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Tackling Youth Restiveness And Insecurity In Edo State Through Psychosocial Counselling

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ABSTRACT

Youth restiveness and insecurity confront Edo State, Nigeria, with profound implications for sustainable development, social cohesion, and economic transformation. This paper examines the nexus between psychosocial counselling and the mitigation of youth restiveness and insecurity in Edo State. Drawing from a review of empirical literature, theoretical frameworks, and State-specific statistical data, the study argues that strategic counselling approaches encompassing individual, group, community-based, and crisis interventions can address the root causes of youth agitation. The paper situates youth restiveness within Edo State's specific context, tracing its evolution to contemporary manifestations such as cultism, irregular migration, human trafficking, political thuggery, and drug-related crimes. The study identifies seven causal factors specific to Edo State: inadequate counselling, youth unemployment, poverty, irregular migration, cultism, political marginalization, and peer pressure. Each factor is examined through Self-Determination Theory and Social Identity Theory. The paper presents a framework of counselling strategies, including cognitive-behavioural interventions, trauma-informed counselling, career guidance, and conflict resolution counselling, with implementation pathways for Edo State's educational institutions, communities, and government agencies. Based on the analysis, the study recommends reinvigorating counselling units, integrating counselling into the State's security architecture, ensuring youth inclusion in policy, and establishing an Edo State Youth Counselling and Rehabilitation Commission. The paper concludes that without systematic investment in psychosocial counselling infrastructure, Edo State's aspirations for sustainable development will remain elusive. (Word Count: 218 Words)

Keywords: Psychosocial counselling, youth restiveness, insecurity, sustainable development, cultism,

INTRODUCTION

Edo State, located in Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone, possesses rich cultural heritage, abundant human resources, and strategic positioning for sub-national development. With a projected population of approximately 4.7 million (NPC, 2022), the state is endowed with agricultural potential, solid mineral resources, and vibrant human capital. However, its development trajectory has been consistently undermined by escalating youth restiveness and multifaceted insecurity challenges threatening social stability and economic progress (Edo State Government, 2022). At the epicentre are Edo State's youths,

constituting approximately 70% of the population (Edo State Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2023), representing both the state's greatest asset and its most volatile element when marginalized.

Youth restiveness in Edo State transcends juvenile delinquency; it represents a complex socio-political phenomenon characterized by organized expressions of dissent, frustration, and aggression against perceived injustices and systemic failures (Ikelegbe, 2019). Historically, youth of the old Bendel State were at the forefront of anti-colonial and pro-democracy struggles (Falola & Heaton, 2008). However, the paradigm shifted in the late 1990s with the proliferation of secret cults on university campuses, initially disguised as social fraternities but later morphing into violent criminal syndicates (Tamuno, 2012). Institutions like the University of Benin, Ambrose Alli University, Auchi Polytechnic, and Federal College of Education Technical, Ekiadolor became epicentres of cult clashes, resulting in tragic loss of lives (Omoju, 2020).

Contemporary youth restiveness has diversified and intensified. Irregular migration facilitated by human trafficking networks has reached alarming proportions, with NAPTIP (2023) confirming Edo State as the most endemic state for external trafficking in Nigeria. The UNODC (2022) estimates over 60% of Nigerian trafficking victims in Europe originate from Edo State. Concurrently, cybercrime and drug abuse provide alternative, illegal means of economic empowerment, exacerbating the state's insecurity profile (Adewale, 2018).

Parallel to youth restiveness is escalating insecurity. Edo State has witnessed a disturbing surge in cult-related killings, particularly in Benin City, Ekpoma, Auchi, and Uromi (Edo State House of Assembly, 2023). The Edo State Security Network (2023) reported 115 cult-related deaths in 2022 alone. Additionally, the state faces boundary disputes, communal clashes, and targeted kidnappings (Nigerian Police Force, 2023).

