

Insecurity in Nigeria: a Criminological Assessment of Rural Instability in Kwara State and its Implications**Jimoh Buhari Edun¹, Badmus Samsudeen Dayo¹, Akoji Solomon John², & Aliyu Ali Yusuf²**

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Abstract

Rural insecurity has emerged as a critical challenge confronting Nigeria's internal security architecture, particularly in agrarian communities characterised by socio-economic deprivation and weak governance structures. This study examined rural insecurity in Woro and Babanla communities of Kwara State, Nigeria. Anchored on strain and social disorganisation theories, the study adopted descriptive cross-sectional survey research design. Data were collected using structured questionnaire, and analysed using descriptive statistical tools such as frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviation. The findings revealed that high unemployment, pervasive poverty, and ineffective leadership significantly contribute to rising incidences of theft, youth violence, and fear of criminal victimization in the study areas. The study further established that poor leadership exacerbates leading to decline effective governance, and coordinated security responses. The paper concludes that rural insecurity in Woro and Babanla is structurally driven and cannot be addressed through reactive security measures alone. It therefore recommends employment generation initiatives, poverty reduction strategies, leadership accountability, and strengthened community-based security mechanisms to enhance rural safety and stability.

Keywords: Kwara, Poor Leadership, Poverty, Rural Insecurity, Unemployment

INTRODUCTION

Insecurity has become one of the most profound social problems facing Nigeria in the 21st century, threatening lives, livelihoods, and national development. While public and scholarly attention has largely focused on insurgency, banditry, and urban crime, rural insecurity has increasingly emerged as a critical but underexplored dimension of Nigeria's security crisis. Recent studies indicate that rural communities across Nigeria are experiencing rising levels of theft, youth violence, communal tensions, and fear of criminal victimization, undermining agricultural productivity and social cohesion (Alemika, 2021). Scholars have argued that rural insecurity in Nigeria is not merely a law enforcement problem but a manifestation of deeper structural and socio-economic failures. According to Agbiboa (2022), insecurity in rural areas is closely linked to unemployment, poverty, and governance deficits that create conditions conducive to crime and

violence. In many rural settings, limited access to employment opportunities and basic social services has generated frustration, marginalisation, and vulnerability, particularly among young people. These conditions heighten the likelihood of engagement in criminal activities as alternative survival strategies.

Unemployment has been consistently identified in contemporary criminological literatures as a major predictor of insecurity. Drawing from strain-based explanations of crime, studies in Nigeria show that youth unemployment in rural areas increases involvement in theft, violence, and informal criminal economic activities (Okoli & Abubakar, 2021). The decline of rural economic opportunities, especially in agriculture due to poor infrastructure, climate pressures, and weak policy support, has further intensified unemployment and insecurity. Poverty remains a defining feature of rural Nigeria and a critical driver of insecurity. The World Bank (2022) reports revealed that rural poverty rates in Nigeria significantly exceed urban levels, exposing rural populations to deprivation and economic desperation. Criminological research since 2020 indicates that poverty weakens informal social control mechanisms, erodes community trust, and increases tolerance for criminal behaviour as a means of survival (Akanle, 2020). Poor leadership further compounds rural insecurity by undermining governance, accountability, and effective security coordination. Contemporary Nigerian scholars emphasise that leadership failure at local and traditional levels manifests in neglect of rural development, poor resource management, and ineffective engagement with security agencies (Ojo, 2023). When leaders fail to address unemployment and poverty, insecurity becomes entrenched and normalized within rural communities.

Woro and Babanla communities in Kwara State typify these challenges. Predominantly agrarian and economically marginalised, the communities face high unemployment, widespread poverty, and weak leadership structures. Reports of theft, youth violence, and fear of criminal attacks have become recurring concerns, threatening livelihoods and social stability. Despite these realities, there remains a scarcity of localized empirical studies that examine the socio-economic and leadership determinants of rural insecurity in these communities. Against this backdrop, this study undertakes a criminological assessment of rural insecurity in Woro and Babanla communities of Kwara State, Nigeria focusing on unemployment, poor leadership, and poverty as key explanatory variables. By adopting an empirical and theory-driven approach, the study seeks to contribute to contemporary debates on rural insecurity in Nigeria and provide evidence-based insights for policy and community-level interventions.

