GJCSR
Global Journal of Contemporary Social Research
Faculty of Social Sciences, Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria • imsufoss.com
Vol. 1 • No. 1
November 2026
pp. 1–11

RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS DOUBLE-BLIND PEER REVIEWED

Industrial Strain, Unemployment and Cybercrime among Nigerian Youths: An Industrial Sociology Perspective

Chinedu N. Nwokorie[1, *]

[1] *Department of Sociology, Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria*
* **Correspondence:** nedu.nwokorie@imsuonline.edu.ng
DOI: https://doi.org/10.68442/gjcsr/2026/v1i1.001

RECEIVED	REVISED	ACCEPTED	PUBLISHED
05 August 2026	30 September 2026	20 October 2026	02 November 2026

ABSTRACT

The decline of manufacturing and the weak absorption of school leavers into formal work have left many young Nigerians underemployed or working informally. At the same time, internet fraud, popularly called "Yahoo Yahoo", has become a visible feature of youth life. This study examined how young people in three Nigerian cities perceive the links between industrial decline, unemployment and cybercrime, drawing on Merton's strain theory, Agnew's general strain theory and Cloward and Ohlin's idea of differential opportunity. A mixed-methods design was used. A 35-item questionnaire was completed by 250 purposively and snowball-sampled youths in Owerri, Onitsha and Lagos (40 self-identified internet fraudsters, 100 unemployed graduates, 60 factory workers and 50 students), and 40 in-depth interviews and ten days of observation in cybercafés were carried out. Most respondents agreed that Nigerian industries have collapsed (94%), that they felt frustrated by the lack of jobs (89%) and that unemployment causes cybercrime (89%); 76% agreed that they would not take part in internet fraud if they had a good factory job. Lack of jobs (89%), quick money (74%) and peer pressure (62%) were the reasons most often given for involvement. Interviewees described cybercrime as a substitute for formal work. Because the sample was purposive and the data are perceptions, the findings show how youths explain cybercrime rather than establishing its causes. The paper argues that internet fraud is best understood as a response to blocked legitimate opportunity combined with open illegitimate opportunity, and that enforcement should be joined to job creation, skills programmes that redirect digital skills to legitimate work, and rehabilitation of young offenders.

KEYWORDS cybercrime • unemployment • strain theory • differential opportunity • youths • industrial sociology • Nigeria

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE • APA 7
Nwokorie, C. N. (2026). Industrial strain, unemployment and cybercrime among Nigerian youths: An industrial sociology perspective. *Global Journal of Contemporary Social Research, 1*(1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.68442/gjcsr/2026/v1i1.001

Licence: © 2026 The Author(s). Published by the Faculty of Social Sciences, Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence (CC BY 4.0), which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original authors and source are credited.

1. INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Nigeria has a large and growing youth population, and the capacity of its formal economy to absorb young people into stable work has long been a concern. Since 2023, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) has measured unemployment with a revised Labour Force Survey method, under which the headline unemployment rate has been around 4% to 5% (for example, 5.3% in the first quarter of 2024 and 4.3% in the second quarter; NBS, 2024a, 2024b). These low headline figures reflect a strict definition of unemployment; much of the labour force works informally, part-time or below its skills. Under the earlier method, the NBS reported unemployment of 33.3% and youth unemployment of about 42.5% in the fourth quarter of 2020 (NBS, 2021). The change in method means the two sets of figures cannot be compared directly, but both point to weak access to stable, decently paid formal work for young people.

This problem is not unique to Nigeria. Across sub-Saharan Africa, most young people who work do so in family farms and household enterprises rather than in wage jobs, and the growth of formal wage employment has been too slow to absorb the numbers leaving school each year (Fox et al., 2016). Rodrik (2016) has described a pattern of "premature deindustrialisation", in which manufacturing's share of employment in many developing countries peaks earlier, and at lower levels of income, than it did in the countries that industrialised first. For Nigerian youths, this means that the factory job, which in earlier generations offered a route from school into secure adult work, is now scarce. The International Labour Organization (2018) has also shown that informal employment accounts for most employment in Africa, which means that many young people who are counted as working have no written contract, no social protection and no reliable income.