Within this turbulent context, psychosocial counselling interventions emerge as a potentially transformative yet critically underutilized strategic framework. While the Edo State Government has implemented various security measures (Edo State Government, 2022), empirical evidence suggests that kinetic approaches cannot address the psychological root causes of youth restiveness (WHO, 2021). This paper argues that comprehensive psychosocial counselling strategies can serve as effective non-kinetic tools for addressing youth agitation and social instability, thereby fostering sustainable development.

Literature Review

Conceptual Clarifications

Youth restiveness in Edo State is a multifaceted socio-political phenomenon encompassing constructive agitation and destructive expressions of frustration through violence, criminality, and anti-social behaviour. It is intertwined with socio-economic realities, manifesting through organized cultism, human trafficking networks, and electoral violence (Omolegho, 2024). It represents a symptom of a broken social contract where the promise of education and employment is unfulfilled (Ikelegbe, 2019).

Insecurity in Edo State is a multidimensional condition encompassing physical threats, economic deprivation, social marginalization, and psychological trauma (Aminu & Hamza, 2021). It is characterized by pervasive fear disrupting socio-economic activities (Edo State Security Network, 2023), stifling commerce, and deterring investment (World Bank, 2023).

Psychosocial counselling extends beyond clinical therapy to encompass individual, group, community-based, and crisis interventions addressing psychological, social, and emotional dimensions of youth frustration (ACA, 2020). In Edo State's context, counselling serves to de-radicalize youths, heal trauma, and equip young people with cognitive and vocational tools for constructive civic engagement (WHO, 2021).

Contextual Overview of Youth Restiveness in Edo State

The history of youth restiveness in Edo State is intertwined with the region's political and economic evolution. The proliferation of secret cults – Black Axe, Eiye, Vikings, and Buccaneers – morphed into violent criminal syndicates (Tamuno, 2012). Notable incidents include the 2015 cult clash at the University of Benin resulting in five deaths and university closure (Vanguard Nigeria, 2015), and the

2021 Ekpoma clash resulting in three student and two lecturer deaths, prompting a state of emergency on cultism (The Guardian Nigeria, 2021).

Contemporary youth restiveness has globalized. Edo State is the epicentre of human trafficking in Nigeria, with Benin City referred to as the "trafficking capital" (NAPTIP, 2023). UNICEF (2022) reports 70% of Nigerian girls trafficked to Europe originate from Edo State, while IOM (2023) estimates over 10,000 Edo indigenes stranded in Libya. Cybercrime has also emerged, with EFCC (2023) ranking Edo State among the top three for internet fraud. Political thuggery persists, with youths recruited by political elites to intimidate opponents and disrupt elections (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Empirical Review of Counselling Interventions

Counselling strategies to address youth restiveness have been validated in Nigerian contexts with specific relevance to Edo State. Ehigbor (2021) found that structured guidance counselling reduces students' propensity to join secret cults by providing alternative avenues for identity formation and peer belonging. Omolegho (2024) emphasized proactive career counselling reduces the allure of irregular migration by highlighting local entrepreneurial opportunities.

Studies on drug abuse demonstrate that cognitive-behavioural interventions break the cycle of substance dependency, a precursor to violent restiveness (Omoju, 2020). Omoijuanfo and Omoruyi (2022) found 80% of cult members in Edo State had a history of substance abuse, concluding early counselling intervention could significantly reduce cultism.

Despite empirical validations, translation into state-wide policy remains fragmented. Most counselling efforts are confined to isolated academic research or NGO initiatives, lacking systemic backing (CASON, 2021). While the Edo State Ministry of Education has established guidance and counselling units in some schools, these are often understaffed, underfunded, and lacking standardized training (Edo State Ministry of Education, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two complementary theories: Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), selected for their explanatory power in accounting for the internal motivational factors and group dynamics driving youth behaviour.

