



THE DILEMMA OF NIGERIAN SECURITY OPERATIVES IN CURBING THE MENACE OF CULT-RELATED ACTIVITIES IN IKWERRE AND EKPEYE ETHNIC NATIONALITIES OF RIVERS STATE

Emeodu, Elijah Nwabueze (Ph.D)

(Sociology of Development)

Ebah, Emmanuel John (Ph.D Candidate)

(Peace and Conflict Studies)

Obuzor, Mezewo Emerinewo (Ph.D Candidate)

(mezewo.obuzor@rsu.edu.ng)

Rivers State University

Article history:	Abstract:
<p>Received: 14th May 2022 Accepted: 14th June 2022 Published: 26th July 2022</p>	<p>This study focused on the dilemma of Nigerian security operatives in curbing the menace of cult-related activities in Ikwerre and Ekpeye ethnic nationalities in Rivers State. This study, which is a descriptive survey, utilised primary and secondary sources. The primary source is a questionnaire, while the secondary data emanates from world climate journals. In addition, textbooks, journal articles, newspapers, and magazines served as sources of data elicitation for the study. The study revealed that the major causes of cultism and youth violence in Ikwerre and Ekpeye ethnic nationalities are traced to negative parenting, peer pressure, societal decadence, lack of sporting activities, the militarization of the Nigerian polity, and media influence. Today, many people are leaving some communities in Ikwerre and Ekpeye ethnic nationalities because of the insecurity in the area. More so, the study revealed the need to curb the destructive predispositions of cult groups and the threat they constantly pose to peace and security in the state, and in achieving this, the current Governor of Rivers State recently requested security agencies to carry out a total clampdown on cultists and related criminal behaviour in communities across the state. The study recommended that the best way to tackle the menace is the complete involvement of security operatives. The deployment of tactical security teams in the affected communities would check the attacks, maintaining that negotiating with the criminals was not the most effective approach.</p>

Keywords: Dilemma, Nigerian Security Operatives, Menace of Cult

1. INTRODUCTION

Obviously, Nigeria as a country is characterised by the seemingly obdurate menace of insecurity. Overtime, cult-related activities have widely been experienced in the Ikwerre and Ekpeye ethnic nationalities and other ethnic groups in Rivers State. Cultism involves a ritual practise by a group of people whose membership, admission, policy, and initiation formalities, as well as their mode of operations, are done in secret and kept secret, with their activities having negative effects on both members and non-members alike. Some scholars see cultism as an enclosed outfit committed to the same course, which is often in conflict with the held norms and values of human society (Akasike, 2018, Dikewoha, 2016, Ajayi et al., 2010, Oyemwinmina & Aibieyi, 2015). Udoh and Ikezu (2015) are of the view that cult groups engage in various unscrupulous or nefarious activities such as kidnapping, killings, armed robbery, maiming, rape, etc. It goes that the two major cult groups in Rivers State that have caused serious issues are the Icelanders (or Deywell) and the Greenlanders (or Deygbam). These two cult groups have proven to be the most disreputable of all the cult groups in Rivers State. Amadi et al. (2016) said that there are other cult groups besides the two mentioned above, such as the KKK, the Mafia Lords, the Germans, the Vultures, the Red Squad, etc.

The emergence and prevalence of cultism in Rivers State emerged as a result of the incompatible or conflicting negation and decay of Nigerian society, which is rooted in its distorted, collapsed economy as well as leadership quagmire. Also, it would be ideal to posit that the Nigerian economy over the years has been vulnerable to perpetual limitation in solving the problems of the populace. Nigerian security operatives posted in Ikwerre and Ekpeye ethnic nationalities in Rivers State (such as the police, army, navy, air force, NSCDC, and others) are established to protect lives and properties, but it seems that their presence is not washing out the activities of cultism. For instance, a series of mayhem, kidnappings,

and struggles for supremacy amongst cult groups have brought about communal crisis and underdevelopment as a result of frequent attacks and reprisal attacks by the core cult groups in Rivers State, such as the Deegban, Icelanders, and Greenlanders. The result of this amounts to scores of lives being lost, forced migration for fear of being killed or kidnapped, and health challenges. This also emanates as the affirmed goal of every cult outfit is to dominate its immediate environment and make life painful for opposition groups to survive

