ECONOMIC HARDSHIP AND THE RISE OF CRIMINALITY IN WUKARI, TARABA STATE

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Abstract
This study was designed to find out the impact of economic hardship on the rise of criminal activities in wukari, causes of economic hardship, causes of crime and solutions to economic hardship in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State. The researcher consulted existing literatures about economic hardships, recession and crime. Robert K. Merton's Strain theory was used to explain the strain experienced by people as a result of economic hardship which makes people resolve to commit crimes. Documentary method was used to collect data for the study. The study found that economic hardship has a significant effect on the rise of criminal activities in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State. Finally, based on these findings, the study recommends that, the government should bring back fuel subsidy or set up modalities where by people will receive some kind of support and relief in the economy, the government at the national level should work towards empowering the naira over the dollar and, citizens must also make the decision to embrace discipline and morally just way of life that is free from crime no matter the condition and look towards innovation, creativity and, to think of ways of effecting positive change in negative situations.

Keywords: Crime Rate, Criminality, Economic Hardship, Recession

Introduction
Globally, crime has existed since civilization's inception. No matter the method of deciding the rules and guidelines which keep society contained, there have always been instances where people have broken their social contracts. Once civilizations grew aware of these inefficiencies, they began developing codes and laws in order to declare and immortalize the directives. According to Perez (2022), Venezuela, Papua New Guinea, South Africa, Afghanistan, and Honduras were found to hold the highest five spots on the crime index list in 2021, and none of these countries have left the top six spots since 2016. The same phenomenon manifests itself at the other end of the spectrum, although admittedly to a lesser degree. Countries such as Japan, Taiwan, Switzerland, South Korea, Hong Kong, Iceland, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates frequently finish at the bottom end of the crime index, meaning they finish at the top of the safety index (Perez, 2022). The above-mentioned countries of the world appear where they are on the list, for various reasons which are all tied to economic conditions at a time.

In Africa, most countries are also witnessing a rise in local crimes and criminal activities as a result of toughened economic conditions. In Kenya for instance, indeed criminals and crime rate committed in Kenya are dominated by persons coming from the extremely poor and disrupted families, the unemployed and less educated youth (Kasina, 2004). This is also attributed to the high levels of inflation in the country. As reported by the Kenya police Annual

Crimes Reports, people in the country are faced with violent crimes associated with many factors; this crime includes robberies, serial and mass murders, child abuse, assaults, terrorism and rape cases among many others (Kenya Police Crime Report, 2011).

In Nigeria for instance, in Lagos, 70% of respondents in a city-wide survey were fearful of being victims of crime caused by a couple of factors one of which is economic hardship (Ogbonnaya, 2013). There are high levels of crime rate in present day Nigeria, including armed robbery and kidnapping in the country. The youth have become the militant groups as witnessed in the South-South of the country; some religious groups have also evolved to become the Boko-Haram Sect in the society (Fasakin, 2015; Ajide, Bankefa & Ajisafe, 2018; Iyekekpolo, 2018). Also, most importantly, present day Nigeria is associated with a high level of inflation and youth unemployment, which have impacted the security level in the country concerning individuals and businesses. Furthermore, crime appears to be the main weapons for financing terrorist activities. This is because many organizations and individuals have been involved in robberies and kidnapping leading to payment of ransoms, which has been used to commit more crimes in the country (Munir & Asghar, 2017).

The primary reason that economic conditions are tracked in relation to crime is that these conditions may relate to poverty in some way, and poverty is understood to be a reason why people commit crime. In fact, poverty is sometimes considered the number one reason for crime (Perez, 2022). On this same list, however, sits unemployment, a macroeconomic variable of interest in representing overall economic conditions, specifically in the realm of labor. This is already known, but this contradicts the idea of poverty and unemployment being the same. Still, there is a relationship. The Bureau of Labor Statistics cites that period of unemployment, along with involuntary part-time employment and low earnings, "hinder a worker's ability to earn income above the poverty threshold" (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Poverty inflicts a sense of desperation within people. When people lack necessary resources to live, or they lack anything above the survival threshold, they will sometimes commit crimes out of necessity. If everyone had a stable, high earning job (relative to their area's economy), there would be no need for anyone to commit crimes out of financial necessity. The issue of poverty remains a primary objective for governments, organizations, and charities to remedy. Whether eradicating poverty is based solely on lowering the amount of crime it induces or whether this mission is far more humanitarian in its core is irrelevant; other than a select few who opt to renounce worldly possessions, there are little who would choose poverty over wealth. The United Nations, which is comprised of over 193 Member States, has a list of 17 Sustainable Development Goals to be accomplished by 2030 (United Nations, 2022). The very first goal on this list is No Poverty, which aims to "end poverty in all its forms everywhere" (United Nations, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

