

# **The Shadows of Asaba: A Study on Female Gangsterism and Cultism and Its Impact on Young Girls – A Communications Development Intervention**

By

**LADY EJIRO UMUKORO  
ED, LightRay! Media**



## Overview

For this term paper, our research questions will answer the following:

1. What is cultism? Is gangsterism a synonym of cult followership?
2. What are the drivers for the aggressive recruitment of young female students in secondary schools into gangs and cults by other students?
3. How are young teenage female students lured? How does language (slangs, broken English), tools such as phones, music, letter writing, flirtation, promises of safety, security, etc., play a significant communication strategies to lure students?
4. What communication approaches, tactics, methods, or strategies do student cult members employ to bait unsuspecting female students into their ranks?
5. What are the social and economic gaps exploited to induce students into gangsterism and cultism?
6. Are there external influences and 'authorities' influencing the internal recruitment of students? Who are they? What are they called?
7. How can development communication interventions be designed to protect young female students in secondary schools from becoming easy targets for cult recruitment?
8. What are some successful DEVCOMM interventions used to prevent the initiation of young students into cult gangs?
9. Other DEVCOMM strategies that can be employed for sustained mitigating impact.
10. Roles parents, school administrators, school counsellors, teachers, mentors, CSOs, NGOs, peer groups, religious organisations, etc., can play in mitigating further exploitation.

## Objectives

- To identify the key drivers as well as vulnerability pointers of female students' that make them more susceptible to peer influence.
- To understand the tactics employed by cult and gang members.
- To analyse the communication styles, semiotics, language, and strategies employed by cult groups to recruit female students.
- To analyse effective DEVCOM as well as design a development communication intervention to prevent further recruitment of young secondary female students in schools into cultism.

## Methodology

- Literature Review: an analysis of my undercover investigative report into cultism, gender, gangsterism, and communication studies and strategies.
- Survey Research: A questionnaire-based survey of female students in secondary schools to gather data on their experiences and perceptions of cult recruitment.

- Underground investigative report: interviews carried out with female students, other students, cult members, pre-initiators, recruiters, counsellors, teachers, and school administrators to gather qualitative data on the drivers of cult recruitment and effective communication strategies.
- Content Analysis: An analysis of cult groups' communication materials (e.g., social media posts, flyers, and pamphlets) to identify persuasive strategies and tactics.

### **Significance:**

This study will contribute to the understanding of the factors driving female students' vulnerability to cult recruitment and the communication strategies employed by cult groups. It will also provide insights into designing effective development communication interventions to protect young female students from cult recruitment.

### **Expected Outcomes:**

- Identification of the drivers of female students' vulnerability to cult recruitment.
- Analysis of the communication strategies employed by cult groups.
- A development communication intervention campaign and framework designed to help, prevent and support students, and female students in particular, from being recruited into cultism.

### **Timeline Covered:**

- Literature review (1 week)
- Survey research (2 weeks)
- Focus group discussions (4 weeks)
- Content analysis (1 week)
- Data analysis and writing (2 weeks)

### **Resources:**

- Access to adolescent female secondary school students and 'cult coordinators' in Asaba, Delta
- Survey software, data visualisation and data analysis tools
- Audio recorders and transcribers for undercover investigation and FGDs
- Computer and software for content analysis
- Literature and online resources
- Ethical Considerations
- Informed consent from participants
- Confidentiality and anonymity of participants' data
- Avoidance of harm or exploitation of participants.

**Abstract:**

*Secret Cult Gangs: The Disturbing Rise of Female Secondary School Members in Delta – Causes, Consequences, and Mitigation Strategies.*

Cultism, also known as secret societies or confraternities, has become a persistent issue in Nigerian secondary schools. While it affects both male and female students, this term paper focuses specifically on the cultism drive among young women. We explore the reasons behind the increase in female cultists, analyze real-life examples, and propose strategies for addressing this menace. Our investigation draws from an undercover investigative report I did. The work also includes academic references, institutional data, and legal frameworks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the problem and solutions.

Cultism remains a pervasive issue in Nigerian secondary schools, affecting both male and female students. However, the aggressive drive to recruit more young female students in secondary schools across Nigeria has hit its tipping point as John Maxwell in his behavioural book, "The Tipping Point" would describe a critical human phenomenon that has turned into a vice or menace.

This term paper investigates the drivers behind the aggressive recruitment of adolescence into cults and proposes a development communication intervention to protect them from becoming easy targets. By understanding the root causes and implementing effective strategies, we can create safer educational environments for female students.

However, the aggressive recruitment of young teenage girls into gang cults demands targeted interventions. This term paper explores development communication strategies that addressed these gaps, which led to a school's action in protecting one of its students, Akudo, including over 150 other adolescents from being recruited.

Specifically, the study developed a series of effective DEVCOM Strategies aimed at preventing female students from joining gang cults. By understanding the root causes and implementing effective approaches, we can create safer educational environments for young women.

## **Introduction:**

Gang violence and cult intimidation have become a pervasive issue among secondary school students in Delta State, with reports of physical assaults, rape, threats, and psychological trauma.