From an industrial sociology perspective, work provides more than income. Jahoda (1982) argued that paid employment gives people a structure to their day, regular contact with others outside the family, a sense of shared purpose, a recognised social status and regular activity. When formal industry fails to provide enough secure jobs, young people lose these benefits as well as wages. They may experience what this paper calls industrial strain: the frustration that arises when the goals society holds out to them, such as wealth, independence and respect, cannot be reached through formal employment.

This paper examines how such strain relates, in young people's own accounts, to internet fraud, popularly known as "Yahoo Yahoo". Merton's (1938) strain theory suggests that when legitimate means to culturally valued goals are blocked, some people turn to illegitimate means. Research on Nigerian cybercrime has also linked internet fraud to socioeconomic conditions (Ibrahim, 2016; Ayodele et al., 2022), although law enforcement accounts describe more varied motives (Lazarus & Okolorie, 2019), and some studies point to the role of the open display of wealth and of spiritual practices in the culture surrounding internet fraud (Akanle et al., 2016; Tade, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

Internet fraud by young Nigerians harms victims at home and abroad, damages the country's reputation and draws young people into crime. Victims of online romance and advance-fee fraud may lose savings and also suffer shame and distress that last long after the money is gone (Whitty & Buchanan, 2012). Within Nigeria, the visible wealth of some fraudsters may weaken the value young people place on education and honest work (Akanle et al., 2016).

Policy responses have focused mainly on arrest and prosecution under the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act 2015 and the Advance Fee Fraud and Other Fraud Related Offences Act 2006. Enforcement is necessary, but it deals with offenders after the fact. Less attention has been paid to how young people themselves understand the link between their position in the labour market and involvement in cybercrime. Few studies have examined this question from an industrial sociology perspective, which treats work, its absence and its substitutes as central to social life. Much of the existing Nigerian work has been either legal, focusing on the adequacy of statutes, or criminological, focusing on offenders. Less has placed internet fraud within the wider story of industrial decline and the changing meaning of work for young people. Understanding these perceptions may help in designing responses that go beyond enforcement and address the conditions in which cybercrime becomes attractive.

Research Questions

1. How do young people in Owerri, Onitsha and Lagos perceive the state of industry and employment in Nigeria?
2. How do they perceive the relationship between unemployment and cybercrime?
3. What reasons do they give for involvement in cybercrime?
4. What responses to cybercrime do these perceptions suggest?

Significance of the Study

The study makes three contributions. First, it brings the concerns of industrial sociology, especially the meaning of work and the effects of its absence, into a debate about cybercrime that has been dominated by legal and criminological perspectives. Second, by including unemployed graduates, factory workers, students and self-identified internet fraudsters in one study, it allows the views of young people in different positions in relation to work to be considered together. Third, it offers evidence that may help policy makers, universities and enforcement agencies design responses that combine control with opportunity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Deindustrialisation, Precarious Work and Youth Labour Markets

Industrial sociology has long treated the factory as more than a place of production. It has been a source of stable wages, skills, trade union membership and a recognised adult identity. The decline of manufacturing employment therefore has social as well as economic effects. Rodrik (2016) showed that in many low- and middle-income countries, manufacturing's share of employment has begun to fall before these countries became rich, so that the path by which earlier industrialisers moved workers from farms into factories is less available. Where industry does not expand, new entrants to the labour market are pushed into services and informal trade, where earnings are lower and less secure.

Kalleberg (2009) described precarious work as employment that is uncertain, unpredictable and risky from the point of view of the worker. Although his analysis focused on the United States, the concept is useful in the Nigerian setting, where casual and contract work, delayed wages and the absence of social protection are common. The ILO (2018) found that informal employment is the main form of employment in Africa. Fox et al. (2016) argued that, for most young Africans, the realistic question is not whether they will find a formal wage job but how productive and rewarding their work in the informal and household sectors can become.

These studies suggest that the problem facing young Nigerians is partly one of quantity (too few jobs) and partly one of quality (too few secure, well-paid jobs that match their education). Both forms of shortage are relevant to strain theory, because both can create a gap between what young people have been taught to expect and what they can actually achieve.