There are many factors attracting the attention of scholars to investigate the possible relationship between economic misery and the crime rate in developing countries. First, the 2008 global financial crisis brought economic hardship to every developing country, which served as one of the motivational factors to individuals who engaged in criminal activities simply to generate income in order to compensate for income deficiency (Bahmani-Oskooee & Oyolola, 2009; Rosenfeld, 2014; Lorde, Jackman & Lowe, 2016; Amin, 2019). Second, Nigeria experienced economic recession in 2015, which continued until the third quarter of 2016; this further brought a lot of hardship to the citizens, including a high rate of unemployment (Adelowokan, Maku, Babasanya & Adesoye, 2019). Hence, crime actually increases in the wake of the recession (Uggen, 2012; Lorde et al., 2016). Therefore, this paper aims at analyzing the phenomenon of crime, economic hardship, causes of crime and economic hardship, relationship between crime and economic hardship and, attempt recommending solutions and ways of reducing economic hardship as it relates in crime causation.

Therefore, the specific objectives of this study are;

1. To ascertain the relationship between economic hardship and crime rate in Wukari LGA
2. To determine the causes of economic hardship in Wukari LGA
3. To determine the causes of crime in Wukari
4. To proffer solutions to economic hardship in Wukari LGA

Conceptual Clarifications

Economic Hardship

Economic hardship is a significant decline in economic activity spread across the economy, lasting for a period of time, normally visible in real gross domestic product (GDP), real income, employment, and industrial production (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2012). The point here is that in an economic hardship, economic activities reduce substantially and this affects wide portions of the economy and it has some permanence (Abiodun, 2023). Abiodun (2023), articulates the key points in Economic hardship to include: "conservative decline in the quarterly real gross domestic product below zero, decline in economic activities spread across the economy in both manufacturing and non-manufacturing sectors, decline in income and profits reported by businesses, reduction in government revenue, job losses due to massive lay-off from companies to cut the cost to remain afloat". To cap it up, it is not a bad idea to say that economic hardship covers a wide range of issues which include: people's monthly salaries not being able to sustain them for a few weeks; people not being able to find jobs; people not being able to pay their children's school fees; government and employers of labor not being able to pay workers' salaries; people's incomes and profits being negatively affected; people losing their jobs because their employers cannot pay their salaries, continuous rise of the prices of goods and services, and a host of other issues

Crime

Crime is simply an act that is contrary to the law and an unacceptable immoral act. Osawe, (2015) described crime as an "illegal act (prohibited by law or failure to act as required by law); illegal activity that involves breaking the law; immoral activity that is considered unacceptable, act that is shameful, unwise and regrettable". To Adebayo (2013), crime is a violation of the rules to be respected by all members of the society, and upon which the rest members of the society make sanction upon those guilty of the violation. When crime is committed, the society bears the consequences. He describes the nature of such crimes to include armed robbery, murder, rape, car theft, burglary, fraud, bribery and corruption, food and drug adulteration, gambling, smuggling, human trafficking, kidnapping, drug trafficking, money laundering, internet scam, advanced fee fraud (419) and other illegal activities. The is the picture of the nature of crime in Nigeria. We must always consider how forms of behavior become defined as a crime, and how the frequency and severity of crime are measured when we are studying phenomena such as the changing rates, seriousness, or nature of criminal activity in a society (Shereen & Dan Hanlett, 2023).

Economic Hardship and Crime Rate in Wukari

Studies provide that there are links between crime and economic hardship. Theoretically, inflation and unemployment can be a motivational factor towards engaging criminal acts, while some provide evidence that it can be an opportunity factor. It may no longer be an exaggeration to state that the news of economic hardship in Nigeria has escalated to a stage where it has become a global concern. This hardship is also recently greatly influenced by the removal of fuel subsidy on the 29th of May 2023 by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu. Fuel subsidy is discount on the market price of fuel offered by government, to allow citizens pay less than the market price of fuel (Ovaga & Okechukwu, 2022). The removal of this discount by the government is what has contributed immensely to the development of economic hardship, inflations and higher cost of living in the country. Before now, the major economic activity of the Jukun in Wukari is farming. Other economic activities today are salt production, trading and commerce, local beer brew, pottery, weaving, and so on. All these economic activities together made life easy going for the people of Wukari and its environs (Agbu, 2013). Today however, even these locally made products and the art of farming practiced by people in wukari are now scarce and expensive thereby making life generally difficult for people in Wukari.

Habib (2024), reports that the president of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), has lamented that Nigerians have become scavengers because of the rising economic hardship in the country. It was reported that burglars emptied the food and properties of a staff working with General Hospital Wukari in his house at the General Hospital quarters in May 2024 (General Hospital). It is also on record there have been several incidents of attacks and looting of warehouses and food trucks in many cities of Nigeria orchestrated by hardship and high cost of living (Habib, 2024). Similarly, there have been several incidents of people stealing and harvesting other people's crops in their respective farms in Wukari. The economic hardship faced by the country has made it impossible for most families and homes in Wukari to afford food for their respective families. This is because it is almost as if the prices of food items keep increasing every day and the sources of household income is either stagnant or almost not available.

