



Evaluation of Youth Vulnerability to Community Cultism in Selected States in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author NRN designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, managed the literature searches and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors VEW and MDM managed the analyses and edited the work. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Background of Study: Cultism is one of the major sources of violence and causes of death among youths in the Niger Delta region, Nigeria. Youths join different cult groups to have more influence and power than their peers. Supremacy of a particular cult group in a community gives its members edge to take control of proceeds and royalties accruing from crude oil production in the area. As a result, many cult groups are at conflict to assume dominance and control. This rivalry among them triggered inter and intra cult violence such as assassination, abduction, clashes, and destruction of properties as well as insecurity and upsurge in criminal activities.

Methods and Materials: This study examines the vulnerability of youths to community cultism in the Niger Delta. It looks at reasons joining cultism, crimes committed by cultists and extent of cult

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attacks and fatalities in the area. Adopting cross sectional research design, this study was conducted in the 20 Local Government Areas (LGAs) where amnesty was offered to cultists by government in 2016. The study population was the entire population of the repentant cultists (cultists who embraced the amnesty package) and Taro Yamene's formula was used in selecting the sample size of 400. Snowball sampling technique was employed in selecting repentant cultists. Data relied on primary and secondary sources, and were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, weighted means and choropleth maps.

Results: The highest reason youths engage in cultism in communities was for protection. Also, quest for influence/power, money and peer group were other reasons. Fun and desire for political connection were the least reasons. The major crimes committed by cultists were murder/killing, intimidation, kidnapping and political thuggery. Cult attacks were highest in 2018 with 109 cases and least in 2010 with 33 cases while fatalities peaked in 2017 with 92 deaths and lowered in 2010 with 13 deaths.

Conclusion: Youths are vulnerable to joining cult gangs for protection and to exert influence/power over their peers. Re-orientation and sensitization programs are recommended to disabuse their minds and discourage them from engaging in anti-social behaviors.

Keywords: Vulnerability; youths; community cultism; Niger Delta.

1. INTRODUCTION

Reports of cult attacks have increased sharply in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria as cult violence has taken on various criminal, militant, communal, and political dimensions, traversing and impacting negatively on almost all areas of the economy and social lives of the citizens [1]. A lot of lives and properties have been destroyed in communities through cult violence [2]. Youths have fallen victims of trigger-happy cultists just as the youth population is being gradually decimated due to cult activities. Many youths have been killed while others are imprisoned or incarcerated in Police custodies due to their involvement in cultism. In the Niger Delta Region where cult violence is widespread in recent times, properties worth billions of Naira have been destroyed in communities in the area. The disastrous impact of cult related violence as witnessed in the Niger Delta today has not been given wide publicity even though the level of devastation has remained in constant increase and a cause for serious concern as both social and economic activities have suffered severe setbacks. Communities have been evacuated as inhabitants fled to different places for safety. The result has been the prevailing rural-urban migration and massive displacement of residents from their homes, with farmers abandoning their farms and disaster risk getting escalated. The increasing exposure of youths to delinquent behaviour and the lack of adequate parental care due to high rate of poverty, unemployment, and bad governance have no doubt enhancing their susceptibility to joining cult groups and cumulatively increasing the vulnerability of the

communities to cult conflict/war. Partnership Initiative in the Niger Delta [3] observed that cult and gang related violence has been a significant driver of conflict risk in the Niger Delta between 2015 and 2016. Findings from the study revealed high level of domestic violence against women and girls as this category of people were abused, raped and assaulted in many communities, thereby causing them emotional and psychological trauma which they suffered for months, if not for years. It posited that the women were the most vulnerable group to cult violence in the region and found it difficult to recover from the trauma they passed through. Invariably, the violence impacted on the wellbeing of women and girls as it affected their social life. As pointed by Nnodim and Ochogba [4] in their study, they showed that the menace has affected negatively on social and economic activities of residents despite of their gender and thereby it is threatening their wellbeing. This is because the cult related activities have caused displacement of many from their homes due to fear of being killed. Birabil and Okanezi [5] have pointed out that violence resulting from cult attacks had taken an alarming dimension that posed threats to residents. Because they were perpetrated by the community youths, and took the people by surprise, they became difficult to control and by consequence caused destruction equivalent to man-made disasters.

The prevailing cultic activities have created insecurity in the region, thereby driving away investors both local and foreign. This has greatly affected economic activities and the economy of the region which is rich in crude oil. According to

Alapiki et al. [6], the insecurity in the Niger Delta forced many multinational oil companies to abandon their operational bases. Consequently, many International Oil Companies (IOCs) such as Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), Mobil Oil Company and others initially operated in the area have consistently sold out their assets and relocated their bases. This resulted to job loss, rise in unemployment level and also increased the predicament of the people of the region including the escalation of crime being committed by the unemployed youths. Apart from the foreigners, the locals also have suffered varying degrees of attack from the cultists, which include being kidnapped, robbed, rapped, passenger boats and vehicles hijacked, residential houses burnt, people shot and killed. The cultic attacks are leaving many residents in fear, and security agencies helpless with grave implications on the means of livelihood of the people and the development of the region. According to Imhabekhai [7], no meaningful development could take place in an atmosphere of insecurity.

