Hustle, Hope, and Despair: Youth Unemployment and the Get-Rich-Quick Economy in Ikwerre Society, Niger Delta.

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Abstract

This research paper investigates the interplay between youth unemployment and the allure of get-rich-quick schemes within the Ikwerre society of Niger Delta and Niger Delta imparticular. The study aims to elucidate how economic disenfranchisement among the youth in the, Niger Delta fosters a fertile ground for the proliferation of dubious financial ventures. This menace poses a structural challenge in Nigeria, but is particularly salient in the Niger Delta, where oil-economy volatility, skills-job mismatch, and urban precarity intersect. Utilizing a sociological lens, the paper focuses on the following key themes: (1) hustle, signifying day-to-day survival, (2) hope and moral narratives viz-a-viz religious and aspirational, (3) normalization of risks and short-cut strategies to wealth, (4) structural constraints tied to oil-producing states marginalization, and (5) social media buzz of instant wealth imaginations. This paper draws from mixed methods survey data and interviews with youth and community leaders in Ikwerre

society. Interactions with the locals reveals the language of hustle, harmer, blow, runs and soft life as a shared mora and affective parlance that reframe poverty and unemployment as temporary phases before breakthrough. It synthesizes literature on youth aspirations, religious narratives, including prosperity discourses, peer cultures, and proposes a multi-theory framework integrating Strain Theory and Relative Deprivation theory. Findings are that in spite of the existence of individual agency and entrepreneurial initiatives, structural factors such as limited formal jobs, environmental degradation, cultism and urbanization lure youth towards precarious, exploitative, short-term strategies of get-rich-quick economy. It is recommends that targeted policy interventions that address the root causes of unemployment and promote sustainable economic opportunities for the youth, such as skills training, civic engagement opportunities and programs focusing on hope and genuine hustling should be put in place thereby mitigating the appeal of get-rich-quick temptation in Ikwerre society of Niger Delta.

Keywords: youth unemployment, hustle economy, get-rich-quick, Niger Delta, Ikwerre

Introduction

Across the Niger Delta, the line between survival and morality has grown dangerously thin. In Ikwerre communities, youth hustle and get-rich-quick schemes have become both a strategy of survival and a performance of belonging. The problems of unemployment in the Niger Delta are exacerbated by socio-economic conditions, fostering a distorted culture of pursuing rapid wealth. The labour market in Nigeria does not have sufficient jobs leading to the heightened cause of unemployment and the rising cost of living. The Niger Delta, including the Ikwerre society, just like other societies is known to celebrate material success, coupled with the contemporary social media pressures which have justified the quest of short-cuts to wealth. Despite the large amount of resource wealth generated in Niger Delta, there is a high record of unemployment and environmental degradation in the region. The paradox is acutely experienced in

Ikwerre society, with proximity to wealth, there exist employment marginalization, leading to young people crafting new survival grammars such as "hustle", and "quick money" normalizing a get-rich-quick mindset in the society. The paper interrogates the interplay between unemployment and the get-rich-quick schemes among Ikwerre youth. How economic exclusion, neoliberal aspiration, and the moral economy of success converge to shape a restless generation of youth navigating an economy of uncertainty.

The following are some puzzling questions the paper intends to tackle. 1) What factors in Ikwerre society makes rapid wealth appealing and tolerable? 2) To what extent have peer networks, religious messages, and local norms shape young people's choices in Ikwerre society? 3) Which interventions are most likely to reduce harmful shortcuts while expanding dignified livelihood in Ikwerre society? Although the analysis of this paper are contextual, but the evidence and trends of its findings are not peculiar to the Ikwerre society alone, rather they are generally driven from the indices that surrounds the labour-trends in Nigeria.

The Study Area

Examining the intersection between unemployment and the get-rich-quick schemes among youths in the Niger Delta, necessitates an understanding of the cultural and religio-historical contexts that shape the get-rich-quick temptation. Situating the Ikwerre people within the broader Nigerian socio-cultural landscape, Wotogbe-Weneka (2020) notes that the Ikwerre are one of the major ethnic groups in Rivers State, with a rich cultural heritage deeply rooted in religious beliefs and practices. The Ikwerre society is made up of four local government areas, which include Emohua, Obio-Akpo, Ikwerre, and Port Harcourt. Ethnographic history has it that the Ikwerre share some cultural traits with neighboring societies in the Niger Delta, and they have structures that make them susceptible to urban pressures.

The Ikwerre experience mirrors broader Niger Delta realities, where oil extraction, cultism, urban sprawl, and land commodification have eroded agrarian livelihoods, replacing subsistence with speculative wealth accumulation and violent patronage systems (Akinwale, 2020; Obi, 2019).