Most families can no longer afford a three-square meal feeding schedule and other families cannot even afford a two-square meal feeding schedule. This situation has pushed many people into different kinds of criminal activities all in an attempt to make ends meet. In this light, Gunmen suspected to be Fulani herders on Monday 1st April 2024, invaded the Federal University Wukari in Taraba State and abducted two students. The Chief Security Officer of the university, Mr. Sule Gani, confirmed the incident in a telephone interview with journalists in Jalingo. Mr. Gani said a male and a female ex-student of the university who came to write their carry-over papers were abducted by the gunmen he described as armed Fulani herdsmen (Punch Newspaper, 2024). Odoh and Waheed (2024), for example, assert that as hunger orchestrated by ever increasing prices of food items and essential materials spreads across the country, insecurity continues to rear its ugly head and the added plague of poor purchasing poor power, makes the situation even worse. Also, a young man stabbed a POS operator to death on Monday, June 17. He was pursued, caught, and lynched by a mob. Vanguard learned that the incident happened on Monday around the Wukari Yam market. Residents of the area, angered by the man's actions, pursued and apprehended him before setting him ablaze. (Vanguard Newspaper, 2024).

Koli (2023), holds that the causes of economic hardship that has left the citizens struggling to make ends meet are multi-faceted. The causes, from the author's point of view, are heavy reliance on oil exports, corruption, mismanagement of resources, appreciation of the dollar over the naira, inflation and lack of price control. Similarly, most Taraba state citizens depend solely on their salaries which is barely enough to cater for an individual and their families. This over dependence on salaries makes it difficult for people to bring about innovations and the ability to do business efficiently. When businesses are created and new ideas and policies are created and implemented by both the government and private individuals and corporations, a community or society will be commercialized and there will be an effective circulation of money in that area's economy. Nigerian streets are littered with youth hawkers and idle individuals who ordinarily would have found gainful employment in some enterprise (Okafor, 2011). Also, the prices of both raw goods and finished goods are constantly on the rise in Wukari. This is often times attributed to the instability of the dollar and inflations at all levels.

Prices of things skyrocket almost every day in Wukari and the situation is seemingly alarming. Also, there is a complete absence of price control in Wukari local government area as everybody is allowed to sell at prices of their choice thereby making life difficult for the people.

Poor people especially youths, often see how others (those committing crimes) are making their living and think this is their only option. Without some type of solid support (whether financially or emotionally) some of them (not all) may turn to a life of crime, if for nothing else, a place to stay, food, and healthcare (Siegel, 2005). In this light, people who can no longer afford these products in Wukari because of the constant hike in prices and the lack of reasonable income from their legitimate businesses and careers, turn to illegitimate ways of acquiring their goals. Hence, people can no longer afford the basic needs of life which are; food, clothing and shelter. The current economic condition in the country is also affecting the sustainability of most business as it has been observed that most petty market businesses are almost at a halt. For example; most of the petty market traders in the Wukari market who are selling fresh pepper and onions are no longer selling. When I personally asked a few of them why this is so, their reply was that the prices of these goods are way too expensive and as such they would risk losing their money because most people who are coming to buy from them cannot afford it and these goods are perishable goods. As such their businesses have hit a pause for now. By this example it can be deduced that the petty trader can either switch to another kind of business or wait for prices to go down so they can get back in business. Taking into consideration by waiting, they risk spending their capital and eventually venture into dubiousness and criminal activities.

The Nigeria corporate existence and development can be undermined by a number of factors among which is an escalating and uncontrolled crime problem (Tanimu, 2006). Generally, crimes that have been on the rise in Wukari since the economic downturn mostly caused by the removal of fuel subsidy and, the dominance of the dollar over naira ranges from; petty theft, burglary, kidnapping, farm theft, arms trafficking, motorcycle theft and cyber or internet fraud. All the above-mentioned crimes have gained dominance and relevance in Wukari because of the economic hardship in the country. This is true because prior to the 2015/2016 recession in Nigeria which gave birth to all the other economic downturns that have constantly created hardship till date, there were almost little or no cases of kidnapping, arms trafficking, motorcycle theft and snatching, farm theft and internet fraud in Wukari local government area of Taraba state. Similarly, three persons including a woman were killed on Monday while travelling from Tsokundi to Wukari by suspected militiamen. Two others who sustained various degrees of injuries in the attack escaped and are receiving treatment at Federal University Teaching Hospital, Wukari. The attackers, who according to a survivor (name withheld) were suspected Tiv militias, killed the victims who rode motorcycles from Tsokundi to Wukari for their family meeting. She said after killing the deceased, the militias fled the scene with two of the motorcycles belonging to the victims to an unknown destination. “The attackers carried guns, with three on each of their motorcycles they rode on,” she said (Leadership Newspaper, 2024). Also, it was reported that a man was shot dead by Fulani herdsmen along Wukari-Ibi road because he went to steal a cow from the Fulani herdsmen. His corps was found on Wednesday 26th June 2024 by the police. (Wukari Traditional Council).

