

Child Neglect and its Effect on Juvenile Delinquency: A Case Study of the Arrest of Minors During the 2024 End Bad Governance Protest in Nigeria

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Abstract

The arrest of minors during the 2024 End Bad Governance protest in Nigeria represents a multifaceted issue involving child neglect, economic hardship, and juvenile justice. Many Nigerian children face neglect due to systemic poverty, lack of educational resources, and limited parental or institutional support. Consequently, these minors are often pushed toward risky behaviors, including participation in civil disobedience, as seen in the End Bad Governance protest. This study explores the complex relationship between child neglect and juvenile delinquency, with a particular focus on the socio-economic and psychological factors that contributed to the involvement of minors in the protest. Drawing from literature on child neglect and juvenile justice, this report examines how child neglect exacerbates juvenile delinquency, leading to minors' involvement in disruptive behavior or activism. It also highlights the gaps in Nigeria's child protection laws and juvenile justice system, offering recommendations to address the root causes of youth delinquency and mitigate punitive responses to socio-economically motivated youth activism.

Keywords: Child Neglect; Juvenile Delinquency; Minors; End Bad Governance; Youth Uprising

Introduction

Child neglect in Nigeria has severe consequences for children's development, behavior, and societal outcomes. Defined as the failure to meet a child's essential needs for food, shelter, education, and emotional support, neglect leaves lasting effects on children's physical and psychological well-being (McSherry, 2007). Similarly, Child neglect can also be defined as the failure to provide necessary care, supervision, and protection to children, which is one of the most pervasive forms of child maltreatment (Dubowitz, 2020). In Nigeria, this issue is compounded by economic struggles, limited welfare systems, and insufficient access to quality education and healthcare, leaving children from disadvantaged backgrounds particularly vulnerable. Research suggests that children who experience neglect are more likely to develop behavioral issues,

including delinquency and antisocial behaviors, as they seek alternative means to survive and fulfill unmet needs (Gatti et al., 2009).

The 2024 End Bad Governance protest in Nigeria emerged as a grassroots response to worsening poverty, hunger, and inequality across the country. Sparked by economic instability, inflation, and government inaction, the protest aimed to shed light on the deteriorating living conditions affecting millions of Nigerians. A striking aspect of this movement was the significant involvement of minors, many of whom faced arrest during and after the protests. Their subsequent arrest raised concerns about how Nigeria's justice system handles issues of juvenile delinquency in cases influenced by socio-economic factors and child neglect. This development highlights critical concerns surrounding the treatment of minors within the Nigerian justice system, the role of socioeconomic factors in minors participation in activism, and the broader implications of criminalizing minor and youth dissent in a context marked by systemic neglect and inadequate social support. Also, the arrest of minors during the 2024 End Bad Governance protest offers a unique lens through which to understand the intersection of child neglect, juvenile delinquency, and the Nigerian justice system. This study investigates the role of neglect in contributing to juvenile delinquency, using the arrest of minors during the End Bad Governance protest as a case study to illustrate broader systemic issues. The study delves into the contextual factors that led to the arrest of minors during the End Bad Governance protests, examining socioeconomic, legal, and psychological dimensions of this issue.

Literature Review

Child neglect is typically understood as a caregiver's failure to meet a child's essential needs, including physical, emotional, educational, and medical care, which creates adverse effects on the child's overall well-being and development (Sedlak et al., 2010). Child neglect is one of the most prevalent forms of maltreatment globally and often leads to a host of behavioral, emotional, and social problems among affected children. Studies have shown that neglected children are more likely to exhibit academic challenges, emotional instability, and difficulties in socializing with peers, which in turn can lead to antisocial behavior and delinquency (McSherry, 2012; Lounds-Ornstein et al., 2021). Neglected children often lack the supportive environment necessary for positive development, making them susceptible to external influences, including peer pressure and deviant behaviors (Dong et al., 2004). The issue of child neglect and its impact on juvenile delinquency is a significant concern in societies worldwide, with far-reaching consequences for both individual development and social stability.

