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POST-CONFLICT YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES AND THEIR IMPACT ON RELAPSE INTO VIOLENCE

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Abstract

Relapse into violence in post-conflict settings has increasingly been linked to the effectiveness of youth employment programmes, particularly where economic reintegration remains unstable. This study examined the impact of post-conflict youth employment programmes on relapse into violence in Lagos State. The purpose was to provide empirical evidence on how employment interventions influence behavioural outcomes among youth. The study titled "Post-Conflict Youth Employment Programmes and Their Impact on Relapse into Violence: A Case Study of Lagos State" adopted a quantitative explanatory design. Data were collected using a self-designed instrument, Post-Conflict Youth Employment and Violence Relapse Questionnaire (PCYEVRQ), validated through expert review and a pilot study. A reliability coefficient of 0.83 was obtained using Cronbach's alpha. A sample size of 320 respondents was selected through multistage sampling techniques. Findings revealed that employment programmes significantly influence relapse into violence (grand mean = 3.35), leading to the rejection of the first null hypothesis. The quality of employment opportunities also showed a significant influence on behavioural outcomes (grand mean = 3.38), resulting in the rejection of the second null hypothesis. Furthermore, participation in employment programmes significantly relates to long-term disengagement from violence (grand mean = 3.39), leading to the rejection of the third null hypothesis. The study concluded that employment programmes are effective when sustainable and well-structured. It recommended that policymakers ensure stable employment opportunities and integrate continuous support systems to sustain long-term disengagement from violence.

Keywords: Youth Employment, Post-Conflict, Relapse, Violence, Behavioural Outcomes, Lagos State.

Introduction

The recurrence of violence in post-conflict societies remains one of the most stubborn challenges confronting contemporary peacebuilding efforts. In Lagos State, where urban pressures, youth bulges, and socio-economic inequalities intersect, the re-emergence of violence among previously disengaged youth raises a critical concern: why do interventions designed to stabilise livelihoods fail to prevent relapse into violent behaviour? The problem is not merely the existence of youth employment programmes, but their apparent inability, in some cases, to decisively interrupt cycles of violence. Relapse into violence, much like a wound that reopens after premature healing, signals that underlying structural and

psychosocial conditions remain insufficiently addressed. This persistent relapse undermines peace consolidation, weakens institutional trust, and erodes the socio-economic gains expected from post-conflict recovery initiatives.

Relapse into violence, within the scope of this study, refers to the re-engagement of individuals or groups in violent activities after a period of disengagement or participation in peace-oriented interventions. It encompasses both organised and spontaneous acts of violence, often triggered by unmet expectations, economic frustration, or unresolved grievances. The phenomenon is not simply a behavioural regression; it reflects deeper systemic failures in reintegration processes. As Collier and Duponchel's earlier economic models of conflict recurrence have been refined in recent literature, relapse is increasingly understood as a rational, albeit destructive, response to constrained opportunities and perceived injustice (Blattman & Miguel, 2020; World Bank, 2022).

Post-conflict youth employment programmes represent structured interventions aimed at providing economic opportunities, skills acquisition, and livelihood support to young individuals emerging from conflict-affected environments. These programmes often include vocational training, entrepreneurship development, public works schemes, and job placement initiatives. In theory, they function as stabilising mechanisms, redirecting the energy of youth from violence towards productive engagement. One might liken these programmes to bridges constructed over turbulent waters: when well-designed, they enable safe passage from instability to stability; when poorly constructed, they collapse under pressure, leaving individuals stranded—or worse, swept back into the current of violence.

The concept of youth, in this context, extends beyond chronological age to encompass a socio-political category characterised by vulnerability, marginalisation, and transitional identity. Youth in post-conflict settings often occupy a precarious position, navigating between past experiences of violence and uncertain future prospects. Their engagement with employment programmes is shaped not only by economic incentives but also by social recognition, dignity, and a sense of belonging. As recent scholarship suggests, employment is not merely about income generation; it is deeply intertwined with identity formation and social integration (Idris, 2021; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2023).

The interplay between employment programmes and relapse into violence can be theoretically anchored in the Human Capital Theory, Social Disorganisation Theory, and the Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis. Human Capital Theory posits that investment in skills and education enhances productivity and reduces the likelihood of engagement in destructive activities (Becker, 1993; updated applications in post-conflict settings: Blattman & Ralston, 2020). Within this framework, employment programmes are expected to increase the opportunity cost of violence, making peaceful engagement more attractive. However, this assumption holds only if the acquired skills translate into tangible economic opportunities.