Violent crimes persist, it has been demonstrated by scholarly writings that criminality has increased significantly in both rural and large cities in the recent past (Da Silva, 2014). Globally, violent occurrences continue unrestrained and in essence, it is currently a worrying problem in both rural and urban areas of both developed and developing nations (Farrington, 2000). In Brazil, a survey conducted showed that almost 23% of Brazilians cited urban violence as the major social problem they wished tackled, followed by the problem of drugs (21%), and unemployment (19%) in that order (CNT/SENSUS, 2010). In South Africa, the South African Police Service (SAPS, 2012) figures also show an alarming rise in violent crimes with 27% of men indicating they had committed rape (Britto, 2006). Whatever the accuracy of crime statistics, the perception of growing danger has generated widespread anxiety in most African countries. For instance, in Lagos, Nigeria 70% of respondents in a city-wide survey were fearful of being victims of crime caused by a couple of factors one of which is economic hardship (Ogbonnaya, 2013).

Causes of Economic Hardship

Overdependence on Government: Taraba state generally, is a state that is overly dependent on the government. This is because, most of the population wants to do government jobs. Entrepreneurship and business orientation is lacking in the state. If salaries are not paid, almost everybody is broke. This is an important factor exacerbating hardship in Nigeria. Taraba State has continued to face challenges of unemployment and limited entrepreneurial development, leading many youths and graduates to depend heavily on government employment opportunities rather than private enterprise (Yakubu, Isa & Inuwa 2024; Teru, 2015). Such dependence weakens economic resilience because household incomes become vulnerable to delays in salary payments and fluctuations in government spending.

Unemployment and Poverty: Nigeria faces high levels of unemployment and poverty, which have a direct impact on consumer purchasing power and demand. The majority of the population struggles to meet their basic needs, resulting in reduced spending on non-essential goods and services. This decreased demand affects businesses along the supply chain, leading to decreased production and potential disruptions for suppliers and distributors. Hence, the level of unemployment is highly dependent on the overall status of the economy (Awogbenle & Iwuamadi, 2010).

Infrastructure Deficiencies: Inadequate infrastructure is a major obstacle in Nigeria's economic growth and hampers the efficiency of the supply chain. Poor road networks, unreliable power supply, and limited access to ports hinder the smooth flow of goods, resulting in delays, higher transportation costs, and reduced productivity. Poor road networks, inadequate transport facilities, and unreliable power supply contribute to higher production and transportation costs, thereby hindering economic growth and competitiveness in Nigeria (Akinola & Adeyemo, 2024). These challenges discourage investment and make it difficult for businesses to compete on a global scale.

Inflation and Exchange Rate Volatility: Nigeria has experienced bouts of high inflation and currency fluctuations, impacting the purchasing power of businesses and consumers alike. Manufacturers and retailers often struggle with rising production costs, which can lead to higher prices for goods and services. The constant uncertainty surrounding the exchange rate makes it difficult for businesses to plan, leading to supply chain disruptions and decreased investor confidence. Nigeria's high inflation and exchange rate volatility have increased production costs, disrupted business planning, and weakened investor confidence, thereby constraining economic growth (World Bank, 2026).

Security Concerns: The prevalence of security challenges in certain regions of Nigeria poses a significant risk to the supply chain. From armed conflicts and kidnapping to piracy and theft, insecurity disrupts the movement of goods, deters investment, and increases insurance costs. Businesses may be hesitant to operate in vulnerable areas, limiting the accessibility of goods to certain regions and impeding the overall flow of goods within the country. Security challenges such as armed conflict, kidnapping, theft, and other forms of insecurity disrupt business operations, discourage investment, increase operational costs, and negatively affect the movement of goods across Nigeria (Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission (NIPC, 2025).

Dependence on Oil: Nigeria's economy heavily relies on oil exports, making it susceptible to global oil price fluctuations (World Bank, 2026). When oil prices drop, the country faces revenue shortfalls, which impact government spending and infrastructure development. This, in turn, affects the efficiency and reliability of the supply chain, especially for industries that rely on imported goods or fuel for transportation.

Corruption and Bureaucracy: Corruption and bureaucratic red tape in Nigeria can create significant barriers for businesses operating within the country. Delays in customs clearance, inconsistent regulations, and corrupt practices add to operational costs and hinder the smooth functioning of the supply chain. Such challenges can discourage foreign investment and limit access to international markets. Corruption and bureaucratic bottlenecks continue to increase the cost of doing business and discourage investment in Nigeria (Osuma, Ayinde & Ntokozo, 2024).