In Nigeria, child neglect is often exacerbated by widespread poverty, limited access to social services, and socio-economic challenges that affect families' ability to provide adequately for their children. The 2024 arrest of minors during the End Bad Governance protest in Nigeria offers a poignant example of how neglect and socio-economic deprivation intersect to expose children to delinquent behaviors and potential criminalization. Nigeria ranks among the highest in Africa for child poverty, with millions of children living in conditions that hinder their access to basic needs, including food, healthcare, and education (UNICEF, 2022). Child neglect often arises from structural inequalities, high rates of unemployment, inadequate social welfare systems, and government inaction on poverty reduction. This environment creates significant challenges for children, especially those from economically disadvantaged families, and contributes to psychological and social instability. By exploring the socio-economic background and analyzing

the systemic challenges leading to child neglect in Nigeria, this background aims to contextualize the link between neglect and juvenile delinquency within this case study.

Types of Child Neglect

Child neglect can manifest in various forms, including:

- **Physical Neglect:** Failure to provide essential needs, such as food, clothing, and shelter.
- **Educational Neglect:** Inadequate provision of education, often due to financial constraints or lack of access to schools.
- **Emotional Neglect:** Lack of emotional support and guidance, which is crucial for a child's psychological development (Dubowitz, 2020).

Each type of neglect can contribute to developmental deficits that increase the likelihood of delinquent behaviors as children attempt to navigate challenging environments without adequate support.

Relationship between Child Neglect and Juvenile Delinquency

Numerous studies have linked child neglect to juvenile delinquency. Children raised in neglectful environments often exhibit higher rates of aggressive and antisocial behavior, which can lead to delinquency and, in some cases, involvement in criminal activities. According to a study by Smith and Thornberry (1995), neglected children have a significantly higher risk of becoming involved in delinquency compared to their non-neglected peers, as they may engage in rebellious activities as a coping mechanism or a way to express unmet needs. Neglect can hinder a child's ability to develop social norms, leading to weakened social bonds and increasing the likelihood of engaging in criminal activities as a means of survival or self-expression (Hirschi, 1969).

Factors Linking Child Neglect to Juvenile Delinquency in Nigeria

Economic Hardship and Parental Absence

High levels of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria make it challenging for many parents to provide for their children, often leading to neglect. Children from such backgrounds are more likely to lack proper supervision and guidance, increasing their vulnerability to delinquent behaviors, such as joining protests or engaging in other risky activities (Olusegun, 2023).

Lack of Access to Education and Extracurricular Activities

Educational neglect is another factor contributing to juvenile delinquency. Many Nigerian minors, particularly in low-income areas, face barriers to consistent schooling due to fees, distance, or lack of infrastructure. Without educational engagement, these children are left to spend their time unsupervised, often turning to the streets, where they may encounter delinquent peers and influences (Adewale, 2021).

Emotional Neglect and Psychological Impact

Emotionally neglected children may develop feelings of low self-worth, anger, and frustration, leading them to seek validation through peer groups or anti-social behavior. Participation in protests may provide a sense of purpose, even if it involves confrontational or illegal activities (Kiser et al., 2010).

Understanding the Participation of Minors in the 2024 End Bad Governance Protest

The #EndBadGovernance and #EndHunger protests that erupted in Nigeria in August 2024 reflects the deep socio-economic challenges facing the nation, particularly with regard to food insecurity and poverty. Rising food prices, unemployment, and inflation have placed considerable strain on low-income families, many of whom struggle to provide consistent meals and safe environments for their children (UNICEF, 2023). In this context, child neglect becomes an almost inevitable outcome for many families, not due to a lack of care, but because of an inability to meet basic needs. Children in these circumstances often experience what is termed “economic neglect,” where they are deprived of essential resources necessary for growth and development, and are thus compelled to seek those resources through alternative means (Amnesty International, 2024). The minors arrested during the End Bad Governance protest represent this demographic of economically neglected youth, likely driven to participate in the protests out of frustration with their deprivation and a desire to draw attention to the issues affecting their lives. Research indicates that children exposed to neglect are more susceptible to behavioral issues, often displaying aggression, impulsivity, and defiance (Kiser et al., 2010). These tendencies can escalate into delinquency, as neglected children may seek acceptance or survival through activities that bring them into conflict with the law (Ogundele, 2023).