Industrial Strain

In this paper, industrial strain refers to the pressure and frustration young people experience when the formal industrial system does not provide stable jobs, adequate wages and security. It draws on Merton's (1938) idea of a gap between culturally approved goals and the legitimate means of reaching them, applied to the world of work. Industrial strain may arise from factory closures, casual and contract employment, low wages and job insecurity. It also has a non-material side. Jahoda (1982) showed that unemployment deprives people of the latent benefits of work, including time structure, social contact, collective purpose and status. A young graduate who cannot find work may therefore feel not only poor but also idle, isolated and without a recognised place in society.

In the present study, industrial strain was measured through respondents' agreement with statements about industrial decline, frustration at the lack of jobs, the value of their education for employment and government's role in the decline of industry (Table 2).

Unemployment and Youths in Nigeria

Nigeria's National Youth Policy (Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act, 2015 (Nigeria).

Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2019) defines youths as people aged 15 to 29. Because this study also covered young adults aged up to 35, who are often treated as youths in everyday Nigerian usage, the wider range of 18 to 35 was used, and the difference from the policy definition is noted. As explained in Section 1.1, the NBS's revised measures show low headline unemployment alongside widespread informal and insecure work. For many graduates, the difficulty is not a complete lack of activity but the absence of stable, formal jobs that match their education.

Graduate unemployment carries a particular kind of strain. Families often invest heavily in a child's education in the expectation that a degree will lead to a salaried job that can support the wider family. When that job does not come, the graduate may feel that the promise made by the education system has been broken. This is the situation captured by one of the survey items in this study, "My education has no industrial value". It is also the situation that Merton (1938) had in mind when he argued that strain is greatest where a society stresses success goals strongly but distributes legitimate means unequally.

Cybercrime among Nigerian Youths

Cybercrime refers to criminal activity carried out through computers and the internet, including advance-fee fraud, romance scams, phishing, business email compromise and identity theft. In Nigeria, internet fraud by young people is commonly called "Yahoo Yahoo", and those involved are called "Yahoo boys". The term is often said to come from the free e-mail accounts used in early schemes.

Several strands of Nigerian research are relevant here. Ibrahim (2016) proposed a socioeconomic account of Nigerian cybercriminals, linking their activities to economic pressures and to wider social conditions, and distinguished cybercrime driven by economic motives from other types. Lazarus and Okolorie (2019), drawing on interviews with officers of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), described how investigators distinguish between different types of offenders and motives, and noted that economic hardship is only part of the picture. Ayodele et al. (2022), in a qualitative study of 15 participants in Ibadan, found that young people involved in internet fraud described it as a way of supporting themselves under harsh economic conditions, that fraudsters were organised by specialisation, and that they believed weak and compromised enforcement allowed them to continue.

Other studies point to cultural factors. Akanle et al. (2016) linked the spread of internet fraud to the pursuit of wealth and social recognition, and to the way in which wealth gained by any means can bring status in some communities. Tade (2013) described a "Yahoo plus" variant, in which fraudsters are said to combine internet fraud with spiritual and ritual practices in the belief that these will make victims more compliant. These studies suggest that unemployment may contribute to cybercrime but is unlikely to be the only cause; greed, peer influence, the social display of wealth and belief systems also play a part.

Economic accounts of crime offer a further view. Becker (1968) treated the decision to offend as a weighing of expected gains against the probability and severity of punishment. Kshetri (2006) applied similar reasoning to cybercrime and argued that it grows where the expected rewards are high, the skills and tools are cheap, and the chance of being caught and punished is low. Internet fraud fits this description well: it needs only a phone or a laptop and an internet connection, it can target victims far away, and it is often hard to investigate across national borders.

The harm done by internet fraud should not be understated. Whitty and Buchanan (2012) found that victims of online romance scams suffer a "double hit": the loss of money and the loss of a relationship they believed to be real, which can leave them ashamed and distressed. Studies of offenders' motives are therefore not excuses for their actions; they are a means of designing better prevention.

