

**Examining the Nature
and Causes of Youth
Restiveness in New
Nyanya, Karu LGA,
Nasarawa State, Nigeria**

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Abstract

This study examines the nature and causes of youth restiveness in New Nyanya, a peri-urban settlement within Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The research forms part of a broader investigation into the effectiveness of community participation in addressing youth restiveness, with this seminar paper focusing specifically on one key objective. Adopting a qualitative research design, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with selected youths, community elders, and key informants, including security and youth development officers. The study found that youth restiveness in New Nyanya manifests in cult-related violence, political thuggery, drug abuse, vandalism, and social disorder. These behaviours are driven by a combination of factors, including unemployment, exclusion from governance, family

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breakdown, peer influence, drug accessibility, and political manipulation. The findings further reveal that the proximity of New Nyanya to Abuja exacerbates feelings of relative deprivation, as youths compare their socio-economic circumstances, unfavourably, with those in the Federal Capital Territory. The study concludes that youth restiveness in the area reflects broader systemic and structural failures rather than mere deviance. It recommends multi-layered responses, including targeted economic empowerment, inclusive youth engagement structures, family and community mentorship, and stronger local governance. The paper contributes to the understanding of youth restiveness as both a social and developmental issue requiring coordinated, context-specific solutions.

Keywords: Youth Restiveness, Peri-Urban Communities, Unemployment, Political Manipulation, Drug Abuse, Social Exclusion, Relative Deprivation.

Introduction

Youth restiveness has become an enduring challenge in Nigeria's socio-political landscape, often manifesting as violent protest, cultism, thuggery, vandalism, and other forms of disruptive behaviour. These expressions of unrest are typically driven by deep-seated socio-economic, political, and psychological grievances that are either poorly addressed or entirely ignored by state and community institutions. In peri-urban communities such as New Nyanya in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, the problem is particularly acute due to rapid population growth, limited infrastructure, rising unemployment, and strained social services. The area, located at the interface between Nasarawa State and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, has experienced significant demographic shifts, hosting a large youth population grappling with marginalisation and limited life opportunities. Youth restiveness, while often treated as a security issue, reflects broader questions of governance, inclusion, and systemic neglect. Restiveness among young people is not merely a reaction to poverty or

idleness, but a reflection of frustration with institutions that fail to provide pathways for expression, participation, or empowerment. When the youths are excluded from community development processes, denied access to education or employment, or manipulated by political actors, their latent energy often becomes channelled into resistance, violence, or criminality.

Existing studies on youth restiveness in Nigeria have frequently focused on the Niger Delta region and urban centres, with less attention paid to emerging hotspots in peri-urban and rapidly urbanising areas such as Karu. Yet, such areas are increasingly becoming incubators for social tension due to weak formal governance structures, the breakdown of traditional social controls, and rising intergenerational mistrust. New Nyanya, as a settlement characterised by socio-economic diversity, informal housing expansion, and youth-dominated demographics, offers a relevant context for examining the nature and root causes of restiveness from a localised perspective.

This seminar paper, derived from a broader dissertation on the effectiveness of community participation in addressing youth restiveness, narrows its focus to a specific objective: examination of the nature and causes of youth restiveness in New Nyanya. The aim is to provide contextual insights that can inform more responsive community engagement strategies and policy interventions targeted at mitigating youth restiveness in peri-urban contexts. By analysing the underlying socio-economic, political, and cultural factors that fuel restiveness in New Nyanya, the study seeks to bridge the knowledge gap between national-level analyses of youth unrest and the lived realities within smaller, fast-growing communities. Ultimately, the paper argues that sustainable solutions to youth restiveness must go beyond punitive security responses to embrace participatory, inclusive, and development-oriented approaches that empower young people as active stakeholders in their communities rather than as threats to social order.

