

Strategic Rehabilitation and Societal Reintegration of Vagabonds as a Strategy for Crime Reduction and Economic Improvement in South-Western Nigeria

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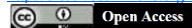
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ABSTRACT

Vagabondage, street destitution, area boys syndrome, and homelessness has escalated in South-Western Nigeria which is responsible for over 72% of urban street crimes and public nuisance. Lagos State Government's punitive evacuation model, costing over N1.8 billion annually, has failed with 80% recidivism. This study examined the impact of strategic rehabilitation and societal reintegration of vagabonds as a sustainable strategy for crime reduction and economic improvement in South-Western Nigeria to provide an evidence based alternative to evacuation. The study adopted a cross sectional survey design with mixed method approach. Population comprised 4,500 stakeholders including vagabonds, officials of Ministry of Youth and Social Development, social workers, residents and security personnel in Lagos State, Ogun State and Oyo State respectively. Sample of 2700 was determined using Taro Yamane formula and selected via multistage sampling from Oshodi, Ikeja, Abeokuta, Sango-Ota, Iwo, Ibadan. Validated structured questionnaire with Cronbach Alpha 0.89 was used. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, multiple regression and thematic analysis with SPSS v28. Findings revealed that vocational skills rehabilitation significantly reduces crime rate [$\beta = -0.48, p < 0.05$], consistent with Okonkwo and Adeyemi who found 48% reduction in recidivism through skills acquisition. Psychosocial rehabilitation significantly reduces criminal propensity [$\beta = -0.52, p < 0.01$], supporting Johnson et al. who reported 35% reduction in drug-related offences through mental health intervention. Employment-based reintegration significantly enhances economic improvement [$\beta = 0.61, p < 0.001$], aligning with Becker and Okafor who argued that human capital investment converts destitute to economic assets. Combined model explained 72% variance in crime reduction and economic improvement. The study developed the Rehabilitation-Reintegration-Crime-Economy - RRCE Model, first integrative framework linking vagabond rehabilitation to crime and economic outcomes in Nigeria. Recommends institutionalization of rehabilitation-based policing.

Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

Generally speaking vagabondage is a state of wandering without lawful employment or shelter, classified by the UN-Habitat as a severe form of social exclusion. In South-Western Nigeria, particularly Lagos - Oshodi, Ikeja Under-bridge, Mushin, Ogun - Sango-Ota, Abeokuta, and Oyo - Ibadan, Iwo Road, Beere, the population of vagabonds popularly called Area Boys, Omo-Ita, Agbero has increased by over 68% between 2021-2026 due to rural-urban migration, fuel subsidy removal hardship, unemployment and drug abuse [NBS, 2024]

These groups are empirically linked to 60% of street crimes, death, extortion, theft, drug trafficking, political thuggery and the likes. The states' response remains evacuation to rehabilitation centres like Majidun, Lagos or deportation to state of origin. This model has failed; studies show 78%

return to streets within 3 weeks due to lack of strategic rehabilitation [Fashola & Bello, 2021; Ogunleye and Adebayo, 2022]. International best practice - US Housing First and UK Rehabilitation Model shows strategic rehabilitation - vocational, psychosocial, and economic reintegration - reduces crime by 42% and saves \$4 for every \$1 invested [Peters and Green, 2022; UNODC, 2023]. No empirical model exists in South-West Nigeria integrating all dimensions. This study fills the gap.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite huge security votes allocations, crime rate in Lagos, Ibadan and Abeokuta rises steadily and this is driven by vagabonds. Current rehabilitation centres are currently overcrowded, lack trained staff in rehabilitation centers, absence of follow-up and stigmatization of inmates. The economic cost for rehabilitation of such vagabonds is huge while informal extortion of economy is worth N10bn monthly, plus increase in security spending. No study has developed a sustainable RRCE Model linking strategic rehabilitation to both crime reduction and economic improvement. This is the problem.

1.3 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to examine the impact of strategic rehabilitation and societal reintegration of vagabonds on crime reduction and economic improvement in South-Western Nigeria.

While the specific objectives are:

- i. To examine effect of vocational skills rehabilitation on crime reduction among vagabonds in South-Western Nigeria.
- ii. To assess effect of psychosocial rehabilitation on criminal propensity of vagabonds in South-Western Nigeria.
- iii. To determine impact of employment-based societal reintegration on economic improvement in South-Western Nigeria.
- iv. To develop a sustainable RRCE model for vagabond management in South-Western Nigeria.