Empirical Gaps

The studies reviewed above share three limitations that this paper tries to address. First, many treat unemployment as a general background condition without examining how young people in different positions in the labour market, including those who do have jobs, see the link between work and cybercrime. Second, few connect cybercrime to the decline of industry, which is the central concern of industrial sociology. Third, most rely on a single method, either surveys or interviews. The present study combines a survey of four groups of young people with interviews and observation, while recognising that its sample does not allow generalisation.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Merton's Strain Theory

Merton (1938) argued that when a society emphasises goals such as wealth and success but does not give everyone legitimate means of achieving them, people adapt in five ways: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion. Innovation, the acceptance of the goal combined with the use of illegitimate means, offers one way of understanding young people who pursue wealth through internet fraud. Ayodele et al. (2022) used this idea directly, describing internet fraud in Ibadan as a form of "deviant innovation". In Nigerian society, where wealth is celebrated openly at weddings, funerals and on social media, the goal of material success is strongly emphasised, while the formal routes to it are narrow.

Agnew's General Strain Theory

Agnew (1992) widened strain theory by identifying three sources of strain: the failure to achieve positively valued goals, the removal of positively valued stimuli, and the presentation of negative stimuli. Strain produces negative emotions such as anger and frustration, which may lead to crime when coping resources are weak. For unemployed young people, the failure to find work, the loss of jobs when factories close, and exposure to poverty may all act as sources of strain. Agnew (2001) later specified the kinds of strain most likely to lead to crime: strains that are seen as unjust, that are high in magnitude, that are linked to low social control, and that create pressure or incentive to cope through crime. Long-term unemployment after years of education, blamed on government failure and experienced in a setting where fraud is visible and rewarded, appears to meet several of these conditions.

Differential Opportunity Theory

Cloward and Ohlin (1960) added an important point to Merton's account. They argued that illegitimate means, like legitimate ones, are unequally distributed. A young person under strain can only turn to a particular form of crime if he or she has access to the knowledge, contacts and settings in which that crime is learned and practised. This idea helps to explain why strain among Nigerian youths may lead to internet fraud rather than to other crimes. Internet fraud requires digital skills that many young people, especially graduates and students, already have, and it is learned through peer networks in cybercafés, hostels and neighbourhoods. Sutherland's (1947) theory of differential association makes a similar point: criminal behaviour is learned in interaction with others, including the techniques of the crime and the attitudes that justify it.

Routine Activity and Neutralisation

Two further perspectives help to explain why internet fraud in particular is attractive. Routine activity theory holds that crime occurs when a motivated offender, a suitable target and the absence of a capable guardian come together (Cohen & Felson, 1979). The internet brings large numbers of potential victims within reach of offenders, while guardianship across national borders is weak. Sykes and Matza (1957) argued that offenders often use "techniques of neutralisation", such as denying that anyone is really harmed or condemning those who condemn them, to protect their self-image while breaking rules. Claims that internet fraud is less serious than violent crime, or that its victims are rich foreigners, may serve this purpose.

Integrating the Perspectives

Together, these perspectives suggest an explanation in three parts. Strain arising from blocked access to formal work supplies the pressure (Merton, 1938; Agnew, 1992, 2001). Access to digital skills and peer networks supplies the illegitimate opportunity (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960; Sutherland, 1947). The structure of online activity and the availability of justifications make the crime easier to commit and to live with (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Sykes & Matza, 1957). The present study does not test this as a causal model; it examines whether young people's own accounts are consistent with it.

4. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study used a mixed-methods design, combining a questionnaire survey with in-depth interviews and observation. The survey gave a broad picture of how young people in the study areas viewed industry,

unemployment and cybercrime, while the interviews and observation allowed respondents to explain their views in their own words and allowed the researcher to see the settings in which internet fraud is discussed and practised.

Study Area

Data were collected in three cities: Owerri (around Imo State University), Onitsha (around the Main Market) and Lagos (around the Ikeja Computer Village). These sites were chosen because they combine large numbers of young people seeking work, informal trading and widespread internet use. Owerri is a university and administrative city, Onitsha is one of the largest trading centres in West Africa, and the Ikeja Computer Village is a major market for phones, computers and accessories. Together they offer contrasting settings in which young people encounter work, trade and the internet.

