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FROM SCREENS TO STREETS: SOCIAL MEDIA'S INFLUENCE AND PEER PRESSURE IN THE RISE OF RITUAL KILLINGS AMONG YOUTHS IN IBADAN METROPOLIS

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ABSTRACTS

Ritual killings among youths in Nigeria, especially in Oyo State, represent a significant societal issue rooted in socio-economic and cultural challenges. These violent acts are increasingly driven by peer pressure and the pervasive influence of social media, which shape young people's aspirations for social acceptance and perceived wealth. Many youths are compelled to engage in ritual killings due to the glorification of such acts within their social circles, while social media distorts perceptions of success and normalizes criminal behaviors. The study examines the impacts of peer pressure on pathway to ritual killings among youth killings, the role of the social media world towards the pathway for ritual killings among youths, the incidences of youth ritual killings and effects of ritual killings amongst youths. The study anchored itself on Social Learning Theory. The study engaged an exploratory and qualitative research methodology and collected data through 5 in-depth interviews, 10 key informant interview. The increasing pressure on Nigerian youth to engage in ritual killings highlights a disturbing social and cultural crisis. This form of violence, driven by desires for quick wealth, is symptomatic of deeper societal issues such as economic hardship, lack of education, peer pressure, and moral erosion. Hence, the volume of content portraying wealth and success achieved from the perpetration of crime or violence should be reduced, and likewise collaboration must be done by governments and other relevant parties with the owners of social media. Film industries like Nollywood should be encouraged in the direction of producing content that focuses on the consequences of such crime and violence, rather than aggrandizing them.

Keywords: Peer Pressure, Ritual Killings, Social Media, Social Learning Theory, Ibadan Metropolis

INTRODUCTION

Ritual killings have emerged as a significant societal concern in Nigeria, characterized by their disturbing association with various social phenomena, particularly among youth. In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in reported cases of ritualistic crimes, raising alarms about the factors driving these heinous acts. Among the contributing elements, peer pressure and the pervasive influence of social media have gained recognition as critical factors shaping the behavior of Nigerian youth. Peer dynamics often exert considerable influence on individual decisions and actions, making youth susceptible to engaging in illicit activities, including ritual killings, as a means of gaining social acceptance or financial gain (Adeyemi & Adesina, 2021). Furthermore, social media platforms serve as a double-edged sword, facilitating both positive interactions and the dissemination of harmful ideologies that glorify wealth and success through unethical means (Agboola et al., 2020). Understanding the interplay between peer pressure, social media, and the pathway to ritual killings is vital in addressing the root causes of this issue and implementing effective intervention strategies. A critical examination of peer pressure reveals how social dynamics lead individuals to engage in violent and criminal behaviors, often as a misguided attempt to conform to perceived societal expectations (Ogunyemi, 2021). Many youths find themselves in environments where the pursuit of wealth and status through unethical means is normalized, resulting in dire consequences for individuals and communities alike. This pressure to conform culminate in tragic outcomes, as some youths resort to ritual killings as a means to achieve social acceptance or financial success. Simultaneously, the role of social media cannot be overlooked in this context. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok often showcase glamorous lifestyles, creating unrealistic benchmarks for success that youth feel compelled to meet (Okoro, 2022). The glorification of wealth and material possessions on these platforms can distort youth perspectives, leading them to believe that shortcuts, including ritualistic practices, are legitimate pathways to achieving their goals. Research indicates that the exposure to negative influences online can significantly increase the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors among youth (Odeh, 2023). Given this backdrop, it is crucial to explore the impacts of peer pressure and the role of social media in facilitating pathways to ritual killings among Nigerian youth. This study answered the following research questions: What are the impacts of peer pressure on the pathway to ritual killings among Nigerian youth? How does the social media landscape contribute to the normalization of ritualistic behaviors and the glorification of wealth? Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing targeted interventions that address the root causes of ritual killings and promote healthier, more constructive pathways for youth development.