Self-Determination Theory

SDT posits three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When satisfied, individuals experience enhanced motivation and well-being; when frustrated, psychological distress and maladaptive behaviours emerge (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Social Identity Theory

SIT posits that individuals derive identity from group membership and strive for positive social identity through favorable in-group/out-group comparisons. The process involves social categorization, identification, and comparison (Turner et al., 1987).

Theory Relevance to the Study

In Edo State, high unemployment frustrates autonomy, poor education-employment alignment undermines competence, and weakened family structures erode relatedness (Ikelegbe, 2019; Gureje et al., 2016). Youths consequently turn to cultism, cybercrime, or irregular migration (Omoju, 2020; Adewale, 2018). SDT informs counselling that supports autonomy through empowerment, competence through vocational training, relatedness through group therapy, and autonomous motivation through values clarification (Rappaport, 1981; Savickas, 2012; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005; Deci & Ryan, 1985).

SIT explains that cult groups offer belonging, purpose, and status, leading youths to adopt violent norms (Tamuno, 2012; Adewale, 2018). Threats to group identity provoke defensive aggression (Edo State Security Network, 2023). SIT guides counselling promoting positive identities through role models, reducing prejudice through dialogue, strengthening self-esteem, and supporting identity transformation through restorative justice (Marcia, 1966; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Rosenberg, 1965; Braithwaite, 2002).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a systematic conceptual analysis and secondary data review research design, appropriate for synthesizing literature, analyzing macro-level phenomena, and proposing strategic frameworks without primary fieldwork (Creswell, 2014). Data were sourced from peer-reviewed journals, NBS publications, NAPTIP reports, Edo State Government policy documents, and media reports from 2018–2024.

Data Collection

A multi-source strategy ensured comprehensiveness. Academic literature was sourced from Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and institutional repositories using keywords: youth restiveness, cultism, human trafficking, insecurity, Edo State, counselling interventions, Nigeria. Inclusion criteria included peer-reviewed articles, theses, and conference papers published between 2010 and 2024. Government reports, NAPTIP annual reports, and media articles from Vanguard, The Guardian, Premium Times, and Punch were also utilized.

Analytical Procedure

Thematic coding identified root causes of youth restiveness, cross-referenced statistical data to establish the insecurity crisis scale, and mapped theoretical frameworks to propose actionable counselling interventions. Data triangulation ensured validity and reliability (Denzin, 1978). NVivo software facilitated thematic analysis, with descriptive statistics for quantitative data and trend analysis for insecurity patterns. Theoretical mapping applied SDT and SIT to explain the aetiology of youth restiveness and inform the counselling framework.

Data Presentation and Analysis

To provide a robust empirical basis for the proposed counselling framework, this section presents statistical data on youth demographics and economic exclusion in Edo State, the deficit in counselling infrastructure, and trends in insecurity and violent incidents.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Youth Demographics and Economic Exclusion in Edo State

The demographic reality of Edo State underscores the urgency of the youth restiveness crisis. The youth constitute the overwhelming majority of the population, yet this demographic dividend is severely compromised by economic exclusion and the allure of illicit economies. Table 1 presents a statistical overview of youth demographics and economic indicators in Edo State.

Table 1. Statistical Overview of Youth Demographics and Economic Indicators in Edo State

Indicator	Statistical Value	Year of Estimate	Source
Total State Population	~4.7 million	2022	NPC (2022)
Youth Population (15–35 years)	~70% of total population	2023	Edo State Ministry of Youth Affairs (2023)
Youth Unemployment Rate	19.0%–25.1%	2023	NBS (2023)
Multidimensional Poverty Rate	~55% of state population	2022	NBS (2022)
Share of National Trafficking Victims	~60% of Nigerian external trafficking cases	2023	NAPTIP (2023)
Literacy Rate	85.2%	2022	NPC (2022)

Analysis – The data reveals a stark contradiction. While Edo State possesses a massive youth population with a relatively high literacy rate, over half of the broader population experiences multidimensional poverty. The youth unemployment rate remains critically high, ranging from 19.0% to 25.1% (NBS, 2023). Most alarmingly, the state accounts for a disproportionate share (60%) of Nigeria's external human trafficking cases (NAPTIP, 2023). This economic exclusion is a primary driver of the frustration of basic psychological needs as identified by Self-Determination Theory, pushing youths toward irregular migration, cultism, and cybercrime as alternative means of survival and social mobility (Adebayo & Isumonah, 2020).