This term paper delves into the harrowing experiences of young girls in Asaba, Delta State, who are caught in the web of female gangsterism and occultism.

The study begins with a content analysis of a letter sent to Dumebi who was carefully selected or 'bammed', a term used by cultists to mark a 'victim for recruitment'. Through the stories of Akudo, Dumebi, and Millicent, it explores the societal pressures that drive these adolescents towards cult-gang affiliation, the brutal consequences of attempting to leave, and the pervasive fear that governs their lives.

The paper also examines the broader implications of gang culture on education, social dynamics, economic, and the psychological well-being of these young individuals. This term paper project aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the aggressive recruitment of female students into cultism and design a development communication intervention to protect them from becoming easy targets.

The paper then looks at mitigating cultism and gangsterism among female secondary students in Nigeria through the deployment of development communication strategies drawn from the data gathered based of off the lived experiences of victims.

## **Literature Review:**

Gang violence and intimidation have serious consequences on the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of students (WHO, 2018). Development communication strategies have been effective in addressing similar issues globally (UNICEF, 2019).

We analyse the contents of the 'bammed letter' used as a language and call-to-action communication strategy by cultists as a tool of cohesion, silence, fear, and perdition.

Academic studies also shows that parental influence plays a significant role in shaping students' experiences and vulnerabilities (Brown, 2003).

Thus, parental influence can be both positive and negative, with some students experiencing undue parental pressure, emotional abuse, and lack of support (Hart, 2001).

According to (Brown 2003), human influence is a powerful social variable that can make or mar a girl's sense of worth, academic performance, career choices, and vulnerabilities.

## **Methodology:**

This study employed a quantitative and qualitative research approach. It included conducting in-depth interviews with school administrators, school counsellors, teachers, including three students specifically targeted for recruitment by secret-gang-cult members into cultism: Akudo, Dumebi, and Millicent.

A content analysis of an FOI 'bammed letter used for recruitment' was obtained.

Students who had experienced cult poaching, gang violence and intimidation were sources who gave background to the menace of gang-cults and their aggressive recruitment drive.

Additionally, surveys were conducted and questionnaire were administered to 100 randomly selected female students on the International Day of the Girl.

The study also drew on data from the State Anti-Cult Unit (SACU), including statistics on arrested suspects, prosecuted cases, and renunciation programs.

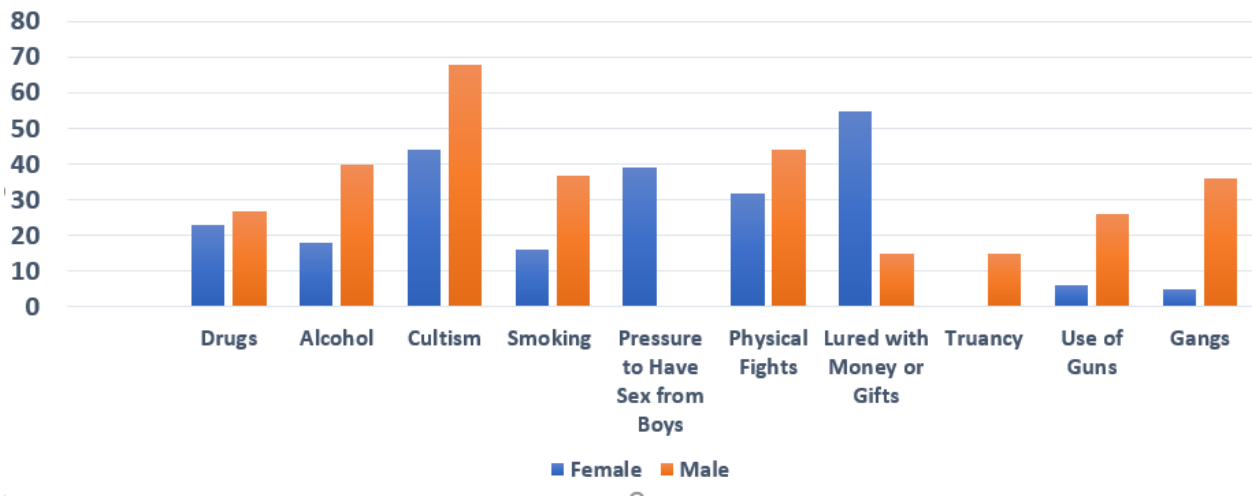
Data on the Renunciation Certificate administered by the Margistrate court to cult initiates to enable their exist or leave the cult-gang was sighted.