More so, the humanitarian crisis occasioned by cult attacks is alarming yet has not received government attention as the nation's response body, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) has failed to provide emergency services and the needed humanitarian assistance to ameliorate the suffering of the victims. With many residents being displaced and chased from their homes, families separated, youths killed and many incarcerated in prisons or police custody, houses burnt, and properties destroyed, the human cost of the menace is incalculable. The situation is impacting on social cohesion, availability of labour, social order, population growth of the youths as well as increasing immorality and crime rate, thereby threatening food sufficiency in the region.

Specific initiatives to tackle the menace, which include Amnesty/disarmament program, arrest and prosecution of those caught in the act, a campaign to raise awareness and discourage cultism have not yielded success. But many of these initiatives concentrate on tackling risk young people pose to society as reflected in the punitive approaches that characterized them, with little attention on the risk young people face. Many young people in the state are faced with challenges of unemployment and joblessness, a situation that can predispose them to taking to crime. Unemployment is an unwanted social

trend and its effects on the aggrieved youth are geared towards crime.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The study explored the vulnerability of youths to community cultism in the Niger Delta Region. The specific objectives were:

1. Determine the social and economic factors of youth vulnerability to joining cult gangs in the study area.
2. Identify the crimes committed by cultists in the study area.
3. Determine the magnitude of attacks from community cults and the deaths in the LGAs with amnesty policy in the study area.
4. Map areas vulnerable to cult impacts in the study area.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What are the social and economic factors making youths vulnerable to joining cults in the study area?
2. What crimes do cultists commit or are peculiar to communities that have experienced cult related activities?
3. How frequent are cult attacks and deaths in the LGAs with amnesty?
4. Which areas are vulnerable to cult impacts?

2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

2.1 Study Area

This study was conducted in Imo and Rivers States which are the two Niger Delta States that offered amnesty to cultists in 2016. The Niger Delta is located along the Atlantic coast which forms the southern boundary of Nigeria. The region has an estimated area of 70,000 km² and is one of the world's largest deltas. It is in the central part of southern Nigeria (Fig. 1). The 2017 projected population of the Niger Delta is 44,229,729, comprising the total population of the nine (9) States that make up the political Niger Delta (Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers). The region represents 12% of Nigeria's total surface area [8].

The design of the study was a cross-sectional survey carried out across the States – Rivers and Imo States. The States were exclusively chosen because of their administration of Amnesty Program to cultists in 2016. The population of the

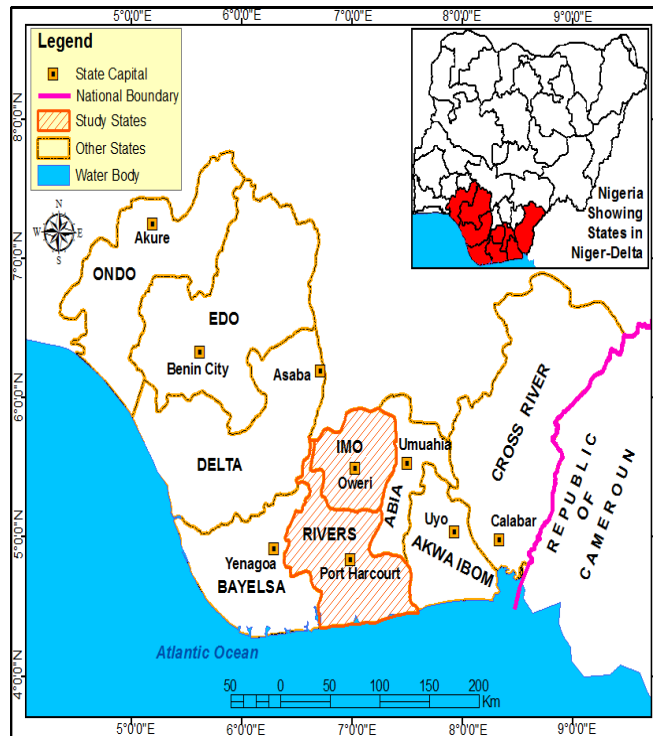


Fig. 1. Niger Delta State with study area States (Shaded)
 Source: Authors' representation