The Deficit in Counselling Infrastructure in Edo State

A critical factor exacerbating youth restiveness in Edo State is the severe lack of psychosocial support infrastructure. The counselling profession in the state is plagued by underfunding, poor policy implementation, and a massive deficit in human resources, particularly in public tertiary institutions. Table 2 presents a comparative analysis of counselling infrastructure in Edo State tertiary institutions.

Table 2. Comparative Analysis of Counselling Infrastructure in Edo State Tertiary Institutions

Metric	Edo State Reality	International Best Practice	Variance/Gap
Counsellor-to-Student Ratio	1:4,500	1:250	Severe Deficit
Presence of Functional Counselling Units	<40%	100% mandatory	Critical Infrastructure Gap
Integration of Mental Health Curriculum	Non-existent	Mandatory	Policy Implementation Failure
Availability of Trained Counsellors	<50%	100%	Human Resource Deficit

Source: Edo State Ministry of Education (2022); American School Counsellor Association (2021)

Analysis – The data indicates a catastrophic failure in the psychosocial support system within Edo State's educational sector. A counsellor-to-student ratio of 1:4,500 means that a single counsellor is responsible for the psychological, academic, and career needs of thousands of students, rendering proactive intervention impossible and limiting the counsellor to mere crisis management. This infrastructural deficit leaves millions of youths to navigate trauma, peer pressure, and economic frustration without professional guidance, directly contributing to the prevalence of cultism and substance abuse in institutions across the state (Ehigbor, 2021).

Trends in Insecurity and Violent Incidents in Edo State

The escalation of youth restiveness into organized insecurity is evident in the statistical trends of violent incidents over the past few years, particularly cult-related violence and trafficking-related crimes. Table 3 presents the trend of cult-related and security incidents in Edo State from 2018 to 2023.

Table 3. Trend of Cult-Related and Security Incidents in Edo State (2018–2023)

Year	Estimated Annual Incidents	Key Events
2018	30	Cult clashes in UNIBEN and AAU
2019	40	Increased cult-related violence in Ekpoma
2020	45	COVID-19 pandemic, spike in trafficking
2021	55	State of emergency on cultism declared

Year	Estimated Annual Incidents	Key Events
2022	65	115 cult-related deaths recorded
2023	75	Sustained high levels of violence

Source: Edo State Security Network (2023); National Media Tracking

Analysis – The data demonstrates a sharp, upward trajectory in violent incidents from 2018 to 2023. The year 2020 saw a significant spike, correlating with the economic shock of the global pandemic and the expansion of cult networks seeking to exploit vulnerable, stranded youths. The sustained high numbers in 2022 and 2023 indicate that purely kinetic security responses have failed to stem the tide of violence. This persistent insecurity creates a continuous cycle of trauma, displacement, and radicalization, necessitating urgent, large-scale psychosocial interventions.

Analysis of Root Causes Specific to Edo State

Synthesizing the statistical data and theoretical frameworks, the root causes of youth restiveness and insecurity in Edo State can be categorized into seven interconnected factors, as follows:

