



## Socioeconomic Background Influence on Youth Participation in Internet Crime: The Benin Evidence

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**Abstract.** Charity begins at home, a parlance which suggest that social experience is never developed in isolation. However contestable, an individual disposition remains a function of his/her background. This paper therefore investigates the relationship between parental socioeconomic background and youth participation in internet crime in Benin City, Nigeria. Using a cross-sectional survey of 1,093 young adults, and in-depth interview with key personalities, the study explores how parental income, education, and family structure influences youth behaviour, propensity and predisposition to internet crime. Anchored on Relative Deprivation Theory, the study finds that although youths engage in internet crime, socio-economic conditions and family dysfunction are an indirectly influence that shapes such behavioural tendencies while pointing that deprivation and societal glorification of wealth act as motivating factors. The study concludes that addressing youth unemployment, improving parenting quality, and reshaping societal values are crucial in mitigating internet crime in Benin City.

**Keywords:** Youth, Background, Socio-economic, Internet Crime.

### 1. Introduction

Internet crime, popularly called *Yahoo yahoo*, *Yahoo plus* or *Yahoo millionaire* in Nigeria, has become an entrenched social issue that reflects deeper structural inequalities and value distortions in the society. Longe (2013) and Omeje and Omeje (2012) point that internet crime has developed into a subculture that exceeds class boundaries, and offers some form of reward in form of prestige and material recognition to its participants. The phenomenon of internet crime is often glamorized as a means

of achieving financial success which signals the intersection of poverty and moral decadence in a city like Benin. Sociological inquiry into the problem suggests that family background—especially socio-economic status of parents plays a crucial role in shaping the values and choices of young people. However, not all youths from poor homes engage in crime, suggesting that multiple factors interact in complex ways.

Benin City, one of the major urban centres in South-South Nigeria, is particularly notorious for the proliferation of internet-based crimes among its youth population. Whereas some arrogate this development to relationship with family background, poverty and lack of opportunity (Nwokeoma, Osadebe, Amadi & Ugwu, 2019), others link it to financial difficulty, social exclusion, broken home, lack of parental and school discipline (Adegbite, 2014; Oliha & Audu, 2014; Nesmith & Ruhian, 2008; Murray, 2007). Farrington, Coid and Murry (2009) are of the view that youths who engage in internet crime have predictor factors such as family with lack of love, support and parental deficiency in administrative skills, use of drugs, alcohol consumption and psychological impulsiveness. Longe (2013) points that socioeconomic-status of parent influences their children's status and hence their behaviour in a larger social setting. Contextualized in the social realities of youth in Benin City, disoriented family connection, unconventional methods of growing up and anti-social behaviour features the constellation that characterizes the background of criminality and criminal behaviour among young adults in Benin City. This exposes the confounding construct of the importance of an individual background and socio-economic life. Youth from problematic background tend to

experiment with negative proximities of anti-social behaviour and usually seek out other individuals with similar experience (Awogbenle & Iwuamadi, 2010). Their socio-economic background becomes therefore a significant determinant of participation in criminal activities and evaluates the extent to which their family socio-economic background, parental supervision, education, and social exposure predict deviant behaviour. Internet crime contributes shows an existence of social deprivation and crime which is direct and uniform, but mediated by individual volition, background influence, and social expectations.

### 1.1 Objective of Study

The objective is to examine the socioeconomic background of parents and its influence on youth involvement in internet crime in Benin City.

### 1.2 Hypothesis

There is likelihood of relationship between parental socioeconomic background and youth involvement in internet crime in Benin City.

