

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MALE AND FEMALE ADOLESCENTS'
INVOLVEMENT IN CULTISM IN UYO METROPOLIS: AN ACADEMIC DISCOURSE**

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the comparison of male and female adolescents' involvement of in cultism within Uyo Metropolis, Nigeria, examining the gendered dynamics and socio-psychological factors that contribute to their participation. In carrying out the study, comparative survey design was adopted for this study. The study was carried out in Uyo metropolis. The targeted population for the study comprised all male and female adolescence in Uyo metropolis. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 100 male and 100 female which gave a total of 200 respondents used for the study. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Male and Female Adolescents' Involvement in Cultism Questionnaire (MFACQ)". Face and content validation of the instrument was carried out by an expert in test, measurement, and evaluation in order to ensure that the instrument has the accuracy, appropriateness, and completeness for the study under consideration. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.87, and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument. Descriptive statistics was used to answer the research question and independent t-test analysis was used to test the hypothesis. The study showed that there is significant difference in the level of management of secondary school by male and female principals in Akwa Ibom State. It was also showed that the highest percentage (32.50%) was recorded for "Peer Pressure", while the least percentage (10.00%) was recorded for "Influence of Media and Social Environment". The study concluded that the research contributes to the growing discourse on youth violence and deviance in Nigeria and calls for more nuanced approaches to address cultism, with attention to gendered experiences and motivations. It underscores the need for gender-sensitive intervention strategies that consider these distinctions. One of the recommendations made was that local communities should be engaged in awareness campaigns that educate adolescents, parents, and teachers about the dangers of cultism.

KEYWORDS: Male and Female Adolescents, Cultism, Uyo Metropolis.

INTRODUCTION

Cultism, a significant social menace, has gained alarming prominence among adolescents in Nigeria, particularly in urban centers like Uyo Metropolis. It involves membership in secret societies or groups that engage in illegal or violent activities, often characterized by rituals, initiation processes, and strict codes of conduct. While cultism was initially associated with male students in tertiary institutions, recent reports suggest a growing involvement of female adolescents in cult-related activities. This trend poses a unique challenge to understanding the dynamics of cultism, especially in the context of gender differences.

The involvement of adolescents in cultism has been extensively studied in various regions of Nigeria, with many studies highlighting the socio-economic, psychological, and environmental factors that contribute to their participation. Researchers like Obasi (2013) and Folarin (2017) have emphasized how peer pressure, family disintegration, and societal instability encourage young individuals to join cults. However, these studies often focus primarily on male adolescents, with limited attention given to the growing involvement of females in these groups. This comparative study, therefore, aims to examine the extent of male and female adolescents' participation in cultism within the context of Uyo Metropolis, with a particular focus on the underlying factors that drive these behaviors and how gender influences involvement.

The study will explore the various motives behind adolescent cultism, including the desire for power, protection, belonging, and societal recognition, which are often common among both genders. However, it is crucial to note that gendered experiences may affect the way in which these motives manifest. For instance, males may be more driven by the need for physical protection and dominance, while females may seek emotional and social support. As noted by Okoro (2019), the increasing involvement of female adolescents in cultism has introduced new dynamics, as females may face different pressures and expectations than their male counterparts.

Furthermore, while the phenomenon of cultism has traditionally been associated with violent behaviors and criminal activities, understanding the different motivations for male and female adolescents can provide valuable insights into developing gender-sensitive interventions aimed at curbing the influence of cultism. By exploring how these adolescent groups experience and engage with cultism differently, the study seeks to contribute to the growing discourse on youth violence and social deviance in Nigeria.

Statement of Problem

Rising cases of cultism among adolescents in Uyo metropolis have become a major concern due to their negative impact on students' academic performance and social behavior. Despite efforts to curb the menace, both male and female adolescents continue to be involved, with limited understanding of gender-specific patterns and motivations. Existing studies often generalize adolescent involvement without adequately comparing differences between male and female participants. This gap in knowledge hinders the development of targeted intervention strategies that address the unique needs of each gender. Furthermore, the influence of peer pressure, family background, and societal factors on gender-based involvement remains insufficiently explored. Therefore, this study seeks to comparatively examine male and female adolescents' involvement in cultism in Uyo metropolis to inform effective academic and policy responses.