1. Inadequate Counselling and Psychosocial Support: The systemic absence of counselling leaves youths without coping mechanisms for trauma and frustration (CASON, 2021).
2. Youth Unemployment: With 19.0%–25.1% youth unemployment rate (NBS, 2023), economic frustration, idleness, and vulnerability to manipulation by cults and trafficking networks are significant consequences.
3. Pervasive Poverty: Approximately 55% multidimensional poverty rate (NBS, 2022) leads to economic hardship, limited opportunities, social exclusion, and crime as survival strategy.
4. Involvement in Irregular Migration and Human Trafficking: Approximately 60% of Nigerian external trafficking victims originate from Edo State (NAPTIP, 2023), normalizing the "Japa" syndrome and exposing youths to trauma and exploitation.
5. Cultism and Secret Societies: With 115 cult-related deaths in 2022 (Edo State Security Network, 2023), cultism provides a false sense of belonging, perpetuates cycle of violence, and disrupts academic activities.
6. Political Marginalization: Exclusion of youths from decision-making processes (Onapajo & Uzoechina, 2019) leads to lack of representation and resentment toward political elite.
7. Peer Pressure and Group Dynamics: Strong influence of peer groups in shaping youth behaviour (Asch, 1951) results in conformity to negative norms and group polarization in violent acts.

Psychosocial Counselling Interventions: A Strategic Framework

To effectively address the root causes and mitigate the consequences of youth restiveness, this paper proposes a comprehensive, multi-tiered psychosocial counselling framework tailored to the Edo State context. This framework moves beyond clinical therapy to encompass strategic, community-level interventions designed to foster resilience, alter cognitive distortions, promote social cohesion, and address structural inequalities.

Cognitive-Behavioural Interventions for Behavioural Modification

Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is highly effective in addressing the distorted thought patterns that justify aggressive and restive behaviours (Beck, 1976). Many youths involved in cultism, political thuggery, and cybercrime in Edo State operate on cognitive distortions, such as the belief that violence is the only means of achieving respect, that systemic corruption justifies personal criminality, or that irregular migration is a viable pathway to success.

Implementation in Edo State: CBT programs should be integrated into secondary schools, tertiary institutions, and community youth centres. Focus areas include identifying cognitive distortions through thought records and challenging negative automatic thoughts (Beck & Clark, 1997), developing emotional regulation through anger management techniques and mindfulness-based interventions (Kabat-Zinn, 1990), enhancing problem-solving skills through structured problem-solving models (D'Zurilla &

Goldfried, 1971), and building resilience by fostering a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006). Evidence of effectiveness: A study by Omoijuanfo et al. (2021) found that CBT-based counselling reduced cult-related violent behaviour by 40% among students in Edo State tertiary institutions.

Trauma-Informed Counselling and Crisis Intervention

Given the high prevalence of violence, displacement, and loss in Edo State, particularly among victims of cult violence and survivors of human trafficking, counselling must be strictly trauma-informed. This approach recognizes the widespread impact of trauma and integrates this knowledge into all levels of intervention (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2014).

Implementation in Edo State: Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (TF-CBT) provides evidence-based treatment for children and adolescents impacted by trauma and PTSD (Cohen et al., 2017), targeting survivors of cult violence, returnees from human trafficking, and witnesses to communal clashes. Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) can be deployed in community health centres and NGO-run rehabilitation facilities (Shapiro, 2018). Group trauma counselling provides a supportive environment for survivors to share experiences, process emotions, and develop coping strategies (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Community-based trauma interventions include psycho-education workshops, community rituals for healing, and mobile crisis counselling units providing immediate psychological first aid (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2020).

Career Guidance, Entrepreneurship, and Life Skills Counselling

To address the root causes of poverty, unemployment, and the "Japa" syndrome, counselling must extend to robust career and entrepreneurship guidance. The traditional model of counselling focusing primarily on academic placement is obsolete in the current economic climate.

Implementation in Edo State: Career assessment using standardized tests and inventories assesses interests, values, skills, and personality traits (Holland, 1997). Career information provides comprehensive details about various careers, job requirements, outlook, and training opportunities (National Career Development Association, 2021). Career exploration through job shadowing, internships, and informational interviews helps youths explore various options (Savickas, 2012). Employability skills training provides soft skills in communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership (Rothwell et al., 2009). Entrepreneurship training offers business planning, financial management, marketing, and access to microfinance (Kuratko, 2016). Job search strategies help develop resume and cover letter writing, interview preparation, and networking skills (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2012).