Statement of the Problem

Rural insecurity has become an increasingly disturbing phenomenon in Nigeria, undermining social stability, agricultural productivity, and sustainable development in many rural communities. Recent empirical studies indicate that insecurity in rural areas now manifests through theft, youth violence, communal disputes, and persistent fear of criminal victimization, with effects that are as damaging as those experienced in urban centers (Alemika, 2021). Despite the strategic importance of rural communities to national food security and economic development, they remain structurally neglected in security planning and socio-economic interventions.

One of the most critical drivers of rural insecurity in Nigeria is unemployment, particularly among young people. Contemporary research suggests that rising youth unemployment created a pool of idle and frustrated individuals who are vulnerable to criminal involvement as a means of economic survival (Agbibo, 2022). In rural communities, limited access to formal employment, declining agricultural opportunities, and lack of vocational alternatives have intensified unemployment. This situation has increased the likelihood of involvement in theft, violent behaviour, and other forms of criminality, thereby deepening insecurity.

Closely connected to unemployment is the persistent problem of poverty, which continues to shape crime patterns in rural Nigeria. According to the World Bank (2022), rural poverty remains disproportionately high in Nigeria, exposing communities to deprivation, hunger, and economic desperation. Scholars argue that poverty weakens informal social control mechanisms and erodes collective efficacy, making communities more susceptible to crime and insecurity (Akanle, 2020). Where basic needs are unmet, criminal behaviour may be perceived as a rational coping strategy rather than a deviant act. Poor leadership further exacerbates rural insecurity by undermining governance, accountability, and effective security coordination. Recent studies reveal that leadership failure at local and traditional levels often results in poor resource management, neglect of rural development, and weak engagement with security agencies (Ojo, 2023). In many rural communities, leaders lack the capacity or political will to address unemployment and poverty, thereby allowing insecurity to persist and escalate. The absence of responsive and accountable leadership erodes public trust and encourages self-help security measures, which can sometimes intensify violence.

In Woro and Babanla communities of Kwara State, these challenges are particularly evident. The communities are predominantly agrarian, with limited employment opportunities, widespread

poverty, and weak leadership structures. Reports of theft, youth violence, and fear of criminal attacks have become recurring concerns, affecting residents' livelihoods and sense of safety. Despite the growing impact of insecurity on these communities, there is a noticeable lack of localized empirical studies that systematically examine the socio-economic and leadership factors driving rural insecurity in Woro and Babanla. The absence of context-specific criminological evidence limits the effectiveness of policy responses and intervention strategies aimed at addressing rural insecurity in Kwara State. Without a clear understanding of how unemployment, poverty, and poor leadership interact to fuel insecurity, efforts to improve rural safety may likely remain fragmented and ineffective. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to provide a criminological assessment of rural insecurity in Woro and Babanla communities, focusing on unemployment, poor leadership, and poverty as key explanatory variables.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine rural insecurity in Woro and Babanla communities of Kwara State, Nigeria.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. Examine the extent to which unemployment contributes to rural insecurity in Woro and Babanla communities of Kwara State;
- ii. Assess the role of poor leadership in the persistence and escalation of insecurity in Woro and Babanla communities;
- iii. Investigate how poverty influences the occurrence and continuity of rural insecurity in Woro and Babanla communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rural Insecurity and the Nigerian Context

Rural insecurity has become a critical dimension of Nigeria's broader security crisis, challenging earlier assumptions that insecurity is predominantly an urban phenomenon. Recent studies indicate that rural communities across Nigeria increasingly experience theft, youth violence, communal conflicts, and persistent fear of criminal victimization, with serious consequences for social cohesion and rural development (Alemika, 2021). Scholars argue that rural insecurity is deeply embedded in structural socio-economic inequalities and governance failures rather than isolated criminal acts. In the Nigerian context, rural areas are often characterised by limited state presence, weak policing structures, and inadequate access to security infrastructure. According to Okoli and

Lenshie (2021), the absence of effective security governance in rural communities creates security vacuums that allow criminal activities to thrive. These scholars note that rural residents frequently resort to informal security arrangements, such as vigilante groups, due to the perceived inefficiency of formal law enforcement agencies. While such arrangements may provide temporary protection, they sometimes escalate violence and undermine the rule of law.

