IJERSD

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
RESEARCH EDUCATORS AND SCIENTIFIC DEVELOPMENT

(IJRESD)

PERCEIVED CRIMINAL JUSTICE DELIVERY, DIFFERENTIAL ASSOCIATION AND PERCEPTION OF POLICE AS PREDICTORS OF CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR AMONG YOUTHS IN ONITSHA METROPOLIS, ANAMBRA STATE

Ezeonuegbu Chinyereugo C.
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Anambra State
Department of Psychology
Chinyereugowisdom@gmail.com

Prof. Madu Sylvester N.
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Anambra State
Department of Psychology

Prof. Nwankwo Okechukwu D.
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Anambra State
Department of Psychology

Amaefuna Ogechukwu B.
Ebonyi State University, Ebonyi State
Department of Psychology

Abstract

The study examined perceived criminal justice delivery, differential association and perception of police as predictors of criminal behaviour among the youths in Onitsha metropolis, Anambra State, Nigeria. A total number of 400 youths drawn from Onitsha metropolis served as participants for the study. They were sampled using cluster and incidental sampling techniques. The sample consisted of 276 males (61.4%) and 124 females (38.6%), aged between 18 to 41 years (M = 28.3, SD = 4.84). Four instruments were utilized in the study namely: Perceived Criminal Justice Delivery Scale, Differential Association Scale, Perception of Police Scale, and Criminal Behaviour Rating Scale. The study adopted predictive and correlation designs while the statistics was hierarchical linear regression analysis. The findings revealed that perceived criminal justice delivery had a negative significant prediction of criminal behaviour among youths (β = -0.153; p < 0.05), while differential association did not significantly predict criminal behaviour (β = 0.060; p > 0.05). The perception of police had a significant negative prediction of criminal behaviour (β = -0.171; p < 0.05). Perceived criminal justice delivery, differential association and perception of police showed joint significant prediction of criminal behaviour. These findings help to understand the factors predisposing youths to criminal behaviour. Hence, the study recommended the need to improve criminal justice delivery in Nigeria as a way of handling criminal behaviours among the youths. It is also recommended that community policing should be made effective. This study contributed to knowledge by empirically examining the role of Nigerian justice delivery in the youths' criminal behaviour. Again, the study succeeded in disaffirming the role of differential association theory in criminal tendencies of youths in Nigerian context.

Introduction

Criminal behavior represents a significant challenge to societal stability, impacting both individual well-being and collective progress (Obaji, 2020). This issue is particularly concerning among youths, where criminal activities such as violent offenses, cybercrime, cultism, and drug abuse are on the rise (Obaji, 2020). Youth involvement in these crimes often reflects deeper societal dysfunctions, including economic disparity, unemployment, and ineffective justice systems. The increasing prevalence of such behaviors raises critical questions about the underlying predictors, necessitating a deeper investigation into the psychosocial and structural factors that contribute to criminal tendencies.

Criminal behavior refers to actions that violate societal laws, often causing harm to individuals, communities, or institutions (Hoge, 2021). For young individuals, these actions frequently include status offenses like truancy, property crimes, and involvement in organized criminal networks. In Nigeria, the escalation of youth crimes is exacerbated by socio-economic pressures, family breakdowns, and limited access to quality education and opportunities (Obaji, 2020). The problem is further compounded by systemic issues within the criminal justice system and a growing perception of police inefficacy and corruption.

A well-functioning criminal justice system is pivotal to maintaining societal order, delivering fair justice, and deterring criminal activities. However, the Nigerian criminal justice system faces numerous challenges, including prolonged trial durations, inadequate resources, and perceived bias in law enforcement (Carter, 2022). For many youths, these shortcomings undermine faith in the justice system, fostering a belief that criminal activities offer a viable alternative to achieving personal or financial goals.

Differential association theory provides a useful framework for understanding criminal behavior, emphasizing that such actions are learned through social interactions. According to Sutherland (1939), individuals acquire criminal tendencies when exposed to environments where deviant norms and attitudes predominate. This theory has been extensively supported, with studies showing that peer influence, family dynamics, and social networks significantly shape youth behavior (Smith & Thornberry, 2015; Felson & Lane, 2019). Notably, exposure to pro-criminal peers not only normalizes deviant behavior but also offers a sense of belonging and reinforcement, particularly in contexts where societal systems fail to provide adequate support.

The perception of police plays a dual role in either mitigating or exacerbating criminal behavior. Policing in Nigeria has long been criticized for issues such as excessive use of force, extortion, and lack of accountability, culminating in movements like #EndSARS, which underscored widespread grievances against law enforcement (Busari, 2020). Negative perceptions of the police not only erode public trust but also embolden criminal activities, as individuals lose faith in the ability of law enforcement to deliver justice (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2022; Okonkwo & Ezeonuegbu, 2022). Conversely, when police officers are viewed as fair and effective, public cooperation improves, reducing the likelihood of criminal tendencies.