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There exists some dilemma confronting the security operatives in the provision of security in Rivers State and Nigeria at large. These situations can also be attributed to the conditions found in the Ikwerre and Ekpeye ethnic nationalities, where there exists the presence of cult activities amidst security operatives' presence. How did cult activities stated have been a reoccurring discussion in the academic world, inducing crime and insecurity amidst the efforts of various security platforms? For instance, a study by Owonikoko (2016) titled "*From Campuses to Communities: Community-Based Cultism and Local Responses in the Niger-Delta Region, Nigeria*" found that cult groups evolved from college confraternities that existed on college campuses in the 1950s as an avenue for bridging the ethnic and tribal divide among students. Sardonicly, the idea of those who introduced cult practise is no longer what is practised by cultists in Nigeria and specifically in Ikwerre and Ekpeye ethnic nationalities. Currently, cult groups are fueled by external political influences, struggles for supremacy, and the availability of small arms to engage in criminal activities that extend well beyond the walls of colleges into communities.

Today, due to the menace of cult activities, life is no longer what it used to be for Ikwerre and Ekpeye ethnic nationalities as the place has degenerated into a state of anomie, which has been a prominent issue in recent times. There has been an increase in the occurrence of acts of violence and lawlessness. Reacting to the manifestation of this quagmire, a study by Emeodu (2021) titled "*Community Indigenous Security Outfit and socio-economic development in Onelga and Emolga, Rivers State,*" revealed that the activities of cultists are kidnapping and hostage-taking of prominent citizens and the kidnapping of middle class citizens and expatriate oil workers. With this entire crisis happening in the face of security operatives, one may be poised to ask what the dilemma of Nigerian security operatives is in curbing the menace of cult-related activities in Ikwerre and Ekpeye ethnic nationalities. Although various studies have proven the situation that hypnotised effective security against cult activities in Nigeria, none of the studies captured or fused the situations in Ekpeye and Ikwerre ethnic nationalities. For example, a study by Okunola and Ojo (2012) titled the "*Prospects of Graduates Choosing Police as a Career in Nigeria*" explained the situation that posed a dilemma to Nigeria security operatives in curbing cult activities to include: lack of management inadequacies, corruption, disregard for human rights and poor salary structures, amongst others. One worrisome situation is that after the deployment of tactical security teams in the affected communities to check the attacks, they may desire to negotiate with the criminals. Some of the security operatives have become informants for cultists, and this cannot take the people to a safe environment. Hence, it was seen as not being the most effective approach. With the above crisis, most communities in Ikwerre and Ahoada ethnic communities have Despite the beefing up of security in various affected communities in Ikwerre and Ekpeye ethnic nationalities, the problems still loom or persist in the study areas. Given this situation, the researchers critically investigated the dilemma of Nigerian security operatives in curbing the menace of cult-related activities in Ikwerre and Ekpeye ethnic nationalities in Rives State.

Research Questions

- i. What are the roles of security operatives in combating the menace of cult related activities in Ikwerre and Ekpeye ethnic nationality, Rivers State?
- ii. What are the dilemmas of Nigeria security operatives in combating cult related activities in Ikwerre and Ekpeye ethnic nationality, Rivers State?
- iii. What are the impacts of cult activities due to the failure of Nigerian securities on Ikwerre and Ekpeye ethnic nationality, Rivers State?

Objective of the Study

- i. To find out the roles of security operatives in combating the menace of cult related activities in Ikwerre and Ekpeye ethnic nationality, Rivers State.
- ii. To identify the dilemmas of Nigeria security operatives in combating cult related activities in Ikwerre and Ekpeye ethnic nationality, Rivers State.
- iii. To ascertain the impacts of cult activities due to the failure of Nigerian securities on Ikwerre and Ekpeye ethnic nationality, Rivers State?