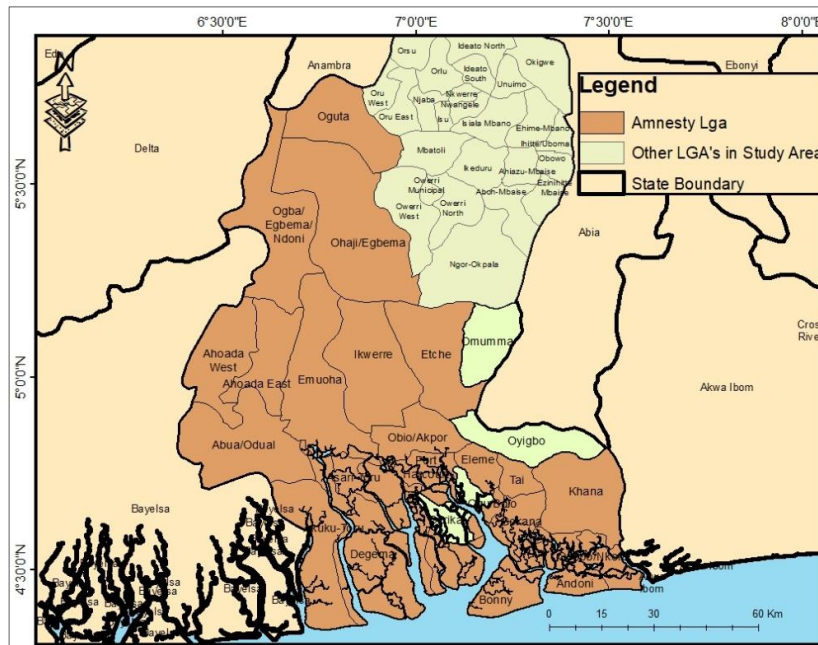


Fig. 2. Study LGAs (LGAs with Amnesty program for cultists in the study area)
 Source: Authors' representation

study comprised the entire population of the government's amnesty in 2016). Taro Yamene's repented cultists (cultists who embraced formula was applied on the 26,233 being the

entire population of the repentant cultists in the two selected states to give a total sample size of 400 used for this study. A total of 20 LGAs where the amnesty took place were purposively selected for this study while the repentant cultists were chosen using snowball sampling technique. Both primary and secondary data were used for this study. While primary data were gotten from questionnaire administered to repentant cultists, secondary data were acquired from the Nigerian Police Taro Yamene's formula is expressed as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(\alpha)^2}$$

where

n = sample size

N = Actual (target) population

α = significant level (5%)

$$n = \frac{26233}{1+26233(0.05)^2} = 393.99$$

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Cults/Cult Related Activities

For the purpose of this research, a cult group is a group or gang whose beliefs, actions and behaviours are considered as extreme or strange by many people and engage in criminal activities which make the residents feel unsafe and intimidated. Cult related activities are criminal activities perpetrated by cult members either in groups or individually which impact negatively on the security of people and resources. Such activities include inter/intra cult violence, invasion of communities by armed cult gangs, kidnapping/abduction, inter-communal violence, sea piracy, illegal oil bunkering, rape, political thuggery/assassinations and armed robbery. According to UNICEF [9], cult activities include inter/intra cult violence to defend and control territory, drug trafficking, oil bunkering, reputation for being brutal, among others.

Like gangs, cults operate in order to provide economic gain for their members. However, they also tend to be more organized around defending a certain territory-often in defense of a neighborhood or ethnic group within an urban area-than gangs do. They also involve rules and rituals and are more strongly organized than are gangs. Cult related activities in Rivers State have caused havoc on rural communities especially in areas where government security forces cannot easily access. The report posited that such cult

related activities have taken on various criminal, militant, communal and or political undertones with many deaths and huge devastations, thereby creating unsafe and insecure environment.

Adekola and Enyiche [10] observed that the cult clashes being experienced in Rivers State, especially between rival cult groups have created an atmosphere of insecurity and the feeling of unsafe by the residents. The authors have noted that cult violence had not only promoted division and disunity among community members, but had also resulted in the abandonment of many community-based development projects by contractors executing them because they had to flee their project sites due to the insecurity. No meaningful development can take place in a crises prone area because it is only in a peaceful environment that development can thrive.

Nyiayaana [11] affirmed that the cult violence in Rivers State has spread to villages with serious implications on social order and stability and called for urgent steps to be taken to address it. He remarked that although most cult clashes/violence occur mainly due to battle for supremacy and territorial control of an area by different cult groups, the struggle for social identity and the expression of economic discontent by dissatisfied village youths are key elements fueling cult violence in the state. To corroborate this assertion [12] posited that the killing of the seventeen persons in Omoku, who were returning from the 2018 New year crossover church service was the fallout of the supremacy fight among rival cult groups in the area. Also, Onoyume [13] opined that at Mgboshimili community, fifteen persons were shot dead and many houses burnt down in a single attack carried out by members of the Icelander cult group over battle for supremacy and territorial control.

The four (4) cult groups identified as the major cult groups operating in communities in Niger Delta, causing the escalation of cult violence and the worsening insecurity are;

- i. Deebam Cult Group
- ii. Deewell Cult Group
- iii. The Icelanders Cult Group and
- iv. The Greenlanders Cult Group

However, there are other cult groups operating in the state. This research was based on the four (4) major cult groups. To justify this position, the

researcher will adopt the following criteria for classifying groups as cult groups or youth gangs proposed by several authors [14,15,16,17,18).