This study investigates the interplay of perceived criminal justice delivery, differential association, and perceptions of police as predictors of criminal behavior among youths in Onitsha Metropolis, Anambra State. By examining these factors, the study aims to provide actionable insights into the psychosocial dynamics of criminal behavior, with the goal of informing targeted interventions to address youth crime and improve the criminal justice system in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Criminal behavior remains a multifaceted challenge with far-reaching effects on individuals and society at large. It undermines community safety, disrupts social stability, strains the criminal justice system, and generates considerable economic burdens. In Onitsha Metropolis, as in many other regions, crimes such as theft, violence, cultism, drug-related offenses, fraud, and defiance of authority figures, including police officers, are alarmingly widespread. These criminal actions are often linked to systemic issues, particularly perceptions of corruption and inefficiency within the criminal justice system, as well as growing mistrust of law enforcement agencies. Youths, who ideally represent the foundation of society's future, are increasingly losing hope and becoming entangled in criminal activities. This trend is fueled by a combination of adverse personal experiences, unfavorable social contexts, and the belief that the justice system is fundamentally flawed. The pervasive corruption within the system and the negative public image of law enforcement contribute to maladaptive thought patterns. These distorted perceptions of justice and law enforcement significantly influence the choices and behaviors of young individuals. Although numerous studies have examined criminal behavior, there remains a paucity of research focusing on the combined influence of perceived criminal justice delivery, differential association, and perceptions of the police on youth criminality, particularly in Onitsha Metropolis, Anambra State, Nigeria. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring how these interconnected factors shape and predict criminal behaviors among youths in the region. Hence, the study sought to:

1.   Ascertain if perceived criminal justice delivery will significantly predict criminal behaviour among the youths in Onitsha metropolis, Anambra State, Nigeria.

2.   Determine if differential association will significantly predict criminal behaviour among the youths in Onitsha metropolis, Anambra State, Nigeria.

3.   Investigate if perception of police will significantly predict criminal behaviour among the youths in Onitsha metropolis, Anambra State, Nigeria.

4.   Examine if perceived criminal justice delivery, differential association and perception of police will jointly predict criminal behaviour among the youths in Onitsha metropolis, Anambra State, Nigeria.

Significance of the Study

Theoretically, this study enhances knowledge by enriching frameworks like Hirschi's (1969) social control theory, which asserts that weak societal bonds increase deviant behavior. It addresses gaps in literature on criminal justice delivery, differential association, and police perception, providing a systematic understanding of criminal behavior and inspiring future research in these areas.

Practically, the findings would guide the criminal justice system by illustrating how law enforcement attitudes influence public cooperation and criminal tendencies. Insights from the study can inform reforms, training programs, and policies that improve relationships between law enforcement and civilians, fostering trust and reducing crime.

The research would also aid policymakers by revealing how judicial and law enforcement behaviors impact crime rates, offering recommendations for systemic improvements to create a more empathetic and effective justice system. Psychologists gain deeper insights into deviant behavior and rehabilitation, while youths benefit from advocacy for reforms promoting justice and resilience, empowering them to engage positively with the system.

Finally, the study's results will be shared through peer-reviewed publications and academic conferences, ensuring broad accessibility to stakeholders for crime prevention and societal improvement.

Conceptual Review
Perceived Criminal Justice Delivery

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report (2014) emphasized that the aim of governance is to cultivate capacities essential for advancing development. Reflecting this, numerous nations are striving to establish democratic systems to reinforce governance, albeit often at significant expense (Bates et al., 2022).

In Nigeria, a key obstacle has been creating institutions and systems that prioritize the needs of the general populace, including the underprivileged. These efforts align with objectives such as eradicating poverty, ensuring universal education, promoting gender equality, and addressing other critical developmental goals (Anaedozie, 2016). However, these challenges are compounded by widespread issues such as ineffective criminal justice delivery, which exacerbates systemic corruption and undermines governance. A striking example is the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which reportedly spent N3.4 billion on the BIVAS technology for elections, yet failed to utilize it fully. The Presidential Election Petition Tribunal's ruling that INEC could act at its discretion further highlights systemic inadequacies (Presidential Election Petition Tribunal Report, 2023).

Causes of Delayed Justice in Nigerian Courts

The Nigerian judiciary faces several persistent issues that hinder efficient justice delivery. Agbede (2015) attributed delays primarily to the failure to adapt English common law to Nigeria's socio-legal realities, which creates procedural inefficiencies. Additionally, court congestion due to an overwhelming number of cases far exceeding judicial capacity significantly delays trials. Obaseki (2014) argued that such congestion infringes on litigants' rights to timely hearings, defeating the principles of the Rule of Law.

Olawoye (n.d.), as cited in Gloria (2014), noted that the lack of sufficient courts and personnel has failed to keep pace with population growth in major urban centers, further exacerbating delays. Obiokoye (2015) highlighted that as of 2005, Nigeria had only a fraction of the judicial resources needed relative to its population, with merely 43,953 lawyers and limited judges across various court levels. This shortfall remains a critical bottleneck in judicial efficiency. Furthermore, inadequate funding and antiquated systems, such as judges writing in longhand, contribute to slow case resolutions (Borokini, 2018; Abubakar, 2019).

Investigative shortcomings also play a role. Olateru-Olagbegi (2019) pointed to frequent transfers of police officers during trials and their poor investigative skills as key factors. Similarly, Okagbue (2016) and Osinbajo and Kalu (2020) highlighted that stringent bail conditions often prolong detentions. Judicial inefficiencies are compounded by corruption, including bribery, missing case files, and unethical practices by court officials, which further derail justice delivery (Chowdhury, 2023; Hussain et al., 2015).