Theoretical Framework/Empirical Reviews

This study is guided by Frustration–Aggression Theory and the Relative Deprivation Theory, both of which provide a useful lens for understanding the emergence of youth restiveness within marginalised and peri-urban communities such as New Nyanya.

The Frustration–Aggression Theory, originally developed by Dollard et al. (1939) and later expanded by Berkowitz (1989), posits that aggression is

often the result of frustration arising from the obstruction of goal-oriented behaviour. Applied to the context of youth restiveness, this theory explains how structural barriers such as unemployment, poor education, exclusion from governance processes, and perceived injustice can lead to psychological frustration among young people, which eventually manifests in aggressive or violent behaviour. In New Nyanya, where many youths are unemployed or underemployed, despite having aspirations for upward mobility, the inability to achieve life goals contributes to feelings of helplessness, bitterness, and, in many cases, resorts to disruptive actions as a means of venting frustration or gaining attention.

Complementing this is the Relative Deprivation Theory, which focuses on perceived disparities between expectations and actual living conditions. Gurr (1970) argues that individuals or groups become restive when they believe they are unfairly disadvantaged relative to others. In New Nyanya, this perception is amplified by the proximity of the community to the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja), where signs of wealth, development, and privilege are visibly on display. For many youths in New Nyanya, this contrast intensifies feelings of exclusion and resentment. Even when basic needs are met, the comparison to more privileged peers, often amplified by social media, creates a sense of being left behind or denied access to opportunities.

Together, these theories help explain why restiveness persists even in the absence of acute poverty or physical deprivation. The interplay between psychological frustration, perceived injustice, and unfulfilled aspirations creates fertile ground for the emergence of youth restiveness. By applying these theoretical lenses, the study situates the problem within broader frameworks of social behaviour, identity, and structural inequality, offering deeper insight into why young people in New Nyanya may engage in restive acts despite existing community efforts or policy interventions.

Literature Review

The phenomenon of youth restiveness has received significant attention within the discourse on national development, peacebuilding, and security in Nigeria. Broadly speaking, youth restiveness refers to the state of agitation, disorderliness, or violence often exhibited by young people due to a combination of socio-economic deprivation, political exclusion, and systemic

marginalisation. Scholars such as Imobighe (2003) and Aluede (2012) identify youth restiveness as both a symptom and a cause of broader societal dysfunction, typically manifesting in forms such as cultism, gang violence, drug abuse, vandalism, and political thuggery. While these outward behaviours may appear criminal, underlying them are deeper grievances stemming from a lack of opportunity, neglect by state actors, and eroded social structures. The nature of youth restiveness is shaped by local realities. In rural and peri-urban areas, it often arises from the intersection of population pressure, infrastructural deficits, unemployment, and weak governance (Akinbobola & Adegoke, 2019). In settlements like New Nyanya, where informal housing and rapid migration are common, restiveness may take on unique forms influenced by ethnic diversity, spatial inequality, and disconnection from formal authority structures. The literature further suggests that youth restiveness is not inherently violent; rather, it is often an initial expression of the need for recognition, justice, and participation. When ignored, it escalates into destructive behaviour (Nwagboso, 2012).

A key driver of youth restiveness identified in many studies is unemployment and underemployment. The National Bureau of Statistics (2020) reported that youth unemployment in Nigeria exceeds 40%, with higher figures in urban and peri-urban locations. This reality, coupled with poor access to vocational training and capital, leaves many young people idle and vulnerable to manipulation by political elites or criminal gangs. Ojo and Abdullahi (2020) observe that where economic survival becomes uncertain, many youths resort to illegal or aggressive methods to assert control over their environment or to gain relevance within their peer groups. Social exclusion is another significant contributor. Young people in Nigeria often find themselves excluded from decision-making at both the family and community levels. This exclusion breeds resentment and alienation, which can become a precursor to anti-social behaviour. A study by Eze (2017) on youth restiveness in southeastern Nigeria found that communities with stronger youth representation in traditional leadership or local governance reported lower levels of restiveness. This underscores the value of inclusion in building a sense of belonging and responsibility among young people.