Unemployment has been widely identified in recent criminological and security studies as a major driver of rural insecurity in Nigeria. Agbiboa (2022) argues that prolonged unemployment, particularly among rural youths, generates frustration, marginalisation, and susceptibility to criminal involvement. In rural Nigeria, declining agricultural productivity, lack of rural industries, and limited access to vocational training have intensified unemployment, making crime an alternative means of economic survival for many young people. Closely related to unemployment is the problem of poverty, which remains pervasive in rural Nigeria. The World Bank (2022) reports that a significant proportion of Nigeria's rural population lives below the poverty line, with limited access to basic services such as education, healthcare, and portable drinking water. Recent studies suggest that poverty weakens informal social control mechanisms and erodes collective efficacy within rural communities, thereby increasing vulnerability to crime and insecurity (Akanle, 2020). Where poverty is widespread, criminal behaviour may be normalized as a coping strategy.

Poor leadership further exacerbates rural insecurity by undermining governance, accountability, and effective security coordination. Contemporary governance literature emphasises that leadership failure at the local levels manifests in poor resource management, neglect of rural development, and weak engagement with security institutions (Ojo, 2023). In many rural communities, leaders lack the capacity or political will to implement employment programs or poverty alleviation initiatives, thereby allowing insecurity to persist and intensify.

Empirical studies conducted since 2020 consistently demonstrate that unemployment, poverty, and poor leadership interact to fuel rural insecurity in Nigeria. Osumah (2021) observes that poor leadership often fails to address unemployment and poverty, which in turn creates conditions conducive to crime and violence. This interaction underscores the multidimensional nature of rural insecurity and highlights the need for integrated socio-economic and governance-based interventions.

In Kwara State, rural communities such as Woro and Babanla reflect these broader national dynamics. Limited employment opportunities, widespread poverty, and leadership deficiencies have heightened insecurity and fear among residents. Despite these realities, there remains a paucity of localized empirical studies that focus specifically on the criminological drivers of insecurity in these communities. This gap in the literature underscores the importance of the present study, which seeks to provide a context-specific analysis of rural insecurity in Woro and Babanla communities, using unemployment, poor leadership, and poverty as key explanatory variables.

Challenges in Addressing Rural Insecurity in Nigeria

Rural insecurity in Nigeria is sustained by a complex set of structural, socio-economic, and governance-related challenges that hinder effective prevention and control of crime in rural communities. Contemporary security studies emphasise that these challenges are not merely operational failures of law enforcement but are deeply embedded in broader issues of development, governance, and social inequality (Alemika, 2021). As a result, rural communities continue to experience persistent insecurity despite the existence of formal security institutions.

One major challenge confronting the management of rural insecurity in Nigeria is the limited presence and capacity of formal security agencies in rural areas. Scholars note that policing in Nigeria remains urban-centered, leaving many rural communities under-policed and vulnerable to criminal activities (Okoli & Lenshie, 2021). Inadequate personnel, poor logistics, and weak intelligence gathering mechanisms constrain the ability of security agencies to respond promptly to rural crimes. This security vacuum often encourages criminals to operate with relative impunity. Unemployment poses another significant challenge to addressing rural insecurity. Since 2020, empirical studies have consistently shown that high levels of youth unemployment in rural Nigeria contribute to rising crime rates and insecurity (Agbiboa, 2022). The absence of employment opportunities limits legitimate means of livelihood, pushing some rural youths toward theft, violence, and participation in informal criminal networks. This situation complicates security efforts, as economic desperation continually reproduces criminal behaviour. Poverty further compounds the challenge of rural insecurity by weakening community resilience and social control mechanisms. According to the World Bank (2022), widespread rural poverty undermines access to basic services and reduces the capacity of communities to collectively resist crime. Criminologists argue that poverty erodes trust, cooperation, and shared norms, making it difficult

for rural communities to support crime prevention initiatives or collaborate effectively with security agencies (Akanle, 2020). In such contexts, crime may be tolerated or concealed due to fear or economic dependence.