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The dilemma of Nigerian security constitutes the centre of this study as it relates to cult-related activities. The Nigerian security forces are saddled with the responsibility of ensuring both external and internal security. Regrettably, it was found that they have failed in their constitutional responsibility as in Nigeria's north, Fulani herdsmen and the Boko-haram crisis exist, and this is not healthy amidst security presence. In the southern region, what we experience are cult-related activities that have affected our society negatively and have attracted self-security through indigenous efforts (Emeodu et al. 2022; Adiele & Emeodu, 2022; Dickson, 2021). According to Ajayi *et al.* (2010), cultism refers to a ritual practise by a group of people whose membership, admission, policy, and initiation formalities, as well as their mode of operations, are done in secret and kept secret, with their activities having negative effects on both members

and non-members alike. These outlaw groups, in the view of Udoh and Ikezu (2015), always engage in despicable activities such as kidnapping, drugs, armed robbery, rape, etc.

One may ponder: what are the causes of youth’s involvement in cult violence? The answer is not farfetched. They may be due to the problems of poverty, unemployment, and lack of quality education. Despite the efforts and campaigns against cultism, cult-related activities such as killings and other crimes have continued to rise. The more the security operatives are prone to some dilemmas, the more the cult groups cause more injuries. Rivers State has been ensnared in a mind-numbing cycle of violence orchestrated by vicious cult groups that operate without fear; neither do they worry about any dire consequences for their actions. In recent times, gang wars have ravaged many communities, including Ogoni, Andoni, Emohua, Abua-Odual, Rumuolumeni, Ikwerre, and Eleme, where everyone appears to be on edge. Some of the groups that have continued to perpetrate a culture of violence and bloodshed as well as terrorise the people of the state are Deywell, Deybam, Iceland, Greenland, and the Green Bishops. (The Guardian, Sunday Magazine, April 28, 2019).

Hence, studies by Amadi et al. (2016) and Osaghae et al. (2011) revealed numerous incidences or cases of killings, kidnapping, armed robbery, etc. that are accredited to cult groups in Rivers State. They were of the view that their attacks always emerged as a result of reprisal attacks. Through this, uncountable lives have been reportedly lost in many communities, and as these situations occur, many people desert their communities for fear of being killed or kidnapped.

Thus, various factors are responsible for security operatives' poor performance, such as funding, corruption, and others. Research by Ladapo (2013) suggested that funding issues hamper the police's ability to carry out active investigations into the incessant cases of murder and other violent crimes in Nigeria. A research survey by Chinwukwu (2017) involving 360 respondents from three states in Nigeria identified political interference in police duties as a significant barrier to the Nigerian police's effectiveness. However, the poor performance of the security operatives as well as the activities of the cult groups pose negative impacts. Ajayi et al. (2010) wrote on the effects, and they range from poor human and infrastructural development in the state to the loss of billions of naira in many communities. Emeodu (2021) found that it stagnated economic activity, while Chukwu (2018) revealed that it led to capital flight. All these show that security is ideal for a better society, and when security operatives fail to measure up to expectations, it affects the entirety of society. Therefore, the study gap is towards addressing the dilemma of Nigerian security operatives in curbing the menace of cult-related activities in Ikwerre and Ekpeye ethnic nationalities in Rivers State.

4 METHODOLOGY

The paper adopted a descriptive survey design. The study area is the Ekpeye and Ikwerre ethnic nationalities in Rivers State. They constitute two of the numerous ethnic nationalities in Rivers State and Nigeria at large, with an estimated population of Ikwerre ethnic as 1954100 (NPC, 2016) and an Ekpeye estimated population of 768,000 (Obuzor & Emeodu, 2021). Using Taro Yameni, a sample size of 400 was retrieved. Purposive sampling was used to select four communities in the two ethnic groups, such as the Obelle community and Rumuekpe community in Ikwerre ethnicity, while Epkeye ethnic nationality was represented by the Odiemudie community and Ogbologbolo community. Again, a purposive sampling technique was used to select various security operatives, farmers, chiefs, CDCs, and youths. Both primary and secondary sources were utilised by the researchers for data generation under the instrumentality of a questionnaire. The simple percentage was used for data analysis

5 DATA ANALYSIS

Research Question 1: What are the roles of security operatives in combating the menace of cult related activities in Ikwerre and Epkeye ethnic nationality, Rivers State?