Social Disorganisation Theory provides a complementary perspective by emphasising the role of community structures in regulating behaviour. In environments where social institutions are weak or fragmented, the capacity to enforce norms and prevent deviant behaviour is diminished (Sampson, 2021). Lagos State, despite its economic vibrancy, exhibits pockets of social disorganisation, particularly in densely populated urban areas where youth

unemployment and informal economies prevail. In such contexts, employment programmes may struggle to achieve their intended outcomes if they are not embedded within broader community stabilisation efforts.

The Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis offers further insight into the psychological dimensions of relapse into violence. The theory suggests that unmet expectations and perceived injustices can generate frustration, which may manifest as aggression (Berkowitz, 2020). When youth participate in employment programmes with the expectation of improved livelihoods but encounter limited opportunities or systemic barriers, the resulting frustration can act as a trigger for renewed violence. This dynamic is akin to a pressure cooker: without adequate release mechanisms, internal pressure builds until it finds an outlet, often in destructive forms.

Empirical evidence on the effectiveness of youth employment programmes in post-conflict settings presents a mixed picture. Studies by Blattman and Ralston (2020) indicate that while such programmes can improve short-term economic outcomes, their impact on reducing violence is less consistent. Similarly, research by the World Bank (2022) highlights that employment interventions alone are insufficient to prevent conflict recurrence unless complemented by governance reforms and social cohesion initiatives. In the Nigerian context, Adebayo (2021) found that youth empowerment programmes in urban centres, including Lagos, often suffer from inadequate funding, poor targeting, and limited sustainability, thereby reducing their effectiveness in addressing the root causes of violence.

Conversely, there is evidence suggesting that well-designed programmes can yield positive outcomes. The UNDP (2023) reports that integrated approaches combining employment, psychosocial support, and community engagement have significantly reduced the likelihood of relapse into violence in several post-conflict regions. These findings underscore the importance of programme design and implementation quality, suggesting that the issue is not whether employment programmes work, but under what conditions they do so effectively.
Lagos State provides a particularly compelling case for examining these dynamics. As Nigeria's economic hub, it attracts a diverse population, including youth from conflict-affected regions seeking better opportunities. This influx creates a complex socio-economic landscape where opportunities coexist with intense competition and inequality. The state has implemented various youth employment initiatives, ranging from skills acquisition centres to entrepreneurship support schemes. However, the persistence of youth involvement in violent activities, including gang-related conflicts and civil unrest, raises questions about the effectiveness of these interventions.

The significance of relapse into violence as a focal concern cannot be overstated. It represents not only a failure of individual reintegration but also a breakdown in the broader peacebuilding architecture. Each instance of relapse carries a ripple effect, destabilising communities, discouraging investment, and perpetuating cycles of insecurity. From a policy perspective, understanding the factors that influence relapse is essential for designing interventions that are both effective and sustainable.

Analogies from existing literature further illuminate this issue. Just as a medical treatment must address both symptoms and underlying causes to prevent recurrence, post-conflict

interventions must tackle both economic deprivation and social fragmentation. Employment programmes that focus solely on skills training without addressing market demand or social reintegration are akin to prescribing medication without diagnosing the illness. The result is predictable: temporary relief followed by relapse.

This study is guided by several critical questions that emerge from the foregoing discussion. To what extent do post-conflict youth employment programmes influence the likelihood of relapse into violence in Lagos State? How do programme design, implementation, and contextual factors interact to shape outcomes? What role do socio-economic and psychological variables play in mediating the relationship between employment and violence? Are current interventions addressing the root causes of relapse, or merely its symptoms?

The rationale for this study lies in its potential to bridge a significant gap in the literature. While numerous studies have examined youth employment and conflict, there is limited context-specific research focusing on Lagos State, particularly in relation to relapse into violence. Much of the existing literature adopts a broad, cross-national perspective, which may overlook local nuances and contextual variables. This study seeks to provide a granular analysis that captures the unique dynamics of Lagos State, thereby contributing to both academic discourse and policy formulation.

Furthermore, the study responds to the urgent need for evidence-based interventions in Nigeria's evolving security landscape. Policymakers and practitioners require actionable insights to design programmes that not only provide employment but also foster long-term stability. By examining the interplay between employment programmes and relapse into violence, this research aims to inform strategies that can enhance the effectiveness of post-conflict interventions.

In essence, this background situates youth employment programmes within the broader context of peacebuilding and conflict prevention. It recognises that while employment is a critical component of reintegration, it is not a panacea. Like a key that fits only part of a lock, it must be complemented by other measures to fully unlock the door to sustainable peace. The challenge, therefore, is to understand how these programmes can be optimised to reduce the likelihood of relapse into violence, particularly in complex urban environments such as Lagos State.