Poor leadership represents another critical challenge in tackling rural insecurity. Recent governance literature highlights that leadership failure at the local levels often results in neglect of rural development, lack of accountability, and ineffective coordination with security agencies (Ojo, 2023). Weak leadership limits the formulation and implementation of policies aimed at reducing unemployment and poverty, thereby allowing insecurity to persist. Moreover, the absence of transparent and responsive leadership erodes community trust in authority, discouraging cooperation with security institutions. Another challenge is the reliance on informal security arrangements such as vigilante groups, which have proliferated in rural Nigeria due to the inadequacy of formal policing. While these groups may provide immediate protection, scholars caution that they often operate without legal oversight, leading to human rights abuses and escalation of violence (Amnesty International, 2021). The activities of such groups can complicate crime control efforts and undermine the legitimacy of the formal justice system. In addition, inadequate data and localized empirical research on rural insecurity pose significant challenges to effective intervention. Many policy responses are based on national or urban-focused data, which may not accurately reflect the realities of rural communities. According to Osumah (2021), the lack of context-specific criminological evidence limits the effectiveness of security policies and development interventions in rural areas.

In Woro and Babanla communities of Kwara State, these challenges manifest through limited security presence, high unemployment, pervasive poverty, and weak leadership structures. The interaction of these factors creates a cycle of insecurity that is difficult to break. Addressing rural insecurity in these communities therefore requires confronting not only crime itself but also the underlying socio-economic and governance challenges that sustain it.

Role of Unemployment, Poor Leadership, and Poverty in Rural Insecurity

Contemporary criminological scholarship increasingly recognizes that rural insecurity in Nigeria is structurally produced through the interaction of unemployment, poor leadership, and poverty. These factors operate both independently and collectively to create conditions that encourage crime, weaken social control, and undermine community safety. Rather than viewing rural insecurity as a result of individual criminal tendencies, recent studies emphasises the importance

of socio-economic and governance failures in shaping patterns of rural crime and violence (Alemika, 2021).

Unemployment and Rural Insecurity

Unemployment plays a central role in the emergence and persistence of rural insecurity in Nigeria. Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated a strong correlation between youth unemployment and increased criminal activities in rural. For instance, Agbiboa (2022), revealed that prolonged unemployment generates frustration, social exclusion, and economic desperation, which heighten the likelihood of engagement in theft, violence, and other forms of survival crime. In rural areas, the decline of agriculture, lack of rural industries, and limited access to skills acquisition programs have exacerbated unemployment. Criminologists argue that unemployment weakens individuals' attachment to conventional social institutions, thereby increasing susceptibility to deviant behaviour. Osumah (2021) observes that idle rural youths are more likely to participate in criminal networks or spontaneous acts of violence, particularly in environments where informal social control is weak. As a result, unemployment functions as a catalyst that transforms socio-economic frustration into insecurity.

Poverty and Rural Insecurity

Poverty remains a fundamental driver of rural insecurity in Nigeria. The World Bank (2022) reports that rural poverty in Nigeria is widespread and persistent, exposing communities to hunger, poor living conditions, and limited access to basic services. Recent studies suggest that poverty erodes communal bonds, weakens collective efficacy, and reduces the capacity of rural communities to prevent and respond to crime (Akanle, 2020). Poverty also normalizes criminal behaviour as a coping mechanism in rural settings. Where legitimate means of survival are scarce, crime may be perceived as an acceptable or necessary strategy. According to Okoli (2021), poverty-driven insecurity often manifests in petty theft, farm produce stealing, and violent disputes over scarce resources. These forms of crime, though sometimes dismissed as minor, cumulatively contribute to widespread fear and instability in rural communities.