Below are data findings revealed through our research methodologies:

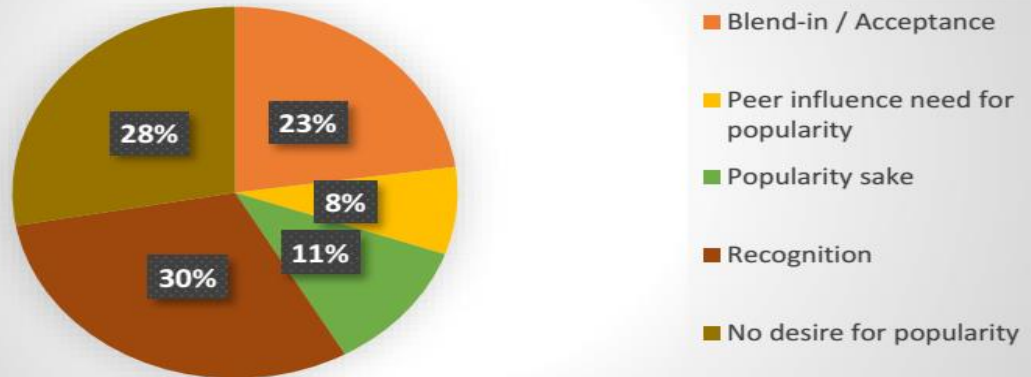


Figure 1: Students ages 10-17 fill the GIME Project Question on issues related to cultists' recruitment, gangsterism, pressures students face, institutional support, parental roles and more on International Day of the Girl Child.

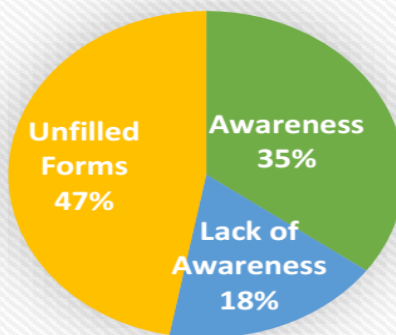
**Blue:** Types of Peer Pressures Girls Face In School.  
**Orange:** Types of Pressures Girls See Boys Face in School.  
 Source: GIME PROJECT. International Day of Girl, 2018.



## Social Pressure: Need for Popularity

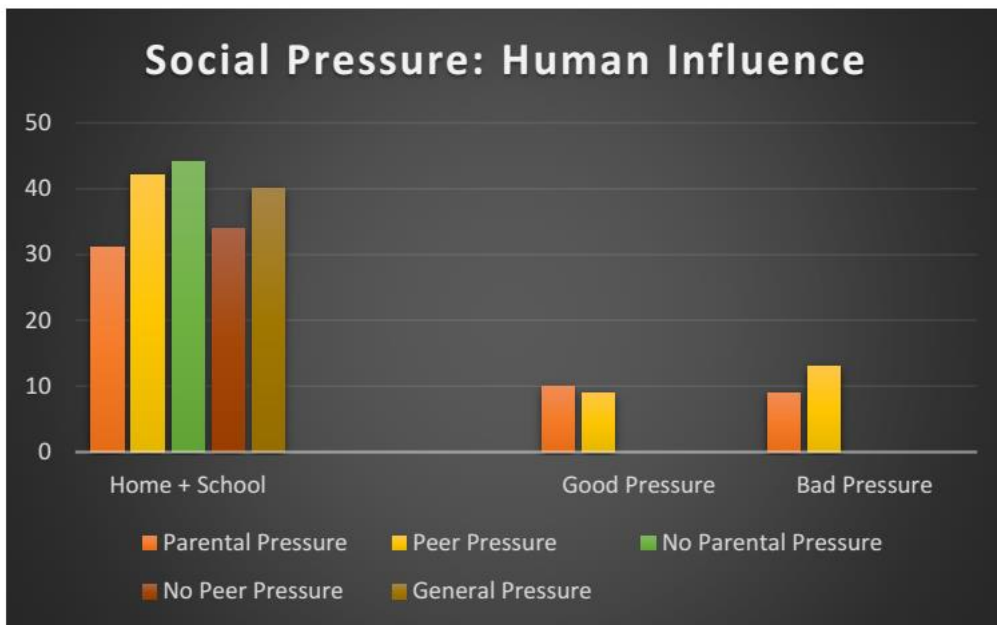
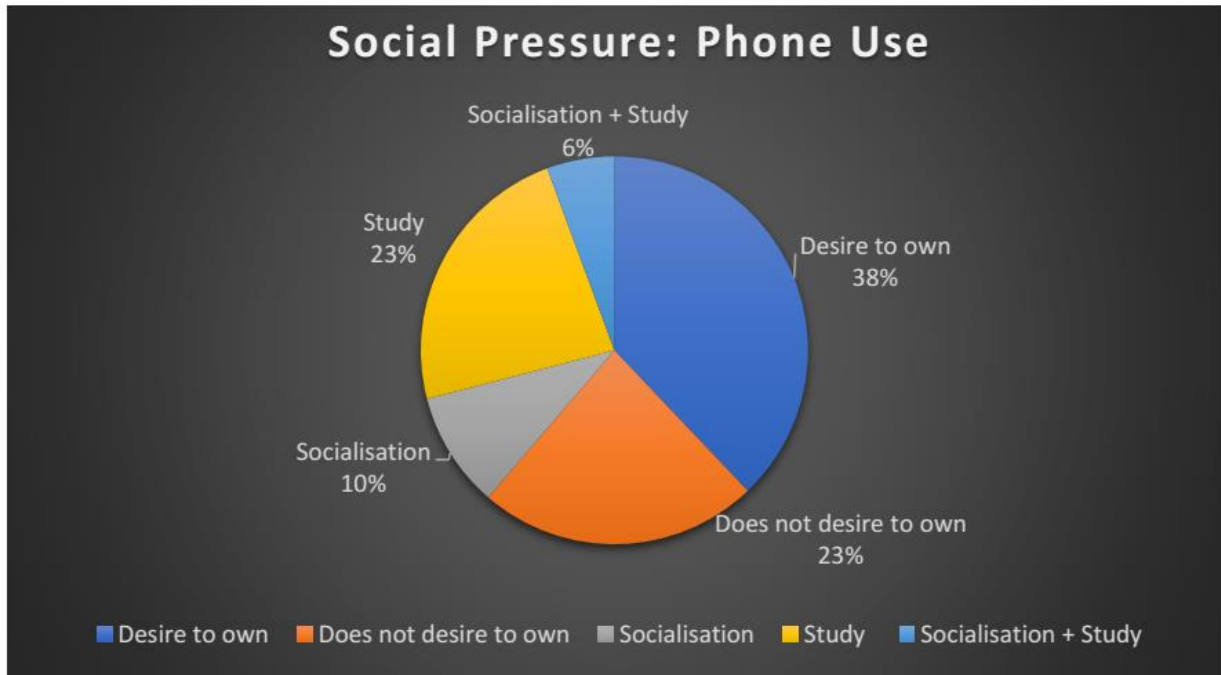