Addressing the economic hardships in Nigeria requires a multi-faceted approach involving both government and private sector efforts. Investment in infrastructure development, promoting job creation through diversified industries, implementing policies to stabilize the currency and control inflation, and improving security measures are all vital steps to enhance the resilience of the supply chain and stimulate economic growth.

Fuel Subsidy Removal: A subsidy is defined as any mechanism that keeps the prices consumers pay for products below market levels for consumers or above market levels for producers. Subsidies come in several kinds. Some subsidies have a direct pricing impact. Grants, tax cuts and exemptions, and price restrictions are examples of these. Others have an indirect impact on pricing or expenses, such as rules that tilt the market in favor of specific products, government-sponsored technologies, or research and development (Adebiyi, 2011).

Causes of Crime

Unemployment: Unemployment is one of the major challenges in Nigeria today. In spite of thousands of graduates produced every year and an abundance of natural and human resources, the rate of unemployment is increasing at an alarming rate daily. Uchechukwu, Amechi, Okoye and Okeke, (2023), revealed that Nigerian tertiary education institutions produce up to 500,000 graduates every year besides Nigerian graduates who study abroad and return home to compete for jobs (Uchechukwu et al, 2023). The federal tax agency in November, 2016 received 700,000 applications for 500 advertised positions. In May, nearly a million people applied for 10,000 listed positions in the Nigerian Police Force (Uchechukwu et al, 2023). Voice of America (2018) reported Nigeria’s unemployment official figure to be 16 million with additional 2 million expected to join by the end of the year 2018. The classical economists argued that there can never be a situation of total employment in any economy (Ogunyomi & Oginni, 2013). Therefore, this shows that a good number of young people in Wukari are unemployed and lack jobs to do for their survival hence, the next best thing becomes crime.

Poverty: Poverty is simply the inability of an individual to afford the basic needs of life which are; food, shelter and clothing. When people can no longer afford the basic needs of life, most tend to turn towards the direction of crime. Poverty is widely documented as a significant driver of crime because economic deprivation can push individuals toward illegal means of survival (Siegel, 2022).

Laziness: Some people are just extremely lazy such that they do not want to work hard for anything rather, they are constantly looking for shortcuts to success and a better life at the cost of other people's sweat and hard work. Although crime is often linked to structural factors, some criminological theories argue that individuals who seek immediate gratification and avoid legitimate effort may be more prone to criminal behavior (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990).

Peer Pressure/Influence: Peer pressure and influence is another factor causing crime in Wukari. Some young people find themselves in a life of crime not because they lack the basic needs of life rather because they want to belong among their peers. This will to belong makes commit crimes with their peers.

Get rich quick syndrome: Most young people who have ventured into different kinds of criminal behaviors today have done so because they want to get wealth and success but, are not willing to pay the price. Most of this people are found in crimes such as; internet fraud, farm theft, motorcycle theft and hijacking, burglary and kidnapping. The desire for rapid wealth acquisition, especially in societies experiencing economic hardship and high youth unemployment, has been linked to crimes such as fraud, theft, and kidnapping (Merton, 1938)

Theoretical Underpinning

According to strain theory, when an individual is unable to meet culturally-acceptable goals using institutionalized means, he or she experiences a state of emotional disturbance, also known as strain. This strain then forces the individual to adapt to his conditions to relieve the stress he faces. The various adaptations can be categorized into conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion.

Robert K Merton (1910 - 2003) was an American Sociologist who is considered a founding father of modern sociology, and a major contributor to the subfield of criminology. He developed the first major strain theory in criminology in 1938.

Robert K. Merton argued that all people in the United States were encouraged to strive for the cultural goal of monetary success. Lower-class individuals, however, are often prevented from achieving this goal through legitimate means. Their parents may fail to provide them with the skills and attitudes necessary for school success, they may live in communities with inferior schools, and their parents often lack the money to send them to college or set them up in business. As a consequence, lower-class individuals more often experience strain, with this strain being a function of the disjunction between their goals and the legitimate means for achieving them. According to Merton's strain theory, societal structures can pressure individuals into committing crimes. Classic Strain Theory predicts that deviance is likely to happen when there is a misalignment between the "cultural goals" of a society (such as monetary wealth) and the opportunities people have to obtain them.

