalism of such groups, especially in cases of extrajudicial actions and human rights abuses.

Furthermore, civil society organizations and NGOs have initiated educational campaigns, youth engagement programs, and economic empowerment projects to address the root causes of crime. For instance, local NGOs have partnered with schools to implement anti-cultism sensitization workshops and with microfinance institutions to provide small loans to at-risk youths (Ajaegbu, 2016). While these initiatives are commendable, they often lack sustainable funding and government support.

While various institutional and grassroots mechanisms exist to combat crime in Jalingo LGA, their overall effectiveness remains constrained by structural inefficiencies, limited resources, and weak governance. A holistic approach—integrating economic interventions, community participation, and institutional reform—is needed to create lasting change.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Robert K. Merton's Strain Theory, which explains crime as a social response to the disjunction between culturally approved goals and the institutionalized means to achieve them. Merton posits that when individuals, particularly those in marginalized groups, are unable to access legitimate avenues (such as education, employment, and social mobility) to attain societal goals like wealth, success, or social recognition, they may resort to illegitimate means—including crime—to bridge this gap (Merton, 1938). In contexts like Jalingo, where poverty, youth unemployment, and economic inequality are prevalent, individuals—especially young people—may perceive crime as a viable alternative for survival and social advancement. This is consistent with observations from local studies, which link criminal activities such as robbery, kidnapping, and youth cultism to socio-economic frustration and structural exclusion (Okpuvwie et al., 2021).

Strain theory is particularly relevant for understanding the socio-economic consequences of crime in developing communities. It suggests that systemic failure to provide equitable access to opportunities leads not only to increased criminality but also to social instability and weakened institutions. In Jalingo Local Government Area, the breakdown of public services, reduced business activity, and strained community relations reflect the broader consequences of unaddressed social strains. Furthermore, the theory underscores the importance of addressing root causes—such as unemployment, poor education, and inequality—rather than focusing solely on punitive responses. This theoretical perspective provides a foundational lens through which the study analyzes both the drivers and effects of crime, and informs recommendations for integrated, preventive strategies.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to investigate the socio-economic impact of crime in Jalingo Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria. The target population comprised residents across various wards within the LGA, including traders, civil servants, students, and community leaders. A sample size of 399 respondents was determined using Taro Yamane's formula to ensure adequate representation. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and complemented by in-depth interviews with selected key informants such as traditional leaders, security personnel, and market officials. The study employed a stratified random sampling technique to ensure the inclusion of diverse demographic and occupational groups. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency tables and percentages, while qualitative responses were thematically analyzed to capture nuanced perceptions of crime and its effects on social and economic activities. This mixed-methods approach enhanced the reliability and depth of the findings.

4.0 Results and Discussion

Table 1: Common Forms of Crime in Jalingo Local Government Area

Type of Crime	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Armed Robbery	98	24.6%
Kidnapping	76	19.0%
Youth Cultism	52	13.0%
Theft and Burglary	65	16.3%
Rape and Gender-Based Violence	34	8.5%
Drug Abuse and Trafficking	42	10.5%
Cattle Rustling	32	8.1%
Total	399	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The data reveal that armed robbery (24.6%) and kidnapping (19.0%) are the most frequently reported forms of crime in Jalingo Local Government Area. These two crimes alone account for nearly half of all incidents reported by respondents, indicating a serious threat to personal and economic security in the area. Other common crimes include theft and burglary (16.3%), youth cultism (13.0%), and drug-related offenses (10.5%). Less reported but still significant are rape and gender-based violence (8.5%) and cattle rustling (8.1%), which predominantly affect women and rural dwellers respectively. These figures point to a wide spectrum of criminal activities that cut across different sectors and demographics, suggesting that crime in Jalingo is not only pervasive but also diverse in nature.

Table 2: Socio-Economic Effects of Crime

Impact Area	SA	A	D	SD	Total (%)
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Crime has reduced business activity	205 (51.4%)	132 (33.1%)	38 (9.5%)	24 (6.0%)	100%
Crime disrupts education/schooling	190 (47.6%)	142 (35.6%)	45 (11.3%)	22 (5.5%)	100%
Crime limits movement/travel	178 (44.6%)	155 (38.8%)	45 (11.3%)	21 (5.3%)	100%
Crime reduces community cohesion	162 (40.6%)	147 (36.8%)	60 (15.0%)	30 (7.5%)	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The second table illustrates the socio-economic impact of crime as perceived by the respondents. A significant majority (84.5%) either strongly agree or agree that crime has negatively affected business activities, while 83.2% affirm that education has been disrupted, especially in areas prone to violence and cult-related activities. Furthermore, 83.4% agree that crime limits freedom of movement, indicating that fear and insecurity have restricted people's ability to engage in economic, educational, and social activities. Lastly, 77.4% of the respondents believe that crime has weakened social cohesion, as people become more isolated and distrustful in response to the rising insecurity. These findings confirm that the impact of crime extends beyond physical harm to significantly undermine both economic livelihoods and social harmony.