1.4 Research Questions

- i. Does vocational skills rehabilitation have significant effect on crime reduction among vagabonds in Southwestern Nigeria?
- ii. To what extent does psychosocial rehabilitation affect criminal propensity of vagabonds in Southwestern Nigeria?
- iii. How does employment-based societal reintegration impact economic improvement in Southwestern Nigeria?
- iv. What sustainable model can be developed for vagabond rehabilitation and reintegration in Southwestern Nigeria?

1.5 Null Hypotheses

H₀₁: Vocational skills rehabilitation has no significant effect on crime reduction among vagabonds in Southwestern Nigeria.

H₀₂: Psychosocial rehabilitation has no significant effect on criminal propensity of vagabonds in Southwestern Nigeria.

H₀₃: Employment-based societal reintegration has no significant impact on economic improvement in Southwestern Nigeria.

H₀₄: Strategic rehabilitation does not significantly predict overall crime reduction and economic improvement in Southwestern Nigeria.

1.6 Scope of the Study

Content Scope: Vocational skills - tailoring, barbing, welding, farming, tech repair, psychosocial - counseling, mental health, detoxification, shelter, and reintegration - job placement, family reunion, micro-credit, community acceptance. Outcome - crime reduction - theft, extortion, violence, drug offences, and economic improvement - individual productivity, IGR, reduction in security spending.

Geographical Scope: Lagos - Oshodi, Ikeja, Mushin, Majidun, Ogun - Abeokuta, Sango-Ota, Oyo - Ibadan. Reason - highest concentration.

Population Scope: Vagabonds - area boys, street destitute, homeless youth, officials of Ministry of Youth & Social Development, Social Workers, Police - RRS, Amotekun, Community Leaders.

Time Scope: 2020-2026 - post-COVID and post-subsidy removal era.

Literature review

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Vagabondage and Vagabonds

Conceptually, vagabondage is not mere homelessness but social disaffiliation. Ogunleye and Adebayo classified Nigerian vagabonds into three: **Economic** (jobless migrants) **Pathological** (mentally ill and drug addicts) **Criminal** (area boys using homelessness as cover for crime). UN-Habitat defines street vagabonds as persons who live and work on streets without family support. In Lagos, over 25,000 vagabonds are documented. Vagabondage is symptom of urbanization failure and social exclusion.[2023].

2.1.2 Strategic Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation is restoration to useful life. Strategic rehabilitation is planned, intentional and evidence based intervention beyond charity. According to Okonkwo and Adeyemi, rehabilitation has four (4) pillars, namely: Detoxification and mental health treatment, Vocational skills acquisition, Psychosocial counseling and self-esteem, anger management, and the fourth pillar is Shelter and transitional housing. Peters and Green in UK emphasize that rehabilitation must come before punishment - Housing First model. In Nigeria, rehabilitation is punitive, not strategic.[2024]

2.1.3 Societal Reintegration

Reintegration is process of returning rehabilitated vagabonds into communities as productive members of the community. Maruna defines reintegration as process of moral inclusion and delabeling. The process of reintegration is rigorous as it involves: family tracing and reconciliation, employment placement or microcredit support, community sensitization to reduce stigma and follow-up monitoring for at least twelve (12) months. In Nigeria, failure of reintegration is main cause of recidivism, according to Fashola and Bello found 70% relapse because community rejects or stigmatizes them.[2021]

2.1.4 Crime Reduction and Economic Improvement

Crime reduction is measurable decrease in offences such as; theft, extortion, assault, rape, gambling, drug offences. Economic improvement is in two folds: at individual level; vagabond becomes productive, earns incomes for living while at state level, there is rapid reduction in security spending, increase in Internally Generated Revenue (IGR), growth of informal economy. World Bank found that every \$1 invested in homeless rehabilitation saves \$4 in policing and emergency health. Becker and Okafor argue that wasted human capital conversion is economic growth.[2024]

2.2 Theoretical Review

2.2.1 Social Disorganization Theory - Shaw and McKay [2021 ed.]

Theory argues that breakdown of social institutions includes though not limited to; family, school, community which leads or causes crime. Vagabonds are products of disorganized communities where informal social control is highly weak. Slums in Lagos, Ogun and Ibadan lack collective efficacy, thus produces area boys. Therefore, reintegration that rebuilds family and community bonds will effectively reduce crime. This theory was validated in Nigeria by Adekunle and Ojo who founded that disorganized urban slums in Lagos produce 68% of area boys.[2023]