Population and Sample

The population was young people aged 18 to 35 in the three cities. A sample of 250 respondents was drawn: 40 self-identified internet fraudsters, 100 unemployed graduates, 60 factory workers and 50 students. Unemployed graduates, factory workers and students were selected purposively; self-identified internet fraudsters were reached through snowball sampling, because of the sensitivity of the topic. Because the sample is not random, the findings cannot be generalised to all Nigerian youths. The inclusion of factory workers and students alongside unemployed graduates allowed the views of young people with different relationships to work to be gathered, although results are reported for the sample as a whole.

Instruments

A 35-item questionnaire was used to collect data on respondents' background, their views on industry and employment, and their perceptions of the links between unemployment and cybercrime. In addition, 40 in-depth interviews were held, and the researcher spent ten days observing activities in cybercafés.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and no names were recorded for respondents who reported involvement in internet fraud. Interviewees were told the purpose of the study and that they could withdraw at any time. Quotations are reported without identifying details beyond age, sex, education and city.

Data Analysis

Questionnaire data were analysed with SPSS and are presented as percentages. Interview and observation data were analysed thematically, with attention to how respondents described work, money, success and cybercrime.

5. RESULTS

Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1. *Characteristics of Respondents (N = 250)*

Variable	Frequency	%
Male	198	79.2
Female	52	20.8
Aged 18–25	108	43.2
Aged 26–35	142	56.8
Graduates	156	62.4
Unemployed	124	49.6
Underemployed	58	23.2

Note. The number unemployed (124) includes the 100 unemployed graduates and unemployed respondents in the other groups.

Most respondents were male and more than half were aged 26 to 35. Nearly two thirds were graduates, about half were unemployed and almost a quarter described themselves as underemployed.

Perceptions of Industrial Strain

Table 2. *Perceptions of Industrial Strain*

Statement	Agree (%)
Industries in Nigeria have collapsed	94
I feel frustrated because there is no job	89
My education has no industrial value	81
Government has failed industries	88

Most respondents saw Nigerian industry as in decline and reported frustration at the lack of jobs, which is consistent with the idea of industrial strain set out in Section 2.2. Most also blamed government for the decline of industry and felt that their education had little value in the industrial labour market.

Perceptions of Unemployment and Cybercrime

Table 3. *Perceptions of Unemployment and Cybercrime*

Statement	Agree (%)
Unemployment causes cybercrime	89
I know someone doing Yahoo because of unemployment	84
If I had a good factory job, I would not do Yahoo	76
Yahoo is better than stealing or kidnapping	68

Most respondents linked unemployment to cybercrime and knew someone who they believed had turned to internet fraud because of unemployment. About three quarters said they would not take part in internet fraud if they had a good factory job, and about two thirds saw internet fraud as better than stealing or kidnapping.

Reasons for Involvement in Cybercrime

Table 4. *Reasons Given for Involvement in Cybercrime*

Reason	%
No job	89
Quick money	74
Peer pressure	62
Family pressure	58
Government failure	58

Note. Respondents could give more than one reason, so percentages add up to more than 100.

Lack of jobs was the reason most often given, followed by quick money and peer pressure. More than half also cited family pressure and government failure.

Qualitative Findings

Interviewees described cybercrime as a substitute for formal work. A 24-year-old computer science graduate in Owerri who reported involvement in internet fraud said: “I graduated in 2021. I applied for 200 jobs. No job. My mother is selling akara. I started Yahoo in 2022. I now pay my mother’s rent. If they give me factory job of N150,000, I will stop today.”

A 27-year-old unemployed female graduate described informal work as survival rather than employment: “I have a B.Sc. I am doing POS. POS is not a job. It is survival. My friend is doing Yahoo and she has built a house.”

A factory worker in Onitsha, who was outside the main age range but was interviewed because of his long experience, described job losses in his factory: “In 1990, this factory had 500 workers. Now we are 30. The rest have become Yahoo boys or gone to Lagos.”

Three themes run through these accounts. The first is blocked access to formal work despite education and effort. The second is family obligation: the first speaker presents his earnings as a way of supporting his

mother. The third is comparison with peers whose visible wealth from internet fraud contrasts with the speaker's own position.