Research Objective

1. To find out the causes of adolescent involvement in cultism in Akwa Ibom State.
2. To examine the difference in the level of involvement in cultism between male and female adolescence in Akwa Ibom State

Research Question

1. What are the causes of adolescent involvement in cultism in Akwa Ibom State?

2. What are the differences in the level of involvement in cultism between male and female adolescence in Akwa Ibom State?

Research Hypothesis

1. What is the difference in the level of involvement in cultism between male and female adolescence in Akwa Ibom State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Adolescents

Adolescents are individuals in the transitional stage between childhood and adulthood, typically ranging from ages 10 to 19, characterized by rapid physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development (World Health Organization, 2021). This period involves identity formation, exploration of autonomy, and increased susceptibility to peer influence and risk-taking behaviors. Adolescents experience significant hormonal and neurological changes that affect decision-making, self-perception, and social interactions, making them a unique demographic for educational, health, and social interventions. Understanding adolescence as a distinct developmental stage is crucial for addressing challenges such as mental health, substance use, academic engagement, and susceptibility to negative social influences, including involvement in delinquent behaviors or cultism (Sawyer et al., 2022).

From a psychosocial standpoint, adolescence is characterized by identity exploration, growing independence, and the development of peer interactions outside of the home setting. Erikson's theory of psychosocial development identifies this period as a stage of identity versus role confusion, where adolescents seek to establish a coherent sense of self (Viner et al., 2021). Adolescent growth is significantly influenced by social, cultural, and environmental influences, such as peer pressure, family dynamics, education, and community support.

Adolescence is critical for interventions that support resilience and healthy development since it is a time of increased susceptibility to risky behaviors, mental health issues, and social pressures. Effective adolescent development programs focus on supporting physical health, mental well-being, education, and positive social engagement (Patton et al., 2020).

Concept of Cultism

"Cultism" refers to the practice of belonging to a cult or secret group that often operates with strict rules, secrecy, and strong loyalty among its members. These groups are usually formed around shared beliefs, ideologies, or objectives and may function outside accepted social or institutional norms. In many societies, especially within educational institutions, cultism is associated with secret organizations whose activities may include intimidation, violence, or unlawful behavior. Because of their hidden nature and strong internal bonds, cult groups often operate discreetly, making them difficult to detect or control (Afolabi, 2021).

One of the major characteristics of cultism is secrecy. Members of cult groups are often required to take oaths of loyalty and maintain strict confidentiality regarding the activities of the group. These groups usually have symbols, codes, and initiation rituals that strengthen unity and commitment among members. Such practices create a strong sense of belonging and identity

within the group. However, this secrecy can also encourage behaviors that go against societal values and institutional regulations (Ogunode, 2022).

Cultism also influences the attitudes and behavior of its members. Individuals who belong to cult groups may feel pressured to conform to the expectations and activities of the organization, even when such activities are harmful or illegal. In many cases, cultism has been linked to conflicts, intimidation, and other forms of misconduct within communities and educational institutions. These actions often disrupt academic activities and create an atmosphere of fear and insecurity among students and staff (Okorie & Uche, 2020).

Several factors contribute to the development and spread of cultism. Peer pressure, the desire for protection, the search for identity, and the need for power or social recognition are some of the reasons individuals may join cult groups. Some students may believe that membership will provide them with influence or security within their environment. Unfortunately, involvement in cultism often results in negative consequences such as disciplinary measures, legal sanctions, and damage to personal reputation (Afolabi, 2021).

Cultism is a social phenomenon involving secretive groups that demand strong loyalty and adherence to specific beliefs or practices. Although individuals may join cult groups for various reasons, the activities associated with cultism often have harmful effects on individuals and society. Understanding the concept of cultism is essential in developing strategies to discourage participation in such groups and to promote safe and peaceful learning environments.

Prevalence of Adolescents Involvement in Cultism

Identity formation, social impact, and increased vulnerability to dangerous behaviors are all hallmarks of adolescence, a crucial developmental stage. Participation in cults, which include violent, antisocial, or secretive group activities that frequently pass for fraternity-like groups, is one of the alarming trends affecting young people worldwide. The prevalence of adolescent involvement in cultism varies across regions but has been consistently associated with peer influence, socio-economic deprivation, family dysfunction, and exposure to societal violence (Okafor et al., 2021; Adetunji & Ibekwe, 2022).