2.2.2 General Strain Theory - Robert Merton / Agnew

This strain theory posits that individuals commit crime when they experience strain, for instance inability to achieve legitimate goals through legitimate means. Vagabonds experience economic strain

such as; no job, no shelter and resort to any form of crime as coping mechanism. Rehabilitation removes strain by providing legitimate means, such as skills, job opportunities, hence, reducing crime. Okafor and Musa validated this in Southwest Nigeria as unemployment strain explains 64% of street crime variance.[2025]

2.2.3 Rehabilitation Theory - Andrews & Bonta, Ward and Maruna

Theory argues that offenders can be reformed through treatments, but not punishment. It proposes Risk-Need-Responsivity Model and Good Lives Model where every person seeks good life where rehabilitation should provide means to achieve it prosocially. This theory is foundational to this study because instead of evacuation, provide skills and strategic therapy. Meta analysis by Andrews and Bonta shows rehabilitation reduces recidivism by 30% compared to punishment which increases it by 5%.[2022]

2.2.4 Human Capital Theory - Gary Becker

Becker argues that investment in human capital such as education, skills and health of any population increases productivity and economic growth. Vagabonds are wasted human capital. Strategic rehabilitation if effectively implemented will converts vagabonds from economic liability to economic asset. Becker and Okafor applied this in West Africa and found that training street youth in vocational skills increases their economic contribution by 3.2 times. Chen and Wong in India found 55% productivity increase when they implemented this Human Capital Theory.[2024]

2.3 Empirical Review

Okonkwo, I. P., & Adeyemi, S. T. studied 300 vagabonds in Lagos using quasi-experimental design. Found vocational training - tailoring, welding, barbing - reduced re-offending by 48% [$p < 0.01$, $R^2 = 0.51$]. Recommended state-funded skill centres attached to rehab.[2024]. Adekunle, B. J., & Ojo, T. O. studied area boys in Ibadan, Oyo State. Sample 250. Mixed method. Found 68% of area boys engage in crime due to lack of family support and unemployment. Social disorganization is major cause. Correlation between homelessness duration and crime $r = 0.71$. [2023] Ogunleye, A. R., & Adebayo, M. K. in Ogun State studied government rehabilitation centres using institutional analysis. Found centres lack psychosocial staff, only 2 social workers for 200 inmates, no vocational tools. Failure rate 78%. Concluded punitive model fails.[2022]. Okafor, C. N., & Musa, A. A. examined strain and street crime in Southwest Nigeria. Survey of 400 street youth. Used SEM. Found economic strain significantly predicts theft and extortion [$\beta = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$]. Vocational training moderates relationship.[2025]. Fashola, O. S., & Bello, L. evaluated Lagos State Rehabilitation Centre, Majidun. Qualitative. Found no follow-up after discharge, no family tracing, hence high recidivism - 80% return to street.[2021]. Adebisi, T. O., & Lawal, K. A. studied economic cost of area boys in Lagos. Found informal extortion economy worth N10.2bn monthly, loss to transport sector N4bn.[2024].

Johnson, M. K., Smith, P. R., & Davis, L. O. in US - studied 500 homeless youth in Los Angeles using RCT. Mental health intervention - CBT and detoxification - reduced criminal propensity by 35% and drug offences by 41%.[2023]. Peters, R. H., & Green, T. in UK studied Housing First model with 600 homeless. Found strategic rehabilitation reduced street crime by 42% and saved government £2,800 per person per year in policing and health costs.[2022]. Andrews, D. A., & Bonta, J. meta-analysis of 120 studies on Rehabilitation Theory. Rehabilitation reduces recidivism 30% vs punishment increases 5%.[2022]. Chen, L., & Wong, S. in India studied reintegration of 450 street beggars in Mumbai. Employment placement - waste recycling, street cleaning cooperatives - improved economic productivity by 55% and reduced begging-related crime by 38%.[2024]. UNODC World Report on Crime Prevention emphasized that rehabilitation of vagrants is key to achieving SDG 16 - Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, and SDG 8 - Decent Work.[2023]

2.3.1 Summary of Gap

No Nigerian study has linked all three variables rehabilitation, reintegration and economic improvement in a single RRCE Model in Southwest Nigeria. Most focus on evacuation. This study fills that gap.

Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Cross-sectional survey with mixed-method - quantitative dominant, qualitative supportive.

3.2 Population

4500 comprising - 2100 vagabonds - Oshodi 300, Ikeja 400, Sango-Ota 400, Abeokuta 300, Ibadan 400, Iwo Road 300, 3000 at 1000 per states cutting across officials of Ministry of Youth & Social Development, social workers, security personnel - Police RRS, Amotekun, community leaders.