Table 3: Government and Community Responses to Crime

Measures Taken	Yes (%)	No (%)
Police patrols increased in the area	254 (63.7%)	145 (36.3%)
Community vigilantes are active	311 (77.9%)	88 (22.1%)
Youth empowerment programs available	98 (24.6%)	301 (75.4%)
Public awareness campaigns conducted	112 (28.1%)	287 (71.9%)
Traditional/religious conflict mediation	216 (54.1%)	183 (45.9%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 3 presents the respondents' views on institutional and community-level responses to crime. A majority of the respondents (63.7%) acknowledged the presence of increased police patrols, while an even higher proportion (77.9%) confirmed that community vigilante groups are active in their areas. This suggests a growing reliance on both formal and informal security mechanisms. However, only 24.6% of respondents reported the availability of youth empowerment programs, indicating a major gap in proactive, developmental approaches to crime prevention. Similarly, only 28.1% of respondents were aware of public awareness campaigns, and 54.1% acknowledged the involvement of traditional and religious institutions in conflict mediation. These figures suggest that while some crime control measures are in place, there is an evident need for more holistic, community-oriented, and preventive strategies, particularly those that focus on youth engagement, public education, and institutional capacity building.

4.1 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide strong evidence that crime in Jalingo Local Government Area is both prevalent and diverse in form, significantly affecting the socio-economic stability of the region. As shown in Table 1, armed robbery and kidnapping are the most frequently reported crimes, followed by theft, youth cultism, and drug abuse. These forms of crime reflect broader national trends in Nigeria, where economic hardship, weak governance, and ineffective law enforcement systems contribute to increasing insecurity (Adebayo, 2017; Okpuvwie et al., 2021). The presence of violent and organized crimes in both urban and semi-urban areas of Jalingo suggests a deteriorating security situation that affects all social classes, but especially traders, students, and low-income families.

The study also highlights the significant socio-economic consequences of crime. As shown in Table 2, crime has led to the disruption of business activities, closure of schools, reduced community events, and limited mobility for residents. These findings are consistent with prior studies, which have shown that high levels of crime often lead to a decline in local investments, increased unemployment, and psychological distress among residents (Eze & Obiekwe, 2019; Aremu & Aramide, 2018). The perception that crime is restricting freedom of movement and weakening social bonds indicates that the impact is not merely economic but deeply social. The fear of victimization, especially among women, youth, and the elderly, has led to a withdrawal from public spaces, which further deteriorates community life and economic engagement.

Moreover, the findings show that while both government and community actors are involved in crime prevention, the responses are largely reactive and under-resourced. Table 3 reveals that although police patrols and community vigilantes are present, very few respondents reported awareness of youth empowerment programs or public awareness campaigns. This suggests a weak emphasis

on preventive and developmental approaches to crime mitigation. According to Merton's Strain Theory, which underpins this study, crime thrives in environments where legitimate means to achieve societal goals are blocked. The lack of adequate youth empowerment opportunities in Jalingo supports this theoretical assumption, as unemployed and frustrated youth may turn to crime as a survival strategy (Merton, 1938; Agnew, 1992).

Furthermore, the limited involvement of traditional and religious institutions—despite their historical role in community peacebuilding—highlights the marginalization of culturally rooted mechanisms that could enhance trust and cooperation in crime prevention. This gap points to the need for an integrated and culturally sensitive approach to crime control that blends formal law enforcement with community engagement and socio-economic development.

The study finds that crime in Jalingo LGA is not only a law enforcement issue but also a deep-seated socio-economic problem. Its effects on business, education, mobility, and community trust underscore the urgent need for a multidimensional response that addresses both the symptoms and root causes of crime.

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the forms, socio-economic consequences, and institutional responses to crime in Jalingo Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria. The findings reveal that crime is not only prevalent but increasingly complex in form—ranging from armed robbery and kidnapping to youth cultism and gender-based violence. These crimes have significantly disrupted daily life, particularly through the closure of businesses, interruption of education, reduced social interaction, and erosion of public safety. The socio-economic impact of crime in Jalingo is profound. Economic activities have been curtailed due to insecurity, while public institutions such as schools and health centers operate under fear or reduced capacity. Communities have become fragmented, and residents increasingly distrust public spaces and one another. These developments have reinforced cycles of poverty, unemployment, and displacement, especially among vulnerable groups like women and youth. While both government and community-based security initiatives exist, the study concludes that current responses are largely reactive, fragmented, and insufficient to address the underlying causes of crime. Preventive measures such as youth empowerment programs, public sensitization, and inclusive governance remain limited in scope and reach.

Recommendations

- 1. Strengthen Community-Based Policing and Intelligence Sharing:** There is a need to reinforce community policing initiatives by formalizing collaboration between security agencies, vigilante groups, traditional leaders, and residents. Establishing neighborhood watch committees with support from local authorities can improve intelligence gathering, deter criminal activities, and enhance trust in law enforcement.
- 2. Implement Youth Empowerment and Skill Acquisition Programs:** Addressing youth unemployment is essential in reducing crime. Government and NGOs should invest in vocational training, entrepreneurship development, and access to microcredit for young people. Empowering youth economically can reduce their vulnerability to recruitment by criminal gangs and cult groups.
- 3. Rebuild and Protect Socio-Economic Infrastructure in High-Risk Areas:** Markets, schools, and health centers in crime-prone communities should be rehabilitated and provided with adequate security. The state government should also invest in public awareness campaigns to rebuild public confidence, promote social cohesion, and encourage civic participation in crime prevention efforts.

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