Although they are known as an oil-rich society yet development seems to be quite slow as local youths grapple with the many challenges of unemployment and underemployment due to missed opportunities, fueling perceptions that get-rich-quick economy are the easiest way to change one's social status. Despite corporative social responsibility initiatives in the society, youth marginalsation remains pronounced, thereby worsening the case of unemployment and get-rich-quick economy. Furthermore, the rise of cult groups and youth confraternities in Port Harcourt and Ikwerre towns reflects a broader urban crisis. Cultism has become not only a form of violent expression but also an alternative labour network, sustaining the new economies of land grabbing, political thuggery, and informal security contracts

The Ikwerre traditional social structure is organized around the village council, which is composed of elderly men who make decisions on behalf of the community (Wotogbe-Weneka, 2020). This system of governance has been perpetuated over time, with men bearing the burdens of leadership and of financial responsibilities in the home and society at large. But in recent years, due to the harsh economic realities of Nigeria, viz-a-viz the Ikwerre society, it is not only the men who are responsible for the financial stability of the home; the women also bear the burden, as well as the young ones in the society. Nowadays, most parents no longer question the source of the wealth their young ones rake in, so long as they make money available to them for their daily needs. This background has therefore provided an overview of the Ikwerre people's cultural heritage. The burden of the remaining sections will shed light on the other aspects of the get-rich-quick temptation in Ikwerre society.

Literature Review

Conceptualizing Youth and Unemployment in Nigeria and in Rivers State

There are myriads of literature that highlights the numerous cases of unemployment in Nigeria and how this ugly scenario affect the youths in Ikwerre society, Rivers State. Unemployment refers to a situation where an individual is without a job. Nzidee (2005) likens it to a situation where some factors of production are non-productive or unutilized. In other words, unemployment occurs when people who are eligible to work do not have a job and cannot contribute to national development. A youth is a young male or female who is in

the period of being a child and growing up to full adulthood. Based on statistics, the United Nations (UN) identifies youth as people within the age range of 15-24 years, but other organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO) categorize them on a broader scale to include from aged 10-24. Although the national policy on youth refers to a youth as someone who is between the ages of twenty and thirty (Ikunga & Michael, 2021). The youths constitute a significant portion of Nigeria's population, making the implications of unemployment particularly critical for national development. Observations have shown that the Nigerian economic landscape is marked by a high level of corruption, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of investment in key sectors, which have contributed to this menace. The World Bank (2020) reports that the Nigerian unemployment rate reached 33.3% in 2020, with youth unemployment significantly higher at approximately 42%. The specific case of Rivers State is compounded by the decline in oil prices, which has historically been the backbone of the state's economic revenue (Nwankwo, 2021). Additionally, the socio-political environment in Nigeria, characterized by governance instability and challenges, further exacerbates youth unemployment. Political patronage and nepotism often dictate employment opportunities, leaving many youths without jobs. This is the case of youths in Rivers State, where youths are not equipped with the necessary skills due to the inadequacy of the educational system, limited job opportunities, the decline in the oil sector, and other socio-political factors, which have led to the redundancy of many youths. This has, over time, resulted in a pervasive sense of hopelessness among the youth, with many falling into the get-rich-quick temptation.

Conceptualizing the Get-Rich-Quick Temptation

The get-rich-quick economy refers to the inordinate, strong desire to make wealth in a fast manner that is unethical without the necessary precursor to conventional pathways, such as education, skill acquisition, or entrepreneurship. This is often velarized through digital trade, entertainment, and speculative ventures often done in online spaces. The Ikwerre society belief holds that wealth is not only personal but communal, as material success elevates family prestige and secures social recognition (Okafor & Onoh, 2021). This is true when we take into cognizance that in Ikwerre society, cultural practices such as funerals, weddings, and chieftaincy titles often reinforce the association between wealth and respect.

For this reason, youth perceive wealth acquisition not only as an individual aspiration but as a communal responsibility. This places significance on youth to seek shortcuts to wealth.

Theoretical framework

Two theoretical standpoints guide this paper: Relative Deprivation and Strain Theory.

Youth unemployment is a socio-economic challenge in Ikwerre society of Rivers State. It is powered by the attraction of get-rich-quick temptation often demonstrated in a chain of social vices such as money-doubling schemes, cybercrimes, and ritual practices. Two sociological theories, the Relative Deprivation and the Strain Theory, offer insights into the dynamics of this phenomenon.