Poor Leadership and Rural Insecurity

Poor leadership significantly exacerbates the impact of unemployment and poverty on rural insecurity. Contemporary literature emphasises that leadership failure at the local and governance levels results in weak policy implementation, neglect of rural development, and ineffective security coordination (Ojo, 2023). Leaders who fail to prioritise employment generation, poverty

reduction, and community security create environments in which insecurity thrives. Poor leadership also undermines trust between communities and the state. When rural residents perceive leaders as unresponsive or corrupt, cooperation with security agencies declines. Arowolo (2020) argues that leadership deficits weaken institutional legitimacy and encourage self-help security measures, such as vigilante groups, which may escalate violence and human rights abuses.

Interplay of the Three Variables

Recent studies highlight that unemployment, poverty, and poor leadership do not operate in isolation but reinforce one another in driving rural insecurity. Agbiboa (2022) notes that poor leadership often fails to address unemployment and poverty, thereby creating conditions that sustain crime and insecurity. This interaction creates a vicious cycle in which socio-economic deprivation fuels crime, insecurity discourages investment and development, and weak leadership perpetuates structural neglect.

In Woro and Babanla communities of Kwara State, this interaction is particularly evident. High unemployment limits economic opportunities, widespread poverty increases vulnerability, and weak leadership undermines effective security responses. Together, these may have contributed to persistent rural insecurity, affecting residents' livelihoods, safety, and overall well-being. Understanding the roles of unemployment, poverty, and poor leadership is therefore essential for developing effective and sustainable strategies to address rural insecurity in these communities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on Strain Theory and Social Disorganisation Theory to explain rural insecurity in Woro and Babanla communities of Kwara State, Nigeria. These theories provide a robust criminological lens for understanding how structural socio-economic deprivation and governance failures generate crime and insecurity in rural settings.

Strain Theory

Strain Theory, originally developed by Robert K. Merton and subsequently expanded by contemporary criminologists, explains crime as a consequence of structural pressures that limit individuals' ability to achieve socially approved goals through legitimate means. In recent criminological discourse, strain theory has been widely applied to explain crime and insecurity arising from unemployment and poverty, particularly in marginalised communities (Agnew, 2020). According to Agnew (2020), strain arises when individuals experience blocked opportunities, economic hardship, or social exclusion, leading to frustration, anger, and negative

emotions that may culminate in criminal behaviour. In rural Nigeria, unemployment and poverty represent significant sources of strain. The inability of rural residents especially youths to secure employment or meet basic needs creates intense pressure that increases the likelihood of engaging in theft, violence, and other forms of criminal activity.

Recent Nigerian studies applying strain theory argue that rural youths who experience prolonged unemployment and economic deprivation are more likely to resort to crime as an adaptive response to strain (Agbibo, 2022). In Woro and Babanla communities, limited economic opportunities and widespread poverty generate conditions of chronic strain, making insecurity a rational, though unlawful, coping mechanism. Strain theory therefore provides a useful framework for explaining how unemployment and poverty contribute to rural insecurity in the study areas.

Social Disorganisation Theory

Social *Disorganisation* Theory explains crime and insecurity as outcomes of weakened social institutions and the breakdown of informal social control mechanisms within communities. Contemporary applications of the theory emphasise that poverty, weak governance, and leadership failure undermine community cohesion and collective efficacy, thereby creating environments conducive to crime (Sampson, 2021). According to Sampson (2021), communities characterised by economic deprivation, residential instability, and ineffective leadership often lack the capacity to regulate behaviour and prevent crime. In rural Nigeria, poor leadership at political and traditional levels weakens social organisation by failing to mobilize community resources, enforce norms, and coordinate effective security responses. This leadership deficit erodes trust, cooperation, and shared responsibility for community safety.

Recent Nigerian criminological studies show that poor leadership exacerbates social disorganisation by neglecting rural development, ignoring unemployment and poverty, and allowing informal and sometimes violent security arrangements to flourish (Osumah, 2021). In Woro and Babanla communities, leadership failure undermines collective efforts to address insecurity, resulting in fragmented responses and persistent crime.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative descriptive survey design and were conducted in Woro and Babanla communities of Kwara State, Nigeria. The study population comprised residents, youth leaders, community elders, local vigilante members, and security personnel in the communities. A sample size of 204 respondents were selected using a multistage sampling technique: Woro and

Babanla communities were purposively selected due to reported cases of insecurity, after which respondents were chosen through simple random sampling within relevant groups. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire with close-ended Likert-scale items. The instrument was validated by experts and tested for reliability using Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha = 0.78$). Data were analysed using SPSS, employing descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviation.