Robert k. Merton's theory of strain can be effectively applied in this study because this study sought to analyze the effect or impact of economic hardship on criminality in Wukari. It can be deduced that most people who can no longer afford the basic needs of life as a result of the decay in the country's economy, are innovating ways to achieve their goals. While others are retreating from life itself and others have become rebellious that is, they have rejected both the institutionalized means of achieving goals and the cultural goals itself. The extreme level of hardship and inflation in Wukari has encouraged and pushed many people into different criminal activities such as; petty theft, kidnapping, farm theft, motorcycle theft and hijacking, internet fraud/ yahoo, and breaking and entering all in an attempt to live a better life. Also, the high level of inequalities that is obvious in Nigeria, is another factor causing people to innovate criminal ways of achieving their goals. This is evident because there is a very wide gap between the rich and the poor. In wukari most people considered as "the rich" are politicians few business men and high-ranking civil servants. To the ordinary man he sees evidence of good living in the lives of these people and their children but cannot have a good life because of lack of opportunity and connections created by high level of inequality in the society. This mindset has also pushed many people towards innovating criminal ways of getting to live a good life. In a nut shell, all the earlier mentioned economic strains of; poverty, inflation, unemployment, dependence on salary and social inequalities have made it possible for there to be a rise in criminal activities such as; breaking and entering, petty theft, kidnapping, snatching, high jackings, farm theft and internet fraud.

Robert Agnew introduced the General Strain Theory (GST) in the early 1990s as a significant expansion of Robert K. Merton's Strain Theory to explain why individuals turn to crime and delinquency.

The General Strain Theory (GST) is a criminological framework proposing that individuals are pressured into crime and deviance by negative emotions such as anger, frustration, and depression that arise from stressful life events and strained social relationships. The theory seeks to explain why people commit crimes across all social classes by focusing on individual, psychological, and emotional responses to adversity. Agnew's General Strain Theory shifts the focus from structural inequalities to individual psychological and emotional experiences. The Three Major Sources of Strain Agnew identified three specific categories of strain that trigger negative emotions

Failure to Achieve Positively Valued Goals: The inability to attain wealth, status, or academic success through legal means (often due to blocked opportunities).

Removal of Positively Valued Stimuli: The loss or deprivation of valued things in one's life, such as the death of a loved one, a romantic breakup, job loss or lack of job.

Confrontation with Negative Stimuli: Exposure to stressful, toxic, or harmful environments, such as physical abuse, bullying, or chronic neighborhood conflict, hardship.

The Pathway to Crime Strains do not automatically lead to crime. Instead, they trigger negative emotions most notably anger. Anger energizes individuals, reduces their concern for consequences, and creates a desire for revenge or relief. Individuals may then turn to crime as a coping mechanism to: Gain revenge against the source of their strain, Remove or escape the strain (e.g., running away from an abusive home or stealing money to relieve financial pressure). Manage feelings (e.g., using illicit drugs to cope with depression). Moderating Factors and Coping Whether someone resorts to criminal coping depends on their individual characteristics and available resources. It is on the above highlighted premises that enables us to explain the Nigerian situation and Wukari to be specific. Hardship has practically driven people crazy thereby, enabling criminal innovations that are now affecting the society. Kidnappings, banditry, burglary, theft and all sorts of crimes are on a constant rise.

Methodology

The paper adopted methodological approach and content analysis. The paper makes use of secondary sources of data for the purpose of data collection in discussing the phenomenon. Mainly, the sources of the information are textbooks, pamphlets, journal articles newspapers, magazines and other online materials which focuses on the subject of this study. The paper focused on analytical and interpretive approach and documentaries were analyzed thematically. Hence this article is an academic paper showcasing some conceptual perspectives and already existing data on crime and economic hardship in Nigeria. This study is purely a qualitative study. The materials for the study were generated through documentary method with the data analyzed using Reflexive thematic Analysis. Newspapers, Personal observations, journals and academic articles were consulted.

Discussion of Findings

The findings generated from the documentary data analyzed through Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2022). The analysis involved repeated engagement with documentary materials, including newspaper reports, academic literature, policy documents, and personal observations relating to economic hardship and crime in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State. Through iterative coding and theme development, four major themes were generated:

1. Economic hardship as a driver of criminal behavior.
2. Structural causes of economic hardship in Wukari.
3. Emerging patterns of crime associated with economic hardship.
4. Pathways for mitigating economic hardship and crime.

Economic hardship as a driver of criminal behavior

The documentary evidence consistently portrayed economic hardship as a significant factor contributing to the rise of criminal activities in Wukari. Reports reviewed indicated that increasing inflation, unemployment, poverty, and the rising cost of living have created conditions that push individuals toward unlawful means of survival. This finding is consistent with existing documentary and empirical literature. Wilfred (2024) found that inflation and unemployment significantly increase crime rates in Nigeria by worsening economic conditions and reducing legitimate income opportunities. Similarly, Ojo, Omojuwa and Oludare (2023) established a long-run relationship between unemployment and crime, arguing that persistent joblessness creates economic frustration that often manifests in criminal behavior. Ebobo and Alero (2022) further observed that poverty and unemployment are major drivers of crime in contemporary Nigeria, as individuals deprived of basic needs may resort to illegal activities for survival. Likewise, Ihensekhien and Miedideke (2023) reported that youth unemployment significantly contributes to rising crime rates and poverty across Nigeria. Supporting this position, Doris, Embwa and Everest (2025) found that poor living conditions, low-income levels, and economic hardship significantly influence youth involvement in criminal activities in Taraba State. Furthermore, Daniel (2024) argued that hunger, food insecurity, and economic inequality have intensified criminal behavior among vulnerable populations in Nigeria. These studies collectively reinforce the documentary evidence that economic hardship remains a critical factor driving criminal activities in Wukari and other parts of Nigeria.