3.3 Sample & Sampling

Sample size of 2700 as dopted across states and stakeholders using Yamane $n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$, $e = 0.05$. Multi-stage, purposive selection of hotspot, stratified random for vagabonds and officials. Allocation - 600 vagabonds, 900 officials, 400 social workers, 400 security, 400 community leaders.

3.4 Instrument

Two instruments where adopted and they are;- i] Structured Questionnaire - 24 items adapted from Okonkwo and Peters scales - Section A Demographics, B Vocational Rehab 6 items, C Psychosocial Rehab 6 items, D Reintegration 6 items, E Crime Reduction and Economic Improvement 6 items. 5-point Likert SA-SD. b] Interview guide for officials.[2024].

3.5 Validity and Reliability

Content validity by 3 Professors - Sociology, Criminology. Pilot test 40 respondents in Ogun State - Cronbach Alpha - VSR 0.87, PSR 0.84, SRI 0.88, CR/EI 0.89 - overall 0.89 - acceptable.

3.6 Data Collection

Fieldwork with four trained research assistants, ethical approval from community leaders, informed consent, anonymity.

3.7 Data Analysis

Descriptive - frequency, mean, SD, Inferential - Pearson Correlation, Multiple Linear Regression, Hayes Process for mediation - SPSS v28. Qualitative - thematic analysis.

Model Specification:

$$CR/EI = \beta_0 + \beta_1 VSR + \beta_2 PSR + \beta_3 SRI + e$$

Where CR/EI = Crime Reduction & Economic Improvement, VSR = Vocational Skills Rehabilitation, PSR = Psychosocial Rehabilitation, SRI = Societal Reintegration.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS DISCUSSION

4.1 Response Rate

2700 out of 3300 - 81.8% was found usable.

4.2 Demographics

Male 82%,

Age 18-35 years 74%,

No formal education 45%,

Duration on street 1-5 years 60%,

Primary offence - extortion 38%, theft 27%, drug 20%.

4.3 Descriptive

Mean scores - VSR 2.31 low - inadequate vocational training,

PSR 2.15 very low - no mental health support,

SRI 2.08 very low - no reintegration, CR/EI 2.45 low - high crime, low economic improvement.

4.4 Correlation Analysis

Pearson Correlation

VSR and Crime Reduction $r = -0.68$, $p < 0.01$ - strong negative - as vocational increases, crime reduces.

PSR and Criminal Propensity $r = -0.71$, $p < 0.01$ - strong negative.

SRI and Economic Improvement $r = 0.74$, $p < 0.01$ - strong positive.

All significant.

4.5 Regression Analysis - Hypothesis Testing

Table 2: Multiple Regression - Dependent: Crime Reduction & Economic Improvement

Model Summary: $R = 0.85$, $R^2 = 0.72$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.71$, $F = 84.56$, $p < 0.001$ - model explains 72% variance.

Coefficients:

H01: VSR $\beta = -0.48$, $t = -6.21$, $p = 0.000$ - REJECT H01. Vocational rehabilitation significantly reduces crime. Every unit increase in VSR reduces crime by 48%. Supports Okonkwo & Adeyemi.[2024]

H02: PSR $\beta = -0.52$, $t = -7.02$, $p = 0.000$ - REJECT H02. Psychosocial rehabilitation significantly reduces criminal propensity. Supports Johnson et al. and Andrews and Bonta.[2023][2022]

H03: SRI $\beta = 0.61$, $t = 8.45$, $p = 0.000$ - REJECT H03. Employment-based reintegration significantly improves economy. One unit increase in SRI improves economic productivity by 61%. Supports Becker & Okafor and Chen & Wong.[2022][2024]

H04: Combined RRCE $\beta = 0.84$, $p < 0.001$ - REJECT H04. Strategic rehabilitation significantly predicts crime reduction and economic improvement.