Community-Based Conflict Resolution and Peace-building Counselling

At the macro and meso-system levels, counselling must focus on restorative justice and community peace-building. Group counselling and facilitated dialogue sessions can bring together conflicting demographic groups, fostering empathy and dismantling ethnic or religious prejudices.

Implementation in Edo State: Mediation sessions involving a neutral third party help conflicting parties reach mutually acceptable agreements (Folger & Bush, 1994), such as mediation between rival cult groups in tertiary institutions. Negotiation training provides youths with skills in active listening, empathy, assertiveness, and problem-solving (Fisher et al., 1991). Peace-building workshops provide a supportive environment for exploring root causes of conflict and developing conflict resolution skills (Lederach, 2005). Dialogue and reconciliation sessions provide opportunities for conflicting parties to share experiences, express emotions, and work toward forgiveness (Staub, 2005). Community peace-building initiatives include intergroup dialogues, joint community projects, and peace education programs in schools (Lederach, 2005).

Implementation Pathways and Institutional Integration

The successful deployment of this framework requires coordinated implementation across three primary tiers in Edo State, namely:

1. Educational Institutions: The Edo State Ministry of Education, in collaboration with SUBEB and the Edo State Tertiary Education Trust Fund, must urgently address the deficit in counselling infrastructure. This includes mandatory employment of professional counsellors to achieve the international standard counsellor-to-student ratio of 1:250 (American School Counsellor Association,

2021), adequate funding for counselling units, integration of mandatory mental health, life skills, and peace education curricula, and establishment of peer counselling programs.

2. Communities: The Edo State Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, in partnership with the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASON), Edo State Chapter, should deploy community-based psychosocial support centres in urban slums, conflict-affected rural areas, and boundary dispute zones. Implementation strategies include mobile counselling units, peer counselling programs, community education and awareness programs, and collaboration with community leaders to promote counselling services and address cultural barriers.

3. Government and Security Agencies: Psychosocial support must be integrated into the state's security architecture. This involves establishing specialized trauma and rehabilitation units within the Edo State Security Corps and Nigeria Police Force for psychological rehabilitation of apprehended cultists, trauma counselling for survivors of human trafficking, and crisis intervention for victims of communal violence. Training for security personnel in trauma-informed policing, crisis counselling, and conflict de-escalation is essential. Integration into Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs for apprehended cultists, repentant cybercriminals, and returnees from human trafficking is crucial.

Discussion of Findings and Implications for Sustainable Development

The analysis presented in this paper yields critical findings regarding the aetiology of youth restiveness and the strategic utility of psychosocial counselling in Edo State. The findings confirm that youth restiveness in the state is not an inherent behavioural defect but a rational, albeit destructive, response to systemic ecological failures, economic frustration, and a profound deficit in psychosocial support. The statistical data unequivocally demonstrates that the current reliance on kinetic military and police approaches is insufficient and often counterproductive, as it fails to address the psychological trauma and cognitive distortions that fuel the cycle of violence.

Economic Implications

The most significant implication of this framework is economic. Edo State's massive youth population is currently a demographic liability, consuming state resources and destabilizing the economy through crime, insecurity, and brain drain. However, if properly counselled, skilled, and psychologically supported, this same population can be transformed into a demographic dividend. Potential economic benefits include reduction in security expenditure through decreased incidence of cultism, cybercrime, and political thuggery; increased productivity through a psychologically resilient, gainfully employed youth population; job creation through transitioning youths from the criminal economy to the productive economy; attraction of investment through a stable, secure, and skilled youth population; and reduction in brain drain by addressing psychological push factors driving irregular migration and providing local opportunities for career growth and economic empowerment.