- The group has three or more members
- Members share an identity, typically linked to a name and often, other symbols.
- Members view themselves as a cult, and others recognize them as a cult.
- The group has some permanence and a degree of organization.
- The group is involved in an elevated level of criminal activity, and destruction of lives and property.

3.2 Evolution of Cults and Conceptual Analysis of Cult in Niger Delta

Cultism began from the then University College, Ibadan, now University of Ibadan, in the early 1950s with the formation of the Pirates Confraternity also known as the "Magnificent Seven" (Bergman, 2016). Furthermore, Pirate Confraternity was formed by Professor Wole Soyinka and a group of six friends and was aimed at producing future Nigeria leaders who should be very proud of their African heritage. The Pirate confraternity was concerned with fighting colonialism, ethnicity, bad university policies and sexual exploitation of female students by lecturers.

As cultism is fast spreading in most communities and urban areas of the Niger Delta, their activities (though violent and illegal) are beginning to be an acceptable behaviour in the society, especially for the young people who believe that joining cult groups would make them earn respect from their peers [19].

Presently, there are over fifty cult groups in Nigeria. They include Neo-Black Movement of Africa (NBA) also known as Black Axe, Aye or Axe Men Confraternity, Air Lord's Confraternity, Supreme Vikings Confraternity (SVC), Klansmen Confraternity, Brotherhood of Blood (Black Berete or Two Two), Mafia, De Norsemen Club of Nigeria, Daughters of Jezebel, Black Brazier, White Angels, Vic Queens, Damels among others. Since the formation of the cult groups, there have been increased membership into their folds, with the members perpetrating all sorts of heinous acts such as armed robbery, assassination, drug trafficking and abuse, arms dealing and kidnapping.

The report revealed that the Klansmen Confraternity expanded their influence by

creating a street and creek wing cult group, Deebam, which by reason was to expand their influence and fight for and control territory outside the universities through violence and crime. In response to this development, Supreme Viking's Confraternity (SVC), which started its operation in the University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT) in 1982, established its own street and creek cult group, Dewell. When the Dewell was unable to match Deebam, the SVC created the second confraternity wing, the Icelanders (Germans).

Presently, many have wondered why the heinous acts which were originally known to thrive only in the nations tertiary institutions have expanded its coast and crept into the streets and communities of Niger Delta, leading to loss of lives and destruction of properties as well as displacement of residents from their homes. Hence, cultism has drifted from the university campuses to the communities with Deebam, Deewell, Icelander, Greenlanders and Black axe being prominent in the Niger Delta States. Deewell was affiliated to the Niger Delta Vigilante Group (NDVG) and Deebam affiliated to the Niger Delta People Volunteer Group (NDVG). The two were the major armed militia groups that operated in the Niger Delta region to prosecute the struggle for resource control and the struggle against environmental degradation in the region (Ebiede, 2011).

In the contemporary Niger Delta, crime and violence occasioned by the activities of the cult groups have threaten the wellbeing of residents. For some time now, there has been an increase in the number of gun-related killings, beheading of people and burning of houses arising from either inter-cult or intra-cult clashes. Although it is not exactly clear to what extent, this is a long-term trend. Hardly will a day passed without any incident of cult related clashes or killings, a development that is affecting both the social, economic and security situations of the region, making people feel unsafe and live in fear. Many rural dwellers have been forced to abandon their homes and communities and flee to cities where they believe is safe and secure. No doubt this upsurge of cultism is viewed to have caused rural-urban migration and by extension threatens food security with the possibility of slowing down socio-economic activities.

The high rate of abduction/kidnapping, armed robbery, sea piracy, militancy, rape, theft, pipeline vandalism and incessant killings in Niger Delta have been linked to cultic activities. World

Health Organization [20] affirmed that the ravaging effects of cultism in the region has led to wanton destruction of prosperities, kidnapping, armed robbery, prostitution, drug abuse, loss of lives, waste of resources and threat to lives and properties, thereby amounting to a disaster. According to Onoyume [21] disaster is an occurrence disrupting the moral conditions of existence and causing a level of suffering that exceeds the capacity of adjustment of the affected community. The roots of the violence reach deep into the society, tapping into such complex conditions as poverty, ethnicity, joblessness and hopelessness. The devastation cause by violence in the region cannot be quantified. Hence, daily newspapers are awash with reports on community violence and destructions attributing them to increasing rate of cultism. Whether or not, they are truly caused by cultism is yet unknown. Also, media coverage of this phenomenon tends to focus on number of deaths but rarely explores the economic consequences and physical destructions on the built environment. For example, Ukpong [22] reported that in Ula Upata, a rural community of Rivers State in Niger Delta, ten persons were murdered by cultists. Similarly, the battle for supremacy between rival cult groups in Omoku led to the killing of twelve persons and displacement of many from their homes, [23]. Since then the cult killings have continued with many houses in various communities razed down and properties worth millions of naira destroyed. The catastrophic nature of the menace is alarming as virtually every community is at risk. According to Anazie [24] an inter-cult clash that erupted in some communities of Tai LGA, resulted in the death of fourteen persons and the destruction of a number of houses. A similar incident witnessed in Iba, a community in the region, following the invasion of the community by cultists led to the killing of eight persons and the displacement of many from their homes. To every resident of the region, cult attacks have posed serious security challenge, almost overwhelming the security agencies. Today, almost every street in the region has one form of cult group or the other [25]. More worrisome is the rate at which community youths and residents are getting involved in the inhuman clandestine acts and the wickedness associated with it.