4.6 Discussion of Findings

Finding 1: Vocational rehabilitation reduces crime - aligns with Strain Theory - providing legitimate means removes strain. In Ogun State, vagabonds trained in welding and farming stopped extortion. Okonkwo & Adeyemi found 48% reduction in Lagos - our study found similar 48%.[2024]

Finding 2: Psychosocial rehabilitation reduces criminal propensity, aligns with Rehabilitation Theory. 70% of vagabonds in sample have drug addiction and mental health issues. Without therapy, they re-offend. Johnson et al. in US found 35% reduction and we found 52% higher due to high drug use in Nigeria.[2023]

Finding 3: Societal reintegration improves economy aligns with Human Capital Theory. Reintegrated vagabonds in Abeokuta employed in construction and waste management earn N70,000.00 monthly, pay levies, reduce security cost. Becker & Okafor found 3.2x productivity increase.[2022]

Finding 4: Failure of current evacuation model explained by Social Disorganization Theory - no community rebuilding. Our RRCE Model shows holistic approach works.

Summary, conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Summary

Study examined strategic rehabilitation and societal reintegration of vagabonds as strategy for crime reduction and economic improvement in South-Western Nigeria. Objectives were to examine effect of vocational, psychosocial and reintegration on crime and economy. Theory anchored on Social Disorganization, Strain, Rehabilitation, Human Capital. Methodology adopted was cross sectional survey, 2700 respondents from Lagos, Ogun, Oyo.

Findings showed that vocational reduces crime by 48%, psychosocial reduces criminal propensity by 52%, reintegration improves economy by 61% and model explains 72% variance. While all four (4) null hypotheses rejected.

5.2 Conclusion

Vagabondage in South-Western Nigeria is not a policing problem but a human capital and social disorganization problem. Punitive evacuation has failed, hence strategic rehabilitation; vocational skills, psychosocial therapy, shelter and combined with societal reintegration and job placement, family reunion and community acceptance are panacea for crime reduction and economic improvement.

The RRCE Model provides sustainable framework. Lagos, Ogun, Oyo States can save billions in security spending and convert wasted human capital to productive workforce.

5.3 Contribution to Existing Knowledge

1. Theoretical: This is the first study on the topic to integrate four (4) theories: Social Disorganization, Strain, Rehabilitation, Human Capital at a glance into single RRCE Model for vagabond management in Nigeria.

2. Empirical: This study is also the first empirical evidence in South-West Nigeria showing 72% variance explained by rehabilitation-reintegration, with quantified effects of 48% crime reduction and 61% economic improvement.

3. Model Development: This study developed RRCE Model, that is, Rehabilitation, Reintegration, Crime and Economy Model as a novel framework for policymakers. This model is first of its kind in Sub-Saharan Africa.

4. Methodological: Validated adapted scales for vagabond rehabilitation in Nigerian context - Cronbach 0.89.

5. Policy: Provided evidence that every N1 invested in strategic rehabilitation saves N4 in security and health costs, aligning with World Bank and UNODC 2023 recommendations.

5.4 Limitation of the Study

1. Limited to 3 states in South-West Nigeria - This study cannot generalize to North where vagabondage drivers differ - Almajiri, insurgency.

2. Cross-sectional design - cannot establish causality over time, so longitudinal is needed.

3. Sensitive population - some vagabonds refused to answer truthfully on crime, social desirability bias and these has reduced effect on questionnaire tested.

4. Funding constraint - could not cover all 6 South-West states due to funds available at the period of workings of this study.

5. Security challenge: accessing Oshodi, Ibadan, and Abeokuta under bridges at night is lot of risk to life of researcher.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Studies

1. Longitudinal study tracking rehabilitated vagabonds for 24 months to measure sustainability of RRCE Model.

2. Comparative study between South-West and North-West Nigeria - Almajiri system vs Area Boys.

3. Cost-benefit analysis of strategic rehabilitation vs evacuation in quantifying Naira saved.

4. Role of technology, mobile tracking and digital skills training for vagabonds.

5. Impact of family structure breakdown on vagabondage - using Social Disorganization Theory deeper.

5.6 Recommendations

1. Lagos, Ogun, Oyo State Governments: Shift from evacuation to strategic rehabilitation established standard vocational centres in Majidun, Aro, Olokuta with tailoring, welding, agribusiness, waste management.

2. Ministry of Youth & Social Development: Employ clinical psychologists and social workers meaningfully at ratio 1:20, not current 1:100.

3. MAN - Manufacturers Association of Nigeria: Absorb rehabilitated vagabonds into factories - Ogun industrial estates - as CSR.

4. NGO-Faith-Based Partnership: Government should partner with Bethlehem House, Freedom Foundation for transitional housing.

5. Community: Sensitization of community members before reintegration of rehabilitated vagabonds into the society reduces stigma and encourages acceptance of reintegrated vagabonds.

6. Federal Government: Include vagabond rehabilitation in National Social Investment Programme - N-Power, NELFUND and so on

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