The Socioeconomic Context of the End Bad Governance Protest

Nigeria's economy, while one of the largest in Africa, faces severe challenges, including high poverty and unemployment rates, which are exacerbated by inflation and weakened public welfare systems (World Bank, 2023). According to UNICEF, over 40% of Nigerian children live in multidimensional poverty, deprived of essentials like food, healthcare, and education (UNICEF, 2022). This high rate of child poverty has left many minors exposed to neglect, hunger, and lack of educational and social opportunities.

The End Hunger protest was born out of these conditions, with Nigerian citizens demanding urgent action to address food insecurity and improve living standards. Minors' involvement in the protests signifies the pervasive impact of hunger on Nigerian youth, who often bear the brunt of poverty's effects. Many minors from impoverished backgrounds feel a sense of urgency to participate in movements that speak directly to their lived experiences and basic needs, despite the risks involved (Adegbeye & Olaniyan, 2021).

Child Neglect and Juvenile Delinquency: Theoretical Perspectives

Theories are concepts without a universal definition or meaning, rather scholars, experts and researchers have tried to define and explain theories based on their perceptions and background. Also, Theory is what gives studies a required footing (Anaeto O 2012). Understanding the link between child neglect and juvenile delinquency requires a theoretical framework that considers the interplay between social environment, individual psychology, and behavioral outcomes. Relevant theories include:

Social Strain Theory

Social theories on delinquency, such as strain theory and social disorganization theory, offer valuable insights into the relationship between child neglect and delinquent behavior. Strain theory posits that individuals are more likely to engage in delinquency when they experience significant frustration due to unmet basic needs or societal expectations, leading to feelings of helplessness and resentment (Agnew, 1992). Strain Theory posits that societal pressures and lack of legitimate means to achieve success can lead to criminal behavior (Merton, 1938). In Nigeria, economic

hardship and neglect push minors into survivalist behavior, often leading them to engage in delinquent acts as a response to unmet needs.

In Nigeria, where socio-economic inequalities are profound, many young people from impoverished backgrounds may feel marginalized and overlooked by society, amplifying feelings of frustration and increasing the likelihood of engaging in delinquent acts as a form of expression. In the case of the End Hunger protest, the minors' participation could be interpreted as an attempt to voice these frustrations, showcasing how neglect and unmet needs can drive young people toward rebellion and protest.

Social Disorganization Theory

Social disorganization theory also sheds light on the environmental factors that contribute to delinquency among neglected children. This theory suggests that communities with high levels of poverty, residential instability, and limited social cohesion are more likely to experience elevated rates of juvenile delinquency (Shaw & McKay, 1942). Strain Theory posits that societal pressures and lack of legitimate means to achieve success can lead to criminal behavior (Merton, 1938). In Nigeria, economic hardship and neglect push minors into survivalist behavior, often leading them to engage in delinquent acts as a response to unmet needs. Many urban areas in Nigeria, particularly those affected by poverty, lack the necessary social infrastructure and resources to foster positive youth development. Limited access to quality schools, recreational facilities, and social support systems in these communities often leave children unsupervised, leading them to become involved in delinquent peer groups. The End Hunger protest was concentrated in such communities, where economic neglect and the absence of structured support for children contributed to their susceptibility to joining the protest, regardless of the potential risks or legal consequences.

Case Study: Arrest of Minors During and After the 2024 End Bad Governance Protest in Nigeria

The End Bad Governance protest of 2024 brought together Nigerians from various socio-economic backgrounds to voice their frustration over worsening food insecurity and economic hardship. Many of the minors involved came from impoverished households affected by systemic neglect. These youth participated in the protest to demand government intervention in addressing hunger, which directly impacted their lives. Driven by inflation, rising food prices, and poverty, the End Bad Governance protest called attention to Nigeria's growing socio-economic crisis. For many Nigerian families, daily sustenance is a struggle, and children often experience the brunt of food insecurity and deprivation. Minors who joined the protest did so to advocate for their right to food and basic welfare, an act that reflects the profound neglect they experience.

Arrest and Detention Of Minors

In response to the protests, Nigerian authorities detained numerous participants, including minors, citing public order concerns. Reports from human rights organizations indicate that many of these minors were held in overcrowded facilities, often lacking adequate legal representation or access to rehabilitative support (Amnesty International, 2024). Detention in adult facilities exposes these minors to psychological trauma and exacerbates feelings of alienation, which are linked to future delinquent behavior.

Implications of the Arrests on Youth Development

The arrest and criminalization of minors involved in socio-political activism underscore the Nigerian justice system's shortcomings in handling vulnerable children. Rather than addressing the underlying causes of delinquency namely, poverty and neglect the justice system risks perpetuating cycles of criminality by stigmatizing youths who are already marginalized. The experience of arrest can reinforce negative behavioral patterns, making it difficult for minors to reintegrate into society.

Understanding the Arrest of Minors: Legal and Human Rights Concerns

The arrest of minors during and after the End Bad Governance protests raises significant legal and human rights concerns. Under both Nigerian and international law, children have the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which Nigeria has ratified, explicitly recognizes children's rights to participate in matters affecting them, including the right to express their opinions freely (UNCRC, 1989). However, the arrest of minors engaging in protest activities appears to contradict these rights, highlighting a gap between Nigeria's commitments to child protection and its on-ground actions.

In Nigeria, the legal framework for handling juvenile offenders is provided by the Child Rights Act (CRA), which emphasizes rehabilitative rather than punitive measures for minors (Adewale, 2020). According to the CRA, any detention of minors should be a last resort, and when unavoidable, it should be for the shortest possible duration under humane conditions. Yet, reports indicate that many minors arrested during the End Bad Governance protest faced extended detention in adult facilities for three months, where conditions are often harsh, and minors lack access to adequate legal representation and rehabilitation services (Amnesty International, 2024). Such practices not only contravene the CRA but also expose minors to psychological trauma and increase their vulnerability to future delinquency.

The involvement of minors in the protests should prompt the Nigerian justice system to reassess its approach to youth dissent. Criminalizing minors for participating in social movements related to their survival needs such as access to food and basic necessities undermines the rehabilitative goals of juvenile justice and risks further marginalizing already vulnerable populations.

Psychological and Social Dimensions of Minors and Youth Protest Participation

Participation in social protests can serve as a coping mechanism for marginalized youth who lack formal avenues to address their grievances. Psychological research suggests that adolescents involved in activism often do so in response to a sense of injustice, frustration, or unmet needs (McAdam, 1986). In the case of Nigeria, high rates of poverty, neglect, and hunger have created an environment where many minors feel compelled to take to the streets to demand change, given the absence of institutional support (Ajibola & Eke, 2023).

For minors in Nigeria, the End Bad Governance protest represented an opportunity to voice their discontent with social conditions affecting their daily lives. Many of these minors come from neglected backgrounds where food security is uncertain, and opportunities for positive engagement are minimal. Such conditions lead to psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and anger factors that can push minors toward activism as a means of reclaiming agency over their lives (Kiser et al., 2010). However, these minors' efforts to express themselves were met with police repression and criminalization, which may have lasting adverse effects on their mental health and social reintegration.

Minors arrested during the protests are at heightened risk of psychological trauma due to their experiences in detention. Research indicates that detention, particularly in adult facilities, can have severe psychological impacts on minors, leading to increased aggression, social withdrawal, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Gatti et al., 2009). For Nigerian youth who already face socioeconomic hardship, the experience of arrest and detention could exacerbate feelings of alienation and increase the likelihood of future encounters with the justice system.

The Role of the Nigerian Justice System and Systemic Challenges

The Nigerian justice system has historically struggled with handling youth offenders, often defaulting to punitive measures over rehabilitative ones. This is due in part to limited resources, overcrowded detention facilities, and inadequate training on child-centered justice approaches. Despite Nigeria's adoption of the CRA, which emphasizes child protection and rehabilitation, the system still falls short in implementing policies that address the unique needs of minors (Aransiola et al., 2021).

The treatment of minors involved in the End Bad Governance protests reveals systemic issues within the Nigerian justice framework, such as the lack of youth-specific detention centers, insufficient juvenile courts, and inadequate legal representation for minors. These shortcomings lead to minors being processed through adult systems, where they face harsher conditions and are deprived of age-appropriate interventions. This exposure can lead to increased stigmatization and reinforce criminal identities, contributing to a cycle of recidivism and marginalization (Olusegun & Oluwabunmi, 2020).

Additionally, Nigerian authorities' response to the protests reflects a broader tendency to suppress dissent rather than engage in constructive dialogue with young people. Criminalizing minors who protest for basic needs serves to further alienate these individuals from society and deepens the mistrust between youth and the state. Rather than treating youth activism as a criminal offense, the Nigerian justice system would benefit from policies that recognize youth voices as legitimate contributions to public discourse, particularly on issues as vital as hunger and poverty.

International Perspectives and Best Practices in Juvenile Justice

Examining how other countries address juvenile involvement in protests offers valuable insights for Nigeria. In several countries, such as Norway and the Netherlands, juvenile justice policies prioritize rehabilitation, emphasizing restorative justice approaches over punitive measures (Jones, 2018). These countries use diversion programs that redirect youth away from formal detention, focusing instead on social support, counseling, and educational opportunities. International best practices suggest that addressing minors' grievances constructively can reduce youth recidivism and improve social outcomes. For instance, New Zealand's "Family Group Conference" model includes family and community members in discussions on the minor's actions and needs, ensuring that the root causes of delinquency are addressed collaboratively (Maxwell & Morris, 1993). Nigeria could adopt similar models to address minors' grievances more effectively while also promoting social reintegration rather than alienation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, child neglect remains a critical social issue with profound implications for juvenile delinquency, as evidenced by the recent arrest of minors during the 2024 End Bad Governance protest in Nigeria. Child neglect, characterized by the failure to provide basic needs such as

emotional support, proper supervision, education, and adequate nutrition, has been widely linked to increased susceptibility to criminal behaviors and delinquency among minors. The protest incident underscores the pressing need for effective interventions addressing child neglect, poverty, and systemic factors that exacerbate vulnerabilities among young people, ultimately influencing their propensity to engage in unlawful activities. The research indicates a strong relationship between neglect and delinquency, suggesting that children exposed to neglect are more likely to develop antisocial behaviors, struggle with school performance, and experience mental health challenges that may lead to juvenile offending (Reid et al., 2020; McLaughlin et al., 2019). This is because neglect, as a form of abuse, disrupts the normal development process, creating barriers to acquiring social skills, empathy, and coping mechanisms that help prevent delinquent behaviors. In the Nigerian context, the effects of child neglect are further compounded by high poverty levels and limited access to quality education and healthcare, which are essential for child development and well-being.

The End Bad Governance protest, primarily fueled by economic hardship and food insecurity, created an environment where minors, already experiencing neglect and deprivation, were drawn to the protest in hopes of advocating for basic needs they had been denied. Their subsequent arrest highlights the systemic neglect they endure and their vulnerability to adverse outcomes, including criminalization (Amnesty International, 2024). Economic deprivation, which often underpins neglect, plays a pivotal role in pushing children towards delinquent behavior as they struggle to meet their basic needs. In Nigeria, where over 60% of the population lives below the poverty line, children from low-income families face significant neglect due to limited resources (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Many of these children are left unsupervised for extended periods as parents work multiple jobs or migrate in search of better opportunities, creating a vacuum in their lives that often leads to negative peer influences, substance abuse, and participation in criminal activities. The minors arrested during the End Bad Governance protest exemplify this trend, as their involvement in the protest was likely influenced by a combination of economic hardship and inadequate parental supervision or support, typical characteristics of neglect (Afolayan & Ojo, 2024).

Furthermore, child neglect has adverse psychological effects, leading to emotional distress, low self-esteem, and social withdrawal, which are common precursors to delinquent behavior. Studies have shown that neglected children often exhibit high levels of aggression and hostility, stemming from unmet emotional needs and a lack of positive role models or supportive relationships (Johnson & Solomon, 2021). In the case of the minors arrested in Nigeria, their participation in the protest may be seen as an attempt to assert their presence and significance in a society that has largely ignored their plight. This aligns with the frustration-aggression theory, which posits that individuals who face repeated frustration, particularly those stemming from neglect and deprivation, are more likely to engage in aggressive or delinquent behaviors as a means of coping (Dollard et al., 1939). The arrested minors may thus represent a population driven to delinquency not by choice but by socio-economic and psychological factors largely beyond their control.

The arrest of these minors also raises important questions about the criminal justice system's response to youth involvement in civil unrest. Rather than criminalizing their actions, there is a need to understand the socio-economic and familial circumstances that led them to participate in the protest. Research advocates for a shift from punitive responses to rehabilitative and preventive

approaches, emphasizing the importance of addressing the root causes of delinquency such as child neglect through social support programs, educational opportunities, and community-based interventions (Stewart et al., 2022). In Nigeria, where social welfare systems are often underfunded, there is an urgent need for policies that prioritize child welfare, particularly for marginalized and impoverished families. The government, therefore, must implement policies that not only address child neglect directly but also reduce poverty and improve access to social services, as these are foundational measures in mitigating the risk of juvenile delinquency.

In summary, Neglect, driven by economic hardship, systemic poverty, and inadequate social support structures, significantly increases the likelihood of young people engaging in delinquent acts, whether as a means of survival, expression, or protest. Addressing child neglect requires a holistic approach that encompasses poverty alleviation, enhanced parental support, and accessible social services to protect vulnerable children from the pull of delinquency. As demonstrated by this case, failing to address these issues perpetuates a cycle of neglect and delinquency that not only harms individual children but also undermines social stability and development. Only through coordinated efforts by government, civil society, and community stakeholders can Nigeria hope to curb the impact of child neglect on juvenile delinquency and build a future in which all children have the opportunity to thrive (UNICEF, 2023; National Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

Recommendations

To protect minors' rights and prevent the negative consequences associated with criminalizing youth activism, Nigerian authorities should consider the following actions:

1. Implement Youth-Centered Rehabilitation Programs

Youths arrested during protests should be directed to rehabilitation programs rather than detention. These programs should address the underlying socioeconomic conditions that led to protest participation, such as hunger and neglect, and offer psychological counseling, educational support, and vocational training.

2. Strengthen the Juvenile Justice System

The Nigerian government should allocate resources to improve juvenile justice infrastructure, including the establishment of youth-specific detention facilities and juvenile courts. Training for law enforcement and judicial personnel on child rights and juvenile justice is essential to ensure that minors are treated with dignity and receive age-appropriate interventions.

3. Engage Youth in Policy Dialogue

Authorities should create avenues for young people to express their concerns constructively, such as through youth advisory councils and community forums. By actively involving youth in policy discussions, the government can reduce the need for protests while building trust and collaboration.

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