

## **Assessment of Youth Vulnerability to Community Cultism in Selected States in Niger Delta Region of Nigeria**

### **ABSTRACT**

**Background of Study:** Community cultism is one of the major sources of violence and causes of death among youths in Niger Delta region, Nigeria. Youths join different cult groups to have more influence and power than their peers. Dominance 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, various cult groups are at rivalry to assume dominance and control. This rivalry among them engendered 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 x-rays reasons why youths join cultism, crimes committed by cultists and magnitude of cult 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 population of study was the entire population of the repentant cultists (cultists who embraced the amnesty program) 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 join cultism in communities was for protection. This was followed by quest for influence/power, money and peer group. 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 **due to quest 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, and Niger Delta

## 1. Introduction

Reports of **cult violence** have increased sharply in Niger Delta as **cult violence** has taken on various criminal, militant, communal, and political dimensions, traverse and impacting negatively on almost all **sector** of the economy (PIND, 2015). A lot of lives and properties have been destroyed in communities through **cult violence** (Mgbekem, 2004). Youths who are supposed **to be leaders in future** 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 **many** imprisoned or incarcerated in **Police** custody due to their involvement in cultism. In 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 Niger Delta today **is yet to gain currency across the globe** 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 **sacked** as inhabitants flee to different places for safety (Adewale, 2005). 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 **is** no doubt enhancing their **vulnerability** to joining cult groups and cumulatively increasing the **vulnerability** of the communities to cult conflict/war.

PIND (2016) observed that cult and gang related violence has been a significant driver of conflict risk in 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 are abused, raped and assaulted in many communities, thereby causing them emotional and psychological trauma which they suffer for months, if not for years. It posited that the women are the most vulnerable group to cult violence in the region and may find it difficult to recover from the trauma they pass through. Invariably, the violence affects the wellbeing of women and girls as it affects their social life. As pointed by Nnodim and Ochogba (2018), in their study on “Impact of Cult Activities on Socio-Economic Wellbeing of Rural Dwellers in Orashi Region of Rivers State”, the menace has negatively affected social and economic activities of residents despite their gender, thereby threatening their wellbeing. This is because the menace of cult related activities have sacked many from their homes due to fear of being killed. Birabil and Okanezi (2017) pointed out that violence resulting from cult attacks has taken an alarming dimension that pose threat to residents. Because they are perpetrated by community youths, and take people by surprise, they become difficult to control and by consequence cause 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 (2015), 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), Mobile Oil Company and others initially operated in the area have consistently sold out their assets and relocated their bases. This resulted in 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, locals also suffer varying degrees of attack from the cultists which include being kidnapped, robbed, raped, passenger boats and vehicles hijacked, residential houses burnt and people **macheted**, shot and killed. The **situation is 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** (2009), no meaningful development can 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 **agency**, 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 **sacked** 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. As observed by Jennifer and Debarati (2013), the immediate and long term **effects of destructions caused by conflicts on large populations constitute humanitarian crisis**.

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 **desired result**. But many of these initiatives concentrate on **the risk young people pose** 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. Alwell and Samuel (2014) argue that 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 explores the vulnerability of youths to community cultism in Niger Delta Region.**

**The specific objectives were:**

1. Determine the social and economic factors **affecting** 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 **fatalities (killings)** resulting from **them** in the LGAs with amnesty **program** 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 **fatalities (killings)** in the LGAs with amnesty **program**?
4. Which areas are vulnerable to cult impacts?

## 1.3 METHODS AND MATERIALS

### 1.3.1 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 about 70,000km<sup>2</sup> 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 about 12% of Nigeria's total surface area (NDDC, 2006).