Relative Deprivation Theory

Relative deprivation theory suggests that individuals or groups experience feelings of deprivation when they see themselves as being deficient in resources, opportunities, or privileges compared to others within their social milieu (Walker &Smith, 2002). The youths in Ikwerre society are regularly exposed to symbols of wealth through the media (television, radio, social media, and so on), urban migration, and interactions with elites in the oil-rich Rivers State. Unemployed youths feel discontent when they compare their social status with that of their peers, relatives, and community elites. This results in a sense of exclusion and the feeling of frustration. This sense of relative deprivation drives many youths in society towards settling for alternative, illegitimate sources of wealth acquisition (Merton, 1968; Uche & Nwankwo, 2021). Therefore, the get-rich-temptation among unemployed youths in Ikwerre society can be said to be an attempt to close the perceived gap between their current disadvantaged states to the wealthy status they want to attain.

Strain Theory

Strain Theory, postulated by Robert K. Merton (1938/1968), elucidates unconventionality as a rejoinder to the disjunction between culturally accepted goals and the socially accepted means of achieving them. Wealth, material success are highly recognized in Nigeria. However, certain obstacles such as

unemployment, poor governance, and systematic corruption hinder many youths, including the Ikwerre youth, from accessing legitimate means of achieving these goals (Okafor, 2011). When this happens, the attendant result is strain or pressure to explore alternative means. For get-rich-quick temptations such as money-doubling, cybercrimes, or ritual wealth, the most sought-after alternative adaptations to structural strain are. Instead of abandoning societal goals of success, the youths in Ikwerre society abandon societal acceptable means of wealth acquisition and adopt non-conventional means to achieve them, thereby demonstrating Merton's notion of Innovation (Merton, 1968).

Theories Application to Ikwerre Youths

Both Relative Deprivation Theory and Strain Theory balance each other in explaining the socio-psychological and operational background of the get-rich-quick temptation. Relative Deprivation highlights the subjective view of inequality in society, while Strain Theory underscores the structural disjunction between aspirations and opportunities. Together, they show how Ikwerre youths, facing unemployment, perceive their exclusion and respond to structural limitations by engaging in deviant but goal-oriented strategies. In other words, high rates of unemployment and inadequate economic prospects in Rivers State create significant pressure on youths, leading to get-rich quick temptation. This dual theoretical lens provides a deeper understanding of the interplay between unemployment and the rise of alternative wealth-seeking behaviours in the community.

Beyond Moral Economy: Situating the Hustle within Postcolonial Capitalism

Following the Comaroffs' (1999) notion of the occult economy and Mbembe's (2001) reflections on the postcolony, this study reconsiders get-rich-quick culture not as moral decline but as a creative—if dangerous—response to the contradictions of neoliberal capitalism. The Niger Delta youth, caught between oil wealth and structural exclusion, transform illicit practices into moral performances of power, visibility, and hope.

Research Questions

1) What is the prevalence and perception of get-rich-quick strategies among Ikwerre youths?

2) How do structural factors (education, employment history, and household income) contribute to willingness to engage in get-rich-quick strategies among Ikwerre youths?
3) What cultural narrative and social pressure shape the get-rich-quick behaviours among Ikwerre youths?

Methodology

Design

A mixed-methods cross-sectional study using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Quantitative Component

Structured household and school-based surveys among youths aged 15-34 in selected Ikwerre communities (Urban: Obio-Akpo/Port Harcourt wards; peri-urban: Ikwerre, Emohua LGAs).
Target Sample: 600 respondents chosen via multi-stage cluster sampling to allow sub-group analysis (gender, education level, urban/rural).

Qualitative Components

30 in-depth interviews with selected youths (including those engaged in informal/online economies), 6 focus groups (separated by gender and age band). And 10 key informant interviews with community leaders, clergy, youth organisers, and local law enforcement.

Instrument for the Study

Survey: modules on demographics, education/employment history, household dependency, exposure to "money-doubling" narratives, attitudes toward rapid wealth, risk preference measure, and self-reported engagement in get-rich-quick practices. Also, a 24-item self-structured instrument titled "Youth Unemployment and the Get-Rich-Quick Temptation in Ikwerre Society Questionnaire" (YUGRQTISQ) was used for the collection of information or data for the quantitative study from the 600 respondents.

Qualitative Guides
Designed to probe motivations, narratives of success, family pressures, and perceptions of state opportunity in terms of employment.