Cybercrime and Ritual Killings: Where Intersections Lie

The Phenomenon of Cybercrime Known as "Yahoo Yahoo" among Youths in Nigeria
Cybercrime, otherwise colloquially referred to as "Yahoo Yahoo," has really caught on with the youth of Nigeria due in large part to economic hardship, unemployment, and the enrichment of wealth via social media. Most Nigerian youths take cybercrime as a shortcut to achieving financial success, while social media has played a major role in promoting fraudulent culture. In this regard, cybercriminals, popularly called "Yahoo boys," have tended to boast about their ill-gotten wealth on social media in order to trick others into the practice. That is, such individuals conduct online scams, particularly romance scams, whereby unsuspecting foreigners are duped in a so-called romantic relationship. The money realized from such scams is always used to keep the luxurious lifestyle they show to people on social media. Displaying one's wealth publicly, as if this is an achievement that their peers must view with high regard, sends a very dangerous message to impressionable youth that crime pays (Chinedu & Nwanne, 2020). The Role of Ritual Killings in Cybercrime This trend now takes another metamorphosis by linking the act to ritual killings. It is reported that many "Yahoo boys" believe that performing human sacrifices or doing some occult can guarantee their success in cyber fraud activities. A belief in supernatural forces, emanating from traditional African spiritualism, to invite good fortune, especially in their dealings with scamming victims

online. Nwosu and Chima (2019) noted that some of the young cybercriminals have taken part in ritual killings because they believe that such sacrifice would provide them with money and protect them from being harmed by law enforcement. In addition, the contents being shared across social media platforms reveal shared means of various occult rituals, personal and other testimonials, and success stories about human sacrifices, thus further fueling the link between cybercrime and ritual killings. Most of these activities are in nature glorified and hence increase the rate of crimes related to rituals. The public display of wealth by individuals suspected to engage in both cybercrime and occult practices perpetuates the problem because it endorses the belief that supernatural intervention can bring about material success. (Odukoya & Ademola, 2020).

Social Media in the Life of Nigerian Youth

Nigerian youth demonstrate high levels of digital engagement, actively participating in various online activities, particularly social media platforms, which serve not merely as communication tools but as crucial venues for self-expression and identity formation (Asemah et al., 2013). Research indicates that social media platforms serve as significant spaces where urban youth engage, express, and negotiate their cultural identities (American Journal of Arts, Social and Humanity Studies, 2024). These digital environments have emerged as powerful instruments for entertainment, networking, activism, and education, providing Nigerian youth with unprecedented voice and visibility that may be limited in offline contexts, particularly within societies where young voices face marginalization (Wilska et al., 2023).

Through social media platforms, young Nigerians actively engage with global popular culture while simultaneously constructing their sense of identity and sharing perspectives on diverse topics ranging from fashion trends to political discourse (Soh, 2024). However, this digital engagement creates a complex cultural negotiation space. These platforms provide access to a diverse range of cultural expressions, facilitating the blending and reshaping of traditional and modern cultural elements (Echesony, 2024). The pervasive influence of social media has fundamentally altered how Nigerian youth perceive themselves within the context of global culture, accelerating cultural exchange processes and positioning Nigerian youth as active participants in global youth culture while remaining deeply influenced by local traditions and value systems (Asemah et al., 2013). Quantitative research in Nigeria suggests that social media reshapes core values of respect for old age, traditional ways of dress, and language use, with platforms like "Facebook, Twitter, and 2go" serving as "potent tools of cultural" transformation. This cultural duality creates a complex identity navigation space for Nigerian youth, who find themselves attracted to Western ideals of individualism, success, and material possessions while simultaneously struggling to reconcile these aspirations with traditional community cultural expectations (Akande & Lawal, 2020). Research on materialism and social media consumption reveals concerning patterns, as social media users may develop negative effects over consumption as a consequence of being engaged on social media platforms.

The rapid exposure to globalized content through social media platforms has introduced significant challenges for Nigerian youth development. The tendency of social media to showcase material success without transparent explanations of the legitimate pathways to such achievements has clearly fostered desires for immediate gratification and wealth accumulation (Akande & Lawal, 2020). In a society where materialism and unequal distribution of wealth is the order of the day, there is always an alarming rate of crime and social vices. Get-rich-quick syndrome is slowly killing Nigerians especially the youth (Daily Trust, 2022). This materialistic culture, amplified by social media influencers and celebrities, presents an idealized lifestyle that many Nigerian youth aspire to achieve but find difficult to attain through legitimate means (Daily Trust, 2022). Consequently, social media exposure has contributed to the proliferation of a "get-rich-quick" mentality among youth populations, where criminal activities, including ritual killings, become perceived as viable alternatives for achieving economic success and social status (Akande & Lawal, 2020).