Table 2: Showing the role of security operatives in combating the menace of cult related activities

S/N	Items	SA%	A%	D%	SD%	Total
1	Security operatives ought to arrest cult members	200 (50%)	150 (37.5%)	40 (10%)	10 (2.5%)	400 (100%)
2	Not to be involved in negotiation with cult members demanding for ransom	250 (62.25%)	140 (35%)	10 (2.5%)	-	400 (100%)
3	Security operatives adopting ideal intelligence to control the activities of cultism	180 (45%)	150 (37.5%)	20 (5%)	30 (7.5%)	400 (100%)
4	Responsibility of prosecuting cult members and protecting the people against cult threats	225 (56.25%)	100 (25%)	40 (10%)	35 (8.75%)	400 (100%)

Source: Researcher’s Field work, 2022.

Table 1 shows the role of security operatives in combating cultism in Ikwerre and Ekpeye ethnic nationalities. In fact, all the items were accepted and agreed upon because they represent the roles of security operatives in combating the menace of cult-related activities in Ikwerre and Epkeye ethnic nationalities in Rivers State. It demonstrated that security personnel should arrest cult members; that security personnel should not engage in ransom negotiations with cult members; that security personnel should use ideal intelligence to control cult activities; and that security personnel should also be responsible for prosecuting cult members and protecting the public from cult threats.

Despite the menace of cult groups in the study area, security operatives have been ineffective in combating their criminal activities. Owonikoko (2016) found that members of some communities accused the police of collaborating with cult members or turning a blind eye to their criminal activities, which is consistent with the current study. Based on the analysis, the researchers found that the police/cult relationship exists and that those cult members arrested are often released at the police station and appear to know the people who reported them to the police.

Research Question 2: What are the dilemmas of Nigeria security operatives in combating cult related activities in Ikwerre and Epkeye ethnic nationality, Rivers State?

Table 2: Showing the dilemmas of Nigeria security operatives in combating cult related activities

S/N	ITEMS	SA%	A%	D%	SD%	Total
1	Poor funding and poor security welfare package	220 55%	160 40%	- -	20 5%	400 (100%)
2	Failure of the citizens to align and respect the security operatives	140 35%	230 57.5%	30 7.5%	- -	400 (100%)
3	Most securities involvement on illegal oil bunker	200 50%	150 (37.5%)	20 (5%)	30 (7.5%)	400 (100%)
4	Revealing important information to cult members in exchange for money and other corrupt habits	180 35%	200 50%	15 3.75%	5 1.25%	400 (100%)

Source: Researcher’s Field work, 2022.

Table 2 above shows the dilemmas of Nigeria's security operatives in combating cult-related activities. The paper found that poor funding and poor security welfare packages

The failure of the citizens to align and respect the security operatives; security involvement in illegal oil bunkery; revealing important information to cult members in exchange for money; and other corrupt habits are some of the dilemmas or barriers of Nigeria's security operatives in combating cult related activities in the study area. Related findings on this were found in the studies of Albert and Okoli (2016) as well as Salihu and Gholami (2018), who identified corruption, lack of procedural justice, inadequate resources, lack of community collaboration, police culture, and poverty as some of the factors that hinder police efforts in combating cult activities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Speaking on the effect of corruption, a study by Yagboyayu & Akinola (2019) revealed that the problem of corruption presents a severe obstacle to Nigeria's overall development. Also, Maya-Pearce (2014) and Kempe (2018) noted that corruption is institutionalised and is a cankerworm permeating Nigerian society's social fabric. Studying more on security corruption, a study by Otusanya et al. (2015) noted that the Nigerian security services, such as the police, do not adequately investigate cases involving politicians and other social influencers; collect bribes from both complainants and arrestees to thwart the course of justice; and illegally detain suspects to extort money, among others (Agbibo, 2014). As this unfolds, there is a likelihood that they will become weaker in their operations, and this may likely be attributed as a dilemma to the poor performance in cult eradication.