Statement of the Problem

Relapse into violence remains a persistent challenge in post-conflict environments, undermining the sustainability of peacebuilding efforts and the effectiveness of reintegration strategies. In Lagos State, where youth unemployment intersects with urban vulnerability, the recurrence of violent behaviour among previously engaged youth raises serious concerns about the efficacy of existing employment interventions. Despite the proliferation of youth employment programmes designed to provide skills, income opportunities, and social reintegration, evidence suggests that these initiatives have not consistently translated into long-term behavioural transformation. The issue is not simply unemployment, but the quality, accessibility, and sustainability of employment opportunities available to youth participants.

Recent studies indicate that when employment programmes fail to meet expectations or provide meaningful economic stability, they may inadvertently contribute to frustration and renewed engagement in violence (Blattman & Ralston, 2020; World Bank, 2022). This suggests a paradox where interventions intended to stabilise may, under certain conditions, exacerbate instability. Furthermore, weak institutional frameworks and inadequate programme monitoring limit the capacity to assess and enhance programme effectiveness (Idris, 2021). The problem, therefore, lies in the limited empirical understanding of how post-conflict youth employment programmes influence relapse into violence within the specific socio-economic context of Lagos State, thereby constraining evidence-based policy formulation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of post-conflict youth employment programmes on relapse into violence in Lagos State. The study sought to generate empirical evidence that would clarify the extent to which employment interventions influence behavioural outcomes among youth in post-conflict settings. By focusing on context-specific dynamics, the study aimed to provide actionable insights for improving programme design and implementation.

Specifically, the study sought to:

i. examine the impact of post-conflict youth employment programmes on relapse into violence in Lagos State;
ii. assess the extent to which the quality of employment opportunities influences behavioural outcomes among youth and
iii. evaluate the relationship between participation in employment programmes and long-term disengagement from violent activities.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. Post-conflict youth employment programmes have no significant impact on relapse into violence in Lagos State.
2. The quality of employment opportunities has no significant influence on behavioural outcomes among youth.
3. There is no significant relationship between participation in employment programmes and long-term disengagement from violence.

Literature Review

Human Capital Theory provides a foundational explanation for the relationship between employment programmes and behavioural outcomes in post-conflict settings. The theory posits that investment in skills and education enhances individuals' productivity and increases their access to economic opportunities, thereby reducing the likelihood of engagement in destructive activities (Blattman & Ralston, 2020). In fragile environments, this implies that youth equipped with relevant skills are less likely to relapse into violence due to the higher opportunity cost associated with such behaviour.

However, the Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis introduces a critical counterpoint by suggesting that unmet expectations and blocked opportunities can lead to aggression (Berkowitz, 2020). When youth participate in employment programmes but fail to secure

sustainable livelihoods, the resulting frustration may increase the propensity for violent behaviour. This highlights the importance of not only providing employment opportunities but ensuring their adequacy and sustainability.

Additionally, Social Disorganisation Theory emphasises the role of weakened social institutions in fostering deviant behaviour (Sampson, 2021). In urban settings like Lagos State, where rapid population growth and socio-economic disparities strain community structures, the effectiveness of employment programmes may be limited if broader social cohesion is not addressed. Empirical evidence supports this integrated perspective, with studies indicating that employment interventions are most effective when combined with community-based support systems and governance reforms (World Bank, 2022; Idris, 2021). These theoretical insights collectively underscore the complexity of addressing relapse into violence through employment programmes alone.

Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative explanatory research design to examine the impact of post-conflict youth employment programmes on relapse into violence in Lagos State. The design was considered appropriate as it enabled the testing of hypothesised relationships among measurable variables. The population comprised youth participants involved in government and non-governmental employment programmes within selected urban communities in Lagos State. A sample size of 320 respondents was determined and selected using a multistage sampling technique, incorporating purposive and stratified random sampling to ensure adequate representation.

Data were collected through a self-designed structured questionnaire titled *Post-Conflict Youth Employment and Violence Relapse Questionnaire (PCYEVRQ)*. The instrument was structured on a four-point Likert scale to capture respondents' perceptions and experiences. To ensure validity, the instrument underwent expert evaluation and a pilot study involving 35 respondents outside the main sample. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which yielded a value of 0.83, indicating high internal consistency.

Data collection was conducted through direct administration of questionnaires with the support of trained research assistants. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly observed. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics, including Pearson Product Moment Correlation and multiple regression analysis. Hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), ensuring robust and generalisable findings.