## Social Challenges: Emotional Intelligence



■ Awareness ■ Lack of Awareness ■ Unfilled Forms ■





**Results:**

Findings indicate that gang violence and intimidation are prevalent among secondary school students in Delta State, with students experiencing physical assaults, aggressive poaching, sexual harassments, threats, and psychological trauma.

The study also reveals a culture of silence, with students fearing retaliation for speaking out. Millicent, a serial-group hopper, has been a member of multiple gangs, including Tibi and Devils Girl, and has recruited other students, including Dumebi. Akudo and Dumebi have been victimized by gang members, and Millicent has pretended to denounce her membership to recruit new members. Millicent serves as the agent provocateur who follows directions from external authorities known as the “Collaborators”.

The Collaborators are former students of the schools who are in the hierarchal ladder of influence akin to the Two-Step Model Theory who acts as influential leaders with strong ties to the school despite having graduated or dismissed from the institutions. They are usually between the ages of 18-22 years.

Further investigations reveal that above the hierarchy of the Collaborators are the Gang Leaders who were identified as owners of keke who use their tricycles to provide free transportation for their members to and from school. Many members consider this as ‘largess’ courtesy of being part of the cult groups. The gang leaders are only notorious for using their Keke to rob and steal from innocent passengers in instances of ‘One Chance’ synonymous to the same phenomenon in Lagos State.

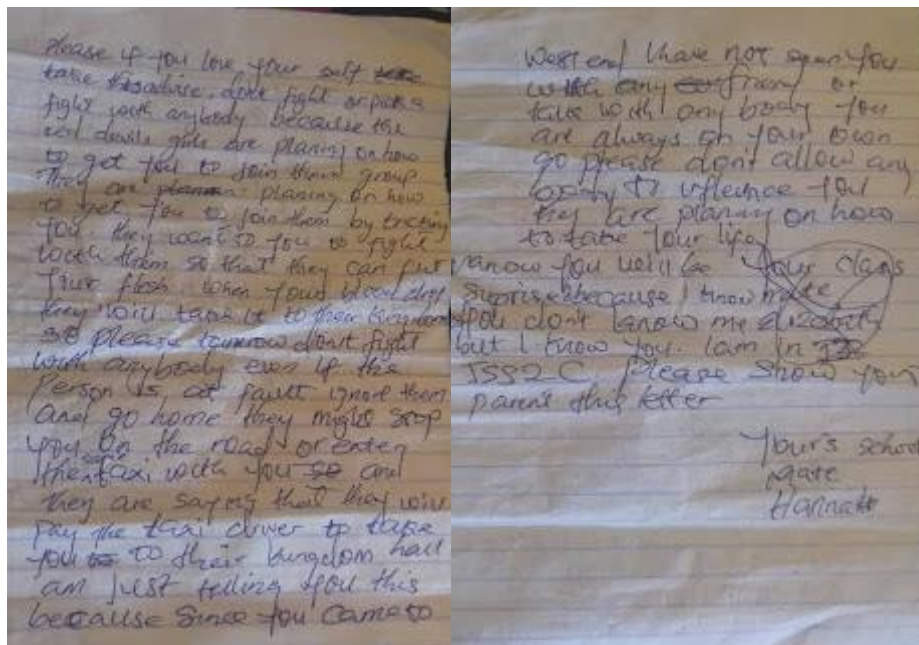


Figure 2: A 'Bamming Letter' - a Communication tool used to coerce 'Targets' selected for Initiation into Secret-Cult-Gangs

The study also reveals a culture of silence, with students fearing retaliation for speaking out. Milicent joined Tibi at age 13 growing up in the ranks to her current age at 15, and has since switched sides, pretending to denounce her membership as a strategy to recruit unsuspecting new members.