Family structure and upbringing also feature prominently in the literature. Disruption of family roles, particularly the absence of paternal guidance or stable adult mentorship, has been shown to correlate with youth deviance. Adeoye and Akeredolu (2015) emphasise that many restive youths come from homes where supervision is weak, emotional needs are unmet, or discipline is either absent or excessive. In such environments, young people may seek alternative identity and support systems in gangs, cults, or other restive formations. In terms of the psychological and behavioural dimensions, youth restiveness is frequently associated with identity crisis and a search for relevance. Erikson's psychosocial development theory, although not always directly cited in African literature, provides a useful framework for understanding how unresolved identity issues during adolescence and early adulthood may lead to aggressive or oppositional behaviours. In New Nyanya, anecdotal evidence suggests that many restive youths engage in violent acts not necessarily for material gain, but to assert themselves in a society that appears to ignore or marginalise them.

From an empirical standpoint, a study by Olukoya and Emeka (2018) in Abuja's satellite towns, including Nyanya and Mararaba, found that over 60% of restive youths interviewed identified "lack of recognition" and "frustration with leaders" as key triggers of their behaviour. The same study noted that areas with active youth groups and community dialogue structures recorded lower levels of criminal activity and violence. Similarly, Ilesanmi and Bako (2021) conducted research in peri-urban Kaduna and found a strong correlation between youth restiveness and poor housing, overpopulation, and low access to recreational or creative spaces. In the case of New Nyanya, there is a scarcity of peer-reviewed academic literature focusing specifically on youth restiveness in the community. However, grey literature from local NGOs, youth development centres, and media reports suggests a rising trend in drug abuse, cult activities, and neighbourhood violence, particularly among males aged 16–30. These trends align with national patterns but are also shaped by local peculiarities, such as the proximity to Abuja, a high rate of informal settlement, and the influx of economically displaced migrants from other parts of the country.

The role of political manipulation cannot be overlooked. Several studies (e.g., Ibrahim & Sanusi, 2016; Adebayo, 2018) have documented how political actors in Nigeria sometimes recruit unemployed youths for electoral

violence or intimidation, thereby reinforcing a culture of restiveness. Once elections are over, these youths are abandoned, often with access to weapons or networks that become tools of terror in the community. An often underexplored but increasingly important theme in the discourse on youth restiveness is the role of gender dynamics. While most manifestations of restiveness, such as cult violence, armed robbery, and political thuggery, tend to be male-dominated, recent studies indicate that young women are not merely bystanders. Rather, they are often indirectly involved or affected, sometimes as victims of sexual exploitation, other times as active agents in drug trafficking, prostitution, or support roles for gang structures (Okereke & Nnadozie, 2019). Moreover, the exclusion of young women from empowerment programmes and civic platforms further compounds their vulnerability. The absence of gender-sensitive interventions in many community programmes results in the continued invisibility of female youths in discussions around restiveness, even though they suffer unique consequences.

Closely related is the failure of local governance systems in responding proactively to youth-related grievances. In many Nigerian communities, including those in Karu LGA, governance structures are often weak, reactive, or disconnected from the grassroots. Youth engagement strategies, where they exist, tend to be top-down, short-term, or politically motivated. According to Ogundele (2021), one major factor fuelling youth restiveness is the erosion of trust in both traditional and formal institutions. In New Nyanya, anecdotal reports suggest that even when youth leaders exist, they are frequently seen as stooges of local politicians, and thus lack legitimacy among their peers. This vacuum creates fertile ground for informal power structures such as cults or street gangs to emerge as alternative centres of authority and belonging. Drug and substance abuse have become prominent triggers and outcomes of youth restiveness. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA, 2022) reported alarming rates of substance abuse in satellite communities around the Federal Capital Territory, including Mararaba and New Nyanya. Drugs such as tramadol, codeine, cannabis, and methamphetamine are easily accessible to young people, fuelling violent tendencies, criminal activity, and poor mental health outcomes. Ayeni and Adedoyin (2020) link the rise in drug abuse to the lack of recreational and mental health support systems in many urbanising

communities. Without safe spaces for creative expression, counselling, or mentorship, youths in these areas are left to navigate socio-economic pressures in isolation, often resorting to substances as a coping mechanism.