RESULTS

This section presents and discusses the results obtained from the field survey conducted in Woro and Babanla communities of Kwara State. The analysis is structured in line with the study objectives and focuses on the influence of unemployment, poor leadership, and poverty on rural insecurity. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, and interpretation was based on mean scores and percentages.

Table 1: Mean Rating on the Influence of Unemployment on Rural Insecurity (N = 204)

S/N	Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1	Unemployment has increased criminal activities among youths in woro and babanla communities.	78	64	22	24	16	3.52	1.14	Accepted
2	Idle youths are more likely to engage in theft and violence in this community.	82	58	20	26	18	3.56	1.12	Accepted
3	Lack of job opportunities contributes to insecurity in this community.	91	60	18	20	15	3.71	1.09	Accepted
4	Unemployment has made youths vulnerable to criminal recruitments.	75	67	25	21	16	3.53	1.18	Accepted

Source: Fieldwork, 2026

Table 1 shows that unemployment significantly influences rural insecurity in Woro and Babanla communities of Kwara State. The results revealed that majority of respondents agreed that unemployment has increased criminal activities among youths in the communities (Mean = 3.52), suggesting that lack of employment opportunities creates conditions that encourage involvement in crime. Respondents also acknowledged that idle youths are more likely to engage in theft and violence (Mean = 3.56), indicating that unemployment contributes to antisocial behaviour. In addition, respondents agreed that lack of job opportunities contributes directly to insecurity in the communities (Mean = 3.71), showing a strong link between joblessness and insecurity. More so, high agreement was recorded on the statement that unemployment makes youths vulnerable to

criminal recruitment (Mean = 3.53), highlighting the risk of unemployed youths being drawn into criminal networks. Overall, the findings confirm that unemployment is a significant driver of rural insecurity in the study area.

Table 2: Mean Rating on the Influence of Poverty on Rural Insecurity (N = 204)

S/N	Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1	Poverty has increased desperation and crime in this community.	85	61	19	23	16	3.60	1.05	Accepted
2	Poor living conditions contributes to insecurity in woro and babanla.	79	65	21	22	17	3.55	1.06	Accepted
3	Poverty weakens community efforts to prevent crime.	73	70	24	21	16	3.54	1.08	Accepted
4	Poverty makes residents to criminal victimization.	88	59	18	22	17	3.62	1.04	Accepted

Source: fieldwork, 2026

Table 2 shows that poverty significantly influences rural insecurity in Woro and Babanla communities of Kwara State. The results indicate that most respondents agreed that poverty has increased desperation and crime in the communities (Mean = 3.60), suggesting that economic hardship pushes individuals toward criminal activities. Respondents also agreed that poor living conditions contribute to insecurity (Mean = 3.55), reflecting the impact of material deprivation on community safety. Furthermore, respondents acknowledged that poverty weakens community efforts to prevent crime (Mean = 3.54), indicating a decline in collective capacity to maintain social order. More so, high agreement was recorded on the statement that poverty makes residents vulnerable to criminal victimization (Mean = 3.62), highlighting the exposure of poor households to insecurity. The results therefore confirm that poverty plays a major role in sustaining rural insecurity in the study area.