Akudo joined her gang two and a half years ago, experiencing sexual exploitation and intimidation. Akudo's determination to abandon the student cult group became the activator for this investigative research. During her initiation she had been ganged-raped by over ten boys. Unable to pay the N3,500 required fee for initiation and her unwillingness to be violently assaulted left her with the third and final option where she was plied with alcohol and drugs as she surrenders out raw fear to be brutally raped serially by no less than fourteen boys. She had been specially targeted because she wanted to act grownup, publicly exposing herself as a sexual deviant. For two years she was raped and was named publicly as a 'slut', 'ashewo' and 'prostitute' in the school. Overwhelmed with shame, she wanted to leave the cult badly. Her attempt to do so however was met with more physical attacks and threats from the male-dominated gang-cult. Milicent, as the Tibi Queen was given the task to ensure Akudo would not have the courage to leave their cult.

The questionnaire results show that girls face various pressures, including the need for acceptance, peer pressure, sexual harassment, and the desire for popularity and control. Some girls are tempted to engage in sexual activities, and there have been cases of consensual sex and rape.

### **Confessions of a Female Gang Member**

The recorded undercover confessions showed how Milicent, a Tibi Queen explained how 'broken language' and slangs are effectively deployed as their form of coded communication only members of the cult gang can understand. Smoking is termed smoshing, drinking it called breezing, when a boy wants to sleep with a girl they term it ooting, while flagging means a particular girl has been singled out for nooting.

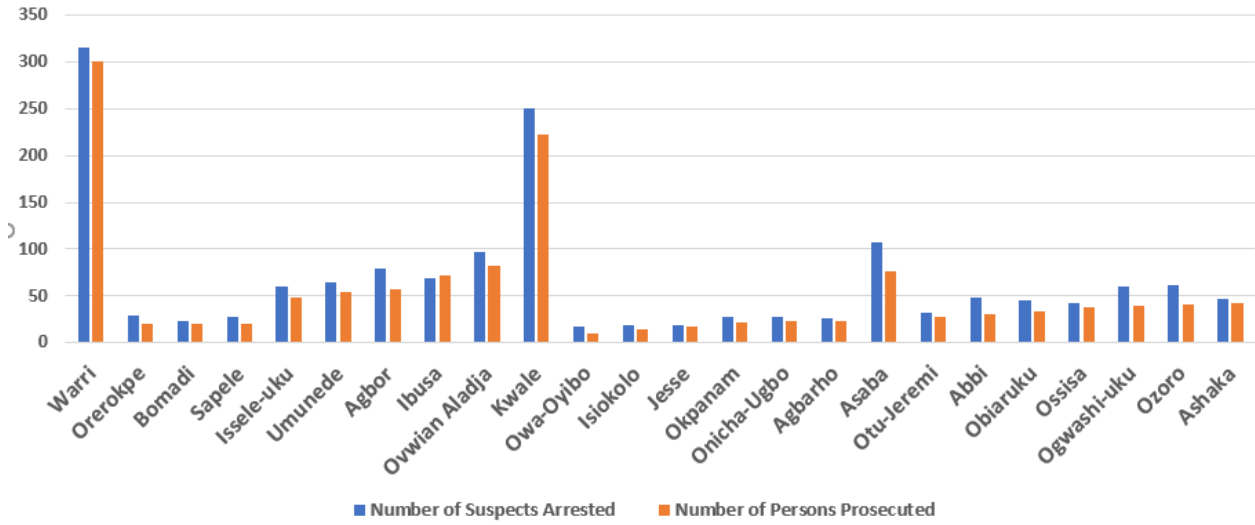
During initiation of initiates into gang cults, students are required to drink alcohol, and their preferred brand is Squadron gin. Other ingredients expected to be bought are eggs and a specific flower plant (that looks like a leaf), which they call daapoon or foam.

The Saint Patrick's Church is the recruitment spot where all cult-gang initiation by all cult groups happens are executed hidden away from public view under thick foliage and bushes.