Peer influence is also central to understanding how restiveness spreads among youth populations. The literature points to the powerful role of group identity in shaping behaviour, particularly in environments where social cohesion is low and aspiration is stifled. According to Adebajo and Yusuf (2021), many young people involved in restive behaviour are motivated not only by material gain but by the need to belong, to be respected, or to escape the perceived humiliation of joblessness and social irrelevance. Peer-led recruitment into cults, street gangs, or cybercrime rings has been reported across Nigeria, often starting from social settings such as motor parks, informal garages, local bars, or viewing centres. While many studies acknowledge these multi-layered causes, there remains a gap in localised policy implementation. For instance, the National Youth Policy (2019) outlines several commendable frameworks for youth inclusion, employment, and empowerment. Yet, there is often a disconnect between policy formulation and actual implementation at the local government or ward level. In communities like New Nyanya, youth restiveness thrives partly due to the absence of these policies on the ground, either due to poor political will, lack of funding, or ineffective stakeholder coordination (Ibrahim & Aliyu, 2020).

Empirically, the need for community-centred and context-specific responses is growing. A study by Chukwuma and Nwachukwu (2022) in neighbouring Ado-Karu found that youth restiveness was more effectively reduced in communities where youth groups were supported to run their own initiatives, such as clean-up projects, ICT training, and dialogue sessions with security agencies. These findings suggest that empowering youths as partners in development rather than as threats to be managed can yield more sustainable results.

The literature underscores the complex, multifaceted nature of youth restiveness, shaped by socio-economic, institutional, cultural, and psychological factors. Although numerous studies provide useful theoretical and empirical insights, there is a clear need for grounded research in emerging communities like New Nyanya. This study contributes to bridging that gap

by examining how restiveness is experienced, expressed, and reproduced at the micro-community level, with a view to informing responsive and inclusive interventions.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the nature and causes of youth restiveness in New Nyanya, Karu Local Government Area (LGA), Nasarawa State. The qualitative approach was deemed appropriate as it allows for a deeper understanding of lived experiences, community perceptions, and local dynamics shaping youth behaviour and restiveness. It also facilitates contextual insights that cannot be fully captured through quantitative metrics alone.

Area of the Study

New Nyanya is a densely populated peri-urban community situated within Karu LGA of Nasarawa State. It shares a border with the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and is characterised by rapid urban expansion, high migration, ethnic diversity, and a large youth population. The community presents a blend of formal and informal settlements, limited public infrastructure, and a visible presence of youth-driven informal economies. These conditions make it a fertile ground for understanding the complex dynamics of youth restiveness within a marginalised, yet strategically located, urban fringe.

Population of the Study

The study population consisted of youths resident in New Nyanya, aged between 15 and 35 years, as well as community leaders, youth group coordinators, parents, teachers, religious figures, and security personnel. These categories were included to ensure a comprehensive perspective on the issue from multiple angles: those directly involved in or affected by restive behaviour and those tasked with community guidance or control.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Purposive sampling was employed to select respondents who possessed relevant knowledge or lived experience concerning youth restiveness in the community. A total of 25 participants were selected for the study: this

included 15 youth respondents (both male and female), 5 community elders and local leaders, and 5 key informants, including security personnel and youth development officers. This sample size was considered adequate for thematic saturation in qualitative inquiry.