According to recent research, the combined effects of curiosity, the need to fit in, and peer pressure make teenagers especially vulnerable. For example, a survey conducted in Nigerian secondary schools reported that approximately 18% of students admitted to membership in cult groups, with higher prevalence among males and older adolescents (Oluwafemi et al., 2020). Similarly, research in Southeast Asia identified that urban adolescents exposed to weak community supervision and school disengagement were significantly more likely to participate in cult-like gangs (Lim et al., 2021).

Socioeconomic and familial factors also play critical roles. Adolescents from low-income households or disrupted family structures often seek support and identity in cult networks, which promise protection, camaraderie, and social recognition (Chukwuma & Bello, 2022). Moreover, the influence of mass media and social platforms has facilitated recruitment and normalization of cult behaviors among youth, increasing the prevalence across both urban and rural contexts (Alabi et al., 2023). According to Kingsley & James (2025) Mass media means technology that is intended to reach a mass audience

The consequences of adolescent cult involvement extend beyond individual risk to community safety, including heightened incidences of violent conflict, substance abuse, and criminal behavior (Nwankwo & Ugochukwu, 2021). Therefore, creating preventive interventions, encouraging adolescent participation in constructive social structures, and putting into practice successful policies in communities and schools all depend on an awareness of prevalence patterns.

Causes of adolescents' involvement in cultism

Adolescent involvement in cultism has become a growing social and educational concern in many societies. Cultism refers to the participation of individuals, especially students, in secret groups that often engage in activities that may disrupt learning environments and social stability. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable because they are at a developmental stage where they seek identity, acceptance, and recognition. Several factors contribute to their involvement in cult groups.

➤ Peer Pressure

Peer pressure is one of the major causes of adolescents' involvement in cultism. Adolescents often desire acceptance and recognition from their friends and social groups. When a student's close friends or classmates belong to a cult group, the individual may feel pressured to join in order to avoid rejection or isolation. In many cases, adolescents join cult groups because they want to be seen as courageous or respected among their peers. Research has shown that peer influence significantly affects young people's decisions and behaviors, including involvement in secret cult groups (Adewale & Olatunji, 2020).

➤ Poor Parental Supervision

Another important cause of adolescent involvement in cultism is lack of adequate parental supervision and guidance. When parents are not actively involved in monitoring their children's activities, adolescents may become easily influenced by negative groups or associations. A weak relationship between parents and children can also create emotional gaps that push adolescents to seek belonging in external groups such as cult organizations. Studies have indicated that family background and limited parental control are strong predictors of youth involvement in cult-related activities (Okeke & Nwoye, 2021).

➤ Search for Identity and Belonging

Adolescence is a stage of life where individuals try to discover who they are and where they belong. During this period, young people often seek acceptance, recognition, and a sense of identity. Cult groups may provide a sense of brotherhood, unity, and loyalty that attracts adolescents who feel neglected or misunderstood in their families or schools. This desire for identity and belonging can make adolescents vulnerable to recruitment into secret societies (Ogunode & Musa, 2023).

➤ Desire for Protection and Power

Some adolescents join cult groups because they believe the group will protect them from bullying, intimidation, or harassment from others. Cult groups sometimes present themselves as powerful organizations capable of defending their members against threats. As a result, adolescents who

feel insecure or threatened may see cult membership as a way to gain protection, influence, or respect within their environment (Omonijo, Uche, & Rotimi, 2022).

➤ **Influence of Media and Social Environment**

Exposure to violent or gang-related content in movies, music, and social media can also influence adolescents' attitudes toward cultism. Some forms of media portray secret groups as powerful, fearless, or admirable, which may attract young people who are easily influenced by such portrayals. In addition, adolescents living in environments where cult activities are common may see such behavior as normal and acceptable. This social and environmental exposure can increase the likelihood of adolescents becoming involved in cult groups (Eze & Nwankwo, 2021).