Peer Influence and Social Media Impact on Youth Behavior

Peer influence has been a change agent in behavior modification and decision making among youths (Nesi et al., 2018). With social media, this influence is amplified as youths are constantly bombarded with images of their peers' lifestyles, opinions, and behaviors online (Nesi et al., 2019). In an age of increased group chats, followership, and going viral, youth behaviors have increasingly started to take cues from what their peers are doing, sharing, or endorsing. These social media platforms have created an environment in which ideas, trends, and behaviors-positive and negative alike-are mutually reinforced and propagated at a rapid pace among the peer group (Nesi et al., 2018). This amplification effect becomes particularly worrying when harmful behaviors, such as criminal activities, are celebrated or normalized among peer groups.

Youths on platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram, where users share content with select groups, become exposed to ideas and practices that promote occultism, ritual killings, and cybercrime without broader societal scrutiny (Adegbola & Goyit, 2021). Research evidence suggests that social media amplifies the speed, scale, and volume of socialization processes around both positive and negative behaviors, creating significant changes in peer group dynamics (Nesi et al., 2019). Agboola and Olatunji have established through research that Nigerian youths are easily influenced by any story or experience their peers relate in case those stories assure them that they may be successful through means that are against the law (Agboola & Olatunji, 2018). This social environment instills within them a situation where unlawful activities are not only pertinent but outwardly glorified as well.

While peer pressure has always been a general factor in youth behavior, social media ramped up the ante by putting a visual and performative element onto it (Mascheroni et al., 2015). Youth not only are exposed to the actions of their peers but also feel compelled to put up a show of their lives, coming up to the perceived standards of success and material wealth displayed on these platforms. Research indicates that teens give more attention to their online image and mimic social media influencers to achieve a sense of belonging (Lajnef, 2023). The pressure of having to "keep up" with what others post on social media drives individuals to seek unconventional and, sometimes even illegal means of gaining money for sustaining social status. It is at this stage that the youth witness peers flexing the wealth they gain through criminal activities or ritual killings and are thus compelled to fall into the repetition of the same actions. Studies show that social media creates new social landscapes that significantly shape adolescents' social skills and relationships from age 10-18 years (Steinsbekk. et al., 2024). These practices are reinforced within the peer groups, while the lack of visible direct consequences on social media places these unethical behaviors within a vicious circle, passing from generation to generation and further to new sets of users.

Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory (SLT), proposed by Albert Bandura, is a psychological framework that explains how individuals learn behaviors through observation, imitation, and modeling. According to this theory, individuals are not born with the inherent ability to perform deviant acts, but rather they acquire these behaviors by observing the actions of others and the outcomes of those actions. Learning occurs in social contexts through the observation of peers, role models, and the media, where behaviors are reinforced or discouraged depending on the social rewards or punishments associated with them (Bandura, 1977). The theory assumes that Individuals observe behaviors in their social environment and imitate these actions based on their consequences. If a behavior leads to success, admiration, or material gain, it is likely to be imitated. Positive reinforcement, such as social approval, wealth, or increased social status, encourages individuals to repeat behaviors. Negative reinforcement, such as punishment, discourages certain actions. Individuals tend to model the behavior of influential people in their environment, which can include peers, authority figures, or, increasingly, personalities on social media. Youth, in particular, are prone to identifying with

role models they see as successful or powerful, adopting their behaviors and beliefs, especially if those models represent pathways to financial success or higher social standing.

In the context of Ibadan, like in many urban areas in Nigeria, the combination of peer influence and social learning provides a powerful explanation for the rise of ritual killings among youth. Due to widespread poverty, unemployment, and socioeconomic challenges, many Nigerian youths are disillusioned with traditional pathways to success. This disillusionment can lead them to seek alternative, often illegitimate means of achieving wealth and social status, particularly when these means are glamorized within their peer groups. In Ibadan Metropolis, ritual killings often arise from youth witnessing or hearing about the success of others who have allegedly used occult practices to gain wealth and influence. According to Social Learning Theory, if these behaviors are perceived as bringing positive outcomes—such as sudden wealth, social prestige, or respect from the community—other young people are likely to imitate them, particularly if they receive approval from peers or avoid immediate punishment (Olatunji & Olowokere, 2021). The ritual acts, justified by the belief in supernatural power, become "learned" behaviors within these social circles, where young people model themselves after older individuals or peers who appear to have successfully navigated these illegal paths to material success.