Method of Data Collection: The qualitative data were collected through secondary data sources from textbooks, journals, articles, newspapers, magazines, lecture notes, and internet materials/publications, among other sources. Also, the face-to-face direct delivery technique was the adopted method of data collection for the quantitative data through the use of the self-structured "Youth Unemployment and the Get-Rich-Quick Temptation in Ikwerre Society Questionnaire" (YUGRQTISQ) instrument. Out of the 600 copies of the YUGRQTISQ instrument that were administered to the respondents, only 571 copies (representing approximately 95% return rate) were validly retrieved and subsequently used for the data analysis of this study.

Method of Data Analysis: The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, while the quantitative data were analyzed using frequency count, percentage rating, mean, and standard deviation.

RESULTS
Research Question 1: What is the prevalence and perception of get-rich-quick strategies among Ikwerre youths?
Table 1: Frequency, Percentage, Mean and Standard Deviation on the Prevalence and Perception of Get-Rich-Quick Strategies among Ikwerre Youths (N = 571)

S/N	**Prevalence of get-rich strategies**	**SA (%)**	**A (%)**	**D (%)**	**SD (%)**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Decision**
1	Many Ikwerre youths engage in dubious means to gain wealth	312 (54.6%)	189 (33.1%)	48 (8.4%)	22 (3.9%)	3.74	0.47	SA
2	Social media promotes get-rich-quick lifestyles among local young people	298 (52.2%)	202 (35.4%)	49 (8.6%)	22 (3.8%)	3.70	0.51	SA

3	Luxury desires drive many youths into dishonest and criminal ventures	304 (53.2%)	196 (34.3%)	50 (8.8%)	21 (3.7%)	3.72	0.49	SA
Sectional Grand Mean/SD						**3.72**	**0.49**	**SA**
S/N	**Perception of get-rich strategies**	**SA (%)**	**A (%)**	**D (%)**	**SD (%)**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Decision**
4	Most youths admire people who acquire sudden wealth illegally	285 (49.9%)	203 (35.6%)	59 (10.3%)	24 (4.2%)	3.68	0.53	SA
5	Wealth is celebrated irrespective of moral, ethical or legal source	301 (52.7%)	194 (34.0%)	52 (9.1%)	24 (4.2%)	3.71	0.50	SA
6	Quick riches are seen as smartness, not immorality, among youths	290 (50.8%)	201 (35.2%)	56 (9.8%)	24 (4.2%)	3.69	0.52	SA
Sectional Grand Mean/SD						**3.69**	**0.52**	**SA**
Group Grand Mean/SD						**3.70**	**0.50**	**SA**

SA (Strongly Agree) = ≥ 2.50 while SD (Strongly Disagree) = < 2.50.

Table 1 shows that both the prevalence and perception of get-rich-quick strategies among Ikwerre youths are very high. The group's grand mean score of 3.70 and standard deviation (0.50) indicate strong agreement across respondents that such practices are common and socially tolerated.

Research Question 2: How do structural factors (education, employment history, and household income) contribute to willingness to engage in get-rich-quick strategies among Ikwerre youths?

Table 2: Frequency, Percentage, Mean and Standard Deviation on the Structural Factors (Education, Employment History, and Household Income) Contributing to Willingness to Engage in Get-Rich-Quick Strategies among Ikwerre Youths (N = 571)

S/N	**Education**	**SA (%)**	**A (%)**	**D (%)**	**SD (%)**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Decision**

1	Limited educational opportunities increase youths' tendency toward illegal wealth pursuits	302 (52.9%)	199 (34.8%)	48 (8.4%)	22 (3.9%)	3.73	0.48	SA
2	Poor educational attainment limits career options, promoting financial desperation	296 (51.8%)	205 (35.9%)	50 (8.8%)	20 (3.5%)	3.71	0.50	SA
Sectional Grand Mean/SD						**3.73**	**0.48**	**SA**
S/N	**Employment History**	**SA (%)**	**A (%)**	**D (%)**	**SD (%)**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Decision**
3	Unemployment among youths encourages participation in quick-money ventures	317 (55.5%)	190 (33.3%)	45 (7.9%)	19 (3.3%)	3.75	0.46	SA
4	Irregular job opportunities drive young people toward fraudulent wealth creation	309 (54.1%)	197 (34.5%)	48 (8.4%)	17 (3.0%)	3.73	0.47	SA
Sectional Grand Mean/SD						**3.73**	**0.48**	**SA**
S/N	**Household Income**	**SA (%)**	**A (%)**	**D (%)**	**SD (%)**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Decision**
5	Low household income makes youths desperate for quick financial gains	315 (55.2%)	191 (33.5%)	46 (8.1%)	19 (3.3%)	3.74	0.47	SA
6	Financial hardship in homes pushes youths toward unethical money sources	308 (53.9%)	198 (34.7%)	46 (8.1%)	19 (3.3%)	3.73	0.48	SA
Sectional Grand Mean/SD						**3.72**	**0.49**	**SA**
Group Grand Mean/SD						**3.73**	**0.48**	**SA**

SA (Strongly Agree) = ≥ 2.50 while SD (Strongly Disagree) = < 2.50.