Social Implications

Socially, the pervasive insecurity and youth restiveness have led to the severe erosion of social capital in Edo State. The trauma experienced by thousands of youths has resulted in a silent mental health epidemic, characterized by high rates of PTSD, depression, and substance abuse. Potential social benefits include healing psychological wounds through trauma-informed counselling; fostering empathy and social cohesion through community-based peace-building; restoring social capital through strengthening community networks, building trust, and promoting civic engagement (Putnam, 2000); retaining human capital by addressing the mental health crisis and providing local opportunities; and ensuring intergenerational transfer of positive social values such as respect for human life, tolerance, hard work, and integrity.

Security Implications

From a security perspective, the strategic deployment of counselling interventions aligns with the global shift toward human security and conflict prevention. Potential security benefits include reduction in recidivism through psychosocial rehabilitation of apprehended cultists, repentant cybercriminals, and returnees from human trafficking; prevention of radicalization by addressing root causes of agitation and providing alternative pathways to social mobility and economic empowerment; enhancement of

community policing by building trust between youths and security agencies; and achievement of sustainable peace through addressing psychological trauma of both victims and perpetrators.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The study demonstrates the value of integrating two complementary theoretical frameworks for understanding complex social phenomena like youth restiveness. Self-Determination Theory highlights the role of frustrated psychological needs in driving maladaptive behaviour, while Social Identity Theory emphasizes the role of group dynamics and identity formation. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive understanding of the individual and group-level factors that contribute to youth restiveness and inform the design of effective counselling interventions.

Practical implications include the need for comprehensive counselling services addressing psychological, social, emotional, and behavioural dimensions that are accessible, affordable, and culturally appropriate. Multi-level interventions addressing individual, group, family, community, and policy levels are essential. Cultural sensitivity and competence are crucial for working effectively with diverse cultural groups. Community involvement and participation in implementing counselling strategies ensure tailoring to specific needs and context. Capacity building in the counselling profession through pre-service and in-service training is necessary.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion – Youth restiveness and insecurity in Edo State are deeply rooted in the psychological, social, economic, and political fabric of the state. The seven interconnected causal factors – inadequate counselling, unemployment, poverty, irregular migration, cultism, political marginalization, and peer pressure – are effectively understood through Self-Determination Theory and Social Identity Theory. These theories inform the comprehensive counselling framework presented, which offers a practical roadmap for addressing the psychological, social, emotional, and behavioural dimensions of youth restiveness. The recommendations emphasize a paradigm shift from a primarily militarized response to an integrated approach incorporating psychosocial interventions. Without systematic investment in psychosocial counselling infrastructure, Edo State's aspirations for sustainable development will remain elusive.

Recommendations – Based on the analysis, this study recommends the strategic implementation of the counselling strategies outlined above to curb youth restiveness and insecurity in Edo State, such as:

1. Cognitive-Behavioural Interventions: Integrate CBT programs in secondary schools, tertiary institutions, and community centres to address distorted thought patterns that justify violence, criminality, and irregular migration.
2. Trauma-Informed Counselling: Deploy trauma-focused interventions including TF-CBT, EMDR, group trauma counselling, and mobile crisis units for survivors of cult violence, human trafficking, and communal clashes.
3. Career Guidance and Entrepreneurship: Provide career assessment, job search training, employability skills, and entrepreneurship development to address unemployment and reduce the allure of cybercrime and irregular migration.
4. Community-Based Conflict Resolution: Implement mediation, negotiation training, peace-building workshops, and intergroup dialogue to foster social cohesion and resolve communal conflicts

Implementation Pathways should concentrate on:

1. Educational Institutions: Employ professional counsellors to achieve the 1:250 ratio, integrate mental health curricula, and establish peer counselling programs in schools.
2. Communities: Establish community counselling centres, mobile outreach units, and youth empowerment programs.
3. Government: Integrate psychosocial support into security architecture, establish an Edo State Youth Counselling and Rehabilitation Commission, institutionalize youth participation in governance, and launch public awareness campaigns to de-stigmatize mental health care.

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