Structural Causes of Economic Hardship in Wukari

The second theme highlights the structural and systemic factors responsible for economic hardship in Wukari. Documentary materials repeatedly identified unemployment, inflation, fuel subsidy removal, overdependence on government employment, inadequate infrastructure, corruption, and exchange rate instability as major contributors to worsening living conditions. The documentary evidence revealed that economic hardship in Wukari is largely driven by structural and systemic economic challenges operating at both the national and local levels. World Bank Report (2024) indicates that high inflation has contributed to increased poverty and food insecurity across Nigeria. Several reports observed that the subsidy removal contributed to inflationary pressures and heightened economic hardship for many Nigerians (IMF, 2024). Findings by African development Bank (2024) further showed that exchange rate instability and the depreciation of the naira have intensified economic difficulties. The unification of foreign exchange markets and the resulting currency depreciation increased the cost of imports, thereby raising production costs and consumer prices. This situation has adversely affected both businesses and households in Wukari. In a World Bank (2024) Report, corruption and poor governance were frequently cited as factors that undermine economic development by diverting resources away from productive investments and social welfare programs.

Emerging patterns of crime associated with economic hardship

The analysis identified several forms of crime that documentary sources linked to worsening economic conditions in Wukari. These included petty theft, burglary, farm produce theft, motorcycle theft, internet fraud, kidnapping, armed robbery, and violent attacks. Available documentary evidence indicates that rising unemployment, poverty, inflation, and declining household incomes often increase the likelihood of individuals engaging in criminal activities as coping mechanisms (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2023; World Bank, 2024; National Economic Council, 2021; Nigeria Police Force, 2023).

Finally, job creation and youth empowerment emerged as central recommendations across documentary sources. The evidence suggests that sustainable employment opportunities would address one of the primary conditions associated with criminal behavior in Wukari. Reports by the World Bank (2024), UNDP (2023), and the National Bureau of Statistics (2023) emphasize that improving economic opportunities, particularly for young people, can significantly reduce vulnerability to crime and social unrest.

The findings support existing literature that advocates socioeconomic development as a long-term strategy for crime prevention. Rather than relying solely on punitive measures, addressing the underlying economic conditions appears necessary for achieving sustainable reductions in criminality (National Economic Council, 2021; UNDP, 2023; World Bank, 2024; Nigeria Police Force, 2023; NBS, 2023).

Table 1: Summary of Findings

Theme	Key Findings
Economic Hardship and Crime	Economic hardship was consistently identified as a major factor contributing to criminal activities in Wukari.
Unemployment	High unemployment levels, particularly among youths, increased vulnerability to involvement in crime as a means of survival.
Inflation and Rising Cost of Living	Persistent inflation and increased living expenses reduced household purchasing power, creating financial pressures that encouraged unlawful activities.
Poverty	Widespread poverty limited access to basic needs and economic opportunities, making criminal behavior an alternative source of income for some individuals.
Survival-Driven Crimes	Economic difficulties were linked to crimes such as petty theft, burglary, farm produce theft, and motorcycle theft.
Organized and Violent Crimes	Severe economic deprivation was associated with the rise of internet fraud, kidnapping, armed robbery, and other violent crimes.
Social Strain	Financial stress, frustration, and inability to meet societal expectations contributed to deviant and criminal behavior.
Overall Conclusion	Documentary evidence suggests that worsening economic conditions create an enabling environment for crime by increasing financial insecurity and reducing legitimate livelihood opportunities.

Source: Study Survey, 2026

Table 2: Summary of Findings

Theme	Summary of Findings
Unemployment	Limited employment opportunities, especially among youths, reduce household income and increase financial vulnerability.
Inflation	Rising prices of food, transportation, and basic commodities weaken purchasing power and lower living standards.
Fuel Subsidy Removal	Increased fuel costs have led to higher transportation and production expenses, worsening the cost of living.
Overdependence on Government Employment	Reliance on public-sector jobs limits economic diversification and leaves many residents vulnerable when government opportunities are scarce.
Inadequate Infrastructure	Poor roads, unstable electricity supply, and limited access to basic services hinder business growth and economic productivity.
Corruption and Poor Governance	Mismanagement of public resources and weak institutional accountability reduce economic opportunities and development outcomes.
Exchange Rate Instability	Fluctuations in the value of the naira increase the cost of imported goods and contribute to inflationary pressures.
Weak Support for Small Businesses	Limited access to credit, training, and business support constrains entrepreneurship and job creation.
Agricultural Challenges	High input costs, insecurity, and inadequate government support reduce agricultural productivity and household income.
Economic Inequality	Unequal distribution of resources and opportunities leaves vulnerable groups disproportionately affected by hardship.