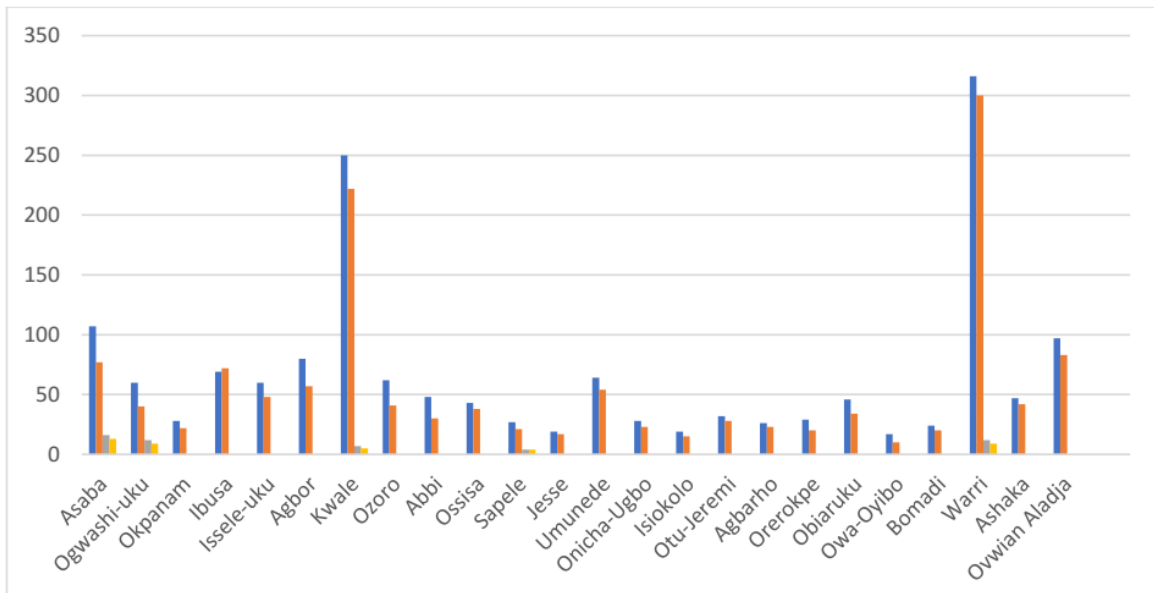
Many students face various pressures, including parental pressure, lack of support, emotional abuse, and financial difficulties. Some students desire to own a phone for study, social media connectivity, or communication with family members, while others do not want to own a phone due to concerns about distraction from studies. The study also highlights the social challenges students face, including inability to mix with friends, pressure from boys to date, threat and assault from boys, and bullying.

Towns and Cities Secret-Cult-Gangs are Active in Delta State

Source: Delta State Anti-Cult Unit. 2018



Delta State Anti-Cult Unit Statistics: 2016 till 19/10/2019



identifiers in spotting out members of various secret cults:

Cult Group	Slogans / Greetings	Dress Codes
Arrow bagger aka Supreme Vikings Confraternity	Aro-mates, Adventurers, Vultures	Pair of black trousers, red top with red stockings, red beret
Aye Confraternity	Ayeks	Black trouser, white top, yellow beret cap
Buccaneer	Fine Boys, Ban Boys, Alora, Bucket Men, Lords	Pair of black trouser, yellow top with yellow beret
Eiye Confraternity	Fliers, Airforce, Air Lords	Sky-blue jeans, white t-shirt, armless jean jacket, blue beret, and yellow cap
Marphite	Not yet known	Black trouser, green top, green beret

## Discussion:

### Vulnerability Pointers:

The study highlights the need for a development communication approach that addressed the root causes of gang violence and intimidation, how to promote the culture of silence-breaking, and provide support for victimized students.

The existence of multiple gangs in schools with dominant control and external influence, perpetuates the problem. On the other hand, girls face various pressures, including sexual exploitation, highlighting the need for a comprehensive sexuality education framework and support services.

A look at the data analysis revealed that for the 35% who ticked yes in the questionnaire when asked why they think students, and especially female students, fall for the lure and trappings of cultism. We found that the following Vulnerability Pointers' database reference provided by the GIME Project identified the following social factors:

- Inability to mix with friends
- Join in noise making
- Inability to answer questions in class
- Attending social activities
- Pressure from boys to date
- Threat and assault from boys when boyfriend offers are turned down

- Too restless to sit in class
- Tendency to act-up
- Not comfortable with 3 sessions operated in school (preference for morning sessions) rather than afternoon / evening
- Bad advice from friends
- Difficulty comprehending
- Speaking in public
- Noisy environment
- Noisy students
- Quarrelling with classmates
- Unfair teachers make learning difficult
- Bullie
- Corrupt students
- Need to avoiding certain persons
- Forced-on friendship
- Over population of students in class (ranges between 45-110)
- Cramped classrooms
- Harassment and Intimidation
- Boring teachers; boring lesson
- Offers of monies and gifts
- Bad roads to school
- Tongue-tie
- Lateness (distance from home to school too far)
- Over-burdened with house chores
- Lack access to textbooks and novels
- Gossiping
- Stealing
- Telling lies
- Difficulty reading

These vulnerability pointers shows that when harassment, bullying, assault and intimidation goes unchecked within the home and in schools, it gives birth to the desire to seek protection from the attacker, bullies, perpetrators or environment that promotes it. This in turn creates the need for the attacked to seek protection from outside themselves that leads to having, and forming a group, or joining one that protects the attacked and their interests.

Often, students who are lured into such secret gang-cults are innocent and ignorant of the activities of the gang they joined until it is too late. And when they do, getting out becomes a life-threatening move. This fear often paralyses students from leaving or denouncing their membership, and after a while, it becomes a habit to carry out the orders of the group, sinking them further, almost to the point of no return.