## 2. Review of Related Literature

The family remains the primary socializing institution, influencing values, discipline, and moral orientation. According to Asikhia (2010), a child's social expectancy and life outcomes are heavily influenced by family environment and economic stability. Families of low socio-economic status (SES) often struggle to provide basic necessities and moral guidance, leading to psychological stress and low resilience among children (Ogunsola & Adewale, 2012). Adegbite (2014) argues that the erosion of family values in Nigeria has compounded the problem of youth delinquency, as children are increasingly left without positive role models. Healthy socio-economic background affects not only access to good life but also exposure to moral and civic values (Ogunsola and Adewale, 2012). Lareau (2003) demonstrates how class shapes daily life experiences, self-esteem, and opportunity access arguing that children from deprived backgrounds often develop compensatory behaviours that could evolve into deviance when legitimate avenues for success appear closed. Similarly, A-Matala (2014) found that parents' educational attainment correlates with their children's behavioural adjustment, implying that low parental literacy translates to weak supervision and limited life guidance.

Parenting style is another critical dimension to youth life in the society. Baumrind's (1991) typology distinguishes between authoritative and permissive approaches. Authoritative parenting, which balances warmth and control, tends to produce socially competent children, while permissive or neglectful parenting often leads to delinquency (Longe, 2013). In Benin City, several parents live below a dollar a day and tend to struggle economically. This allows for permissive parenting that enables children to form alternative moral codes influenced by peers, digital media and the availability of access to opportunity and privileges as well as gratification essential to economic demands and material gratification (Unity, Osagioba & Edith, 2013). The likely effect is internet crime through popular culture, peer admiration and the creation of an enabling environment for deviant adaptation. Empirical findings support the link between family, poor parenting style, deprivation and crime. Bottoms (1988) and Farrington et al. (2009) show that large family size, parental conflict, and poverty are predictors of antisocial behaviours. According to Lochner and Beley (2008) parental income level are positively connected to children's welfare. This suggests that children from well to do social background are likely to be accorded some type of preference or judged to perform better than those who do not. An individual is rated, based on his background which plays important role in their development from child to adulthood. Parental background tends to be a factor in individual placement in the society. Though family background differs greatly, it is however substantial that parental social class is important in determining life opportunities. In Benin City, family background affects youth social life, attitude, and quality of morality. A family's background in terms of parent's education, income, quality of life mirrors the Social class of that youth.

## 3. Theoretical Underpinning

Relative Deprivation Theory provides a powerful lens for understanding why individuals from various backgrounds develop the capacity/tendency to engage in crime. The theory posits that people become frustrated and potentially deviant when they perceive a gap between their expectations and their actual achievements. In highly stratified societies like Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, where material success is celebrated, individuals who feel excluded may resort to alternative means—legal or otherwise—to achieve socially desired material wealth and mobility. Gurr (1970) observed that when legitimate means of

achieving goals are blocked, frustration ensue which leads to aggression that provokes deviant behaviour. For many youths in Benin City, the visible disparity between the rich and the poor, coupled with limited opportunities and disadvantaged socioeconomic background generates feelings of exclusion and resentment. Individuals who perceived themselves as disadvantaged and dissatisfied become disgruntled and build tendencies that subvert the incompatibility between value-expectation and value-capabilities. These emotions, when combined foster rationalizations for crime especially of the internet variant as a viable path to material success.

Though cultural specificity and individual agency obtains, in contexts like Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, cultural narratives around wealth and masculinity interact with deprivation, make internet crime both an economic and symbolic act of resistance to pervasive poverty and poor socioeconomic background that tend to confound a lot of youth. Thus, relative deprivation is not merely about economic inequality but about perceived factors that inspires it in a competitive society such as Benin City.