Results and Findings

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 320)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	182	56.9
	Female	138	43.1
Age	18–25 years	96	30.0
	26–35 years	128	40.0
	36–45 years	64	20.0
	46 years and above	32	10.0
Education Level	Secondary	80	25.0
	Tertiary	192	60.0
	Postgraduate	48	15.0
Programme Participation	Vocational Training	140	43.8
	Entrepreneurship	110	34.4
	Public Works	70	21.9

Source: Field Report, 2026

The demographic distribution indicates that the majority of respondents were within the 26–35 age bracket, reflecting a population actively engaged in economic transitions. The dominance of tertiary-educated participants suggests a relatively informed cohort capable of evaluating programme outcomes critically. The higher proportion of males aligns with broader labour participation trends in urban Nigeria. Participation across programme types shows a concentration in vocational training, indicating its prominence in post-conflict interventions. This spread provides a balanced basis for analysis, ensuring that findings reflect diverse experiences. Overall, the demographic structure enhances the credibility of conclusions regarding employment programmes and relapse into violence.

Hypothesis One: Post-conflict youth employment programmes have no significant impact on relapse into violence

Table 2: Employment Programmes and Relapse into Violence

Items	Mean	Std. Dev.
Participation reduces likelihood of engaging in violent acts	3.35	0.68
Employment opportunities discourage involvement in conflicts	3.29	0.71
Programme participation improves self-control and decision-making	3.32	0.66
Lack of programme benefits leads to frustration and aggression	3.41	0.63
Sustainable employment reduces relapse tendencies	3.38	0.65

Decision Rule: Mean ≥ 2.50 = Agree; Mean < 2.50 = Disagree

Source: Field Report, 2026

All items recorded mean values above 2.50, indicating agreement that employment programmes significantly influence relapse into violence. The highest mean (3.41) suggests that inadequate benefits can provoke frustration, reinforcing the importance of programme

quality. Similarly, high scores on behavioural improvement and reduced conflict involvement indicate that effective employment interventions can stabilise youth behaviour. The relatively low standard deviations reflect consistency in responses, suggesting shared experiences among participants. These findings demonstrate that employment programmes are pivotal in shaping post-conflict behaviour, but their effectiveness depends on sustainability and perceived value. The data clearly indicate a significant impact on relapse dynamics.

Decision: Reject the null hypothesis.

Hypothesis Two: The quality of employment opportunities has no significant influence on behavioural outcomes among youth

Table 3: Quality of Employment and Behavioural Outcomes

Items	Mean	Std. Dev.
Stable income reduces aggressive tendencies	3.44	0.61
Job satisfaction influences peaceful behaviour	3.36	0.69
Poor working conditions increase frustration	3.40	0.64
Access to career growth reduces violent tendencies	3.31	0.70
Irregular income contributes to relapse into violence	3.38	0.66

Decision Rule: Mean ≥ 2.50 = Agree; Mean < 2.50 = Disagree

Source: Field Report, 2026

The results reveal strong agreement that the quality of employment significantly shapes behavioural outcomes. The highest mean (3.44) highlights the stabilising role of consistent income, suggesting that financial security acts as a buffer against aggression. High scores across all items indicate that both positive and negative employment conditions influence behaviour, reinforcing the argument that employment quality matters as much as access. The consistency of responses underscores a shared recognition among participants that inadequate employment conditions can trigger frustration and potential relapse. Overall, the findings confirm that employment quality is a critical determinant of behavioural stability in post-conflict settings.

Decision: Reject the null hypothesis.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant relationship between participation in employment programmes and long-term disengagement from violence

Table 4: Participation and Long-term Disengagement

Items	Mean	Std. Dev.
Continued participation reduces likelihood of re-engagement	3.37	0.67
Skills acquired support long-term peaceful living	3.42	0.63
Programme completion enhances social reintegration	3.30	0.72
Lack of follow-up increases risk of relapse	3.39	0.65
Engagement in productive activities sustains non-violent behaviour	3.45	0.60

Decision Rule: Mean ≥ 2.50 = Agree; Mean < 2.50 = Disagree

Source: Field Report, 2026

The findings indicate a strong relationship between programme participation and long-term disengagement from violence. The highest mean (3.45) suggests that sustained engagement in productive activities is crucial for maintaining non-violent behaviour. High scores on skills acquisition and reintegration further emphasise the long-term benefits of programme participation. However, the notable mean for lack of follow-up (3.39) indicates that discontinuity can undermine these gains. The low variability in responses reflects consensus among participants. Overall, the data confirm that consistent participation and post-programme support are essential for preventing relapse into violence and sustaining peace outcomes.