Many researchers have generated a set of events which can realistically cause cult attacks/or attacks by cult groups and they include:

- Killing of a cult member
- Cult rivalry
- Inter cult attacks
- Intra cult attacks
- Land/boundary disputes
- Chieftaincy dispute
- Political tussle/struggle
- Job struggle for surveillance of oil facilities
- Supremacy battle among cult groups
- Struggle for control or dominance of an area by cult groups
- Struggle for oil bunkering sites
- High poverty rate
- High unemployment rate
- Drug use/alcoholism
- Availability of weapons or proliferation of arms
- Availability of cult groups/cultists

According to NCPC [26], presence of cult groups such as Icelander and Greenlander in Niger Delta has led to a number of inter cult clashes, resulting in killings and huge devastations in the area. He noted that such incidents have grounded economic and agricultural especially farming activities, Between 2003 and 2007, cult violence recorded a total of 85 deaths only in Ogoniland of Rivers State. Various authors found that the activities of cult groups and their involvement in chieftaincy and land disputes have increased fear and anxiety, causing emotional and psychological trauma on the residents. This is because, cult violence have caused widespread destruction of property, farmlands, houses and internal displacement of residents in addition to loss of lives. According to the researcher, many attacks took place in churches, market places, hotels and locations where business transactions are done. Cult conflicts have assumed dangerous dimensions that pose threat to man and may be equal to war. War is a man-made disaster and is synonymous with conflict.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Factors Affecting Youths Vulnerability to Cultism

The research showed that need for protection was the highest reason why youths joined cult groups in the study area. Others were need to exert influence and power over others, quest for money, peer group influence and political connection respectively. Fun was the least

reason why youths joined cult groups as it ranked 6th. As cited by (26) gang involvement is influenced by quest for protection. The findings of this research imply that most youths are vulnerable to joining cult groups in order to avoid being intimidated by others since they feel the group will accord them protection and security over the ravaging influence of other cult gangs.

4.2 Crimes Committed by Cult Gangs

From the results, this research finds that the crimes committed by cultists in the study area were murder/killing, kidnapping, political thuggery, pickpocket and intimidation/harassment.

4.3 Magnitude of Cult Attacks

Analysis of cult attacks is done using secondary data collected from the police as presented in Table 3. The table shows the number of cult related attacks from 2009 to 2018, across LGAs where amnesty program was administered in the Niger Delta region in 2016. From the table, a total of 681 cases of cult attacks were observed in the area and, out of the 20 LGAs, Ohjai/Egbema witnessed the highest number

with 93 incidents, corresponding to 13.66% of the total incidents within the period. This is followed by Oguta, Emuoha, Port Harcourt City, Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni, Ikwerre, Ahoada East, Andoni, Etche, Khana, Obio/Akpor and Asari-Toru LGAs which experienced 88(12.92%), 62(9.10%), 41(6.02), 36(5.29%), 32(4.70%), 32(4.70%), 30(4.41%), 29(4.26%), 26(3.82%), 25(3.67%) and 25(3.67%) incidents respectively. Other LGAs such as Eleme, Degema, Abua/Odua, Gokana, Ahoada West and Akuku-Toru witnessed 25(3.67%), 24(3.52%), 23(3.38%), 22(3.23%), 21(3.08%) and 21(3.08%) incidents while Bonny and Tai experienced the least number of incidents of cult attacks with 13 (1.91%) incidents each. The result implies that in the study area, cult related attacks were experienced more in Ohaji/Egbema, Oguta, Emuoha and Port Harcourt City LGAs from 2009 to 2018 with more than 40 cases but least in Bonny and Tai LGAs where the number of cult related attacks was less than 15 cases over the period. Therefore, it can be deduced that Ohaji/Egbema, Oguta, Emuoha and Port Harcourt City LGAs are high risk areas with respect to cult related attacks while Bonny and Tai are low risk areas.