Mann (2017) and Balogun (2016) identified the unpreparedness of lawyers and frequent adjournments as additional causes of delays. These adjournments often stem from financial incentives tied to multiple court appearances or the refusal of witnesses to testify. Political interference and nepotism during judicial appointments also undermine the efficiency of the judiciary (Oyeyipo, 2015).

Implications of Delayed Justice

Delayed justice has severe repercussions, including overcrowded prisons and an increase in Awaiting Trial Prisoners (ATPs). For instance, by 2017, 48,527 out of 72,384 inmates in Nigerian prisons were ATPs, constituting 66% of the total prison population (Enobore, 2017). Overcrowding has strained prison facilities, limiting access to medical care, adequate nutrition, and rehabilitation programs (Alegeh, 2015).

The United Nations (2016) highlighted that this issue undermines human rights, with many inmates languishing for years without trial.

INT'L JOURNAL OF RESEARCH
EDUCATORS AND SCIENTIFIC DEVELOPMENT
IJRESD

(ISSN) Print: 2992-5665 and Online: 2992-5673
Impact Factor: *5.5* || https://www.ijresd.org
Vol 6 Issue 1. Dec, 2024

Overcrowded prisons also exacerbate jailbreaks, with incidents such as the 2008 Onitsha prison break and similar occurrences in Akure in 2012 highlighting the security risks (Bamgbose, 2020; Gloria, 2014). Poor infrastructure, limited funding, and systemic inefficiencies further weaken Nigeria's justice system and hinder broader developmental goals.

Differential Association

Differential association posits that individuals learn criminal behavior through interactions, acquiring values, attitudes, techniques, and motives from others (Akers, 2020). This learning theory emphasizes how individuals become criminals rather than why they do so (Hayward & Yar, 2021). It aligns with the interactionist perspective but diverges by focusing on specific acts rather than societal boundary construction and perception (Becker, 2022). As a positivist approach, it examines tangible behaviors and motives, including the rationalizations and attitudes that make criminal acts socially easier to commit, often rooted in cultural transmission (Akers & Sellers, 2017; Sutherland, 1939).

Sutherland viewed the self as a social construct, shaped and reshaped through interactions with others (Tilly, 2021). Phenomenology and ethnomethodology further explore how individuals interpret experiences and define their actions based on context, illustrating how varying circumstances influence perceptions and decisions (Schutz, 2020; Garfinkel, 2022). For instance, personal factors like employment status or family dynamics shape an individual's worldview and responses to similar situations differently (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2020; Matsueda, 2017).

Differential association predicts criminal behavior when definitions favoring law-breaking outweigh those supporting law-abiding conduct (Akers, 2020). This tendency is heightened by early exposure to influential group members and is reinforced through social associations (Hayward & Yar, 2021; Hirschi, 2020). While practical

motives like hunger may tempt crime, needs and values motivate both criminal and non-criminal behavior alike, underscoring the complexity of these decisions (Klein & Lee, 2019; Akers & Sellers, 2017).

Perception of Police and Criminal Behaviour

Perceptions of police behavior and authority significantly shape community attitudes and behaviors related to criminal activity. A closer examination of this relationship reveals how views of law enforcement influence interactions with the justice system, adherence to legal norms, and community dynamics.

Trust and Cooperation: Positive perceptions of police as fair, trustworthy, and effective encourage community members to cooperate with law enforcement. Such trust increases the likelihood of reporting crimes, providing information, and supporting investigations. This mutual engagement strengthens partnerships between residents and police, promoting collaborative crime prevention efforts (Tyler, 2016).

Deterrence and Compliance: When police are viewed as legitimate and deserving of respect, individuals are more inclined to comply with laws and regulations. Conversely, distrust or skepticism toward law enforcement can weaken its deterrence effect, leading to noncompliance and potentially deviant behavior (Jackson et al., 2018).

Social Control and Norms: Police behavior influences social norms and expectations within communities. Positive relationships between police and residents reinforce prosocial behaviors while discouraging criminal activity. In contrast, negative perceptions of law enforcement can normalize deviant behavior and weaken community cohesion and resilience (Jackson et al., 2018).

Reactions to Police Misconduct: Misconduct, abuse of power, or bias by police can erode public trust and confidence in the justice system. These

negative perceptions may foster hostility toward law enforcement, reduce cooperation, and heighten tensions, complicating crime prevention and community relations (Jackson et al., 2018).

Alternative Legal Systems: In communities with low trust in police, individuals may turn to informal mechanisms such as community mediation, neighborhood watch groups, or street justice. These alternatives arise when formal law enforcement is perceived as biased or ineffective, highlighting the challenges of maintaining social order without mutual trust (Rosenbaum, 2018).

Overall, perceptions of police behavior and authority have profound effects on community attitudes toward crime and legal norms. Positive perceptions enhance trust, cooperation, and social cohesion, contributing to safer communities. Negative perceptions, however, can erode trust, foster resentment, and challenge law enforcement efforts. Addressing these perceptions is crucial for implementing effective policing strategies and fostering productive relationships between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

Theoretical Framework

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), developed by Icek Ajzen in 1985, serves as the anchor theory in this study. TPB is a psychological framework aimed at explaining human behavior, particularly in decision-making related to goal-directed activities. It builds on Ajzen's earlier work, the Theory of Reasoned Action.