Table 2 shows that structural factors, such as education, employment, and household income, significantly contribute to youths' willingness to engage in get-rich-quick strategies. With a group grand mean score of 3.73 (SD = 0.48), responses indicate a very high level of agreement, suggesting that socioeconomic constraints strongly influence deviant wealth-seeking behaviors among Ikwerre youths.

Research Question 3: What cultural narrative and social pressure shape the get-rich-quick behaviours among Ikwerre youths?

Table 3: Frequency, Percentage, Mean and Standard Deviation on How Cultural Narrative and Social Pressure Shape the Get-Rich-Quick Behaviours among Ikwerre Youths (N = 571)

S/N	**Cultural Narrative**	**SA (%)**	**A (%)**	**D (%)**	**SD (%)**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Decision**
1	Traditional success stories glorify sudden wealth and material achievement	309 (54.1%)	198 (34.7%)	45 (7.9%)	19 (3.3%)	3.74	0.47	SA
2	Cultural emphasis on wealth over morals fuels unethical youth behavior	302 (52.9%)	201 (35.2%)	49 (8.6%)	19 (3.3%)	3.72	0.49	SA
3	Community celebrations of rich individuals encourage get-rich-quick pursuits	311 (54.5%)	193 (33.8%)	49 (8.6%)	18 (3.2%)	3.73	0.48	SA
Sectional Grand Mean/SD						**3.73**	**0.48**	**SA**
S/N	**Social Pressure**	**SA (%)**	**A (%)**	**D (%)**	**SD (%)**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Decision**
4	Peer pressure motivates	317 (55.5%)	188 (32.9%)	47 (8.2%)	19 (3.3%)	3.74	0.47	SA

	youths to engage in fraudulent wealth ventures							
5	Social comparison drives many to pursue questionable wealth accumulation methods	304 (53.2%)	194 (34.0%)	54 (9.5%)	19 (3.3%)	3.71	0.50	SA
6	Family expectations pressure youths into seeking quick financial success	308 (53.9%)	191 (33.5%)	53 (9.3%)	19 (3.3%)	3.72	0.49	SA
Sectional Grand Mean/SD						**3.72**	**0.49**	**SA**
Group Grand Mean/SD						**3.73**	**0.48**	**SA**

SA (Strongly Agree) = ≥ 2.50 while SD (Strongly Disagree) = < 2.50.

Table 3 shows that both cultural narratives and social pressure strongly shape get-rich-quick behaviours among Ikwerre youths. With a group grand mean score of 3.73 (SD = 0.48), respondents show a very high level of agreement, indicating that cultural glorification of wealth and social expectations significantly influence unethical wealth-seeking attitudes.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from Table 1 indicate that some Ikwerre youths engage in dubious means to gain wealth (Mean = 3.74) and that social media promotes get-rich-quick lifestyles (Mean = 3.70). This aligns with recent studies that show how digital platforms glamorize material success, often without portraying the ethical processes of wealth creation (Okorie & Ofoegbu, 2023; Akintunde & Eze, 2022). Also, this finding is consistent with the studies by Ajasa et al. (2023) and Nkenchor (2025) that social media, societal attitudes, and peer influence are key drivers of

get-rich-quick syndrome among youths in Nigeria. Also, the finding on the admiration of sudden wealth, regardless of its source, reflects a moral shift among young people is consistent with Adebayo (2023), who observed that Nigerian youths increasingly equate financial prosperity with intelligence rather than integrity. This moral distortion suggests that economic hardship and societal pressures are reshaping value systems in local communities.

Furthermore, the high mean scores also indicate that **yo**uths perceive wealth, irrespective of its moral or legal source, as a status symbol. This supports the findings of Iwu and Ugochukwu (2022), who emphasized that the erosion of ethical standards in Nigerian society has normalized the pursuit of instant wealth, often celebrated through music, entertainment, and social media influencers. The collective grand mean of 3.70 shows a uniform perception of moral compromise as a socially acceptable pathway to success.

The result in Table 2 highlights the strong influence of structural challenges such as limited education, unemployment, and low household income in fueling youths' involvement in quick-money schemes. The highest mean (3.75) corresponds to the statement that unemployment encourages participation in quick-money ventures, confirming that economic frustration and lack of viable career opportunities increase susceptibility to unethical financial practices (Nwosu & Bello, 2022). Similarly, poor educational attainment and financial hardship in homes were identified as drivers of desperation (Akinola & Yusuf, 2023).