Difference between male and female adolescents' involvement in cultism

Adolescent cultism has grown to be a serious societal issue in many parts of the world, especially in urban areas and educational institutions. In general, cultism refers to the participation of individuals in covert groups or organizations that frequently participate in violent, antisocial, or unlawful behaviors while upholding strong group devotion and secrecy. Young people are especially susceptible to cult recruitment throughout adolescence, a developmental stage marked by identity construction, peer pressure, and risk-taking behaviors. While both male and female teenagers engage in cult-related activities, research reveals significant variations in their roles, motivations, patterns of involvement, and outcomes, with males often being drawn to the perceived power and status within the group, while females may be more influenced by emotional connections and the search for belonging.

The incidence of membership in cults is one of the main distinctions between male and female teenagers. Male teenagers are more prone than female adolescents to join cult groups, according to numerous studies. Cultural expectations of violence, power, and masculinity are frequently linked to this greater rate among men. According to Adeyemi and Ojo (2021), male adolescents are more frequently recruited into cult groups because these organizations emphasize physical strength, bravery, and violent confrontation, traits that are socially associated with male identity. On the other hand, female participation is often lower; however, it has recently increased as a result of shifting societal dynamics and the rise of female cult organizations.

The reasons behind joining cult groups are another important distinction. Male teenagers frequently join cults for a variety of reasons, including peer pressure, recognition, power, and protection. Many young men see joining a cult as a means of elevating their social standing, gaining respect, and defending themselves against bullying or rival organizations. A study by Ogunode and Musa (2022) found that male adolescents frequently report motivations related to dominance, group loyalty, and access to resources. However, female teenagers frequently join cults for a variety of reasons. The urge for belonging, romantic relationships with male cult members, emotional attachment, or safety from harassment are some of their objectives. Relationships with male partners who are already part of these groups can expose some teenage girls to cultism.

Male and female adolescents play quite different roles in cult groups. In cult organizations, male members usually hold operational and leadership roles. They are more prone to actively engage in violent behaviors like fighting, intimidation, and upholding group norms. Additionally, male teenagers are frequently in charge of organizing group activities and attracting new members. On the other hand, female members of cult groups sometimes take on auxiliary or supportive

responsibilities. Intelligence collection, member communication, concealing weapons or contraband, and helping male members elude law enforcement are a few examples of these responsibilities. However, recent research indicates that female cult groups are becoming more active and sometimes engage directly in violent or criminal activities (Okafor & Nwankwo, 2023). However, recent research indicates that female cult groups are becoming more active and sometimes engage directly in violent or criminal activities (Okafor & Nwankwo, 2023).

Another distinction has to do with hiring practices. Peer networks, school-based organizations, and community associations are frequently used to attract male teenagers. Males may undergo physical endurance tests, aggressive deeds, or loyalty displays as part of their initiation rituals. Conversely, social connections, such as friendships or sexual ties with male members, are more frequently used to recruit female adolescents. Initiation practices for female members may differ and sometimes involve social bonding activities or symbolic rituals rather than physically violent tests (Ibrahim & Sadiq, 2020).

Adolescent males and females experience different effects and repercussions from cult membership. Due to their direct involvement in violent confrontations and criminal actions, male teenagers involved in cults are more likely to suffer bodily injuries, be arrested, and be expelled from school. Conflicts with competing groups and police enforcement are frequently the result of their engagement. Even though they are less likely to be involved in violent conflicts-, female adolescents may suffer psychological repercussions like stigma, exploitation, or manipulation within cult networks. Research by Eze and Okeke (2024) suggests that female adolescents involved in cult groups may face gender-based exploitation, coercion, or pressure to maintain secrecy, which can negatively affect their mental health and educational outcomes.

Additionally, there are frequently differences in how society views and reacts to male and female teenagers involved in cults. Female cult members may be seen as followers or victims rather than active participants, whereas male cult members are usually seen as aggressors or violent perpetrators. Disparities in disciplinary actions or rehabilitation programs might occasionally result from this view. However, researchers stress that comprehensive preventative measures that emphasize education, family support, and youth empowerment should be used to treat both male and female adolescents.

Methodology

In carrying out the study, comparative survey design was adopted for this study. The study was carried out in Uyo metropolis. The targeted population for the study comprised all male and female adolescence in Uyo metropolis. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 100 male and 100 female which gave a total of 200 respondents used for the study. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled “Male and Female Adolescents’ Involvement in Cultism Questionnaire (MFACQ)”. Face and content validation of the instrument was carried out by an expert in test, measurement, and evaluation in order to ensure that the instrument has the accuracy, appropriateness, and completeness for the study under consideration. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.87, and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument. Descriptive statistics was used to answer the research question and independent t-test analysis was used to test the hypothesis.