Data Collection Instruments

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). The interview guide was designed to elicit detailed responses on the forms of youth restiveness present in New Nyanya, its underlying causes, and perceptions of the community's response. Questions covered personal experiences, observations, contributing factors, peer influence, governance gaps, and suggestions for solutions. Two FGDs were held: one with male youth participants and the other with female youth participants, to ensure gender-balanced representation and provide space for open expression.

Data Analysis

The data collected were transcribed, categorised, and analysed using thematic content analysis. Emerging patterns were grouped into themes that reflected the nature of restiveness, perceived triggers, and the socio-economic or institutional contexts enabling such behaviours. Narratives from participants were quoted verbatim to preserve authenticity and provide depth to the interpretation. The analysis focused on identifying recurring explanations for restiveness and drawing connections between individual experiences and broader community patterns.

Findings and Discussion

The data collected through interviews and focus group discussions in New Nyanya revealed a complex set of factors underpinning youth restiveness in the community. The findings are presented under thematic categories reflecting both the nature and causes of restiveness as experienced and observed by participants.

Manifestations of Youth Restiveness

The study found that youth restiveness in New Nyanya takes several forms, ranging from violent conduct to subtle social defiance. Common

manifestations included street fighting, cult-related clashes, political thuggery, drug abuse, vandalism, and loud protests against perceived injustice.

A 19-year-old male respondent noted:

“Most of the time, when something happens, boys just gather and start fighting... sometimes it’s about money, sometimes it’s cult wahala [trouble].”

Female participants also reported fear and insecurity due to harassment and unregulated youth activities, particularly at night or near viewing centres and drinking spots. The presence of youth gangs, some armed, was also reported near motor parks and uncompleted buildings. These findings align with earlier observations by Aluede (2012) and Imobighe (2003), who argue that restiveness in Nigerian communities often starts with perceived neglect and escalates into violent confrontation when unresolved.

Unemployment and Economic Frustration

Across interviews, unemployment emerged as the most cited cause of youth restiveness. Respondents expressed frustration over the lack of job opportunities, skills training, or access to capital. Even those with secondary or tertiary education reported being idle.

A local youth leader explained:

“There is nothing for the boys to do. If you see the number of graduates in this community with no job... it’s painful. Some join bad groups out of frustration.”

The data confirms the assertion of Ojo and Abdullahi (2020) that economic hopelessness is a powerful driver of aggression among young people. In New Nyanya, many youths resort to menial work, ride motorcycles, or remain dependent on their parents. Those unable to cope often join gangs or engage in “easy money” activities such as cybercrime or political thuggery.

Weak Community Structures and Exclusion

Participants also pointed to a breakdown in local leadership and poor youth engagement in community decision-making processes. Many young people

felt alienated from both traditional leaders and political representatives, stating that youth voices are often ignored unless elections are approaching.

A female FGD participant remarked:

*“The elders only remember us when it’s time for campaigns.
After that, nobody cares if we are suffering or angry.”*

This corroborates Eze’s (2017) finding that inclusion in community leadership reduces the likelihood of restive behaviour, while exclusion breeds resentment and detachment. The lack of functional youth councils or development programmes in New Nyanya appears to worsen this gap.

Drug Abuse and Peer Influence

Another recurring theme was the widespread use of drugs among youths in the area. Substances such as tramadol, cannabis, and codeine were mentioned as easily accessible. Peer influence was reported as a major reason for initiation into drug use, especially among secondary school dropouts and idle youths. A security officer interviewed stated:

*“Most of the arrests we make here involve young boys and
drugs. When they are high, they can do anything, even kill.”*

This reflects NDLEA (2022) statistics and confirms findings by Ayeni and Adedoyin (2020), linking drug abuse to the growing restiveness in Nigeria’s peri-urban communities.

Family Breakdown and Poor Parental Supervision

Several respondents linked restiveness to the weakening of family structures, particularly absentee or overburdened parents. Many households in New Nyanya are headed by single mothers or elderly relatives, while the actual parents are away working in Abuja or elsewhere.