Table 3: Mean Rating on the Influence of Poor Leadership on Rural Insecurity (N = 204)

S/N	Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1	Poor leadership has contributed to insecurity in this community.	90	58	20	21	15	3.66	1.01	Accepted
2	Community leaders have failed to address insecurity effectively.	83	62	19	24	16	3.59	1.02	Accepted
3	Lack of leadership accountability increases insecurity.	77	68	23	20	16	3.56	1.04	Accepted
4	Weak leadership discourages cooperation with security agencies.	80	65	21	22	16	3.58	1.03	Accepted

Source: fieldwork, 2026

Table 3 shows that poor leadership significantly influences rural insecurity in Woro and Babanla communities of Kwara State. The findings revealed that the majority of respondents agreed that poor leadership has contributed to insecurity in the communities (Mean = 3.66), suggesting ineffective governance at the local level. Respondents also agreed that community leaders have failed to address insecurity effectively (Mean = 3.59), indicating weak leadership response to security challenges. In addition, respondents acknowledged that lack of leadership accountability increases insecurity (Mean = 3.56), pointing to governance deficiencies. More so, high agreement was recorded on the statement that weak leadership discourages cooperation with security agencies (Mean = 3.58), highlighting trust and coordination challenges. Overall, the findings confirm that poor leadership is a significant factor influencing rural insecurity in the study area.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study reveal that unemployment significantly contributes to rural insecurity in Woro and Babanla communities. Respondents strongly agreed that unemployed youths are more prone to involvement in theft, violence, and other criminal activities. This finding aligns with contemporary criminological arguments that unemployment generates economic strain and social frustration, which often manifest in criminal behaviour.

This result supports the position of Agbibo (2022), who argues that widespread youth unemployment in Nigeria has increased vulnerability to crime and insecurity, particularly in rural areas where economic opportunities are limited. Similarly, Alemika (2021) observes that unemployment weakens attachment to conventional social institutions and increases the likelihood of deviant behaviour. The implication is that unemployment remains a critical structural factor driving rural insecurity in the study areas.

The study also found that poverty plays a major role in sustaining rural insecurity in Woro and Babanla communities. Respondents agreed that poverty heightens desperation, weakens social cohesion, and increases residents' vulnerability to crime. This finding corroborates recent development and criminological studies which emphasise that poverty erodes community resilience and informal social control.

According to the World Bank (2022), rural poverty in Nigeria remains pervasive and is closely linked to rising insecurity and crime. In addition, Akanle (2020) argues that poverty normalizes survival-driven crimes in rural communities, making insecurity persistent and difficult to control.

The findings of this study therefore reinforce the view that poverty is a fundamental driver of rural insecurity.

Findings further indicate that poor leadership significantly exacerbates rural insecurity in the study areas. Respondents agreed that ineffective leadership has resulted in weak security coordination, neglect of rural development, and lack of accountability. This supports governance-based explanations of insecurity that emphasise leadership failure as a key factor in crime persistence. This finding is consistent with the argument of Ojo (2023), who notes that leadership failure at local and traditional levels undermines development initiatives and weakens security governance in rural Nigeria. Similarly, Osumah (2021) observes that poor leadership reduces trust between communities and the state, discouraging cooperation with security agencies and encouraging informal security arrangements. The study therefore confirms that leadership failure plays a crucial role in sustaining rural insecurity.

CONCLUSION

This study examined rural insecurity in Woro and Babanla communities of Kwara State using unemployment, poverty, and poor leadership as key explanatory variables. The findings reveal that rural insecurity is significantly influenced by socio-economic deprivation and governance failure. Unemployment was found to increase youths' vulnerability to criminal involvement, poverty was shown to weaken community resilience and social control, while poor leadership undermined effective security coordination and development efforts. The interaction of these factors has created a persistent cycle of insecurity that threatens livelihoods, safety, and social stability in the study areas. The study concludes that addressing rural insecurity in Woro and Babanla communities requires more than reactive security measures. Sustainable solutions must focus on employment generation, poverty reduction, and improved leadership and governance at the local level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Government at all levels should implement targeted rural employment programs, including skills acquisition and agricultural development initiatives, to reduce youth unemployment and vulnerability to crime.
- ii. Policies aimed at improving rural livelihoods such as access to credit facilities, basic social services, and infrastructure should be strengthened to reduce poverty-induced insecurity.

- iii. Local and traditional leadership structures should be strengthened through capacity building, transparency, and accountability mechanisms to enhance effective security governance.
- iv. Improved collaboration between rural communities and formal security agencies should be encouraged to rebuild trust and enhance intelligence sharing.
- v. Security interventions should be informed by localized criminological research to ensure that responses are context-specific and sustainable.

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