### Institutional and Legal Framework Bureaucracy

For this aspect of the study, during an interview with the PPRO of Delta State Command, Andrew Aniamaka, he explained that in response to the rise of secret-gang-cult related activities in the state, the State Anti-Cult Unit (SACU) was created in July 2016 to eradicate secret-cult-gangs and cult related offences.

Then in 2018, the Civilian Anti-Cult Corps (CACC) was created as an adjunct control management stop-gap who were rigorously screened and vetted by the Police State Command across all local government areas within the state was created to support the activities of SACU. The unit serves as additional manpower to achieve SACU's objective: *to identify members, their hideouts, and activities with the goal of eradicating secret-gang-cults in Delta State.*

This is no mean feat as there are, in Asaba alone, over 170 private schools and over 500 public schools in Delta according to the information provided by the Ministry of Basic and Secondary School Education. Many of the public schools investigated have a population of no less than 800 students with some schools having as much as 2,000 or over 3,000 students.

School authorities interviewed for this report expressed concern about the ratio of police support per school to tackle the menace of secret-gang-cults in schools. According to SACU, it has only one vehicle dedicated for this purpose for the entire state, which at the time of the investigative report has been grounded and requires N300,000 to fix it.

Perhaps at this juncture it is pertinent to ask about the bureaucracy and institutional enablers or barriers to successfully uproot the menace of cultism. The study through the investigation revealed that the Delta State Government was not committed enough in tackling head-on the menace of secret-gang-cults in the state. The State Anti-Cult Unit (SACU) created in July 2016 to eradicate secret-cult-gangs and cult related offences does not have the logistics and manpower to track and navigate the terrains where secret-cult-gangs thrive. The only Hiace truck used by SACU was not functional as it needs repairs and replacement of parts such as batteries and engine upgrade.

While the Civilian Anti-Cult Corps (CACC) created as an arm to support SACU's manpower deficits, indirectly undermines the radical push and penetration objectives of the SACU in dealing decisively with the menace as it now relies heavily on CACC across all as an intermediary without much legal authority and power to tackle the hydra of gangsterism and cultism across all L.G.As. The CACC carry continues to do much of the leg work then refers to SACU once suspects are apprehended for proper prosecution.

As are the time of the investigative report under review, 1,598 suspects have been arrested with 1,337 prosecuted. Out of these number 62 females were arrested with 49 of them prosecuted.

### **Applied DEVCOMM Solutions:**

The study reveals that applying a "It-Takes-a-Village" approach emphasizes curbing the incubation to manifestation of their wards and children from falling into the lure of gang-cults is crucial. The role of parents and guardians in preventing and stopping the recruitment of their children and wards by secret cults to address the issue of gang violence and intimidation in schools, thus requires a comprehensive approach.

#### *Role of Parents and Guardians:*

Parents and guardians have a crucial role in preventing and stopping the recruitment of their children and wards by being active, attentive, and watchful carers. They must be aware of the signs that indicate their child is about to be recruited, has joined, or would make a recruit that attracts gang coordinators. These signs include:

- Wearing certain colors of handkerchiefs, bangles, buttons on school shirts or trousers, belts
- Smell of drugs on uniforms
- Tendencies to hide or hide things
- Use of phone to watch pornography
- Telling lies, stealing, stubbornness, disobedience, indiscipline, not studious, addiction to substance abuse, acts of bullying, anger issues, and other anti-social behaviors.

Parents must therefore be decisive in nipping such acts, habits, or behavior in the bud. They must work on and up their parenting skillset, communication style, emotional intelligence, as well as discipline their children with tough balanced love, and modeling before them that there are consequences for bad behavior and anti-social tendencies.

#### *Identifying Root Causes and Triggers:*

Some of the triggers or vulnerability pointers that are at the root of children falling prey to secret cults include:

1. Emotional sickness
2. Children from dysfunctional and 'broken homes'
3. Permissiveness in home and society
4. Child abuse, physical assault, emotional abuse, neglect, or abandonment by parents
5. Peer group influence
6. Quest for power and revenge
7. Popularity and wealth
8. False promises to ignorant and innocent students
9. School environment where teachers are recruiters
10. Lack of proper counseling both at home and in school
11. Bad religious teaching focused on instant gratification, wealth, and material acquisition
12. Low critical thinking skills of students



13. Children living in a home where being part of secret cults is the norm
14. Inadequate welfare programs for children
15. Inconducive learning environment
16. Discrimination, bullying, and intimidation
17. Sexual harassment, rape
18. Curiosity about sex
19. Not inculcating high moral values and discipline
20. Government lukewarm attitude for enacting strict laws to tackle secret-cult gangsterism.

By addressing these root causes and triggers, we can prevent the recruitment of students by secret cults and create a safe and supportive environment for all.

A DEVCOMM Campaign was developed to further escalate, mitigate and amplify a solutions-driven mindset to the menace of secret cult gangs and cults below:

**Campaign Title: "My School, My Safe Haven: Students Say No to Gangs and Cults"**

Objective: To mitigate the effects and dangers of anti-social behaviors and activities, particularly gangsterism and cultism among students in Delta State.

Target Audience: Primary target includes students, parents, teachers, and school administrators. The secondary targets are religious bodies, NGOs, CSOs, community leaders, and the general public.