One respondent, a 23-year-old, shared:

*“Nobody controls us at home. My mum leaves early and
comes back late. We are left to the street.”*

This aligns with Adeoye and Akeredolu’s (2015) argument that poor parenting, emotional neglect, and lack of mentorship contribute to youth

deviance. In many cases, youths turn to peer groups and informal networks for identity, support, and authority.

Political Manipulation

Finally, political instrumentalisation of youths was identified as a root cause and reinforcement mechanism of restiveness. Several respondents indicated that during election seasons, politicians arm and pay young men to disrupt opponents, after which they are abandoned. A community elder lamented:

“These boys were used during the last election. Now, they have nothing to do and still have access to weapons. What do you expect?”

Ibrahim and Sanusi (2016) make similar observations regarding post-election violence being a consequence of youth mobilisation by political actors without long-term reintegration or disarmament plans.

Synthesis of Findings

The findings support the Frustration–Aggression and Relative Deprivation Theories, which frame restiveness as an outcome of unfulfilled aspirations, perceived injustice, and systemic neglect. Youths in New Nyanya do not simply react to poverty or boredom, they respond to social and institutional failure, the breakdown of supportive structures, and visible disparities between their living conditions and those of others in neighbouring urban areas.

The nature of restiveness in New Nyanya is both symptomatic of broader structural issues and uniquely shaped by local dynamics such as proximity to Abuja, demographic pressure, and urban sprawl. These insights point to the need for context-specific interventions grounded in economic empowerment, social inclusion, and youth-centred governance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the nature and causes of youth restiveness in New Nyanya, Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. Drawing from field interviews and focus group discussions, it becomes clear that youth restiveness in the community is multifaceted, manifesting through cult clashes, political thuggery, drug abuse, and vandalism. At the core of these

manifestations are deeply entrenched structural and social problems, including unemployment, economic frustration, peer pressure, the breakdown of family and community structures, exclusion from governance processes, and political manipulation. The proximity of New Nyanya to Abuja further intensifies these challenges, as the visible disparity between opportunity-rich urban spaces and struggling peri-urban settlements breeds resentment and a sense of relative deprivation among young people.

The findings affirm that youth restiveness is not simply a behavioural problem but a reflection of systemic failure and neglect. While young people in the area possess energy, creativity, and aspirations, the absence of meaningful engagement platforms, mentorship, and economic opportunities renders them vulnerable to violence, manipulation, and deviance. Moreover, the erosion of traditional values, poor parenting, and the easy availability of drugs further compound the problem.

Addressing youth restiveness in New Nyanya, therefore, requires a multidimensional approach. There is an urgent need for targeted youth empowerment programmes that go beyond political rhetoric and provide real access to skills acquisition, vocational training, and micro-enterprise funding. Community-based initiatives must prioritise youth inclusion in decision-making, perhaps through the reactivation or formation of credible youth councils that liaise directly with local authorities. Digital literacy and psychosocial support services should also be introduced, particularly for vulnerable groups such as out-of-school youths, teenage mothers, and those recovering from substance abuse.

Religious institutions, schools, and traditional leaders must be mobilised to rebuild community values and provide mentorship structures that offer young people positive alternatives to deviance. At the policy level, the local government should invest in recreational and educational infrastructure, while enforcing measures to curb political exploitation of unemployed youths. A coordinated strategy involving local stakeholders, law enforcement, youth groups, and development partners will be essential to addressing both the symptoms and root causes of youth restiveness in New Nyanya.

Tackling youth restiveness must begin with recognising the structural and emotional wounds that drive it. Restive youths are not merely problems to be contained, but potential agents of peace and development whose

energy can be redirected through purposeful and inclusive interventions. The lessons drawn from New Nyanya serve as a microcosm of similar realities in many peri-urban Nigerian communities and should inform broader strategies for sustainable youth engagement across the country.

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