According to TPB, individual behavior is shaped by three primary factors:

Attitude Toward Behavior (AB): This refers to a person's positive or negative evaluation of performing a specific behavior, influenced by beliefs about its outcomes and the value placed on those outcomes.

Subjective Norms (SN): This factor involves the perceived social pressure to engage in or avoid a

behavior, taking into account the influence of significant people in one's life.

Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC): This reflects an individual's perception of their ability to perform a behavior, considering both internal and external factors that may help or hinder the behavior.

In addition, TPB emphasizes the role of behavioral intention as a key predictor of actual behavior. Behavioral intentions are shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control, with stronger intentions leading to a higher likelihood of performing the behavior. TPB has been widely applied to predict various behaviors, including criminal and environmental behaviors, providing a useful framework for researchers and practitioners to identify influencing factors and develop interventions.

While the theory has received empirical support, it has faced criticism for oversimplifying the complexity of behavior and assuming rational control over actions. Despite these critiques, TPB remains a valuable tool for understanding and predicting behavior across various fields, including crime and criminal behavior.

Empirical Studies

Girvan and Marek (2023) explored how perceived ethnicity influenced sentencing outcomes. They found that individuals perceived as Hispanic were nearly twice as likely to be sentenced to prison compared to those perceived as White, even after controlling for crime severity and criminal history. Interestingly, individuals misidentified as White but self-identifying as Hispanic had sentencing outcomes similar to those perceived as White, highlighting the role of ethnic stereotypes in criminal justice decisions. Janet and Erdal (2021) examined the relationship between differential association and criminal behavior using the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health). They discovered that exposure to various forms of association significantly

increased the likelihood of engaging in crime, with the effect being stronger when individuals experienced multiple forms of association. This reinforced the idea that social influences play a major role in shaping criminal behavior. Lorraine et al. (2021) investigated the link between childhood abuse and adult criminal behavior in 338 recently adjudicated men. They found that childhood sexual abuse was linked to adult sexual offenses, while physical abuse and neglect were associated with proactive and reactive criminal thinking. Their mediation analyses indicated that criminal thinking styles played a central role in explaining adult criminal behavior, suggesting a psychological pathway to crime through differential association. Yunning et al. (2019) studied the impact of race and class on public satisfaction with the police. Using hierarchical linear modeling, they found that African Americans and lower-class individuals reported lower satisfaction with the police. However, neighborhood factors, such as racial composition and economic disadvantage, moderated these effects, with African Americans in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods expressing similar satisfaction levels as Whites in similar neighborhoods. Senuri and Panditharatne (2018) explored how ethnicity and socioeconomic status (SES) intersected to influence trust in and cooperation with the police in New Zealand. They found that ethnic minorities, particularly those with low SES, had significantly lower trust in the police than the majority group. This gap in trust mediated the relationship between minority status and willingness to cooperate, emphasizing how low SES exacerbates the trust divide between ethnic minorities and law enforcement.

Several previous empirical studies were reviewed though none was able to establish the link between the study variables. Hence, the following null hypotheses were postulated in order to check variation of this study to previous studies.

Hypotheses

Based on the broad objectives of the study and comprehensive review of the literature, the hypotheses generated and tested for the purpose of the study were stated and tested at 0.05 level of significance;

1. Perceived criminal justice delivery will not significantly predict criminal behaviour among the youths in Onitsha metropolis, Anambra State.

2. Differential association will not significantly predict criminal behaviour among the youths in Onitsha metropolis, Anambra State.

3. Perception of police will not significantly predict criminal behaviour among the youths in Onitsha metropolis, Anambra State.

4. Perceived criminal justice delivery, differential association and perception of police will not jointly predict criminal behaviour among the youths in Onitsha metropolis, Anambra State.

Method

Participants

A total of 400 participants were sampled from Onitsha Metropolis, Anambra State, which has a population of 1,415,000 (NBS, 2020). The sample size was determined using Slovin's formula (1960), yielding n = 400. Cluster and incidental sampling methods were employed to account for participants' demographic characteristics. The sample consisted of 276 males (61.4%) and 124 females (38.6%), with ages ranging from 18 to 41 years (M = 28.3, SD = 4.84). The majority were Igbo (75.7%), followed by Hausa/Fulani (8.2%), Yoruba (6.7%), and other minority ethnic groups (10.2%). Most participants identified as Christian (84.5%), with smaller groups identifying as Muslim (10.2%) or traditionalists (5.0%). Educationally, 53.6% had secondary school qualifications, 23.4% held a university degree, 24.4% had a Master's degree, and 7.0% held a Ph.D. Regarding income, 63.4% were classified as lower class (earning less than N20,000), 26.1% as upper middle class (N50,000 to N100,000), and 15.7% as lower middle class (N21,000 to N49,000). The majority were traders (43.6%),

INT'L JOURNAL OF RESEARCH
EDUCATORS AND SCIENTIFIC DEVELOPMENT
IJRESD

(ISSN) Print: 2992-5665 and Online: 2992-5673
Impact Factor: 5.5 || https://www.ijresd.org
Vol 6 Issue 1. Dec, 2024

followed by public/civil servants (25.5%) and students (27.7%).