Social media serves as a modern amplifier of Social Learning Theory by providing a virtual space where behavior, values, and actions are continuously observed and modeled. In Ibadan, youths are exposed to content on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, where individuals flaunt wealth, expensive cars, and lavish lifestyles, often without explaining the means of acquiring such wealth (Adewole & Salami, 2020). These online influencers, many of whom are suspected of engaging in cybercrime or occult practices, become role models. When their success stories go unchallenged and are instead celebrated, they reinforce the notion that illegal means, including ritual killings, are viable options for achieving financial security and social standing. For instance, youths in Ibadan may watch videos or posts that depict sudden wealth, associating such displays with "successful" ritual killings or cyber fraud. According to Social Learning Theory, the more they see these behaviors being rewarded (either in terms of material gain or social prestige), the more likely they are to imitate these actions. Moreover, the anonymity and privacy of social media platforms allow such content to circulate unchecked within specific peer groups, reinforcing the acceptability of these behaviors among youth. In Ibadan Metropolis, one of the critical factors that reinforce these behaviors is the lack of visible punishment for ritual killings or other illicit activities. When perpetrators are not brought to justice, or when their crimes are sensationalized in the media but not followed up with adequate law enforcement actions, this absence of punishment acts as a form of positive reinforcement for youths. The perceived lack of consequences makes them more likely to engage in similar behaviors, believing that the risks are low compared to the rewards (Onifade, 2019). Furthermore, social acceptance of "sudden wealth" in the community further perpetuates these actions. Social Learning Theory emphasizes that behavior is more likely to be repeated if it is positively reinforced. In the case of ritual killings, the individuals involved may receive recognition, power, or financial support from their communities, which sends a signal to others that the behavior is acceptable.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Design

The research design adopted for this research study was largely exploratory in nature. Exploratory research design is particularly appropriate for investigating understudied phenomena and emerging social issues (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The population of the study consists of all adults of Ibadan community in exploring the nature and the societal influences in taking into ritual killings. The target population included family of victims of ritual killings, court officials and police men.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The study adopted a qualitative method of data collection and the sample size was determined using purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Palinkas et al., 2015). A total number of (15) interviews were conducted covering families of victims, police officials and court officials. A total of ten (10) in-depth interviews and five (5) key-informant interviews were conducted making a total of fifteen (15) interviews arriving at saturation point.

Data Collection and Management

The instruments consist of in-depth interview and key informant interview. The interview data collection method involves verbal questioning by the researcher in getting back responses from the study participants. The qualitative data used in this study was analysed by categorizing and then putting them into themes. Also, the analysis was done in stages. At the first stage, the recorded data obtained from the field were translated into English. At the second stage, the translated data was transcribed and verbatim quotations was used to describe the responses from the qualitative instrument.

RESULT AND FINDINGS

The Impacts of Peer Pressure on Ritual Killings among Youths in Ibadan Metropolis

The phenomenon of ritual killings is a complex social issue, and there are various factors that contribute to its occurrence. Study found out that one of these factors is peer pressure, which can influence young people to engage in criminal activities, including ritual killings. A study by Adeyemi and Adeyemo (2018) examined the impact of peer pressure on ritual killings among youth in Oyo State, Nigeria. The study found that peer pressure was a significant factor in the initiation of young people into cults and other criminal groups, where they were often required to participate in ritual killings as a means of proving their loyalty and commitment to the group. The study also found that peer pressure could lead to a desensitization to violence and a normalization of criminal behavior, which could make it easier for young people to engage in ritual killings without experiencing guilt or remorse. Another study by Aremu and colleagues (2020) found that peer pressure was a major factor in the involvement of young people in ritual killings in Oyo State. The study identified a number of social and cultural factors that contributed to the phenomenon of ritual killings, including poverty, unemployment, and a lack of access to education and other opportunities. However, the study found that peer pressure was a particularly important factor, as young people were often pressured by their peers to engage in criminal activities in order to gain status and respect within their social networks. A participant affirmed that:

“The fact that young people are being pressured to participate in ritual killings is particularly concerning, as this type of violence can have devastating consequences for both the victim and the perpetrator. It is important for parents, educators, and community leaders to work together to create positive social environments for young people and to provide them with alternatives to joining criminal groups, in order to prevent the occurrence of ritual killings and other violent crimes.
(Participant 5)

A participant affirmed that:

Well, the youths are divided. I know some youths who do not believe in Yahoo or engage in ritual killings but there are some set of youths that aren't well educated but want to get rich overnight you can easily recognize them by their dreadlocks because how much are they earning for them to do that kind of hair. That's why I said they are divided and also polarized. They'd come to meet those that re working here to get whatever they can get from them. We do see some around too serving community services/sentences. **(Participant 6)**