Table1. Distribution of responses on reasons for joining cultism in the study area

S/N	Items	VHE 5	HE 4	ME 3	LE 2	VLE 1	Total	Weighted mean	Ranks
1	Peer Group	184	25	96	34	25	364	3.85	4
2	Money	168	127	51	11	7	364	4.20	3
3	Protection	175	136	36	3	14	364	4.25	1
4	Influence/power	128	204	21	6	5	364	4.22	2
5	Political connection	140	78	24	95	26	364	3.57	5
6	Fun	27	113	71	79	74	364	1.71	6

Source: Researcher's Field Work and Data Analysis, 2019

Table 2. Distribution of crimes committed by cultists in the study area

S/N	Crimes	Yes	%	No	%
1	Murder/Killing	209	57.42	155	42.58
2	Illegal Crude Oil bunkering	104	28.75	260	71.43
3	Kidnapping	192	52.75	172	47.25
4	Sea Piracy	55	15.11	309	84.89
5	Pipeline Vandalism	92	25.27	272	74.73
6	Rape	155	42.58	209	57.42
7	Political Thuggery	261	71.70	103	28.30
8	Pickpocketing	184	50.55	180	49.45
9	Intimidation/harassment	201	55.22	163	44.78
10	Armed robbery	137	37.64	227	62.36
11	House burglary	99	27.20	265	72.80
12	Arson/burning of houses	149	40.93	213	58.52

Source: Research's Field Work and Data Analysis, 2019

Table 3. Frequency of cult attacks in the LGAs with amnesty program (2009-2018)

S/N	LGAs	Year										Total Frequency	Percentage (%)
		2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018		
1	Abua/Odua	1	1	2	1	2	3	4	2	3	4	23	3.38
2	Ahoada East	0	1	5	0	1	1	3	5	11	5	32	4.70
3	Ahoada West	1	0	1	1	1	1	2	3	9	2	21	3.08
4	Akuku-Toru	3	1	3	2	2	1	3	1	2	3	21	3.08
5	Andoni	2	3	2	2	3	3	4	2	5	4	30	4.41
6	Asari-Toru	4	3	4	3	2	1	2	1	2	3	25	3.67
7	Bonny	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	13	1.91
8	Degema	2	4	0	3	2	1	1	6	1	4	24	3.52
9	Eleme	3	1	2	2	2	2	3	3	4	3	25	3.67
10	Emuoha	4	3	2	3	6	9	8	10	8	9	62	9.10
11	Etche	2	2	3	2	3	1	2	3	7	4	29	4.26
12	Gokana	1	1	0	0	0	7	2	6	2	3	22	3.23
13	Ikwerre	1	0	1	1	2	3	5	6	4	9	32	4.70
14	Khana	0	0	1	4	0	0	12	1	3	5	26	3.82
15	Obio/Akpor	2	2	2	3	4	1	1	2	4	4	25	3.67
16	Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni	1	0	1	0	3	2	10	8	8	3	36	5.29
17	Oguta	0	6	11	9	10	8	10	5	12	17	88	12.92
18	Ohaji/Egbema	0	0	8	13	18	7	12	10	11	14	93	13.66
19	Port Harcourt City	3	2	3	4	0	4	4	5	6	10	41	6.02
20	Tai	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	13	1.91
Total		34	33	53	55	64	57	90	82	105	109	681	100

Source: Nigerian Police and Researcher's Field Work, 2019

4.4 Choropleth Mapping of Cult Related Attack in the Study from 2009-2018

Fig. 3 depicts the choropleth map of geographical distribution of magnitude of cult related attacks from 2009-2018 in the LGAs where amnesty was offered to cultists in 2016. From the map, the high risk areas for cult attacks include Oguta, Ohaji/Egbema and Emuoha LGAs while Port Harcourt City, Ikwerre, Ahoada East and Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGAs are areas with moderate risk of cult attacks. Low risk areas are coloured light and dark green in the map. This implies that the cult attacks are more northward than southward of the map. This further suggests that communities within the geographic boundaries of the two states are vulnerable and at high risk of experiencing cult attacks.

4.5 Magnitude of Fatalities of Cult Attacks

Analysis of frequency of deaths resulting from cult attacks was done using secondary data from the police as presented in Table 4. The table shows the number of deaths resulting from cult

related activities from 2009 to 2018 across LGAs where amnesty program was conducted in the study area in 2016. The table shows that a total of 456 deaths were recorded due to cult related activities. Out of the 20 LGAs, Emuoha had the highest number of deaths with 61 (13.38) of the total number. This is followed by Ohaji/Egbema with 47(10.31), Oguta with 46(10.09), Port Harcourt City, Ikwerre and Obio/Akpor with 34(7.46%), each, Ahoada East with 25 (5.48%), Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni with 23(5.04%), Etche with 21(4.61%) and Andoni with 19(4.17) of deaths. Other LGAs such as Khana recorded 17 (3.73%), Abua/Odua and Eleme 14(3.07%) each, Ahoada West and Akuku-Toru 12(2.63%) each, Asar-Toru 11(2.41%), Degema and Tai 10(2.19%) each. However, Bonny and Gokana recorded the least number of deaths with 7(1.54%) and 5(1.10%) respectively. This implies that Emuoha, Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta LGAs were worst affected by cult killings with more than 40 deaths between 2009 and 2018 while Bonny and Gokana were least affected with number of deaths less than 2 digits within the period.