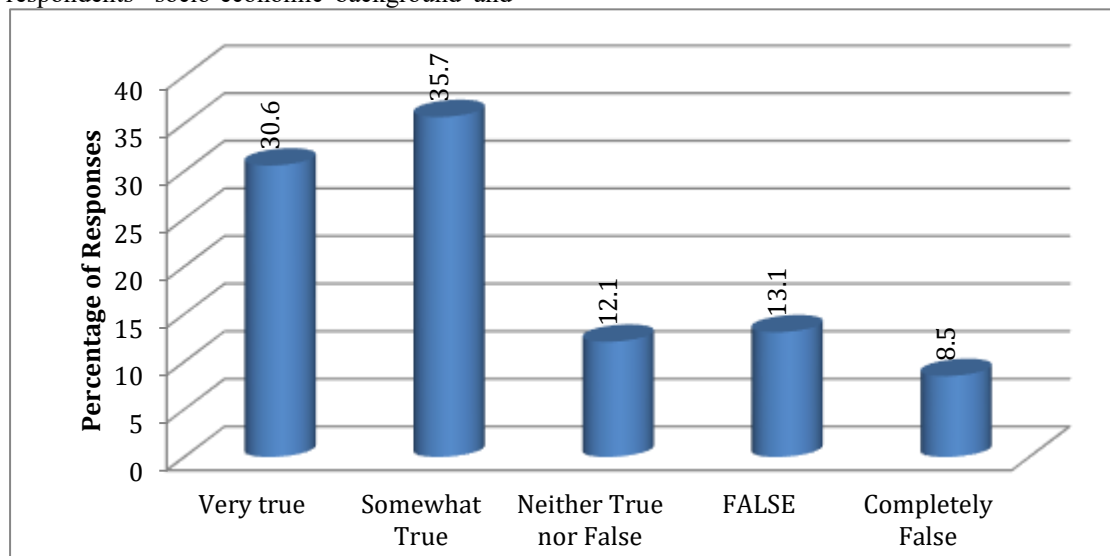
**4. Research Methodology**

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design to collect quantitative data from 1,109 youths aged 15–39 years across three local government areas in Benin City. A structured questionnaire was employed to capture respondents’ socio-economic background and

involvement in internet crime. Sampling followed the Yamane (1987) model for sample determination, ensuring representativeness. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 2.0, employing descriptive and inferential statistics, including the Kruskal–Wallis H test ranks to evaluate the relationship between youth from poor background and their parent’s economic status.

**5. Findings and Analysis**

The demographic analysis revealed that 57.3% of respondents were male, with the majority (70.5%) aged between 20 and 29 years. Over half (54.9%) possessed tertiary education, yet 50.7% were unemployed, and 44.4% had no source of income. This paradox—education without employment—underscores the structural frustration driving youth deviance. A substantial 69.4% agreed that poor parental background affects youth behaviour, corroborating earlier sociological insights that economic hardship distorts moral development. Analysis to the research question relating to the relationship between parental socioeconomic background and youth involvement in internet crime in Benin City as displayed in the figure below revealed that parental socio-economic background such as employment/occupational, education and level of income are strong indicators of social stability that determines material wellbeing of the family and hence the quality of life of children. It is a factor considered by respondents to influences youths’ involvement in internet crimes in Benin City.



**Fig. 1:** Respondents’ ratings about parental socio-economic status and youths’

The data in figure 1 showed that the greater proportion (35.7%) of the respondents considered parental socioeconomic status as significantly related to youths’ involvement in internet crime in Benin City. This was equally the same view with 30.6% of them who considered it as being very true. On the other hand,

(12.1%) opine that neither true, while (13.1%) and (8.5%) are of the view that it is false and completely false respectively. Generally, the views expressed regarding parental socioeconomic background and youths' involvement in internet crimes is also highlighted in the following in-depth:

...Yes, to a great extent the kind of family background one comes from affects his or her disposition and behaviour. Most youth around here are from poor homes. Some provide for themselves and live life on the fringes. Youth from such homes are likely to be influenced negatively especially when they see opportunity to make end-meet and make quick cash-money or hang out with those who have. What I am saying is one's background plays a very significant role. (Male, 30 years, graduate, Benin, Egor L.G.A) Parental background is an absolute. It determines a child's upbringing and plays crucial role in how an individual turns out in the future. I believe it actually has great influence on how a child turns out in life. It is not by parent being rich or poor though. For some youth, it is a choice; they just want to do it... however, a parent being poverty can be a factor that can predispose a youth to do internet crime (Male, 29 years, graduate, Benin Egor L.G.A)