Source: Study Survey, 2026

Table 3: Summary of Findings

Theme	Summary of Findings
Petty Theft and Burglary	Economic hardship increased incidents of petty theft and burglary as individuals sought alternative means of survival.
Farm Produce and Motorcycle Theft	Rising poverty and unemployment contributed to theft of agricultural produce and motorcycles, which are valuable economic assets in the community.
Internet Fraud (Cybercrime)	Limited employment opportunities encouraged some youths to engage in internet fraud as a source of income.
Kidnapping and Armed Robbery	Severe financial pressures and declining economic conditions were associated with the emergence of more organized and violent crimes, including kidnapping and armed robbery.
Violent Attacks and Insecurity	Economic stress, social frustration, and weakened livelihoods contributed to increased violence and insecurity within the community.
Youth Involvement in Crime	Unemployment and lack of economic opportunities made young people particularly vulnerable to participation in criminal activities.
Need for Preventive Interventions	Documentary evidence emphasized job creation, youth empowerment, and economic support programs as key strategies for reducing crime and improving community security.

Source: Study Survey, 2026

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, economic hardship is a problem that requires urgent attention and must be minimized in Nigeria, as citizens are losing their sanity and as their moral compass is shifting towards negativity while, others are losing their lives because of hunger, and falling sick for lack of balanced diets. Recently, the hardship has also exacerbated into innocent people being victims of kidnappings and heavily paying ransoms and insecurities everywhere. The study concluded that poverty, unemployment, fuel subsidy, inflation, social inequalities and bad leadership have a major effect on the increasing crime rate in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria. It is also important to emphasize that if these problems are not tackled, the level of crime will continue to increase in Wukari and Nigeria as a whole.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were proposed to address economic hardship and reduce crime in Wukari Local Government Area:

1. Youth Employment Programs

Government at all levels should establish sustainable youth employment schemes aimed at reducing unemployment, which was identified as a major driver of crime. Public works programs, entrepreneurship support initiatives, and youth-focused employment opportunities should be created to absorb unemployed youths and provide them with legitimate sources of income. Priority should be given to local industries and community development projects capable of generating large-scale employment.

2. Social Protection Schemes

The Federal, State, and Local Governments should strengthen social protection mechanisms such as conditional cash transfers, food assistance programs, health insurance subsidies, and targeted support for vulnerable households. These interventions would cushion the effects of economic hardship, reduce extreme poverty, and minimize the desperation that often pushes individuals into criminal activities.

3. Agricultural Support and Empowerment
Given that Wukari is predominantly an agrarian community, government should invest heavily in agricultural development through the provision of improved seedlings, fertilizers, mechanized farming equipment, irrigation facilities, and agricultural extension services. Access to agricultural grants and low-interest loans should also be expanded to farmers. Increased agricultural productivity will enhance food security, create employment opportunities, and reduce economic pressures that contribute to crime.

4. Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Financing
Financial institutions, development agencies, and government intervention programs should provide accessible and affordable financing to small and medium-scale enterprises. Low-interest loans, grants, business incubation programs, and financial literacy training should be made available to entrepreneurs, particularly youths and women. Strengthening SMEs will stimulate local economic activities, increase household incomes, and reduce dependence on criminal means of survival.

5. Community Policing and Security Partnerships
Community policing initiatives should be strengthened through collaboration between security agencies, traditional rulers, community leaders, and residents. Establishing neighborhood security committees, intelligence-sharing platforms, and community surveillance systems will improve crime detection and prevention. Community participation in security management will foster trust between citizens and law enforcement agencies while discouraging criminal activities.

6. Price Stabilization Mechanisms
Government should implement effective price stabilization policies to control excessive inflation and protect consumers from arbitrary increases in the prices of essential goods and services. Strategic food reserves, market monitoring systems, support for local production, and anti-hoarding measures should be strengthened. Stable prices will improve the purchasing power of households and reduce economic frustration among citizens.

7. Vocational and Skills Acquisition Training
Comprehensive vocational education and skills acquisition programs should be established across Wukari Local Government Area. Training should focus on marketable skills such as tailoring, welding, carpentry, information technology, electrical installation, automobile repairs, agro-processing, and digital entrepreneurship. Such programs should be accompanied by startup grants and toolkits to enable beneficiaries to become self-employed and financially independent.

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