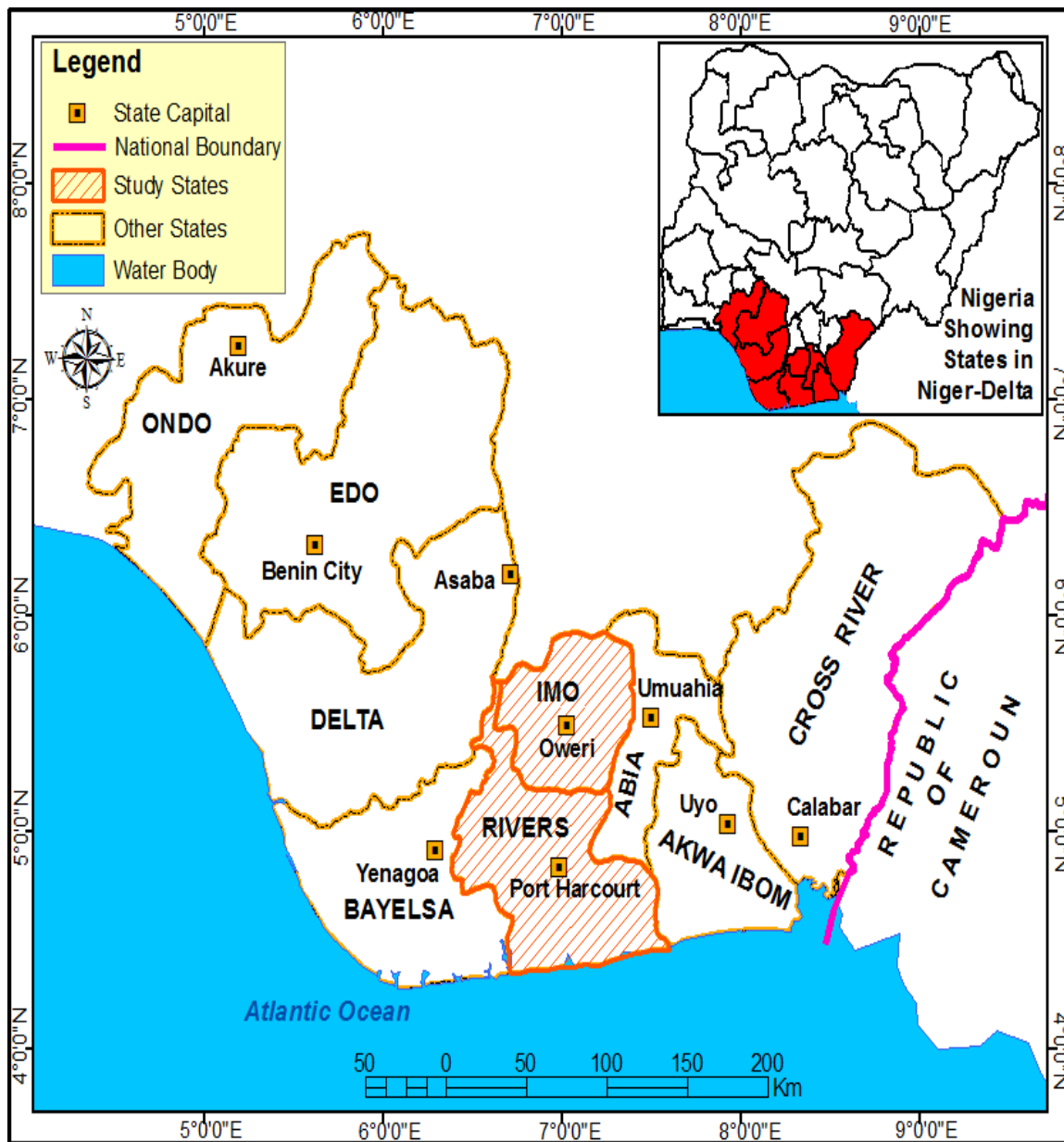


Figure 1: Niger Delta State with study area States (Shaded)

Source: Authors' representation

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 study comprised the entire population of the repented cultists (cultists who embraced government's amnesty in 2016). Taro Yamene's 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

$\alpha$  = significant level (5%)