6. DISCUSSION

Industrial Decline and the Experience of Strain

The findings show that most respondents saw Nigerian industry as in decline, felt frustrated by the lack of jobs, and believed that their education had little value in the industrial labour market. These perceptions agree with the wider evidence on the weak growth of formal wage employment for young Africans (Fox et al., 2016) and on premature deindustrialisation (Rodrik, 2016). They also give a personal form to Jahoda's (1982) account of what is lost when work is absent. The unemployed graduate who described her point-of-sale business as "not a job" but "survival" was drawing the same distinction that Jahoda drew between activity that brings in some money and employment that gives structure, status and a recognised place in society. Kalleberg's (2009) concept of precarious work fits this account well: much of the work available to young people in the study areas is uncertain, poorly paid and without protection.

The respondents' tendency to blame government for the decline of industry (88%) is also important. Agnew (2001) argued that strain is more likely to lead to crime when it is seen as unjust and as the fault of others. Where young people believe that their lack of work results from the failures of those in power, they may feel less bound by the rules those same authorities make.

Unemployment and Cybercrime

Most respondents linked unemployment to involvement in cybercrime. These perceptions are consistent with Merton's (1938) account of innovation, in which people who accept culturally valued goals but lack legitimate means turn to illegitimate ones, and with Agnew's (1992) view that the failure to achieve valued goals produces strain. The interview accounts, in which young people compared internet fraud with the jobs they could not find, give these theories a concrete form in the Nigerian setting. They also agree with Ayodele et al. (2022), whose participants in Ibadan described internet fraud as a means of survival under harsh economic conditions.

The findings should, however, be interpreted with care. Agreement that "unemployment causes cybercrime" is an opinion, not evidence of cause. Respondents also cited quick money (74%) and peer pressure (62%), which suggests that motives are mixed. This is consistent with Lazarus and Okolorie (2019), who found that law enforcement officers distinguish several types of cybercriminals and motives, and with Ibrahim (2016), who placed economic factors alongside social ones. Many unemployed young Nigerians do not turn to crime, and some people involved in internet fraud are not poor. Strain alone cannot explain these differences.

Opportunity, Peers and the Choice of Internet Fraud

The importance of peer pressure (62%) and the high proportion of respondents who knew someone involved in internet fraud (84%) point to the role of illegitimate opportunity. Cloward and Ohlin (1960) argued that strain leads to a particular type of crime only where the means of committing it are available. For young Nigerians with phones, laptops and digital skills, internet fraud is more accessible than many other ways of making money illegally, and it is learned from friends and acquaintances, much as Sutherland (1947) described. The researcher's observation in cybercafés, where young people met and shared devices and connections, is consistent with this view, although the present study did not measure peer networks directly.

Routine activity theory adds a further explanation (Cohen & Felson, 1979). The internet gives offenders in Owerri, Onitsha or Lagos access to large numbers of potential victims abroad, while the chances of being traced and prosecuted across borders are limited. Kshetri (2006) made a similar point in economic terms: where rewards are high and the risk of punishment is low, cybercrime becomes an attractive choice. The belief reported by Ayodele et al. (2022), that enforcement can be evaded, would strengthen this calculation.

Moral Framing and Neutralisation

The view of 68% of respondents that internet fraud is "better than stealing or kidnapping" deserves attention. It suggests that some young people do not see it as serious crime, which may weaken the social pressure against it. This kind of comparison fits Sykes and Matza's (1957) account of neutralisation, in which offenders reduce the moral weight of their actions by comparing them with worse acts or by denying that real

harm is done. Akanle et al. (2016) similarly noted that the social acceptance of wealth, whatever its source, can weaken the stigma attached to internet fraud.

Internet fraud nonetheless causes real financial and emotional harm to its victims (Whitty & Buchanan, 2012), and explanations of its causes should not be taken as excuses for it. A sociological account of why young people turn to internet fraud is useful precisely because it shows where prevention can begin.