These findings corroborate Adesina and Olatunji (2022), who reported that **inequality and limited employment pathways** in Nigeria have intensified the appeal of fraudulent and illegal activities as alternative means of survival. Thus, structural disempowerment, particularly unemployment and financial instability, creates fertile ground for get-rich-quick ideologies to thrive among youth populations. Furthermore, this mirrors findings from Enaikele et al. (2022) who pointed out that economic deprivation, inequality, and limited opportunities are among the factors fueling get-rich-quick desires in southwestern Nigeria. Also, in the study on social media's influence among youths in Port Harcourt, Nkenchor (2025) found that portrayal of luxury lifestyles and distorted realities exacerbate

youth's sense of immediacy in wealth accumulation, especially where formal opportunities are scarce in society.

The result in Table 3 demonstrates that cultural narratives and social pressure significantly shape get-rich-quick behaviour. Respondents strongly agreed that traditional success stories glorify sudden wealth (Mean = 3.74) and that community celebrations of rich individuals encourage such pursuits (Mean = 3.73). This finding supports Chukwu and Ede (2023), who observed that cultural valorization of wealth over virtue in Nigerian societies reinforces materialism. Also, this finding accords with the study by Ogunlade and Rabiu (2025), which observed that peer pressure and societal norms strongly predicted get-rich-quick attitudes among adolescents in Nigeria. The role of media and cultural narratives, such as the celebration of wealth without questioning source, is also highlighted by studies on Nollywood and ritual wealth practices (Opara, 2024), which show that film and popular culture reinforce normative expectations of sudden wealth (often corrupt or unethical) as admirable.

Furthermore, the influence of peer and family expectations was also profound (Mean = 3.74 and 3.72, respectively), echoing the observations of Ezeani and Okafor (2023) that social comparison and familial pressure often drive young people toward unethical shortcuts to success. In Ikwerre culture, where communal validation and prestige are tied to material success, these pressures can override moral or legal considerations (Nwachukwu, 2024). The overall interpretation of the grand means across all dimensions, prevalence (3.72), perception (3.69), structural factors (3.73), and cultural/social pressure (3.73), reveals a consistent pattern: get-rich-quick tendencies among Ikwerre youths are deeply entrenched, multidimensional, and sustained by systemic inequalities and socio-cultural dynamics. The findings suggest that addressing this problem requires integrated interventions that combine economic empowerment, value reorientation, and ethical education (Olanrewaju & Bello, 2023).

Comparison of these findings to other recent findings indicates that in Port Harcourt, a recent study by Nkenchor (2025) reported that social media portrayal of luxury strongly influences wealth perceptions among youths, consistent with item 2 in Table 1. Ogunlade and Rabiu's (2025) work in Oyo State found societal

attitude and peer pressure significantly related to get-rich-quick syndrome, matching your findings in Table 3 (social pressure items). Enaikele et al. (2022) showed that economic deprivation, limited opportunity, and inequality are key predictors of extreme wealth-seeking, aligning closely with your structural factors in Table 2.

Qualitative Analysis of the Get-Rich-Quick Phenomenon among Ikwerre Youths

Hope (Religious and Aspiration)

Hope in this context of the discourse is a drive to continue hustling. Success is often described among youths in Ikwerre society of Niger Delta as an act of the divine. The phrase "God go remember me soon," is freely expressed by youths during the interview session. This legitimizes patience amid scarcity and sanctifies the pursuit of sudden wealth.

"Hammer," "Blow," "Runs," "Soft Life."

The line between legitimate hustle and moral compromise was blurred as most interviewees justified "get-rich-quick" economy with these language, "Hammer", "blow", "runs", "soft life". To them, they are "taking chances" and this normalizes the risk.

The intersection

Together, these terms forms a moral linguistic economy that aestheticizes struggle and risk. It paints the picture of unemployment as being a temporary stage before an eventual breakthrough, legitimizing perseverance and occasional deviance. The get-rich-quick economy exists not only as a behavior but as a discourse through which youths make sense of the precarity of hope.