**Table 1:** Summary of Kruskal Wallis H test showing respondents' views about parental socioeconomic status and youth involvement in internet crime based on parents' employment status

Employment Status	N	Mean Rank	Chi-square	Df	Sig.
Unemployed	587	542.25	1.241	3	.743
Self employed	344	561.29			
Public Service	106	536.81			
Others	56	528.36			
<b>Total</b>	<b>1093</b>				

A Kruskal-Wallis H test showed that there was no statistically significant evidence to accept the stated alternate hypothesis,  $\chi^2(3) = 1.241, p = .743$ , with a mean rank of 542.25 for unemployed group, 561.29 for self-employed group, 536.81 for public service occupational group and 528.36 for other occupational groups. This result suggests that there was no significant variation in the perception of the respondents within the different occupational groups, in relation to the view that parental socioeconomic background influences youths' involvement in internet crimes in Benin City. However, this does not invalidate the socioeconomic argument; rather, it highlights the influence of individual factors as Longe (2013) and Omage and Omage (2012) observed, internet crime has evolved into a subculture that transcends class boundaries, offering prestige, identity and quick material gain to its participants.

A deeper interpretation of the findings reveals that socioeconomic deprivation functions as a contextual rather than a deterministic factor. Poor parental supervision, peer pressure, and societal glorification of illicit wealth mediate the relationship between background and behaviour. Thus, while deprivation may not directly cause crime, it sets the stage for deviant adaptations when combined with weak social control mechanisms.

## 6. Discussion

The findings illuminate the multifaceted nature of youth involvement in internet crime in Benin City. The absence of a direct statistical

relationship does not negate the sociological reality that deprivation breeds frustration. Instead, it suggests that economic background operates through intervening variables such as social-values, peer influence, and parental control. The normalization of internet crime as a symbol of quick material wealth and success among Nigerian youths reflects a value crisis that transcends material poverty. The study aligns with Farrington et al. (2009) and Murray (2007) in showing that broken homes and poor supervision predict youth deviance.

In Benin City, internet crime has become a rationalized survival strategy, where the end—wealth—justifies the means. This interpretation is consistent with the deprivation theory of crime, emphasizing the adaptive functions of deviance in a constrained social environment. Moreover, the influence of material wealth and peer networks cannot be underplayed. Such interplay project lifestyles that valorize conspicuous consumption, deepening feelings of inadequacy among youths. When legitimate means of achieving such lifestyles are inaccessible, deviant alternatives like internet crime become normalized. Thus, policy interventions must target not only economic deprivation but also the cultural narratives that legitimize crime.

## 7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that while socioeconomic background does not statistically determine youth involvement in internet crime in Benin City, it remains an enabling condition for such criminal tendencies and propensities. Economic

hardship, weak family systems, and distorted cultural-value orientations collectively foster an environment conducive to internet crime. To address this issue, holistic interventions are required—combining family-based education, youth empowerment, and government intervention and regulation to digital involvement and usage by young adult in the society.

First, families must be strengthened through parental education programs and legitimate socioeconomic engagement which can generate stable source of income and inspire positive supervision and moral training of young adults in the society. Second, governments should expand youth employment schemes and vocational programs that provide legitimate alternatives to internet crime. Third, public awareness campaigns should challenge the cultural glorification of illicit wealth and promote ethical digital citizenship. Finally, stronger internet crime laws and internet monitoring systems should be implemented, not merely to punish offenders but to deter participation.

Ultimately, combating internet crime requires addressing both the structural inequalities and cultural dynamics that shape youth aspirations. By integrating economic reform with moral reorientation, society can redirect youthful energy toward productive engagement rather than criminal innovation.

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