The study exposes alarming social pressures compelling youth involvement in ritual killings, demonstrating severe consequences for both victims and perpetrators across communities. Findings reveal sharp divisions among young people, where education levels distinctly separate those rejecting these practices from individuals vulnerable to criminal networks seeking quick wealth. The study shows how economic desperation creates visible subcultural identities and behaviors that facilitate recruitment into violent criminal activities. Results emphasize that this crisis extends beyond individual choices, requiring collaborative efforts from families, schools, and community leadership to develop supportive environments and legitimate economic pathways. The study concludes that effective intervention demands comprehensive strategies addressing systemic inequalities and educational deficits, as purely individualized approaches cannot adequately respond to this complex social phenomenon that necessitates community-wide prevention initiatives offering viable alternatives for youth advancement

The Role of Social Media in Ritual Killings among Youths in Ibadan Metropolis

Study revealed that social media and violent movies also contribute to youths engaging in ritual killings because when they see it they will want to try it. Some scholars have suggested that social media may play a role in the promotion and spread of beliefs and practices that can lead to such crimes. For instance, a study by Oyebade and Adeleke (2020) in Nigeria explored the impact of social media on ritual killings among youths. The study found that social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter have become channels for the dissemination of information, including beliefs and practices that promote ritual killings. The study further noted that social media provides anonymity, making it easier for people to share sensitive and dangerous information without fear of being caught by law enforcement agencies. Similarly, a study by Alemika and Chukwuma (2016) in Nigeria suggested that the internet and social media have facilitated the spread of occult practices, including those associated with ritual killings. The study also found that social media provides a platform for the promotion and recruitment of members into cults and secret societies that may engage in ritual killings. A participant revealed that:

Social media and violent movies also contribute to youths engaging in ritual killings because when they see it they will want to try it. Most movies glorify violence meaning that they portray violence as a way of getting what you want. Definitely social media and violent movies are also common factors that influence youths engaging in ritual killings. **(Participant 8)**

A participant also affirmed that:

The widespread use of social media and the internet has increased the potential for peer pressure and negative influences on youth. Exposure to violent or graphic content, online communities that promote extreme beliefs or behaviors, and pressure to present a certain image or persona online can all contribute to negative influences on youth. **(Participant 9)**

The study identifies media influence as a significant factor contributing to youth involvement in ritual killings, with violent movies and social media content serving as catalysts for behavioral imitation. Findings reveal that media portrayals often glorify violence as an effective means of achieving desired outcomes, creating normalization of extreme behaviors among impressionable audiences. The research demonstrates how widespread internet and social media usage amplifies peer pressure and exposes youth to graphic content, extremist online communities, and pressures to adopt certain personas that may promote dangerous behaviors. The data suggests that digital platforms create environments where negative influences proliferate, with young people particularly susceptible to content that presents violence as acceptable or desirable. The study concludes that media literacy and digital safety interventions are essential components of comprehensive prevention strategies, as exposure to violent content through various media channels significantly shapes youth perceptions and behavioral choices regarding criminal activities.

Social and Cultural Factors of Peer Pressure as the Determinants of Youths Involvement in Ritual Killings

Peer pressure can be a strong motivator for individuals to engage in a variety of behaviors, including ritual killings. This can be especially true for youth who may be more susceptible to the influence of their peers. There are several social and cultural factors that contribute to the influence of peer pressure on the decision to engage in ritual killings among youth. In some cultures, ritual killings may be viewed as a way to appease the gods or as a necessary part of certain rituals or ceremonies. These cultural beliefs and norms can make it difficult for youth to resist peer pressure to engage in such activities. Youth who are part of a group that engages in ritual killings may feel a strong sense of group identity and loyalty. This can make it difficult for them to resist peer pressure to participate in such activities, as they may fear being ostracized or rejected by the group if they do not participate. Youth may also be motivated to engage in ritual killings out of fear of retaliation from their peers if they refuse to participate. This fear can be especially strong if the youth feels that their safety or well-being is at risk. In some communities, youth may feel that they have few alternatives to participating in ritual killings. This may be due to a lack of economic opportunities or other social factors that limit their option. Exposure to violence and death can desensitize youth to the consequences of their actions, making it easier for them to engage in ritual killings without feeling the same level of guilt or remorse as they might otherwise. A participant affirmed that:

“Greed is a major factor. Let's say this as a youth when you start working you are not expected to be very rich so soon or meet your breakthrough immediately. It is greed that makes youths engage in such evil actions because if they are content they will be contented with what they have in the beginning and look for good ways to gain more income either learn another trade or look for another source of income. For a young person to go into ritual that means such person is greedy and crazy **(Participant 6)**

A participant also affirmed that:

There are some religions that don't mind ritual killings that is traditional worshippers which makes them see nothing wrong with ritual killings. Religion can affect the youths and make them engage in ritual killings. Poverty is another factor, lack of family value is also part of it; poverty in the sense that many of these young perpetrators usually come from poor families suffering and then make up their mind never to be poor or be like their parents and their children will never suffer the way they did but

they are not patient enough to wait and use legal means to make money. Even if a child of poor parents is wishing to help the parents and make life better for them he's still supposed to go through the normal process to make life better for them. But they are impatient to wait and then engage in ritual killings.
(Participant 13)

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The Impacts of Peer Pressure on Ritual Killings among Youths in Ibadan Metropolis

This places the youth under pressure to carry out ritual killings, which is terribly worrying since such violence might have disastrous consequences not only for the victims but even for those who carried out the act. An incident of this nature indicates further and broader fault lines in society where youth, often uneducated or unemployed, are driven towards criminal and violent activities for a quick means of achieving wealth. Some scholars, therefore, believe that "parents, teachers, and other community leaders must work together to establish positive social environments that provide alternatives to antisocial behavior." Such initiatives could go a long way in stemming the rising tide of ritual murders and other violent criminal offenses by addressing the underlying causes-economic deprivation, absence of moral upbringing, and peer pressure-that are ultimately causing these youths to derail. The youth population in Nigeria is significantly polarized. According to one of the viewpoints, young people are those who do not engage in fraudulent activities such as cybercrime, which is popularly referred to as "Yahoo Yahoo," nor in ritual killing, while others have resorted to legitimate means of making it in life. On the flip side, there is an uncultured class of youths who wants to become instant millionaires and, as a result, can easily be involved in such criminal activities. Some of the characteristics of these youths include some of the lifestyle choices, such as dreadlocks, perceived by the locals to reflect a wish to live a fast, flashy life that is not in line with their earnings or work ethic. This division within the culture of Nigerian youth underlines the polarization of values and aspirations, whereby some are driven by ideals of hard work and moral achievement, while others, influenced by peer pressure, economic hardship, or societal glorification of wealth, tend to drift toward risky behaviors like ritual killings. The presence of youths within community service or sentences further testifies to this ongoing tug of war between these sets of values. These call for a multi-faceted approach in addressing these issues through education, socio-economic reforms, and strong community and family support systems that may help prevent and discourage vulnerable youths from engaging in harmful practices.

The Role of Social Media in Ritual Killings among Youths in Ibadan Metropolis

Social media and violent movies play an important role in shaping youths' behaviors toward ritual killings. The hypothetical illustration of projects on social media delusively portrays wealth, and the youth are highly influenced to believe that easy access to riches is achieved quite easily, at times through unlawful means. This is further summed up by Adewole and Salami (2020) as the emphasis on material success, without reflection on the legitimacy of the work that went into attaining such success, further pushing the youths to take up unworthy actions like ritual killings. Ogunyemi further says that social media has a tendency to stir feelings of inadequacy by bringing into society a compare-thee-to-me culture. Social media, in this regard, drives young people into taking to extreme measures-for instance, ritual killings-so as to project success. The pressure is escalated by the nature of social media, which can easily make anyone viral through some violent, diabolical acts and achieve notoriety that tries to push other youth towards unethical means of being wealthy. Adebayo and Olatunji further argue that violent and other gory displays on social media desensitize the youths to violence and help build negative behaviors. Interaction in these online communities creates an echo

chamber where deviant behaviors, such as ritual killings, are legitimized. Such influences are especially strong among vulnerable youths who are poor and under peer pressure. Similarly, violent movies create the impression that one can be successful through violence. As Olusegun and Adeoye note, films, especially within the Nollywood industry, depict violence or crimes as easy ways through which one may achieve money or high status. Such films, according to Onifade (2018), desensitize the young who watch them into believing that even ritual killings could be a normal thing or some status worth achieving. The impact of violent movies may be due to the creation of cognitive dissonance among youths, who feel violence is wrong but who also witness rewards for such behaviors through the various plotlines within the media they are exposed to. Bandura's Social Learning Theory explains how youths internalize behaviors they observe repeatedly-particularly violent ones-when they see rewards attached to those behaviors in the media. The combination of peer pressure and media exposure creates an enabling environment where ritual killing is normalised as a legitimate money-making strategy. Though most of the scholars agree that social media and violent movies contribute negatively to the influence of youths, others such as Adebayo (2019), argue that these factors operate within a broader socio-economic context comprising elements such as poverty and erosion of family values. Social media and violent movies might have made violent acts easier to commit, but Adebayo opines that such acts have their root in structural inequalities that offer limited opportunity for making legitimate money. Thus, fighting ritual killing transcends regulating media contents into addressing the socio-economic conditions of youths that push them into committing such heinous acts.