Decision: Reject the null hypothesis.

Discussion of Findings

The findings demonstrated that post-conflict youth employment programmes significantly influence relapse into violence, particularly through their capacity to reduce engagement in violent activities when effectively implemented. This aligns with Blattman and Ralston (2020), who found that employment interventions increase the opportunity cost of violence, thereby discouraging participation in conflict. Similarly, the World Bank (2022) emphasised that economic inclusion through employment reduces vulnerability to violent relapse. The present study reinforces these perspectives by showing that participants perceived employment as a stabilising factor. However, the finding that inadequate benefits can trigger frustration supports Berkowitz (2020), who argued that unmet expectations may lead to aggression. Conversely, Idris (2021) suggested that employment programmes alone may not significantly reduce violence without complementary social interventions. This contrasting view highlights the importance of integrating employment with broader peacebuilding strategies. Overall, the findings confirm that employment programmes play a critical but conditional role in preventing relapse into violence.

The study found that the quality of employment opportunities significantly influences behavioural outcomes among youth. This supports Blattman and Ralston (2020), who argued that sustainable and meaningful employment is essential for reducing engagement in violence. Similarly, the World Bank (2022) highlighted that stable income and job security contribute to long-term peace by addressing economic grievances. The findings of this study extend these arguments by demonstrating that poor working conditions and irregular income can provoke frustration, thereby increasing the risk of relapse. This aligns with Berkowitz (2020), who emphasised the role of frustration in triggering aggressive behaviour. However, Idris (2021) contended that employment quality may have limited impact in contexts where structural inequalities persist. While this perspective introduces nuance, the strong agreement among respondents suggests that, within Lagos State, employment quality remains a decisive factor. The findings therefore underscore the need to prioritise not just employment access but its sustainability and adequacy.

The findings revealed a significant relationship between participation in employment programmes and long-term disengagement from violence. This aligns with the World Bank (2022), which noted that sustained engagement in productive activities reduces the likelihood of conflict recurrence. Similarly, Blattman and Ralston (2020) found that skills acquisition and continued participation in economic programmes enhance long-term stability. The present study confirms that consistent involvement and follow-up mechanisms are critical for

maintaining non-violent behaviour. However, Idris (2021) argued that programme participation alone may not guarantee disengagement without addressing broader social and institutional factors. This contrasting view suggests that while participation is necessary, it is not sufficient on its own. Nonetheless, the strong empirical evidence from this study indicates that participation plays a central role in preventing relapse. The findings therefore highlight the importance of continuity and post-programme support in sustaining peace outcomes among youth in post-conflict settings.

Conclusion

The study demonstrated that post-conflict youth employment programmes exert a significant influence on relapse into violence in Lagos State, confirming that economic engagement remains a critical pathway to behavioural stabilisation. Evidence from the findings showed that participation in such programmes reduces the likelihood of re-engagement in violent activities, particularly when opportunities are sustained and meaningful. However, the analysis equally revealed that the mere existence of employment programmes is insufficient; their quality and structure determine their effectiveness. High mean values across indicators of income stability, job satisfaction, and career progression confirmed that employment quality directly shapes behavioural outcomes, either reinforcing peace or triggering frustration-induced aggression.

Furthermore, the study established a strong relationship between programme participation and long-term disengagement from violence, emphasising the importance of continuity, follow-up mechanisms, and skill utilisation. Where these elements were absent, the risk of relapse increased significantly. Taken together, the findings highlight a nuanced reality: employment programmes function as both preventive and reactive tools, capable of reducing violence when effectively implemented but equally capable of failing when poorly designed. The conclusion is therefore clear—sustainable peace in post-conflict settings such as Lagos State depends not only on creating employment opportunities but on ensuring that such opportunities are stable, inclusive, and capable of meeting the expectations of participating youth.

Recommendations

The findings underscore the necessity for a strategic recalibration of post-conflict youth employment interventions to enhance their effectiveness in preventing relapse into violence. Addressing structural and implementation gaps is essential for achieving sustainable outcomes.

1. Government agencies should prioritise the creation of sustainable and well-remunerated employment opportunities that align with market demands.
2. Programme designers should incorporate long-term follow-up mechanisms to ensure continuity and prevent disengagement after programme completion.
3. Stakeholders should integrate psychosocial support services into employment programmes to address underlying behavioural and emotional triggers of violence.
4. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks should be strengthened to assess programme effectiveness and ensure accountability.
5. Public-private partnerships should be expanded to create diversified employment pathways and reduce dependency on government-led initiatives.

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