The paper found that funding is a factor in the dilemma of Nigerian police. This must have compelled Chinwokwu (2018) to posit that inadequate funding of the Nigerian police places significant constraints on their ability to deliver core police services and fulfil their law enforcement obligations. Related to this was the study by Alumona, Osita, and Onuoha (2019) which revealed that inadequate funding affects virtually all law enforcement agencies in Nigeria and undermines public confidence in the government's ability to safeguard the lives and properties of citizens and foreign residents in Nigeria.

Noticing the deficiency of the security operatives in combating cult activities has led to various communities adopting self-help. Emeodu (2021) and Owonikoko (2016) observed that communities have resorted to self-help measures such as the formation of unconventional security outfits. Vigilantes are community members who volunteer to safeguard their communities and confront suspected cult members. He further noted that those suspected of involvement in cult-related activities are subjected to mob justice, which in most cases is death.

Research Question 3: What are the impacts of cult activities due to the failure of Nigerian securities in Ikwerre and Epkeye ethnic nationality, Rivers State?

Table 3: Showing the impacts of cult activities due to the failure of Nigerian securities

S/N	ITEMS	SA%	A%	D%	SD%	Total
1	Cult activities distorts social activities	210 52.5%	180 45%	- -	10 2.5%	400 (100%)
2	It leads to collapse of some business/economic activities	190 47.5%	150 (37.5%)	20 (5%)	30 (7.5%)	400 (100%)
3	It represents negative implication such as poverty and unemployment	225 56.25%	120 30%	40 10%	15 3.75%	400 (100%)
4	Cult activities gives a poor/negative description of the people/society	200 50%	110 27.5%	50 12.5%	40 10%	400 (100%)

Source: Researcher’s Field work, 2022.

Table 3 above reveals the impacts of cult activities due to the failure of Nigerian security in Ikwerre and Epkeye ethnic nationalities. Item 1, 2, 3 and 4 were all accepted, indicating the impacts of cult activities on Ikwerre and Epkeye ethnic nationalities. Other related studies correlate with this, as the studies by Owonikoko (2016) and Nche, et al. (2019)

indicated that cult groups' menace has severely affected communities across Rivers State. Also, the findings of Agbiboa (2015) and Nche et al. (2019) pointed out that the criminal activities of cult groups have negatively influenced economic and social activities and threatened public safety and security. Eze (2015) and Otusanya et al. (2015) found that the police have not been effective in combating the criminal activities of cult groups and crime in general in Rivers State. A review of the literature indicated that both organisational and individual constraints limit the police's ability to function effectively and deliver on their core mandate of service and security (Ikeddinma, 2018; Agbiboa, 2014).

Also, Nche (2019) noted that the criminal activities of cult groups had created so much fear in the communities that people had to adjust their social and economic lifestyles. Residents of some communities in Ikwerre and Ekpeye communities have to close shops early and avoid social gatherings such as clubs, parties, sporting events, and other activities at night. Businesses are fleeing the area as a result of violent acts of kidnapping that have made it difficult for people to move around at certain times of the day. Capital flight has been introduced through poor security and cult activities to more unemployment and poverty in a community that was already suffering from high poverty rates and unemployment before the menace of cult group wars and activities. The violent behaviour perpetrated by cult groups through supremacy struggles in communities in the study area has resulted in the deaths of some cult members and other innocent residents

6 CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

The Nigerian security agencies' inability to effectively curtail the menace of cult groups has resulted in negative public perception and diminished police legitimacy. Constraints such as inadequate resources and corruption, amongst others, influence how security operatives approach their jobs. Cultism is not only predominant in the study areas and in Rivers State, but also in other states of the federation. The activities of cultists in Rivers State have assumed an unprecedented proportion that no articulated and lasting solutions seem to be in sight since the security operatives have failed. The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study

- i. If the Nigeria security desire to perform optimally in their responsibility to fight cult menace, they should avoid being involved in negotiation with cult members demanding for ransom. Hence, strategies measures of ideal intelligence to tackle the situation. Such effort will yield result and reduce the crime of kidnapping for ransom among cult members.
- ii. Secondly, security agencies should avoid corrupt habit that prompts them revealing important information to cult members in exchange for money. When this habit is put to a stop it will help to provide sustainable intelligence that can be useful in the arrest of cult members and it's; prosecution for a better society.
- iii. Finally, it was found and discovered that cult activities distorts social and economic activities. Therefore, there is need for the security operatives both conventional and unconventional outfit to step-up and push harder on the fight against cult activities. This effort will improve more social and economic activities in the study areas and beyond.