1. Prevalence and Perception of Get-Rich-Quick Strategies among Ikwerre Youths

The findings from interviews with selected youths and focus group discussions (segmented by gender and age brackets) revealed that get-rich-quick behaviours are prevalent and socially visible among Ikwerre youths, particularly in urban centres such as Rumuokoro, Choba, and Rumuigbo. Both male and female

respondents between the ages of 18–30 acknowledged that many young people aspire to acquire wealth through *"sharp practices,"* internet fraud, or ritual-related activities. The perception of these activities, however, varied with gender and age. Younger males (18-25 years) often viewed get-rich-quick ventures as a temporary survival strategy or an innovative way to "beat the system," while older youths (26-35 years) were more critical but admitted that societal admiration for wealth discourages ethical restraint. Female participants expressed concern about the erosion of values but noted that even they were indirectly pressured by peers to associate with financially flamboyant men.

Key informant interviews with clergy, community leaders, and youth organizers supported these findings, emphasizing that materialism, social media influence, and weak moral enforcement have created an environment where illegitimate wealth is normalized and even celebrated. Local law enforcement officers also confirmed a rise in cybercrime-related arrests among young males, aligning with perceptions of increased engagement in unethical financial ventures.

2. Structural Factors: Education, Employment History, and Household Income among Ikwerre Youths

The data from focus groups and key informants revealed that limited educational and employment opportunities are significant structural drivers of get-rich-quick tendencies. Participants consistently identified poor access to quality education and the high unemployment rate as major contributors to financial desperation among youths. Several respondents narrated personal experiences of dropping out of school due to a lack of funds, only to later encounter peer influences that promoted fraudulent means of survival.

According to interviews with community leaders and educators, many Ikwerre youths feel economically excluded and disillusioned by unfulfilled governmental promises of empowerment programs. A youth organizer noted that *"those who work hard often remain poor, while those who cheat the system prosper."* This perceived injustice fuels resentment and a readiness to adopt unethical wealth-generating means. Furthermore, household income was also a recurring theme. Respondents from low-income families reported being pressured to provide financial support early, often leading them to seek "quick money" ventures. The clergy respondents

observed that economic hardship has weakened moral influence at home, as parents struggle to discipline children who provide material assistance, regardless of its source. Thus, economic strain has reshaped moral judgment, linking structural deprivation to moral compromise.

3. Cultural Narrative and Social Pressure Shaping Get-Rich-Quick Economy among Ikwerre Youths

Across interviews and discussions, it was evident that cultural narratives and community norms reinforce material success as a sign of prestige and accomplishment. Both young and older participants acknowledged that Ikwerre culture, like much of southern Nigeria, tends to celebrate wealth regardless of its origin. Traditional ceremonies, weddings, and burials often honour individuals who display financial opulence, indirectly validating unethical means of wealth accumulation.

Peer and family pressures were also profound. Many youths admitted feeling socially alienated or undervalued without visible wealth, prompting engagement in illicit ventures to "belong." Female respondents especially mentioned peer competition on social media, where success is equated with luxury displays, travel, and fashion. Male respondents described family expectations to contribute financially, even without stable employment, as a major motivator for seeking shortcuts to wealth.

Community leaders and clergy agreed that the cultural glorification of sudden wealth has distorted moral education and undermined hard work as a core value. Law enforcement informants added that social approval of material success without ethical scrutiny frustrates crime prevention efforts. Overall, the deductions from the qualitative analysis in this study highlight that social pressure, cultural approval, and family expectations jointly sustain get-rich-quick mentalities among Ikwerre youths.

4. **Militancy, Kidnapping and Prostitution**

Youth involvement in militancy, kidnapping and prostitution in the Niger Delta, including Ikwerre society and broader Rivers State is connected to the same structural factors that fuels the get-rich-quick economy.

Militancy

Cases of militancy has dwindled in the Niger Delta since 2009 when the federal government of Nigeria introduced the Amnesty programme for repented youths, but minimal cases of engagements are recorded to happen sometimes motivated by expectations of financial settlements, political patronage, or protection payments. These forms of militancy appear to offer quick payment and as such, are attractive to young men including those or Ikwerre society. Militancy in the Niger Delta has also been associated with oil bunkering, arms trafficking, and protection rackets. All these intersect with the desire to get-rich-quick economy. These trends often thrive when there is a decline informal job opportunities.

Kidnapping for Ransom

Some Ikwerre communities in the Niger Delta, especially around Choba, Aluu, Rumuokoro, Emohua and Elele axis has become a hub for kidnapping for ransom for some unemployed youths to make some quick cash. Studies have shown that kidnapping is a rationalized economic activity in some communities facilitated by weak law enforcement, idle youths and the idea that ransom payment yields quick settlements (Okoli &Ugwu, 2021).