Instrument of Data Collection

The study used structured questionnaires:

Perceived Criminal Justice Delivery Scale: Developed by Martin and Cohn (2004), it contains 39 items measuring attitudes toward various aspects of the legal system. Reliability was 0.79, with a test-retest of 0.82.

Differential Association Scale: A 10-item scale designed by Sutherland (1939) to measure the influence of social environment on criminal behavior. It has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94 and convergent validity of 0.65 with the Criminal Behavior Scale.

Perception of Police Scale (POPS): Designed by Nadal and Davidoff (2015), this 12-item scale assesses individuals' attitudes toward police efficacy and image. Reliability was 0.92 overall, with 0.91 for efficacy and 0.87 for image.

Crime Behavior Rating Scale (CBRS): A 33-item scale developed by Animasahun (2011) to assess tendencies toward criminal behavior. The scale has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94 and discriminant validity of -0.016.

Procedures

The instruments were administered in motor parks, marketplaces, churches, schools, and streets in Onitsha, with assistance from five research assistants. Participants were given an informed consent form, followed by the questionnaires. Each session lasted 20-30 minutes, and participants were debriefed afterward. A total of 510 questionnaires were distributed, with 400 valid responses used for analysis. Ethical guidelines included informed consent, confidentiality, and openness. Participants were assured that their participation was voluntary, and the data would remain confidential, encouraging honest and unbiased responses.

Research Design and Statistics

The study employed predictive and correlation designs. Data were analyzed using hierarchical regression modeling (HRM) at a 0.05 significance level with SPSS version 26.0.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of criminal justice delivery, differential association, perception of police and criminal behaviour

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Age	400	18	41	28.3	4.84	0.982	0.122	0.128	0.243
Gender	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Education	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Occupation	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Income	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Ethnic group	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Religion	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
PCJD	400	109	169	154.3	13.1	1.535	0.122	2.533	0.243
Differential Association	400	16	41	30.6	6.01	-0.540	0.122	0.108	0.243
Perception of Police	400	19	50	32.4	9.58	0.315	0.122	1.237	0.243
Criminal Behaviour	400	69	100	86.9	7.42	-0.057	0.122	-0.716	0.243
Valid N (listwise)	400								

Source: Questionnaire Primary Data

Table 1 showed the criminal behaviour (-0.057) being negatively skewed, indicating that the youths are not much into criminal behaviour. The standard deviation (SD) of 7.42 showed wide variation in the criminal behaviour among the youths. Perceived criminal justice delivery (1.535) was positively skewed showing that perceived criminal justice delivery facilitates criminal behaviour among the youths. In addition, differential association was negatively skewed (-0.540), which indicated that differential association reduced criminal behaviour among the youths in Onitsha metropolis. Also, perception of police was positively skewed, showing that the perception of police enhanced criminal behaviour among the youths. The kurtosis (-0.716) for the criminal behaviour indicated minor experience of criminal behaviour among the youths.

Table 2: Summary showing pairwise inter-variable correlations.

Variables	AGE	PCJD	DA	POP	CB
Age	1				
Perceived criminal justice delivery	-.070	1			
Differential Association	-.079	.013	1		
Perception of Police	-.044	-.047	.108*	1	
Criminal Behaviour	-.006	.162**	.080	-.165**	1

Source: Questionnaire Primary Data; PCJD = Perceived criminal justice delivery, DA = Differential Association, POP = Perception of Police, CB = Criminal Behaviour.

The result from Table 2 showed several correlations between the variables in the study. Ethnicity positively correlated with criminal behaviour (P< 0.05; r = 0.142; N = 400). Perceived criminal justice delivery positively correlated with criminal behaviour (P< 0.05; r = 0.162; N = 400), indicating that perception of criminal justice delivery raised more criminal behaviour among the youth. Differential association showed no correlation with criminal behaviour (P> 0.05; r = 0.080; N = 400), while perception of police (P< 0.05; r = -0.165; N = 400) showed significant negative correlation with criminal behaviour among the youths, indicating that a negative perception of the police breeds criminal behaviour among the youths in Onitsha metropolis, Anambra State.

Table 3: Hierarchical Regression Model Statistics of perceived criminal justice delivery, differential association, perception of police and criminal behaviour

Sources	R	R^2	Adj. R^2	Std. E.E	F	Df	β	T	Sig.
Model 1	0.178	0.032	0.014	7.367	1.830	1			
Age							0.041	0.533	0.595
Model 2	0.233	0.054	0.035	7.289	2.810	2			
Age							0.015	0.200	0.842
Perc. crim. justice delivery							-0.153	-3.066	0.002
Model 3	0.240	0.058	0.036	7.286	2.655	3			
Age							0.024	0.319	0.750
Perc. crim. justice delivery							-0.154	-3.090	0.002
Differential Association							0.060	1.179	0.239
Model 4	0.254	0.097	0.040	7.269	2.680	4			
Age							0.034	0.445	0.656
Perc. crim. justice delivery							-0.158	-3.175	0.002

Differential Association	0.071	1.376	0.170
Perception of Police	-0.184	-3.672	0.035

Dependent Variable: Criminal Behaviour
**P < 0.05

The first model in the hierarchical regression presented the predictive values of the demographic variables on criminal behaviour. The independent predictive influence of ethnicity on criminal behaviour reported a significant beta weight ($R^2 = 0.032$, $\beta = 0.183$; $p < 0.05$). The R square result showed that the demographic factors accounts for 3.2% variance in criminal behaviour.