**Strategies:**

*1. Advocacy and Campaigns:*

- The campaign was taken to the top three public schools in Asaba and Ugbolu in Delta notorious for the highest prevalence of gangs and cult activities, namely: West End Mixed Secondary School, Zappa Mixed Secondary School, and Ugbolu Secondary School, Ugbolu. Use of banners and songs were incorporated as recital tools to empower students minds to SAY NO TO GANGSTERISM and CULTISM.
- Workshops, talks, dramatizations, and seminars in schools and communities to raise awareness about the dangers of cultism were initiated.
- The Ministry of Education declared a state of emergency in secondary schools against cult gangs in the wake of the investigative report.
- Engaged school principals, school counsellors, and teachers to champion the DEVCOMM School Campaign: "My School, My Safe Haven: Students Say No to Gangs and Cults" on daily school assembly. This led to over fifty students reaching out directly to schools principals and the GIME Project team after that had been poached by gang-cult recruiters.

- NGOs were engaged to activate the implementation of the Child's Rights Act in Delta State in partnership with the Ministry of Women Affairs and Children Development governments, spearheaded by Mrs. Agas.
- Parents, communities, schools, religious centers, individuals, parents, and other social groups propagated the campaign, which led to us saving at least 150 students from being recruited and initiated into cultism.
- Social media, print (State-Owned Newspaper, The Pointer), new media, social media, and broadcast electronic media such as Trend FM and Bridge Radio were media partners and co-advocates to amplify the campaign and issues through news, interviews and call-in interactive live programmes on radio dedicated to the *"My School, My Safe Haven: Students Say No to Gangs and Cults"* to reach a wider audience.

### *2. Education and Curriculum Reform:*

- Review and improve civic education and religious studies curricula to emphasize values, critical thinking, and moral guidance.
- Integrate anti-cultism and anti-terrorism education into school curricula.
- Publication of DISTORTION, a novel by the investigative reported, EJIRO UMUKO was approved by the Ministry of Education and the Delta State Government in March 2024 as the literature of study to further help students identify how their vulnerability pointers can be exploited through storytelling, and what to do to prevent themselves from becoming victims.

### *3. School Administration and Management:*

- A special school counsellor's intervention programme was instituted for students to reach out to as first responders within the school premises as was done for Dumebi, which enabled the school to swing into action to protect her. Students can trust the school's counsellor's intervention as their main resort when first targeted by cult gangs to deescalate and mitigate student's recruitment from happening within the school's perimeters.
- A recommended school register that documents expelled students involved in cultism with the goal to publish their names in at least two newspapers was muted (however, concerns were raised as to the long-term effect on children who later rehabilitated. The issue of 'minor offenses' due to youthful exuberance as a result of ignorance, lack of emotional and adversity quotient raised ethical and other privacy issues that needs to be properly handled.
- Strengthen guidance and counseling units in schools and encourage students to attend counseling sessions.
- Reawaken the registration, promotion and engagement of moribund or absent teen clubs such as book clubs, press club, debate society, etc., as the alternative social-peer-community development associations in schools to prevent gangsterism and secret cult activities.

*4. Community Engagement and Collaboration:*

- PTA in many of the schools have become redundant. School administrators were tasked on reviving or creating activities and direct engagement with parents and guardians to meet at least once every session to organize regular PTA/student interactions and annual sports competitions.
- Encourage the formation of Press Clubs, quiz/competition/debate clubs for positive discussions.
- Foster strong collaboration between schools, police, and community organizations to fight secret cult gangs.

*5. Role of Law Enforcement and Prosecution:*

- Create an advocacy awareness on ***Certificate of Renunciation*** provided for by the Magistrate Courts across Nigeria for students determined to leave the cult with proper legal protection through the legal instrument. This will boost confidence in the judiciary processes and systems when successful records of gang/cult-leavers exercise their rights to escape the cult-grip on their lives without fear of repercussion.
- Ensure diligent prosecution of cases based on the Delta State Anti-Terrorism and Anti-Cultism Law of 2016.
- Report teachers involved in secret cult activities to the police and mete out appropriate sanctions.
- Create a database of teachers and other adults above the age of 21 who are caught in the promotion, recruitment and perpetration of gangsterism and cult activities within and outside the schools.
- Make public examples of cultist through documentaries exposing the lies and deceit used to lure unsuspecting students to show what awaits them post initiation: violence, assault, rape, alcoholism, stealing, wasted lives, drugs, trauma, negative identity, rejection by society, armed robbery, mental health breakdown, thuggery, etc.

**Activities:**

- The "My School, My Safe Haven: Students Say No to Gangs and Cults" was launched across schools in Delta in partnership with schools, principals, Getting Inside Me Project (GIME Project) and NAWOJ (National Association of Women Journalists in Delta State) carried out school campaigns on International Day of the Girl Child with a media advocacy.
- Other DEVCOMM strategies for more engagement and promotion are rallies and press conferences to be done quarterly to bridge the gaps on lack of awareness and engagement.
- