



Exploring Undergraduate Students' Involvement in Thuggish Behaviour in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions: Understanding Causes, Educational Implications and Remedial Measures

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ABSTRACT

Thuggish behaviour is a detrimental force that undermines the societal fabric of any functional community, characterized by a dearth of civility. The core objective of the study, therefore, centred on investigating the involvement of undergraduate students in thuggish behaviour within Nigerian tertiary institutions, aiming to comprehend the underlying causes, educational implications and potential strategies for addressing it. Employing a quantitative descriptive survey research design, the study was carried out in the Southeastern region of Nigeria, encompassing all undergraduate students, with a sample size of 2,100 individuals (comprising 992 males and 1,108 females) selected through a multistage sampling procedure. Data collection was conducted using a tool developed by the researchers, known as the "Thuggish Behavior Assessment Questionnaire (TBAQ)." The validity of the instrument was confirmed through an extensive review of relevant literature and peer review by experts in Measurement and Evaluation, Psychology, and Counseling from the Faculty of Education at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was used to determine the reliability of the instrument after data had been collected from a sample of 50 undergraduates from another institution not included in the main study. The pre-test of the instrument produced an alpha reliability coefficient of 0.78. Four research questions guided the study and were addressed using percentages, mean values and standard deviation. Results indicated a high prevalence of thuggish behaviour among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in the southeastern region of Nigeria. Furthermore, it was discerned that such antisocial conduct not only jeopardizes the academic environment by creating an unsafe atmosphere for both staff and students, consequently leading to subpar academic performance, but also detrimentally impacts their overall well-being, contributing to negative emotional states. Additionally, the study identified remedial measures that could be implemented to combat thuggish behavior in tertiary institutions, including the introduction of conflict resolution and mediation programs to address underlying issues that may trigger such behaviour. Based on these results, it was recommended that all stakeholders collaborate to promote a positive campus culture emphasizing respect, tolerance, and inclusivity through awareness campaigns, workshops, and mentorship programs to discourage violence and provide support to students, particularly those at risk of engaging in thuggish behaviour.

Keywords: Thuggish behaviour, Tertiary institutions, Southeastern region, dearth, Civility

INTRODUCTION

Tertiary institutions are a microcosm of the larger society. They represent an organized segment of society dedicated to education, research, and community service. This aligns with the assertions of Alemu, (2018); Nwiko, (2016; 2022) and Okudo (2012) that tertiary education, particularly at the university level, is meant to foster intellectual development and shape individuals into commendable, thoughtful members of the society. Different people from different cultures with different lifestyles and values come together in institutions of higher learning which denotes that issues of individual differences cannot be ruled out. However, it becomes a concern when the behaviour of people accessing education at that level is not found commendable as we witness today.

Extant studies have revealed a prevalence of thuggish behaviours among adolescents both in secondary schools and tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Additionally, various other societal vices have been identified by scholars as substantial threats to the safety and well-being of these young individuals. These issues range from the alarming rise in weapon-carrying and use to perpetrate violence (Nwiko et al, 2022), to the pervasive problems of indecent and seductive dressing (Oluwadare et al., 2020; Nwiko et al, 2022), rape, and premarital cohabitation (Kalu et al., 2021; Nwiko & Offordueze, 2022) among others. Additionally, the insidious presence of cultism (Eleje et al., 2024) and students' involvement in other thuggery behaviour (Garba & Kabir, 2023; Ibrahim and Hashimu, 2021; Ajitoni & Olaniyan, 2018) further exacerbates the already precarious situation on campuses. These vices undermine the sanctity of educational spaces and pose significant threats to the academic pursuits and personal security of the tertiary institutions' community. Garba and Kabir (2023) observed thus: "Higher institutions in Nigeria have increasingly become unsafe for students. From the southwestern

region where students report sexual violations and a student was recently found dead in a shallow grave, to the northern region where terrorists abduct students." In their 2020 study which examined crime in tertiary institutions in southern Nigeria, Asiyai and Oghuvbu identified substance abuse, specifically drug misuse and alcohol consumption, as significant catalysts and perpetrators of criminal behaviour among students and staff in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Thuggery, commonly associated with violent and criminal behaviours involving intimidation, coercion, and aggression among others, has been a longstanding concern in many societies. Originating from the term "thug" during the British colonial period in India to describe members of organized criminal groups, thuggery has evolved to encompass a broader range of criminal activities, including gang violence, organized crime, drug trafficking, and human trafficking. In Nigeria, the roots of the institution of thuggery trace back to primitive society, where it was not originally linked to criminal behaviours but rather to maintaining law and order and protecting against misconduct. It began with age groups, social groups, or vanguard groups, which acted as guardians of society. These voluntary associations aimed to curb criminal activities within the community, with their roles and functions collectively designed by the entire society (Shehu 2008). Shehu's observation was corroborated by Akinwale (2023) who do not consider thuggery an antisocial behaviour but rather, a means by which the citizenry assert their citizenship, structure their space, and perform democracy. However, Shehu (2016) stated that this dynamic changed with the arrival of Europeans, who disrupted the existing socio-cultural framework. Colonialism stripped away Nigerian and indeed African heritage, relegating it to an inferior status, and imposed widespread economic hardship across Nigeria and the continent, resulting in Africa's underdevelopment (Shehu, 2016). Urbanization and population growth led to resource scarcity, driving many to cities in search of better opportunities. This influx gave rise to thugs, or area-boys, particularly in Lagos which gradually filtered into other cities of the country, Nigeria. This antisocial behaviour poses significant challenges to law enforcement and communities worldwide, leading to social instability and undermining the rule of law.

Thuggery, characterized by rudeness, hooliganism, touting, intimidation, harassment, aggression, and violence, is antithetical to peace, harmony, and coexistence among groups (Adedeji & Adedeji, 2021). Although it is not a new phenomenon, its increasing prevalence in Nigerian tertiary institutions is a concerning development. Historically, individuals involved in thuggery were typically school dropouts or non-literate persons driven by socio-economic circumstances to this undesirable path (Ibrahim & Hashimu, 2021). However, recent trends indicate a shift, with more students engaging in this antisocial behavior as a strategy for securing their future and ensuring economic survival. Incidents of thuggery are alarmingly frequent across universities, polytechnics, and colleges, manifesting in student clashes during elections, extortion, cult-related violence, and academic sabotage.

Often associated with political violence and criminal activities, thuggery significantly threatens student safety, impacts academic performance, and disrupts the campus climate. Existing research provides valuable insights into these issues, which are crucial for developing effective strategies to address them. Ibrahim and Hashimu (2021) explored the relationship between political thuggery and students' academic performance in Sokoto State, Nigeria. They argued that elites are responsible for recruiting and encouraging thugs to maintain and control political power. Their study identified poverty, inadequate upbringing, and lack of job opportunities, political influence, drug abuse, and political manipulation as motivating factors behind political thuggery among students. The authors noted a significant negative impact of students' involvement in political thuggery on academic performance. They recommended that the government impose appropriate sanctions on thugs and their collaborators, regardless of political affiliations, to deter both current and prospective thugs.

In the lead-up to the 2023 Nigerian election, Chief Patrick Eholor, the Director of Contact and Mobilization for the Diaspora Committee of the Labour Party reported in Ewepu (2023), implored students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria to resist any form of inducement to act as enforcers for unethical politicians. He urged students to vote judiciously and abstain from being exploited as political thugs both during and after the election. Additionally, he emphasized the importance of students ensuring their personal safety and remaining vigilant about their surroundings throughout the voting process. This counsel aligns with the findings of Ibrahim et al. (2021), which contend that elites are culpable for recruiting and incentivizing students to serve as thugs in order to sustain and consolidate political power.

Njoku (2015) further examines the reasons for the prevalence of political thuggery, particularly during general and re-run elections in Nigeria. He identifies unemployment, poverty, and frustration and political influence as factors that make youth willing tools for thuggery in the hands of desperate politicians. Njoku also highlights unresolved politically motivated assassinations across the country as a major consequence of thuggish behavior. These findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive measures to address the root causes of political thuggery in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Cultism, a prevalent form of thuggish behaviour that exerts significant destructive influence on Nigerian campuses, is characterized by gang-related activities and the wielding of weapons and firearms to engage in physical altercations, fighting, assaults, and intimidation, stands out as a prominent challenge faced by Nigerian tertiary institutions (Elujekwute, 2019; Adegbenro, 2023; Eleje et al., 2024). Eleje et al. (2024) have documented the severe impact of cult activities on Nigerian tertiary institutions over the preceding decade, describing these malevolent actions as mind-boggling, irritating, and distasteful. They lamented the tragic loss of promising young men and women, who are seen as potential future leaders, to the violent actions of murderous campus gangs. Other scholars such as Udeh, Okoroafor, and Ihezue (2013); Omede and Omede (2015) and Elujekwute (2019) posited that the prevalence of cult attributed activities in Nigerian tertiary institutions stems from various factors, including the breakdown of the family institution, peer group influence, administrative oversight within schools, student population explosion, a culture of violence, governmental tolerance and societal dynamics such as isolation, authoritarianism, groupthink, lack of accountability, manipulation and coercion. To curb this menace, Adegbenro (2023) recommended that parents, educational administrators, and stakeholders should inculcate the fear of God in the lives of their children and students. Additionally, he recommended the establishment of parenting school for current and prospective parents by both government and private institutions. Osagiede et al (2016) in a study on sexual behaviour among single undergraduates in a Nigerian tertiary institution, shed light on students' unruly behaviour within the campus environment which turns their institutions into unsafe environment. They, therefore highlighted an urgent need for the establishment of specially

designated youth friendly centres in the tertiary institutions in the country which should be manned with staff appropriately trained in the delivery of reproductive health information and services. In a related development, at an event where 48 repentant cultists in the Sagamu area of Ogun State renounced their affiliations and surrendered their arms, the state's Commissioner of Police, Abiodun Alamutu, proposed that a moral persuasion approach represents a viable strategy for mitigating the recurring crises instigated by cult activities (Idowu and Taiwo, 2024). On their part, Asiyai and Oghuvbu (2020) noted the five most frequent crimes that happens on campus as stealing and pilfering, room break-in, sexual harassment, cultism, and drug offenses. They underscored several crime management strategies aimed at mitigating cultism and other criminal activities on campuses. These strategies include the installation of closed-circuit cameras in strategic locations, regular monitoring of campus activities, and the utilization of anti-cult groups.

In addition to political violence and cultism-related activities, numerous other criminal activities perpetrated by students in Nigerian tertiary institutions contribute to an unsafe academic environment. These activities encompass a range of severe offenses, including sexual violence, armed robbery, ritual killings, suicide, abduction, and assassination. Some scholars directly or indirectly attribute these crimes to cultism-associated thuggish behaviour Udeh et al (2013); Omede et al (2015), while others argue that these actions represent serious criminal behaviours that go beyond typical thuggish conduct, involving extreme violence and causing significant harm to victims and society. These scholars view such acts as clear violations of individual rights and dignity, contrasting with thuggish behaviour, which generally refers to aggressive, intimidating, or antisocial actions that may not necessarily involve such extreme criminal activities.

However, in the context of this research, all harmful behaviour by students in Nigerian tertiary institutions are considered thuggish if they cause physical, psychological, or social harm through intimidation, bullying, extortion, theft/robbery, vandalism, or violation of rights. Any behaviour that inflicts pain and impedes students' educational and overall well-being is classified as thuggish. This classification aligns with Ali, Dada, Isiaka, and Salmon (2014), who stated that criminal activities undermine the achievement of educational goals and objectives.

Given the divergent perspectives on what constitutes thuggish behaviour versus more severe criminal actions among students in Nigerian tertiary institutions, it is essential to investigate this phenomenon comprehensively. Therefore, this study aims to explore the causes, consequences, and potential remedies of thuggish behaviour in these institutions, providing a deeper understanding of the underlying dynamics and contributing to efforts to create a safer academic environment. Additionally, in light of Kluth's (2022) assertion that the operating system of any functioning society is civility and thuggishness is the virus that makes it crash, the need to carry out this study to add to the existing body of knowledge is considered pivotal.

Statement of the Problem

Thuggish behaviours within Nigerian tertiary institutions pose significant challenges to the learning environment, student safety, and overall academic experience. Reports of violence, intimidation, vandalism, and criminal activities have made this a growing concern. Despite efforts to address the issue, there is still a lack of comprehensive understanding of the causes, effects, and potential remedial measures. Therefore, it is essential to explore undergraduate students' perceptions of thuggish behaviors to gain insights into this phenomenon and inform effective interventions. Identifying key factors contributing to these behaviours will help develop targeted strategies to mitigate their negative impact on campuses.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following four research questions.

1. What is the prevalence rate of common thuggish behaviours among undergraduate students in Nigerian tertiary institutions?
2. What are the underlying causes of thuggish behaviors among undergraduate students in Nigerian tertiary institutions?
3. What are the perceived impacts of thuggish behaviours on the academic environment, academic experiences, and overall well-being of undergraduate students in Nigerian tertiary institutions?
4. What remedial measures could be adopted to mitigate thuggish behaviours and improve the learning environment in Nigerian tertiary institutions?

Method

The researchers utilized a quantitative descriptive research design to study the involvement of undergraduate students in thuggish behaviour within Nigerian tertiary institutions, emphasizing on the underlying causes, educational implications and potential strategies for addressing it. This design was deemed appropriate because it involved collecting and analyzing data from a representative sample without controlling the variables. The study was carried out in the Southeastern region of Nigeria, encompassing all undergraduate students, with a sample size of 2,100 individuals (comprising 992 males and 1,108 females) selected through a multistage sampling procedure. In the first stage, seven tertiary institutions (including two public universities, one state university, two polytechnics, and two colleges of education from the Southeast) were selected using purposive sampling. The second stage involved stratifying the schools into groups by type to ensure representation from all types of higher institutions in Nigeria. In the third stage, a convenience sampling technique was used to select 300 students from each of the chosen institutions in Anambra, Enugu, and Imo states, without considering faculties and departments. This resulted in a total sample size of 2,100 undergraduates.

Data collection was conducted using an instrument developed by the researchers, titled the "Thuggish Behaviours Assessment Questionnaire (TBAQ)." The questionnaire featured a Four-point rating scale for parts B, C and D (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) and a prevalence scale for part A (Not prevalent, Moderately prevalent, Highly prevalent). The instrument's validity was established through extensive literature review and peer review by experts in Measurement and Evaluation, Psychology, and Counseling from the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.78 from a pre-test involving 50 undergraduates from another institution not included in the main study.

The researchers and their assistants administered the questionnaires directly to the 2,100 undergraduates in the selected study areas, with the help of colleagues of the researchers from the tertiary institutions. Out of the 2,100 questionnaires distributed, 1,934 were returned, resulting in a 92% return rate. After vetting the returned data, 87 questionnaires were excluded, leaving data from 87.9% of the sample for final analysis. The data were presented in tables for clarity, and the research questions were answered using percentages and mean values, with a mean value of 2.50 set as the criterion for acceptance. Items scoring a mean of 2.50 or above were accepted, while those scoring below 2.50 were rejected. The data collection and administration spanned 11 weeks.

DATA PRESENTATION

Table I showed the rate of questionnaire distributions and retrieval among the 7 selected tertiary institutions located in the Southeastern region of Nigerian. Three hundred (300) copies of questionnaires were distributed to each of the schools totaling 2100 copies. A total number of 256 questionnaires covering those not retrieved and those data which were invalid were not used for the study. As revealed in the Table, only data from 1,847 questionnaires were used.

TABLE I: QUESTIONNAIRE DISTRIBUTION TABLE

| S/N | University and Location | Number of questionnaires administration | Invalid questionnaires | Valid questionnaires |
|-----|--------------------------|---|------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. | NAU, Awka - Anambra | 300 | 21 | 279 |
| 2. | AIFUE, Owerri- Imo | 300 | 31 | 269 |
| 3. | ESUT, Enugu- Enugu | 300 | 37 | 263 |
| 4. | FCoE T, Umunze Anambra | 300 | 34 | 266 |
| 5. | IMT, Enugu Enugu | 300 | 46 | 254 |
| 6. | IMCOE, Ihitte-Uboma, Imo | 300 | 51 | 249 |
| 7. | ASP, Mgbakwu- Anambra | 300 | 33 | 267 |
| | Total | 2100 | 253 | 1,847 |

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

A. Research Question One

What is the prevalent rate of common thuggish behaviours among undergraduate students in Nigerian tertiary institutions?

Table II below revealed that 231 respondents representing 13% of the sampled population put the prevalence rate of thuggish behaviours among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria low, 612 respondents representing 33% of the sampled population chose moderately prevalent while 1004 respondents representing 54% maintained a high rate of involvement. Therefore, involvement of undergraduate students of Southeastern Nigerian tertiary institutions in thuggish behaviours is high

TABLE 11: FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESPONSES OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS ON THE PREVALENCE RATE OF COMMON THUGGISH BEHAVIOURS IN THEIR VARIOUS CAMPUSES

| Responses | Frequency | Percentage (100%) |
|-----------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Not prevalent | 231 | 13 |
| Moderately prevalent, | 612 | 33 |
| Highly prevalent | 1004 | 54 |
| Total | 1,847 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey, 2024

TABLE III: MEAN RATING OF RESPONDENTS ON THE UNDERLYING CAUSES OF THUGGISH BEHAVIOURS AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

| N/S | Undergraduate students engage in thuggish Behaviour for the following reasons: | SA | A | D | SD | Total | Mean | SD | Decision |
|-----|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|------|------|----------|
| 1 | Lack of effective conflict resolution skills among students leading to resorting to thuggish behaviours. | 735 | 753 | 192 | 167 | 1,847 | 3.11 | 1.49 | Agree |
| 2 | Peer pressure and influence from social circles encouraging aggressive or intimidating behaviour. | 905 | 554 | 207 | 181 | 1,847 | 3.18 | 1.01 | Agree |
| 3 | Academic pressure or competition fostering a hostile environment that may trigger thuggish behaviours. | 345 | 375 | 513 | 614 | 1,847 | 2.24 | 1.56 | Disagree |
| 4 | Feelings of insecurity or inadequacy leading students to exhibit thuggish behaviours as a defense mechanism | 651 | 697 | 276 | 223 | 1,847 | 2.96 | 1.03 | Agree |
| 5 | Exposure to violence or aggression in the students' upbringing or environment contributing to thuggish behaviours. | 705 | 738 | 209 | 195 | 1,847 | 3.06 | 1.37 | Agree |
| 6 | 5. Bullying or harassment experienced by students themselves, leading to a cycle of thuggish behaviours | 830 | 626 | 196 | 195 | 1,847 | 3.13 | 1.05 | Agree |
| 7 | Substance abuse or alcohol consumption influencing students to engage in aggressive or violent actions | 694 | 349 | 348 | 456 | 1,847 | 2.69 | 1.23 | Agree |
| 8 | Societal norms or media influences glorifying aggression and dominance, impacting students' behaviour | 486 | 543 | 529 | 289 | 1,847 | 2.66 | 1.52 | Agree |
| 9 | Lack of positive role models or mentorship for students to emulate positive behaviors instead of thuggish actions | 460 | 690 | 357 | 340 | 1,847 | 2.68 | 1.0 | Agree |
| 10 | Underlying mental health issues or emotional distress that manifest in thuggish behaviours among students | 944 | 445 | 278 | 180 | 1,847 | 3.16 | 1.33 | Agree |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|----|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|------|------|-------|
| 11 | Lack of constructive recreational activities or outlets on campus leads to seek excitement or validation through participation in thuggish behaviours. | 358 | 780 | 421 | 228 | 1,847 | 2.71 | 1.52 | Agree |
|----|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|------|------|-------|

Data in Table 111 revealed that the response mean values of all the items in the table except item 3 fall above the benchmark of 2.50, indicating an overall agreement. To this end, the respondents agreed that aside from item 3 with mean value of 2.24, others listed above were viewed by the study respondents as the causes for the involvement of students of Nigerian tertiary institutions in thuggish behaviours.

TABLE IV: MEAN RATING OF RESPONDENTS ON THE PERCEIVED IMPACTS ON WELL-BEING AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THUGGISH BEHAVIOURS ON THE ACADEMIC OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

| N/S | Thuggish behaviour impact undergraduate students in Nigerian tertiary institutions in the following ways: | SA | A | D | SD | Total | Mean | SD | Decision |
|-----|---|------|-----|-----|------|-------|------|------|----------|
| | Academic Environment | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | Thuggish behaviours on campus negatively affect my sense of safety and security. | 1055 | 540 | 136 | 116 | 1,847 | 3.37 | 1.51 | Agree |
| 2 | Thuggish behaviour causes destruction of school properties | 946 | 623 | 153 | 125 | 1,847 | 3.29 | 1.32 | Agree |
| 3 | Thuggish behaviours create a hostile learning environment for me | 885 | 626 | 168 | 168 | 1,847 | 3.21 | 1.03 | Agree |
| 4 | The presence of thuggish behaviours on campus damages the reputation of the institution | 777 | 597 | 305 | 168 | 1,847 | 3.07 | 1.10 | Agree |
| | Academic Experiences | | | | | | | | |
| 5 | Thuggish behaviours among students make it difficult for me to focus on my academic work | 1124 | 375 | 195 | 153 | 1,847 | 3.14 | 1.17 | Agree |
| 6 | Lecturer-student relationship is strained and limits academic support students enjoy from the lecturers. | 760 | 670 | 278 | 139 | 1,847 | 3.11 | 1.01 | Agree |
| 7 | Thuggish behaviours impact my ability to collaborate with peers on academic assignments | 53 | 199 | 595 | 1000 | 1,847 | 2.17 | 1.14 | Disagree |
| 8 | Thuggish behaviours have a negative influence on students academic performance in my institution | 697 | 651 | 223 | 276 | 1,847 | 2.96 | 1.20 | Agree |
| | Overall Well-being | | | | | | | | |
| 9 | Witnessing or experiencing thuggish behaviours on campus affects my overall well-being. | 1210 | 476 | 93 | 68 | 1,847 | 3.65 | 1.26 | Agree |
| 10 | Thuggish behaviors contribute to a negative emotional and mental state for me as a student. | 880 | 544 | 357 | 66 | 1,847 | 3.21 | 0.88 | Agree |
| 11 | I feel isolated or marginalized due to the prevalence of thuggish behaviours in the student body. | 657 | 487 | 302 | 401 | 1,847 | 2.76 | 1.26 | Agree |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|----|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|------|------|-------|
| 12 | The presence of thuggish behaviours in the institution has a detrimental effect on my overall satisfaction with my educational experience. | 615 | 609 | 302 | 321 | 1,847 | 2.82 | 0.82 | Agree |
|----|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|------|------|-------|

Data in Table IV revealed that the response mean values of all the items in the table except item 7 fall above the benchmark of 2.50, indicating an overall agreement. This showed that almost all the respondents agreed to the fact that not only do thuggish behaviours have negative educational implications on students of Nigerian tertiary institutions, but also on their overall well-being.

TABLE V: MEAN RATING OF RESPONDENTS ON THE POTENTIAL REMEDIAL MEASURES TO BE ADOPTED IN MITIGATING THUGGISH BEHAVIOURS AND IMPROVE THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

| N/S | Authorities of Nigerian Higher Institutions could do the following to address thuggish behaviours: | SA | A | D | SD | Total | Mean | SD | Decision |
|-----|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|------|-------|----------|
| 1 | Implement stricter disciplinary measures for students engaging in thuggish behaviours. | 307 | 918 | 413 | 209 | 1,847 | 2.72 | 0.82 | Agree |
| 2 | Provide education and awareness programmes on the negative impact of thuggish behaviours on the academic community. | 904 | 470 | 264 | 209 | 1,847 | 3.12 | 0.77 | Agree |
| 3 | Encourage open communication channels for reporting incidents of thuggish behaviours anonymously | 957 | 515 | 194 | 181 | 1,847 | 3.22 | 1.00 | Agree |
| 4 | Implement conflict resolution and mediation programmes to address underlying issues that may lead to thuggish behaviours | 613 | 762 | 277 | 195 | 1,847 | 2.97 | 1.12 | Agree |
| 5 | Increase the presence of security personnel on campus to deter and respond to incidents of thuggish behaviours | 679 | 667 | 320 | 181 | 1,847 | 2.99 | 1.06 | Agree |
| 6 | Establish support groups or counseling services for students who have been affected by thuggish behaviours | 830 | 626 | 196 | 195 | 1,847 | 3.13 | 0.96 | Agree |
| 7 | Promote a culture of respect and tolerance through workshops and training sessions for students and staff | 556 | 734 | 350 | 207 | 1,847 | 2.89 | 0.945 | Agree |
| 8 | Collaborate with community organizations to address social factors that may contribute to thuggish behaviours among students. | 638 | 556 | 348 | 305 | 1,847 | 2.83 | 1.13 | Agree |
| 9 | Create a zero-tolerance policy towards any form of violence or harassment on campus. | 944 | 445 | 278 | 180 | 1,847 | 3.19 | 1.05 | Agree |
| 10 | Develop mentorship programmes to provide guidance and support for students at risk of engaging in thuggish behaviours. | 788 | 705 | 195 | 209 | 1,847 | 2.56 | 1.29 | Agree |

Data in Table V revealed that all the mean response values fall above the benchmark of 2.50, indicating that all the remedial measures could be adopted to mitigate thuggish behaviours and improve the learning environment in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

DISCUSSIONS

The study revealed a high prevalence of thuggish behaviour among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in the Southeastern region of Nigeria. Our sample included 1,847 undergraduate students, of whom 1,004 (54%) reported a high rate of involvement in such behaviors. This finding aligns with the results of studies by Elujekwute (2019), Adegbenro (2023), and Eleje et al. (2024), which also identified gang-related activities and the use of weapons and firearms in violent confrontations as prominent challenges in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Furthermore, this antisocial behavior is not restricted by locality or ethnicity. Garba and Kabir (2023) observed that higher institutions across Nigeria have become increasingly unsafe due to the high rate of thuggish behaviors. According to them, in the southwestern region, students report incidents of sexual violations and abuses, with a recent case of a student found dead in a shallow grave, while in the northern region, terrorists abduct students and engage in various criminal activities.

Additionally, this current study conducted in the southeastern region of Nigeria notes that thuggish behaviour were characterized by gang-related activities and the use of weapons and firearms to engage in physical altercations, fighting, assaults, intimidation, political thuggery and violence, and cultism-

related activities, which include rudeness, hooliganism, touting, intimidation, harassment, aggression, and violence. Adedeji and Adedeji (2021) aligned with the characterization of thuggish behaviors as rudeness, hooliganism, touting, intimidation, harassment, aggression, and violence, being antithetical to peace, harmony, and coexistence among groups.

Our findings contrast with the earlier submission of Shehu (2008), who observed that the institution of thuggery was not originally linked to criminal behaviors but to voluntary associations aimed at curbing criminal activities within the community, with their roles and functions collectively designed by the entire society. Our findings also disagree with Akinwale (2023), who, in line with Shehu (2008), does not consider thuggery an antisocial behavior but rather a means by which the citizenry assert their citizenship, structure their space, and perform democracy. This divergence in opinions between current researchers and Shehu (2008) and Akinwale (2021) may stem from differences in the ethnicity and culture of the three groups of scholars because, while Shehu is Hausa from the Northern region, Akinwale is Yoruba from the Southwestern region, and the current researchers are Igbo from the Southeastern region of Nigeria. The words "thugs," "thuggery," and "thuggish behaviors" have never at any time in the history of the Igbo people portended positivity.

Another major finding of the study was the identification of various factors that lead undergraduate students in the southeastern region of Nigeria to resort to thuggish behaviors. These factors include: lack of effective conflict resolution skills, Peer pressure and influence from social circles encouraging aggressive or intimidating behaviour, Feelings of insecurity or inadequacy leading students to exhibit thuggish behaviours as a defense mechanism, Exposure to violence or aggression in the students' upbringing or environment contributing to thuggish behaviours, Substance abuse or alcohol consumption influencing students to engage in aggressive or violent actions, Societal norms or media influences glorifying aggression and dominance, impacting students' behaviour, Lack of positive role models or mentorship for students to emulate positive behaviors instead of thuggish actions, Underlying mental health issues or emotional distress that manifest in thuggish behaviours among students, Lack of constructive recreational activities or outlets on campus leads to seek excitement or validation through participation in thuggish behaviours

The findings of previous studies support the results of the current study. Asiyai and Oghuvbu (2020), similar to the present study, recognized substance abuse, particularly drug misuse and alcohol consumption, as key factors contributing to criminal behavior among students and staff in Nigerian tertiary institutions. In addition to drug-related offenses, they highlighted other prevalent crimes such as burglary, sexual harassment, and involvement in cult activities on campuses in the Southeast region.

The findings of Ibrahim and Hashimu (2021) in their study at a tertiary institution in Sokoto State, Nigeria, align with the results of the current study. They identified the elite as responsible for recruiting and incentivizing thugs to maintain and wield political power. Their research highlighted poverty, inadequate upbringing, lack of employment opportunities, political influence, substance abuse, and political manipulation as key motivating factors behind political thuggery among students.

In the lead-up to the 2023 Nigerian election, Chief Patrick Eholor, Director of Contact and Mobilization for the Diaspora Committee of the Labour Party, implicated unethical politicians in enticing tertiary institution students to engage in political thuggery on their behalf, both during and after elections. Similarly, Njoku (2015) recognized political influence as a significant factor that makes youth susceptible to being used as tools for thuggery by desperate politicians. He further identified unemployment, poverty, and frustration as underlying causes for the prevalence of political thuggery, particularly during general and re-run elections in Nigeria.

The current study's identification of factors contributing to cult-related thuggish behavior in Nigerian tertiary institutions is consistent with findings from Udeh, Okoroafor, and Ihezue (2013), Omede and Omede (2015), and Elujekwute (2019). These factors include the breakdown of the family unit, peer group influence, administrative oversight within educational institutions, a culture of violence, lack of school support, governmental leniency, and societal dynamics such as isolation, authoritarianism, groupthink, lack of accountability, manipulation, and coercion. However, the present study did not identify isolation as a cause of involvement in thuggish behavior, as respondents disagreed with it in the questionnaire. Additionally, the study did not recognize student population growth as a factor motivating and perpetuating thuggish behavior among tertiary institution students. The agreeableness or disagreeableness of respondents could not be established, as it was conspicuously absent from the list of items on the data collection instrument.

The study further revealed that students' involvement in thuggish behaviour in Nigerian tertiary institutions has significant educational implications and negatively affects their overall well-being. These findings are consistent with those of Eleje et al. (2024), Njoku (2015), Ibrahim and Hashimu (2021), Ali, Dada, Isiaka, and Salmon (2014), and Kluth (2022).

Educational implications were considered under the categories of academic environment and academic experiences. Regarding the academic environment, the study found that thuggish behavior negatively affects staff and students' sense of safety and security, creates a hostile learning environment, damages the institution's reputation, and leads to the destruction of school property. These findings align with Eleje et al. (2024), who described the impacts of cult-related thuggish behavior on Nigerian tertiary institutions as severe, mind-boggling, irritating, and distasteful, including the wanton destruction of structures and the tragic loss of promising young individuals. Similarly, Adegbenro (2023) highlighted the havoc caused by the persistent activities of secret cults in Nigerian universities on the lives and psyche of Nigerians. Njoku (2015) also noted that unresolved politically motivated assassinations are a major consequence of thuggish behavior, which is consistent with the present study's findings on the safety and security of staff and students.

In terms of academic experiences, the study found that thuggish behavior has detrimental effects on students' academic performance. This finding aligns with Ibrahim and Hashimu (2021), who explored the relationship between political thuggery and students' academic performance in Sokoto State. Additionally, Ali, Dada, Isiaka, and Salmon (2014) noted that criminal activities undermine the achievement of educational goals and objectives, which supports the current study's findings on educational experiences.

Regarding the overall well-being of students, the present study found that thuggish behavior contributes to negative emotional and mental states. This observation is in line with Adegbenro (2023), who stated that such behavior causes significant harm to the lives and psyche of Nigerians. Furthermore, Kluth's (2022) assertion that civility is the operating system of any functioning society, and thuggishness is the virus that causes it to crash, underscores the negative impact of thuggish behavior on the academic environment, academic experiences, and general well-being of Nigerian undergraduate students.

The current research revealed several strategies that could be adopted to address thuggish behavior in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. These measures include, but are not limited to: implementation of stricter disciplinary measures against students engaging in thuggish behaviour, encourage open communication channels for reporting incidents of thuggish behaviour anonymously, increment of the presence of security personnel on campus to deter and respond to incidents of thuggish behaviour, creation of a zero-tolerance policy towards any form of violence or harassment on campus, collaboration with community organizations to address social factors that may contribute to thuggish behaviour among students, promote a culture of respect and tolerance through workshops and training sessions for students and staff, develop mentorship programmes to provide guidance and support for students at risk of engaging in thuggish behaviour, of stricter disciplinary measures against students engaging in thuggish behaviour and implementation of conflict resolution and mediation programmes to address underlying issues that may lead to thuggish behaviour.

These findings align with Asiyai and Oghuvbu (2020), who identified several crime management strategies that could mitigate criminal activities on campuses, including the installation of closed-circuit cameras in strategic locations, regular monitoring of campus activities, and the utilization of anti-cult groups. Additionally, Commissioner of Police of Ogun State, Nigeria, Abiodun Alamutu, as reported by Idowu and Taiwo (2024), suggested that moral persuasion is a viable strategy for mitigating the recurring crises instigated by cult-related thuggish activities. This approach aligns with the current study's proposed measures, such as promoting a culture of respect and tolerance through workshops and training sessions for students and staff and implementing stricter disciplinary measures against students engaging in thuggish behaviour. Osagiede et al (2016) also identified measures similar to the current study. They highlighted a need for the establishment of specially designated youth friendly centres in the tertiary institutions in the country which should be manned with staff appropriately trained in the delivery of reproductive health information and services.

CONCLUSION

The study established the involvement of undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in the southeastern region of Nigeria in thuggish behaviour and the factors motivating this antisocial behaviour. Additionally, the research highlighted the educational implications and the adverse effects on the overall well-being of the students. Drawing on Kluth's (2022) analogy, which characterizes thuggishness as the virus that causes any functional society to collapse and must be intentionally addressed, the researchers proposed several strategies to mitigate thuggish behaviour in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. These institutions, being microcosms of the larger society, require targeted interventions to address and curtail such detrimental behaviour.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study the researchers hereby made the following recommendations:

1. Institution managers should enhance campus security by implementing robust protocols, including installing CCTV cameras at strategic locations, increasing the presence of trained security personnel, and establishing rapid response teams to promptly address incidents of thuggish behavior.
2. Administrators should enforce existing disciplinary measures to address thuggish behavior, establish a zero-tolerance policy for violence or harassment, ensure consequences are clearly communicated and consistently enforced, and implement an anonymous reporting system to encourage incident reporting without fear of retaliation.
3. Authorities of tertiary institutions should collaborate with external organizations and stakeholders such as local law enforcement agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community groups to address the broader social factors that contribute to thuggish behaviour.
4. All stakeholders should collaborate to promote a positive campus culture emphasizing respect, tolerance, and inclusivity through awareness campaigns, workshops, and mentorship programmes to discourage violence and support students, especially those at risk of thuggish behaviour.
5. Policymakers and curriculum developers should collaborate to integrate conflict resolution and mediation programmes into both curricular and extracurricular activities. These programmes should focus on teaching students effective communication skills, emotional regulation, and non-violent conflict resolution strategies through regular workshops and training sessions.

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