Perception of Youths on Peer Pressure in Ritual Killings

The study found that youngsters engage in ritual killing out of fear of rejection and exclusion. This agrees with the findings from Nigeria by Okuneye and Ogunniran, 2017, who observed that peer pressure appeared as a strong predictor of ritual killings among the youth. Their study indicated that there was a higher likelihood of youths to indulge in ritual killings who perceived higher levels of peer pressure than those who did not. A study conducted in Nigeria by Oladepo, Adeoye, and Akinwumi (2018) also identified peer pressure as one of the major factors influencing the decision-making process among the youths in the involvement in ritual killings. According to this study, many of the youths who had been involved in ritual killings yielded to such acts for the pressure mounted on them by their peers as a way of proving their worth or gain some social status. This is reiterated by the findings of Akande and Olawale, 2019 in Nigeria, which suggested that peer pressure has been highly instrumental in the pathway to ritual killings among the youths. Findings also revealed that misguided beliefs exist that ritual killings will bring them good fortune. A number of the youths who engaged in the ritual killings were influenced because of perceived gains, which are affluence and power believed to come from their involvement. The gains in question are often fortified by one's peers, who encourage them to engage in the behavior.

Social and Cultural Factors of Peer Pressure as the Determinants of Youths Involvement in Ritual Killings

However, greed among the youths is always likely to be the greatest driving force to involve themselves in ritual killings. According to Olowokere and Olatunji (2021), greed is an insatiable appetite that seems to be inculcated into the psyche of the youth of Nigeria for unmerited wealth because of societal influences that have demanded material successes. These pressures, combined with a "get-rich-quick" attitude, drive the youth into criminal activities such as ritual killings. In an opposing vein, Onifade (2019) comments that attempts to place this tendency on greed alone tend to be an oversimplification and pay little regard to society-based causes of inequality and unemployment that can better explain why youths engage in such destructive behavior. The ritual killings have, to many, been a kind of survival mechanism in societies that give them minimal legitimate chances of going up the social ladder. Equally debated is the place of religion in ritual killings. Scholars like Adeoye (2020), for instance, do

think that traditional African religions, especially those with their form of worship involving sacrifices, might perpetuate such practices when hijacked by individuals seeking supernatural means of gaining wealth. However, Ogunyemi and Adewole, 2021 observe that many youths combine the ones with the other, using rituals as vehicles for success in life. According to Olusegun, 2018, most African traditional religions do not support human sacrifice, and it can thus be said that ritual killings are criminal activities that use religious beliefs for legitimacy rather than being purely religious practices. The next most widely accepted cause is poverty. Nwafor and Eze surmised in 2019 that most of the economic ills facing Nigeria, which include high unemployment and inflation, make many young people lose their self-esteem in a quagmire of poverty, such that they believe that the way out is through ritual killings. Olayemi also agrees, citing that poverty propels young people into crime, although he suggested that it is the erosion of moral values in society that actually leads them there. On the other hand, Ogunleye posits that equal centrality is occupied by the breakdown of family structures and communal support systems. This lack of robust parental guidance throws the young person into a highly susceptible state to negative influences, inclusive of ritual killings. On the contrary, Adeyemi and Adesina (2021) caution against an over-emphasis on family values; the shift of attention needs to be turned toward systemic failures such as corruption, poor governance, and lack of access to education and jobs as the actual root causes of ritual killings. This emphasis on family values serves only to divert attention from where it should be: at the door of the state, which has failed in its duties to arrest poverty and inequality.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusively, the increasing pressure on Nigerian youth to engage in ritual killings highlights a disturbing social and cultural crisis. This form of violence, driven by desires for quick wealth, is symptomatic of deeper societal issues such as economic hardship, lack of education, peer pressure, and moral erosion. The consequences are devastating, not only for the victims but also for the perpetrators, as these actions often lead to long-term legal and social ramifications. Scholars emphasize the importance of proactive intervention by parents, educators, and community leaders to create supportive environments that offer alternatives to criminal behavior. These measures, including socio-economic reforms and strong family values, are essential in addressing the root causes of ritual killings. The division within Nigerian youth culture further illustrates the complex dynamics at play. While some young people pursue legitimate paths to success, others, swayed by peer influence and societal glorification of wealth, seek illegal and violent shortcuts to achieve their goals. Recognizing and addressing this polarization is key to curbing the rise of ritual killings. A holistic approach combining education, community support, and reforms can provide vulnerable youth with the opportunities and moral frameworks needed to resist negative influences and embrace ethical pathways to success. Furthermore, the issue of ritual killings among Nigerian youth is deeply intertwined with social media influence, violent movies, peer pressure, and broader socio-economic conditions. Social media and violent films contribute to the glorification of material success and violence, distorting reality and pushing vulnerable youth toward illegal activities. Peer pressure further reinforces these behaviors, with youths often feeling compelled to engage in ritual killings to gain social status or prove their worth. However, it is important to recognize that these influences operate within a broader context of poverty, unemployment, and the erosion of family and community structures. While greed and the desire for quick wealth are significant drivers, they are part of a larger narrative that includes structural issues such as economic inequality and a lack of legitimate opportunities for upward mobility. Some scholars argue that religious beliefs also play a role, although others emphasize that ritual killings are more criminal acts exploiting traditional beliefs rather than true religious practices. Addressing the rise in ritual killings requires a multifaceted approach, including regulating harmful media content, addressing socio-economic challenges, and reinforcing family and community support systems. Only by tackling these root causes can society hope to reduce the prevalence of ritual killings and other forms of violent crime among youths.

Recommendations

Strengthen Parental and Community Engagement: Parents and guardians should be actively engaged in mentoring and guiding young people. They should encourage solid family bonds and community support systems that give young people valuable positive values that will eventually protect the vulnerable from negative peer pressure and the allure of ritual killings. Community leaders can only complement this through awareness campaigns that avail information to the youth on the dangers of criminal activities, while promoting alternatives to unethical means of acquiring wealth.

Regulate Social Media Content: To decrease the volume of content portraying wealth and success achieved from the perpetration of crime or violence, collaboration must be done by governments and other relevant parties with the owners of social media. That means tighter regulation regarding depictions of violence and the demonstrations of extravagant lifestyles without proper contextualization may be indicative of reducing the effects of social media sites in the popularization of behavior that is dangerous, such as ritual killing.

Encourage Positive Media Representation: Film industries like Nollywood should be encouraged in the direction of producing content that focuses on the consequences of such crime and violence, rather than aggrandizing them. Movies and television should stress hard work, education, and rightful means of success as methods of positive representation to desensitize the youth from violence.

Educational Reforms: Better quality education and vocational training should be provided to the youth to present a valid career path. Moreover, school curricula should include moral values, financial literacy, and critical thinking to enable them to resist peer pressure and the allure of quick money schemes. A few scholarships and incentives may provide enough attraction for at-risk youth to continue with their studies.

Also, there is a need to establish, by governments and NGOs, economic empowerment programs targeting the youths, focusing on creating opportunities for employment and access to funds to support entrepreneurial activities. In this regard, the programs would add value by acting on those economic conditions that make youths susceptible to ritual killings, such as unemployment and poverty, by instead offering pragmatic, legitimate means of financial stability.

Addressing the Root Causes of Poverty and Inequality: Any lasting solution to ritual killings will have to be founded on the resolution of systemic causes of poverty, unemployment, and economic inequalities. Governments must address such situations through investment in establishing social safety nets, job opportunities, and infrastructure development in urban and rural settings in order to reduce economic desperation as a perceived cause for youths to seek ways out through criminal activities, including ritual killings.

Psychosocial Support and Rehabilitation: Where youths are already involved in criminal activities, including ritual killings, there is a need for psychosocial support and rehabilitation programs. This will help in reintegrating offenders into society by providing counseling, skills development, and support for personal growth. For example, mental health services should be provided to young people, especially those who are being put under extreme peer pressure or residing under impoverished conditions.

Engage in Interfaith and Cultural Dialogue: Religious and cultural leaders should hold discussions that deal with the misuse of traditional beliefs for criminal activities like ritual killings. The actual tenets of traditional African religions, which run contrary to human sacrifice, will raise awareness and nip in the bud all myths so as not to allow spiritual practices to be taken advantage of for criminal activities.

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