The second model which involved the perceived criminal justice delivery also reported a negative significant beta weight on criminal behaviour ($R^2 = 0.054$, $\beta = -0.153$; $p < 0.05$). The R square result showed that perceived criminal justice delivery accounts for 5.4% variance in criminal behaviour.

In the third model, differential association was added. It did not show a significant beta weight on criminal behaviour ($R^2 = 0.058$, $\beta = 0.060$; $p > 0.05$) and the joint contribution based on the R square result on criminal behaviour remained 5.8%.

In the fourth model, perception of police was added. It had a negative significant beta weight on criminal behaviour ($R^2 = 0.097$, $\beta = -0.184$; $p < 0.05$), and the joint contribution based on the R square result on criminal behaviour increased to 9.7%.

Discussion of Findings

The study examined perceived criminal justice delivery, differential association, and perceptions of the police as predictors of criminal behavior among youths in Onitsha metropolis, Anambra State. Each hypothesis was tested with the following outcomes:

The first hypothesis, suggesting that perceived criminal justice delivery would not significantly predict criminal behavior, was rejected. This outcome indicates that perceptions of the criminal justice system play a significant role in shaping youth behavior. This finding aligns with research by Smith and Jones (2018), who found that negative perceptions of the justice system in urban areas led to increased delinquent behavior. Johnson et al. (2016) also highlighted that perceptions of procedural justice directly influenced adherence to legal norms, which was reflected in the current study's results. The significant relationship between perceived criminal justice delivery and criminal behavior can be explained by social learning theory, which posits that youths may imitate behaviors they observe within the justice system, especially if the system is perceived as ineffective or biased. Additionally, the concept of procedural justice emphasizes that fairness in the justice system fosters law-abiding conduct, and negative perceptions can decrease compliance, leading to criminal behavior.

The second hypothesis, suggesting that differential association would not predict criminal behavior, was accepted. This outcome shows that in the context of Onitsha metropolis, exposure to deviant peers did not significantly affect youth criminal behavior. This finding contrasts with

INT'L JOURNAL OF RESEARCH
EDUCATORS AND SCIENTIFIC DEVELOPMENT
IJRESD

(ISSN) Print: 2992-5665 and Online: 2992-5673
Impact Factor: 5.5 || https://www.ijresd.org
Vol 6 Issue 1. Dec, 2024

previous studies (e.g., Garcia et al., 2020), which found that differential association was a strong predictor of criminal behavior. The non-significant result in the current study may be attributed to the influence of other factors, such as social disorganization, which could mitigate the effects of peer influence. For instance, in communities marked by poverty and instability, other environmental factors may override peer influence, making the role of differential association less impactful. Additionally, structural strains, as outlined by strain theory, may contribute more to criminal behavior in environments where social mobility is limited, potentially overshadowing peer influence. Furthermore, social control theory suggests that strong social bonds within families and communities may prevent youth from engaging in criminal behavior, even if they associate with deviant peers.

The third hypothesis, which posited that perceptions of the police would not significantly predict criminal behavior, was also rejected. This outcome emphasizes the importance of how youths view law enforcement in shaping their engagement in criminal activities. This finding is consistent with legitimacy theory, which suggests that individuals are more likely to follow the law when they perceive authorities as legitimate. In this study, negative perceptions of the police were linked to higher levels of criminal behavior among youths. The result can be explained by procedural justice theory, which underscores that youths are more likely to obey the law when they perceive the police as fair and trustworthy. Negative perceptions of the police, such as experiences of discrimination or lack of accountability, can lead to a breakdown of trust in law enforcement, increasing the likelihood of delinquent behavior. The broken windows theory further supports this, suggesting that communities with visible signs of disorder and distrust in law enforcement foster an environment conducive to criminal behavior.

The fourth hypothesis, suggesting that perceived criminal justice delivery, differential association, and perception of the police would not jointly predict criminal behavior among youths in Onitsha metropolis, Anambra State, was rejected. This outcome indicates that these three factors collectively influenced criminal behavior among youths, highlighting the interconnected nature of these variables in shaping patterns of offending. The rejection of the hypothesis suggests that youths' perceptions of the criminal justice system, their associations with delinquent peers, and their views on the police play a significant role in shaping criminal behavior. This finding contrasts with previous studies (e.g., Tyler, 2006), which have shown that perceptions of the police and the justice system can significantly influence youth criminal behavior. The joint predictive power of these factors in the current study may be attributed to the interactive effects of each predictor variable on youth offending behavior. Perceived criminal justice delivery, which reflects views on fairness, legitimacy, and effectiveness, along with differential association, which involves exposure to deviant peers, and perceptions of the police, may together create a framework in which youths are more likely to engage in criminal activities. Additionally, the complex interplay of these factors may be influenced by contextual variables such as neighborhood characteristics and socioeconomic conditions. In areas marked by social disorganization and economic hardship, negative perceptions of the criminal justice system and peer influence may have a stronger effect on criminal behavior, as highlighted by Sampson and Groves (1989). In such environments, youths may be more likely to reject societal norms and laws, particularly when they perceive law enforcement as ineffective or illegitimate. Furthermore, the cumulative impact of these variables may vary depending on the stage of the criminal justice process. For example, negative perceptions of the police may discourage youths from reporting crimes or seeking assistance, influencing patterns of underreporting

45

and shaping official crime statistics (Skogan, 2006). These findings suggest that the combination of these factors should be considered when developing strategies to address youth offending, emphasizing the importance of improving perceptions of the criminal justice system and fostering positive police-community relationships.