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

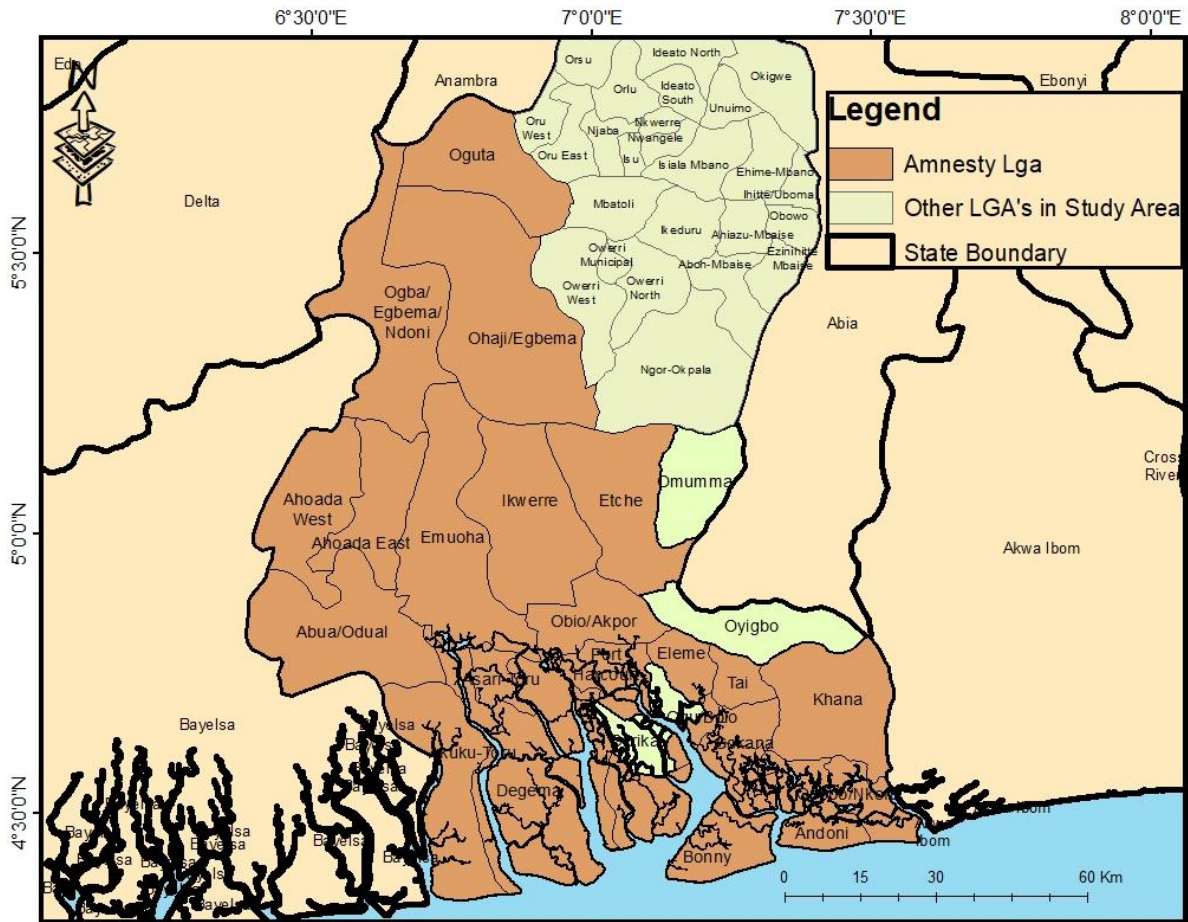


Figure 2: Study LGAs (LGAs with Amnesty Program for Cultists in the Study Area)



Source: Authors' representation.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Cults/Cult Related Activities

For the purpose of this research, a cult group is a group or gang especially youths 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 the community and its 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/killings and armed robbery. According to UNICEF (2012), 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 are gangs (UNICEF, 2012). They also involve more rules and rituals and are more strongly organized than are gangs or groups of things. Those present in the university system evolved from confraternities and may be loosely affiliated to outside cults or across different universities. PIND (2015) underscored that the cult related activities in Rivers State have wrecked 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 (2017) 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. Both noted that the community cult violence has not only promoted division and disunity among community members, but has 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. As cited by Imhabekhai (2009), no meaningful development can take place in a crises prone community because it is only in a peaceful environment that development can thrive.

Moreso, Nyiyayanna (2011) 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 disaffected village youths are key elements fueling cult violence in the state. To corroborate this assertion Chinwo (2018) posited that the killing of the seventeen (17) 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 (2017) opined that at Mgboshimili community, about fifteen (15) 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.

PIND (2015) explained that this cult violence elevated in 2015 with more fatalities and devastations than the previous years since mid 1990s when cult-related violence peaked in the state. The report identified four (4) cult groups as the major cult groups operating in communities in Niger Delta, causing the escalation of cult violence and the worsening insecurity. They 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. **But this research will therefore** be based on the four (4) major cult groups as **discovered by PIND, (2015)**. To justify this position, the researcher will adopt the following criteria for classifying groups as cult groups or youth gangs proposed **by (Bjerregaard, 2002, Curry and Decker, 2003; Esbensen, Winfree, He, and Taylor, 2001; Howell, 2009)**.