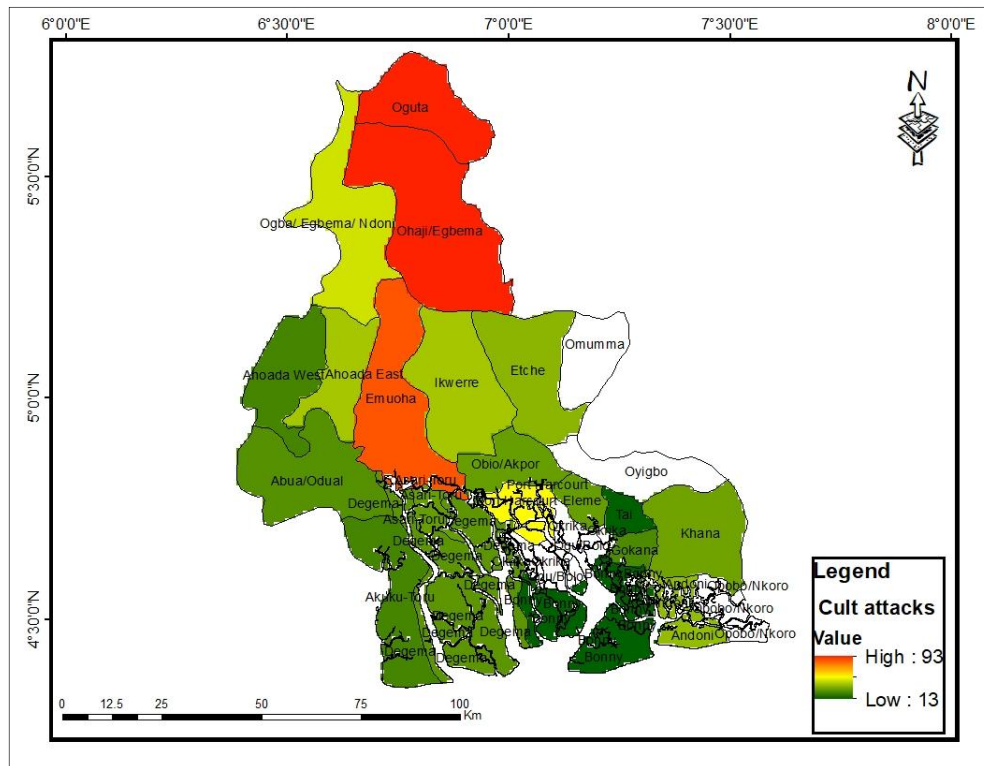


Fig. 3. Choropleth map showing geographical distribution of magnitude of cult attacks in LGAs with amnesty in the ten year study period, from 2009-2018

Also, the table shows that cumulatively the number of deaths were highest in 2017, which is the year following the amnesty, with a total of 92 deaths across the LGAs compared to 57 recorded in 2015, which is the year preceding amnesty. The implication is that the amnesty did not make any positive impact in reducing the number of cult killings in the study area. This finding infers that the amnesty fails to mitigate cult related killings since its administration.

4.6 Choropleth Mapping of Cult Fatalities in the Study from 2009-2018

The choropleth map in Fig. 4 shows that between 2009 and 2018, areas coloured red have witnessed high fatalities resulting from cult related killings especially those from inter and intra cult attacks. Areas coloured yellow shows moderate fatalities while areas coloured green shows low fatalities. From the choropleth map, it can be deduced that cult killings are progressing northward across boundaries, from Port Harcourt and Obio/Akpor LGAs through Emuoha and Ikwerre LGAs of Rivers State into Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta LGAs of Imo State. This implies that the above LGAs are high risk areas, and that the risk is increasing across the border of Rivers and Imo states despite their geographical boundaries. From the map, other LGAs such as Etche and

Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni which are situated in the boundary of the two states are at moderate risk level. This indicates that communities at the boundary of the two states are at risk of experiencing high rate of deaths from cult related activities. This could be attributed to the ease with which the cultists traverse the two states.

5. DISCUSSION

As to the factors increasing the susceptible of youths to joining cult gangs, this study found that peer group influence, need for money, protection, influence, power and political connection were reasons why youths join gangs in the study area. The research further showed that the major crimes committed by cultists in communities include murder/killings, political thuggery, kidnapping, pickpocketing and harassment, and that some of them also commit other crimes such as rape, illegal crude oil bunkering, sea piracy, armed robbery, arson and pick pocketing among others but to a low extent. More so, it was found that from 2009-2018, a total of 681 cases of cult attacks and 456 fatalities were recorded in the LGAs with amnesty program, and that areas such as Oguta, Ohaji/Egbema, Emuoha, PortHarcourt City, Ikwerre, Ahoada and Ogba/Egbema/ Ndoni have high vulnerability to cult impact.