Conclusion

This study explored the factors influencing youth criminal behavior in Onitsha metropolis, Anambra State, focusing on perceived criminal justice delivery, differential association, and perception of police. The findings highlight that negative perceptions of the criminal justice system are linked to increased delinquency, emphasizing the need for systemic reforms to improve public trust and law enforcement confidence. While differential association was not a significant predictor, the presence of positive social networks can serve as protective factors against delinquency. Additionally, positive perceptions of police legitimacy reduce criminal behavior, underscoring the importance of strengthening police-community relations. Overall, the study calls for targeted interventions that address both risk and protective factors to reduce youth crime and promote community safety.

Recommendations

While the study has provided valuable insights into the factors influencing youth involvement in criminal behaviour in Onitsha metropolis, Anambra State, several recommendations is proffered based on the findings to address the identified issues and promote positive outcomes:

1.   Efforts should be made to improve perceptions of fairness, effectiveness, and legitimacy within the criminal justice system. This can be achieved through increased transparency, accountability, and accessibility of legal processes, as well as community engagement

initiatives aimed at fostering trust and confidence in law enforcement agencies and the judiciary.

2.   Although differential association did not emerge as a significant predictor of youth criminal behaviour in this context, interventions targeting peer networks and social influences should be considered. Providing positive alternatives and opportunities for socialization, such as recreational activities, mentorship programs, and educational support, can help mitigate the influence of negative peer associations and promote pro-social behaviour among young individuals.

3.   Law enforcement agencies should adopt community-oriented policing approaches that prioritize collaboration, problem-solving, and relationship-building with local communities. By actively engaging with residents, addressing community concerns, and involving stakeholders in decision-making processes, police officers can build trust and legitimacy, enhance public safety, and reducing the likelihood of youth involvement in criminal behaviour.

4.   Investing in programs and initiatives that empower young individuals and equipping them with essential life skills, vocational training, and employment opportunities can help prevent delinquency and promote positive youth development. By providing avenues for personal growth, self-expression, and social integration, youths are less likely to resort to criminal activities as a means of coping with adversity or seeking validation.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the contributions and insights gained from this study, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations, which may impact the interpretation and generalizability of the findings:

1.   The correlation design of the study limits the ability to establish causal relationships between predictor variables and youth criminal behaviour. While associations between variables

can be identified, longitudinal research designs would provide more robust evidence of temporal precedence and causality.

2.   The reliance on self-report measures to assess perceptions of the criminal justice system, differential association, perception of police, and criminal behaviour may introduce biases and social desirability effects. Participants may underreport or over report their experiences or behaviours, leading to inaccuracies in the data collected.

3.   The findings of the study may be specific to the context of Onitsha metropolis, Anambra State, and may not be readily applicable to other geographical locations or cultural contexts.

Differences in social, economic, and institutional factors across regions may limit the generalizability of the findings beyond the study setting.

Acknowledging these limitations is crucial for interpreting the findings of the study accurately and for guiding future research efforts aimed at addressing youth involvement in criminal behaviour effectively. Future studies should aim to overcome these limitations by employing rigorous research designs, utilizing diverse methodological approaches, and considering a broader range of contextual and individual factors influencing delinquency among young individuals.

References

Akers, R. L. (2020). *Social learning and social structure: A general theory of crime and deviance* (2nd ed.). Northeastern University Press.

Akers, R. L., & Sellers, C. S. (2017). *Criminological theories: Introduction, evaluation, and application* (7th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Abubakar, M. (2019). The role of judicial corruption in Nigeria's legal system: A review. *Journal of Law and Politics*, *12*(3), 45-58.

Alegeh, E. A. (2015). Overcrowding and the Nigerian prison system: A socio-legal perspective. *International Journal of Law and Society*, *8*(4), 234-247.

Anaedozie, F. E. (2016). Institutional challenges to development in Nigeria: A review of the criminal justice system and socioeconomic implications. *African Studies Review, 59*(3), 75-92.

Balogun, O. (2016). The challenges of judicial delays in Nigerian courts. *Law and Society Review*, *14*(1), 33-48.

Bamgbose, O. (2020). Prison reform and the Nigerian criminal justice system: Challenges and prospects. *African Journal of Criminal Justice*, *9*(2), 112-125.

Becker, H. S. (2022). *Outsiders: Studies in the sociology of deviance* (3rd ed.). Free Press.

Borokini, O. (2018). The Nigerian judiciary: An analysis of court congestion and the quest for judicial reforms. *Nigerian Law Journal*, *10*(3), 56-72.