- 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.

## **2.2 Evolution of cults and conceptual analysis of cult in Niger Delta**

Nyiayaana (2011) revealed that cultism began from the then University College, Ibadan, now University of Ibadan **in 1950s** with the formation of the Pirates Confraternity also known as the “Magnificent Seven”. Furthermore, Kinsley (2017) **expatiated** that the Pirate Confraternity was formed by 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. Nyiyayanna (2011) remarked that the **Pyrate** confraternity was concerned with fighting colonialism, ethnicity, bad university policies and sexual exploitation of female students by lecturers.

There are over fifty cult groups in Nigeria **at the presents** 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 has 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 is intended** 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 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 **migrated** from the university campuses to communities with Deebam, Deewell, Icelander, Greenlanders and Black axe being prominent in Niger Delta States. Nyiayaana (2011) noted that the Deewell were affiliated to Niger Delta Vigilante Group (NDVG) and Deebam **afflicted** to 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. . In Niger Delta today; crime and violence occasioned by the activities of the cult groups have threatened the well being 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 pass without any incident of cult related clashes or killings, a development that is affecting both the social, economic and security situations of the region, as it make 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 the community cultism. Ogbondah (2014) affirmed that 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 WHO (2002) 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, Onoyume (2016), reported that in a night in Ula Upata, a rural community of Rivers State of the Niger Delta, about ten (10) persons were killed by cultist. Similarly in a night, a battle for supremacy between rival cult groups in Omoku led to the killing of about twelve (12) persons and displacement of many from their homes, Ukpong (2016). Since then the cult killings have continued unabatedly 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 Nwachukwu (2017) an inter-cult clash that erupted in some communities of Tai LGA, in recent time, resulted in the death of about fourteen (14) 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 about eight (8) persons and the displacement of many from their homes (Azubuike 2017). To every resident of the region, cult attacks have posed serious security challenge, almost overwhelming the security agencies. The results of the inter/intra cult clashes is a disaster which leaves the people in sorrow, pains and agony difficult to recover from. Today, almost every street in the region has one form of cult group or the other (Anazia 2017). 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 Davies (2017), presence of cult groups such as Icelder and Greenlander in Niger Delta has resulted in 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, with the potentials of leading to food shortage in the nearest future.

A study conducted by PIND (2016) on “Abuse of Trust Violence Affecting Women and Girls in River State” observed that the hazards of cult related activities can include sexual abuse of women by cult gangs. The study found that incidences abound were women were abducted or kidnapped or even raped by cultists. It cited that in November, 2015, a female Registrar of Polytechnic in Khana LGA of Rivers State was kidnapped by some cultists but was later rescued by the police during a shootout with the gang. In other incidents, a female doctor was abducted on her way to church in January, 2016 in Port Harcourt, while a female radio host was killed in Eleme in May, 2015 by members of different cult gangs. The findings of the research further revealed that a woman was beheaded along with her husband in a clash between the Icelders and Greenlanders in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGA.

PIND (2016) in a study on “Regional Patterns and Trends in Conflict Risk: January to March, 2016” showed that cult conflicts have resulted in many deaths. The study attributed the increase number of deaths between 2015 and 2016 to political struggle. It noted that during the nation’s

general elections, politicians employed the services of the cult groups to eliminate their political opponents so that they can achieve their political ambitions.

In his study on “From University Campuses to Villages: A study of Grassroots-Based cult violence in Ogoniland”, Nyiayaana (2011) found that between 2003-2007, cult violence recorded a total of 85 deaths only in Ogoniland of Rivers State. The author remarked that the infiltration of the rival, armed Deebam and Deewell cults into the chieftaincy tussles and community land disputes have worsened the inter cult clashes in the area. The author found that the activities of such 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. In some rural communities, it has had effect on family relationship as people have lost their loved ones, some left widowed, marriages separated, teachers attacked and social life and economic activities severely affected. According to the researcher, many attacks took place in churches, market places, hotels and other business environment. According to Birabil and Okanezi (2017), cult conflicts have assumed dangerous dimensions that pose threat to man’s history and may be equal to war. War is a man-made disaster and is synonymous with conflict.