Family Obligation and Social Expectation

The finding that 58% of respondents cited family pressure, and the interviewee who described paying his mother's rent, show that internet fraud is not always pursued only for personal pleasure. In many Nigerian families, a young adult, especially a graduate, is expected to contribute to household needs and to the education of younger siblings. When formal work does not provide the means to meet these expectations, the strain is felt within the family as well as by the individual. This agrees with Agnew's (1992) point that strain can come from the presentation of negative stimuli, such as the pressure of unmet obligations, as well as from the failure to reach personal goals.

Cybercrime as a Substitute for Work

From an industrial sociology perspective, the findings suggest that some young people treat internet fraud as a form of work in the absence of formal jobs. It has its own skills, routines, places of work and networks, and, as Ayodele et al. (2022) found, its own divisions of labour and hierarchies. Seen in this way, internet fraud is a kind of illegal informal sector that competes with the legal economy for the time and talent of young people. The 76% of respondents who said they would not take part in internet fraud if they had a good factory job suggests that, at least in their own view, legitimate work could draw many young people away from it. This claim should be treated with caution, because what people say they would do and what they actually do may differ. It is nonetheless consistent with strain and opportunity theories, which predict that expanding legitimate means will reduce the appeal of illegitimate ones.

Implications

Theoretical implications. The findings support an integrated view in which strain, opportunity and moral framing work together. Merton's (1938) and Agnew's (1992, 2001) theories help to explain why young people under labour-market pressure may look for alternatives, while Cloward and Ohlin (1960), Cohen and Felson (1979) and Sykes and Matza (1957) help to explain why internet fraud in particular becomes one of those alternatives. For industrial sociology, the findings suggest that the study of work should include the illegal activities that grow where formal work is absent.

Policy implications. Policy responses that rely only on arrest may have limited effect unless they are combined with measures that open legitimate routes to income. Industrial policy, skills policy and crime policy are usually handled by different ministries and agencies, but the findings suggest that they address parts of the same problem.

Practical implications. Universities, polytechnics and youth programmes are in a good position to direct digital skills into legitimate work in software, digital marketing, data and cybersecurity. Enforcement agencies may also gain from working with communities and families, given the role that peers and family expectations play in young people's choices.

Limitations

The sample was purposive and snowball-based, so the findings cannot be generalised to all Nigerian youths. The data are self-reported perceptions, and the study did not measure involvement in cybercrime independently. Results were not broken down by respondent group, and no statistical tests were carried out, so it is not possible to say whether the views of self-identified fraudsters differed from those of students, factory workers or unemployed graduates. Respondents may also have given answers that placed their own or their peers' conduct in a more favourable light. Future studies should use probability samples where possible, compare groups formally, and measure peer networks, attitudes to wealth and beliefs about the risk of punishment directly.

7. CONCLUSION

Young people in Owerri, Onitsha and Lagos widely perceived Nigerian industry as in decline and linked unemployment to involvement in internet fraud, although quick money, peer pressure and family pressure were also commonly cited. Their accounts presented internet fraud as a substitute for the formal work they could not find. These perceptions are consistent with strain theories of crime, and the role of peers and the ease of committing fraud online fit theories of differential opportunity and routine activity. The study does not establish that unemployment causes cybercrime, but it suggests that the decline of formal industrial work forms part of the setting in which internet fraud has grown. Responses to cybercrime are therefore likely to be more effective if they address both the pressures that push young people towards fraud and the opportunities that make it easy.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Federal and state governments should support the revival of industrial estates, for example through reliable power supply and access to credit, to expand formal employment for young people.
2. Skills programmes should direct young people's digital skills into legitimate technology work, including software, digital marketing and cybersecurity, and should link trainees to employers and markets.
3. Law enforcement agencies, including the EFCC, should combine enforcement with rehabilitation programmes for young offenders, and should work with communities, religious bodies and families on prevention.
4. Universities should strengthen links between their programmes and the labour market, including industrial attachment, entrepreneurship training and career guidance.
5. Public campaigns should challenge the view that internet fraud is a harmless crime, for example by presenting the experiences of victims.
6. Future research should test the relationships suggested here with larger, representative samples and inferential analysis, and should compare the views of different groups of young people.

REFERENCES

Advance Fee Fraud and Other Fraud Related Offences Act, 2006 (Nigeria).