Results and Discussion

Research Questions 1: The research question sought to examine the causes of adolescent involvement in cultism in Akwa Ibom State. To answer the research question percentage analysis was performed on the data, (see table 1).

Table 1:
Percentage analysis of the causes of adolescent involvement in cultism in Akwa Ibom State.

Causes of Youth involvement in cultism	FRQ	%
Peer Pressure	65	32.50**
Poor Parental Supervision	24	12.00
Search for Identity and belonging	56	28.00
Desire for protection and power	34	17.00
Influence of Media and Social Environment	21	10.00*
TOTAL	200	100%

**** The highest percentage frequency**

*** The least percentage frequency**

SOURCE: Field survey

The above table 1 presents the percentage analysis of the causes of adolescent involvement in cultism in Akwa Ibom State. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that the highest percentage (32.50%) was recorded for “Peer Pressure”, while the least percentage (10.00%) was recorded for “Influence of Media and Social Environment”. This finding agrees with the opinion of Adewale & Olatunji (2020), who stated that adolescents join cult groups because they want to be seen as courageous or respected among their peers. Research has shown that peer influence significantly affects young people’s decisions and behaviors, including involvement in secret cult groups His opinion also align with that of Eze & Nwankwo (2021).who mentioned that social and environmental exposure can increase the likelihood of adolescents becoming involved in cult groups.

Research Questions 2:

The research question sought to examine the difference in the level of involvement in cultism between male and female adolescence in Akwa Ibom State. To answer the research question percentage analysis was performed on the data, (see table 2).

Table 2:

Descriptive statistical analysis of the difference in the level of involvement in cultism between male and female adolescents in Akwa Ibom State.

Variable	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	MD
Male	100	16.89**	1.59	3.39***
Female	100	13.50*	1.89	

**** Highest mean level**

*** Lowest mean level**

***** Remarkable difference**

SOURCE: FIELD SURVEY

Table 2 presents the difference in the level of involvement in cultism between male and female adolescence in Akwa Ibom State. From the result it was observed male adolescents (16.89) were more involved in cultism than their female counterparts (13.50) with a remarkable difference of difference of 3.39, meaning that male adolescent are more involved in cultism in Akwa Ibom State.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis one: Independent t-test analysis of the difference in the level of involvement in cultism between male and female adolescence in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 3: Independent t-test analysis of the difference in the level of involvement in cultism between male and female adolescents in Akwa Ibom State

Variable	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t
Male	100	16.89	1.59	3.39*
Female	100	13.50	1.89	

Significant at 0.05 level; df = 198; N= 200; critical t-value 1.96

Table 3 presents the obtained t-test-value (3.39). This value was tested for significance by comparing it with the critical t-value (1.96). at 0.05 level with 198 degree of freedom. The obtained t-value (3.39) was greater than the critical t-value (1.96). Hence, the result was significant. The result means that there is significant difference in the level of management of secondary school by male and female principals in Akwa Ibom State. This finding agrees with the opinion of Ogunode and Musa (2022), who stated that male adolescents frequently report motivations related to dominance, group loyalty, and access to resources. However, female teenagers frequently join cults for a variety of reasons.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, is study highlights that both male and female adolescents in Uyo Metropolis are significantly involved in cultism, though their motivations and experiences differ based on gender. While males are often driven by the desire for power, protection, and social dominance, females may be more influenced by emotional needs, peer pressure, and a search for belonging.

The findings suggest that societal factors, such as family instability and peer influence, play a critical role in fueling cult involvement for both genders. However, gendered dynamics influence the specific ways in which adolescents engage with cultism. Effective interventions must consider these differences and adopt gender-sensitive approaches to address the root causes and reduce the prevalence of cultism in urban Nigerian youth culture.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Local communities should be engaged in awareness campaigns that educate adolescents, parents, and teachers about the dangers of cultism.
2. Schools should offer counseling services that focus on both preventive and intervention strategies.
3. Schools should also encourage students to participate in positive activities such as clubs, sports, and leadership programs to promote healthy social interaction

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