REFERENCES

1. Adiele, I. B. & Emeodu, E. N. (2022). OSPAC vigilante outfit and crime control in Emohua and Etche Local Government Areas of Rivers State. *IJTRD*, 6(2)1054-1060
2. Agbiboa, D. E. (2014). Transformational strategy or gilded pacification? Four years on The Niger Delta armed conflict and the DDR process of the Nigerian amnesty program. *Journal of Asian African studies*, 50(4), 387-411. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909614530082>
3. Ajayi I. A, Eundayo H & Osalusi FM (2010). Menace of cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions: the way out. *Anthropologist* 12(3): 155–160.
4. Akasike C (2018). Rise in cultism, kidnapping worries Rivers LG boss. *Punch*, 5 July, Available at: www.punchng.com (accessed 3 August 2018).
5. Alumona, I. Osita, & Onuoha (2019). Youth cultism, crime and lethal violence in Nigerian cities. *African Renaissance*, 16(2), 11. <http://doi.org/10.31920/2516-5305/2019/v16n2a1>
6. Amadi L, Imoh-Itah I & Obomanu EF (2016). Oil: Niger Delta and the making of militia capitalists: a theoretical assessment. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research* 4(1): 172–184
7. Chinwokwu, E. C. (2018). An assessment of the relationship between private security companies and the police in crime prevention in Lagos Metropolis, Nigeria. *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, 20(1), 80–93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461355718756413>
8. Chukwu, A. (2018). Youth restiveness and capital flight in Emohua Local Government Area. An Unpublished Project. Economic Department. IAUE, Rivers State.
9. Dickson, K. (2021). Crime and insecurity in Nigeria: the need for alternative security in Rivers State. An Unpublished Dissertation, Sociology Department, IAUE, Rivers State.
10. Dikewoha P (2016) Insecurity: rivers' most volatile areas for kidnapping, killing. *The Nation*, 28 October, Available at: www.thentiononline.net (accessed 2 March 2017).
11. Emeodu, E. N. (2021). *Community Indigenous Security Outfit and socio-economic development in Onelga and Emolga, Rivers State*. An Unpublished Thesis Sociology Department. IAUE, Rivers State
12. Emeodu, E. N., Etire, J. G., Oscar, I. A. and Ezike, K. C. (2022). Politics and insecurity in Ikwerre ethnic nationality in Rivers State, Nigeria.

13. Eze, J. U. (2015). Problems and prospects of providing library and information services to the prisoners in Nigeria. *Library Review*, 64,285-304. <http://doi.org/10.1108/LR-06-2014>
14. Ladapo, O. A. (2012). Effective investigations, a pivotal to efficient criminal justice administration: Challenges in Nigeria . *African J. of Criminology and Justice Studies*, 5(1), 79-94.
15. Nche GC, Wachukwu C, Nwaoga CT, et al. (2019) "We sleep with one eye open": exploring the experiences of churches in Rivers State, Nigeria. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 54(8): 1–18. doi:10.1177/0021909619865582
16. Otusanya, O. J., Laura, S., Ige, O. J., & Adelaja, O. S. (2015). Sweeping it under the carpet. The role of legislators' incorrupt practices in Nigeria. *Journal of Financial Crime*, 22, 354- 377. <http://doi.org/10.1108/JFC-02-2013>
17. Owonikoko, B. S. (2016). From campuses to communities: Community-Based cultism and Local responses in the Niger-Delta Region, Nigeria. *International Journal of Arts and Humanities*. <https://doi.org/10.4314/1jah.v5i4.6>.
18. Oyemwinmina C and Aibieyi S (2015) Cultism: a destructive concept in the educational development of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. *An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia* 9(4): 221–236
19. Udoh VC & Ikezu UJM (2015) Causes, effects and strategies for eradicating cultism among students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. A case study of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Akwa, Anambra State, Nigeria. *Journal of Education and Practice* 6(22): 22–28.