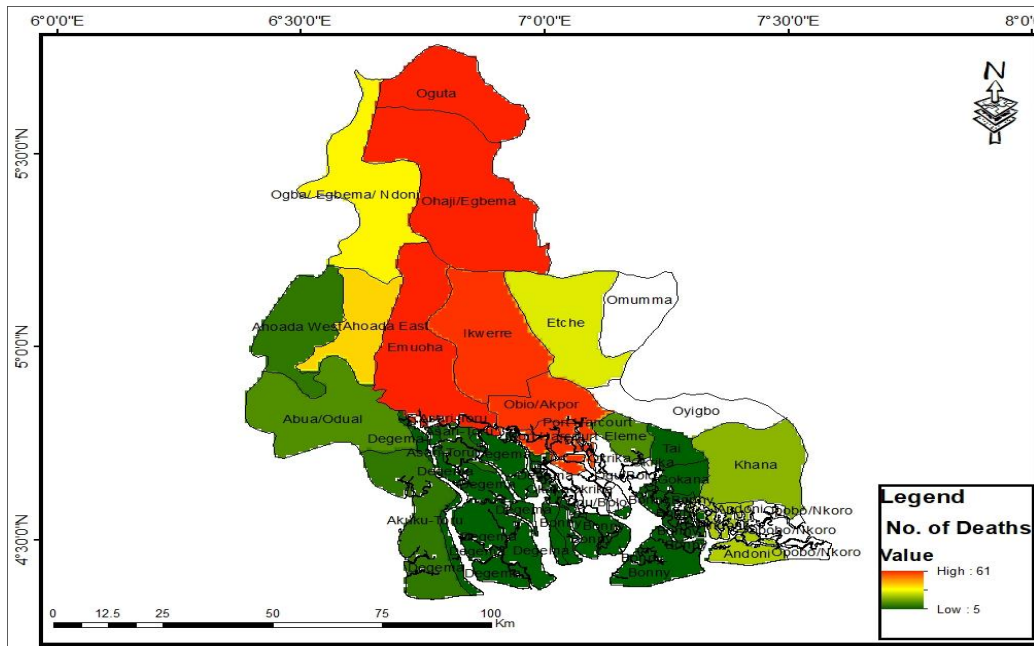


Fig 4. Choropleth map showing geographical distribution of total fatalities of cult related activities in LGAs with amnesty in the ten year study period, from 2009-2018

Table 4. Distribution of frequency of cult killings (number of deaths) in LGAs with amnesty program (2009-2018)

S/N	LGAs	Year										Total frequency	Percentage (%)
		2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018		
1	Abua/Odua	1	1	1	0	1	2	2	1	2	3	14	3.07
2	Ahoda East	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	16	4	25	5.48
3	Ahoda West	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	7	1	12	2.63
4	Akuku-Toru	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	2	12	2.63
5	Andoni	1	1	1	2	1	3	2	2	4	2	19	4.17
6	Asari-Toru	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11	2.41
7	Bonny	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	7	1.54
8	Degema	2	1	0	2	1	1	0	0	1	2	10	2.19
9	Eleme	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	2	14	3.07
10	Emuoha	1	0	1	1	3	14	6	18	14	3	61	13.38
11	Etche	1	1	1	2	1	2	2	3	6	2	21	4.61
12	Gokana	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	1	5	1.10
13	Ikwerre	0	0	1	1	0	11	3	2	3	13	34	7.46
14	Khana	0	0	0	2	0	0	9	1	3	2	17	3.73
15	Obio/Akpor	2	1	1	2	0	5	3	5	7	8	34	7.46
16	Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni	0	0	0	0	0	1	8	4	6	4	23	5.04
17	Oguta	0	0	4	6	4	5	4	7	6	10	46	10.09
18	Ohaji/Egbema	0	0	4	5	12	3	6	5	5	7	47	10.31
19	Port Harcourt City	2	1	1	2	0	5	3	5	7	8	34	7.46
20	Tai	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	2	2	1	10	2.19
Total		16	13	20	30	28	55	57	68	92	77	456	100

Source: Nigerian Police and Researcher's Field Work, 2019

6. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that as vulnerability of the youths to joining cult gangs keep increasing due to need to protect themselves, peer group influence, quest for money, political connection, influence and power, the risk of more attacks remains imminent in the study area.

7. RECOMMENDATION

The ravaging effect of community cultism in Niger Delta region is a cause for serious concern and requires concerted efforts to contain in order to ensure peace, stability and safety of the people. Hence, the following recommendations are put forward.

- ❖ Government should ensure enforcement of punishment measures to all those who commit violent crimes including cult related crimes.
- ❖ Government should ensure enforcement of bans and proscription of existence of cult groups to reduce the risk of emergence and membership of cult groups by youths.
- ❖ Gang-related issues at all levels should be urgently addressed.
- ❖ Parents should ensure good parenting, monitoring and supervision of their children.
- ❖ Security agents should work with the traditional rulers, social services agencies and community members in responding to issues pertaining to community cultism.
- ❖ Massive re-orientation and sensitization programs should be carried out to disabuse the minds of youths and discourage them from engaging in anti-social behaviour.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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