Prostitution and Transactional Sex

Among young women and young men in the Niger Delta as well as other parts of Nigeria, transactional sex is often mentioned as survival strategies to ameliorate poverty. This may not be termed as a criminal offence, but it is seen as an informal way to get-rich-quick because it is aimed at pursuing rapid financial gains rather than delayed gratification. The multiplicity of hotels, brothels and entertainment venues and migrant workers are enabling factors for such acts to thrive in Ikwerre society. Economic hardship pushes some youths in Ikwerre society to engage in this social vice either for personal needs, provide support for family or peer pressure.

Intersections with the broader get-rich-quick economy

Militancy, prostitution and kidnapping all form part of the larger get- rich-economy like the ritual wealth, Ponzi schemes and fraud. Together they form a synergy of a get-rich-quick economy. Among youths in Ikwerre society, these activities, though deviance, are as alternative pathways to fast economy in the

absence of job employment by the government. Generally, the get-rich-quick economy is a multifaceted socio-economic phenomenon that is not centered on cybercrimes alone but deeply tied to broader job insecurity that has bedeviled not only the Ikwerre society of the Niger Delta but the broader Nigeria society.

Synthesis of Findings

Across the four themes, the qualitative evidence underscores that get-rich-quick behaviours among Ikwerre youths of Niger Delta are a multidimensional problem, influenced by intersecting moral, structural, and cultural factors. The study reveals:

i. A **high prevalence** of get-rich-quick tendencies legitimized by social perception.
ii. **Socioeconomic deprivation** as a structural root cause.
iii. **Cultural glorification and social pressure** as sustaining forces.

Thus, addressing the problem requires holistic interventions, moral reorientation, economic empowerment, youth mentorship, and community-based advocacy to reshape values and restore integrity-driven definitions of success.

Conclusion

The findings from the study collectively demonstrate that get-rich-quick strategies have become deeply entrenched among Ikwerre youths, reflecting a combination of social, economic, and cultural influences that shape their attitudes toward wealth acquisition. The results from the tables indicate that many youths not only participate in but also rationalize unethical means of acquiring wealth. This normalization of sudden wealth is reinforced by societal admiration, media portrayal, and a weak moral value system, as well as limited job prospects and economic inequality that push youths to embrace fraudulent or criminal activities as survival mechanisms.

The findings on prevalence and perception reveal that social media influence, materialistic desires, and admiration for illicit affluence significantly drive young people toward get-rich-quick pursuits. Many view quick wealth as intelligence rather than immorality, suggesting a moral distortion in youth value orientation. Similarly, the structural factors highlight that low education levels, unemployment, and financial hardship play major roles in fostering desperation

for instant wealth. Conversely, the cultural and social dimensions underscore how community glorification of wealth, peer pressure, and family expectations sustain unethical financial pursuits.

In summary, the study concludes that get-rich-quick behaviour among Ikwerre youths is a multidimensional issue requiring moral reorientation, economic empowerment, and value-based education to promote integrity and sustainable livelihood development.

The Ikwerre case dramatizes the unfinished story of the Niger Delta: a place where youth negotiate despair through aspiration, where hustle replaces labour, and where wealth—legitimate or not—remains the only language of citizenship. To redeem youth futures, Nigeria must restore not only jobs but the moral grammar of meaningful work.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were proffered:

1. There is a need for value-based reorientation programmes among Ikwerre youths that promote moral integrity, hard work, and delayed gratification. Educational institutions, religious bodies, and media outlets should collaborate to counteract the glorification of sudden wealth and instead highlight stories of legitimate success and perseverance.
2. The government and private sectors should expand educational access, vocational training, and employment opportunities for youths in Ikwerre society. Enhancing skill acquisition and providing microcredit support can reduce the lure of illegal wealth and foster sustainable livelihoods.
3. Community leaders and cultural institutions should reform traditional value systems by de-emphasizing material success as a marker of honour and instead promoting integrity, hard work, and communal responsibility. Social campaigns should target peer and family expectations that encourage quick wealth accumulation.
4. The government should target youth grants that aim at providing income support and seed funding for start-ups to deter risky shortcuts to wealth.

Contribution to Knowledge

1. This study contributes to knowledge by empirically establishing that the normalization of unethical wealth acquisition among Ikwerre youths is strongly influenced by social admiration and media portrayal of affluence, revealing a clear link between societal perception and moral decline in youth behaviour.
2. The findings contribute to knowledge by demonstrating that socioeconomic deprivation, especially low education, unemployment, and poor household income, directly correlates with youths' willingness to engage in unethical financial practices, emphasizing the structural roots of moral erosion.
3. This study adds to knowledge by uncovering how cultural glorification of wealth and social pressure from peers and family serve as critical socializing forces that shape unethical get-rich-quick tendencies among Ikwerre youths, offering a cultural perspective to behavioural change interventions.

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