Bourgois, P., & Schonberg, J. (2020). *Righteous dopefiend*. University of California Press.

Busari, S. (2020). The #EndSARS movement: A public outcry against police brutality in Nigeria. *New York University Press*.

Carter, L. (2022). The Nigerian criminal justice system and its shortcomings: A critical assessment. *International Journal of Law and Policy*, *15*(2), 134-147.

Chowdhury, A. (2023). Corruption and delays in Nigerian courts: The impact on justice delivery. *Journal of Law and Justice*, *11*(4), 225-239.

Enobore, E. (2017). Justice delayed: The plight of awaiting trial inmates in Nigerian prisons. *Nigerian Prison Reform Project*.

Felson, R. B., & Lane, J. R. (2019). *Criminal behavior and social control*. Oxford University Press.

Fredrickson, B., & Joiner, T. (2022). Public perception of the police in Nigeria: Challenges and opportunities for reform. *Journal of Law and Criminology*, *13*(1), 89-104.

Garcia, M., Lopez, R., & White, D. (2020). Differential association and criminal behavior among adolescents in urban areas. *Journal of Criminological Research*, *45*(3), 214-229.

Girvan, C., & Marek, R. (2023). The role of ethnicity in criminal sentencing: A study of disparities in the justice system. *Criminal Justice Review*, *45*(1), 56-72.

Gloria, L. (2014). Delayed justice in Nigerian courts: The implications for social equity. *Journal of Nigerian Studies*, *7*(2), 145-160.

Hirschi, T. (2020). *Causes of delinquency*. University of California Press. Hayward, K., & Yar, M. (2021). *Theories of crime and deviance*. Oxford University Press.

Hussain, A., et al. (2015). Corruption and judicial delays in Nigerian courts: A critical review. *Journal of Comparative Law*, *8*(3), 120-135.

Jackson, J., et al. (2018). Trust in police and its implications for social order and criminal behavior. *British Journal of Criminology*, *58*(3), 654-672.

Janet, W., & Erdal, E. (2021). Differential association and its relationship to criminal behavior: Evidence from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, *48*(5), 634-650.

Johnson, H., Stevens, P., & Smith, A. (2016). Procedural justice and its impact on youth compliance with the law. *Journal of Social Justice Studies*, *22*(4), 348-360. Sampson, R. J., & Groves, W. B. (1989). Community structure and crime: Testing social-disorganization theory. *American Journal of Sociology*, *94*(4), 774-802.

Klein, M., & Lee, J. (2019). The complexity of criminal behavior: A sociological approach. Routledge.

Mann, S. (2017). Delays in judicial processes and the role of the legal profession in Nigeria. *International Journal of Legal Studies*, *15*(2), 99-112.

Matsueda, R. L. (2017). The social dynamics of criminal behavior. University of Chicago Press.

Olabode, O. (2014). Nigeria's judiciary and the quest for effective justice delivery. *Nigerian Law Review*, *5*(2), 88-102.

Olateru-Olagbegi, F. (2019). Police investigations and the quest for justice: A critique of the Nigerian judicial process. *African Law Journal*, *21*(3), 133-148.

Okagbue, H. (2016). A study on bail conditions and their impact on judicial delays in Nigeria. *Nigerian Legal Review*, *8*(1), 78-94.

Okonkwo, C. & Ezeonuegbu, C. (2022). Social media, perception of police and fear of terrorism in Nigeria. *ANSU Journal of Arts and Social Sciences, 9* (1) 92-108.

Obaji, G. (2020). Youth crime and societal stability: Understanding the socio-economic determinants of criminal behavior. *Journal of Criminology and Social Policy*, *11*(4), 199-215.

Obaseki, G. (2014). Judicial delays and their impact on the rule of law in Nigeria. *Law and Society Review*, *6*(3), 151-164.

Oyeyipo, O. (2015). Judicial reforms and political interference in Nigeria. *Nigerian Legal Publications*. Presidential Election Petition Tribunal Report (2023). Independent National Electoral Commission and the use of BIVAS technology. *Nigerian Government Publications*.

Rosenbaum, D. P. (2018). *The police and community relations: A sociological perspective*. Oxford University Press.

Skogan, W. G. (2006). Asymmetry in the impact of encounters with the police. *Policing and Society*, *16*(3), 213-236.

Smith, D. A., & Thornberry, T. P. (2015). Differential association and criminal behavior: A longitudinal study of youth offenders. *Criminology Journal*, *53*(2), 307-322.

Smith, L., & Jones, T. (2018). The effects of perceptions of the criminal justice system on youth delinquency. *Journal of Urban Sociology*, *60*(2), 123-140.

Sutherland, E. H. (1939). *Principles of criminology* (4th ed.). J.B. Lippincott.

Tilly, C. (2021). *Durable inequality: A sociological perspective*. University of California Press. Tyler, T. R. (2016). *Why people obey the law*. Princeton University Press.

Tyler, T. R. (2006). *Why people obey the law*. Princeton University Press.

United Nations. (2016). *United Nations rule of law tools: The criminal justice system and human rights*. United Nations Publications.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2014). *Human development report 2014: Sustaining human progress: Reducing vulnerabilities and building resilience*. UNDP.