### **3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1 Factors Affecting Youths Vulnerability to Cultism**

The result showed that need for protection was the highest reason why youths joined cult groups in the study area having ranked 1<sup>st</sup>. This is followed by the need to exert influence and power over others, quest for money, peer group influence and political connection which ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> respectively. Fun was the least reason why youths joined cult groups as it ranked 6<sup>th</sup>.



As cited by **NCP** (2018) 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 **joining** the group will accord them protection and security over the ravaging influence of other cult gangs.

**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

### 3.2 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, **pickpocketing** and intimidation/harassment. **This is in synergy** with findings by Nyiayaana (2011) that cultists carryout different activities manifesting **in form of kidnapping**, harassment, political thuggery and killing.

**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

### 3.3 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 2009-2018, 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 witnessed 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 witnessed 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 witnessed 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.

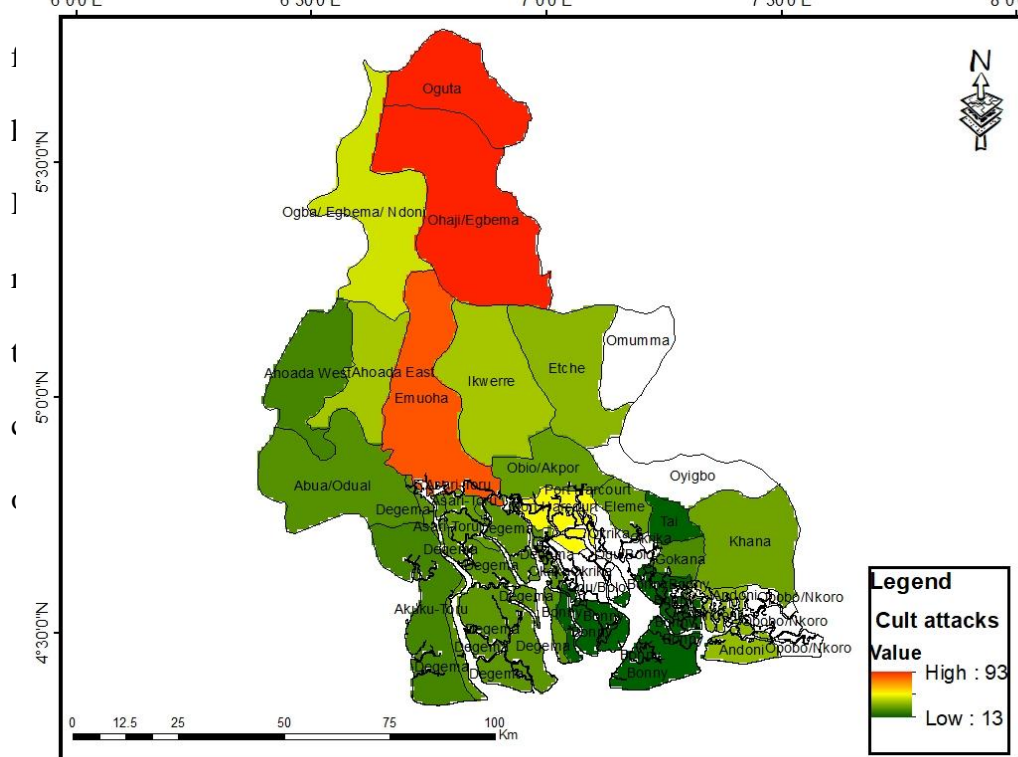
**Table 3. Frequency of Cult Attacks in the LGAs with Amnesty Program (2009-2018)**

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
<b>Total</b>		34	33	53	55	64	57	90	82	105	109	681	100

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

### 3.4 Choropleth Mapping of cult Related Attack In the Study from 2009-2018

Fig 2 depicts the choropleth map of geographical distribution of magnitude of cult related attacks



in the map, the LGAs while Port Harcourt City with moderate attacks. This implies that the study area suggests that the study area is not at high risk

**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.**

**3.5 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%), Etch 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. Also, the table shows that culmulatively, the number of deaths were highest in 2017, which is the year following the amnesty, with a total of 92 deaths across the LGAs compare to the 57 (A drop of 35!!!) 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.

**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	Ahoada East	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	16	4	25	5.48
3	Ahoada 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
<b>Total</b>		16	13	20	30	28	55	57	68	92	77	456	100

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

### 3.7 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.

**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.**

### **3.8 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.

### **3.9 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.

### **3.10 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 behaviours.

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