Agnew, R. (1992). Foundation for a general strain theory of crime and delinquency. *Criminology, 30*(1), 47–88. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.1992.tb01093.x

Agnew, R. (2001). Building on the foundation of general strain theory: Specifying the types of strain most likely to lead to crime and delinquency. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 38*(4), 319–361. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022427801038004001

Akanle, O., Adesina, J. O., & Akarah, E. P. (2016). Towards human dignity and the internet: The cybercrime (yahoo yahoo) phenomenon in Nigeria. *African Journal of Science, Technology, Innovation and Development, 8*(2), 213–220. https://doi.org/10.1080/20421338.2016.1147209

Ayodele, A., Oyedeji, J. K., & Badmos, H. O. (2022). Social construction of internet fraud as innovation among youths in Nigeria. *International Journal of Cybersecurity Intelligence & Cybercrime, 5*(1), 23–42. https://doi.org/10.52306/2578-3289.1120

Becker, G. S. (1968). Crime and punishment: An economic approach. *Journal of Political Economy, 76*(2), 169–217. https://doi.org/10.1086/259394

Cloward, R. A., & Ohlin, L. E. (1960). *Delinquency and opportunity: A theory of delinquent gangs*. Free Press.

Cohen, L. E., & Felson, M. (1979). Social change and crime rate trends: A routine activity approach. *American Sociological Review, 44*(4), 588–608. https://doi.org/10.2307/2094589

Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development. (2019). *National youth policy: Enhancing youth development and participation in the context of sustainable development*. Federal Government of Nigeria.

Fox, L., Senbet, L. W., & Simbanegavi, W. (2016). Youth employment in sub-Saharan Africa: Challenges, constraints and opportunities. *Journal of African Economies, 25*(suppl. 1), i3–i15. https://doi.org/10.1093/jae/ejv027

Ibrahim, S. (2016). Social and contextual taxonomy of cybercrime: Socioeconomic theory of Nigerian cybercriminals. *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice, 47*, 44–57. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlcj.2016.07.002

International Labour Organization. (2018). *Women and men in the informal economy: A statistical picture* (3rd ed.). International Labour Office.

Jahoda, M. (1982). *Employment and unemployment: A social-psychological analysis*. Cambridge University Press.

Kalleberg, A. L. (2009). Precarious work, insecure workers: Employment relations in transition. *American Sociological Review, 74*(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240907400101

Kshetri, N. (2006). The simple economics of cybercrimes. *IEEE Security & Privacy, 4*(1), 33–39. https://doi.org/10.1109/MSP.2006.27

Lazarus, S., & Okolorie, G. U. (2019). The bifurcation of the Nigerian cybercriminals: Narratives of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) agents. *Telematics and Informatics, 40*, 14–26. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2019.04.009

Merton, R. K. (1938). Social structure and anomie. *American Sociological Review, 3*(5), 672–682. https://doi.org/10.2307/2084686

National Bureau of Statistics. (2021). *Labour force statistics: Unemployment and underemployment report (Q4 2020)*. National Bureau of Statistics.

National Bureau of Statistics. (2024a). *Nigeria labour force survey: Q1 2024*. National Bureau of Statistics.

National Bureau of Statistics. (2024b). *Nigeria labour force survey: Q2 2024*. National Bureau of Statistics.

Rodrik, D. (2016). Premature deindustrialization. *Journal of Economic Growth, 21*(1), 1–33. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10887-015-9122-3

Sutherland, E. H. (1947). *Principles of criminology* (4th ed.). J. B. Lippincott.

Sykes, G. M., & Matza, D. (1957). Techniques of neutralization: A theory of delinquency. *American Sociological Review, 22*(6), 664–670. https://doi.org/10.2307/2089195

Tade, O. (2013). A spiritual dimension to cybercrime in Nigeria: The 'yahoo plus' phenomenon. *Human Affairs, 23*(4), 689–705. https://doi.org/10.2478/s13374-013-0158-9

Whitty, M. T., & Buchanan, T. (2012). The online romance scam: A serious cybercrime. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 15*(3), 181–183. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2011.0352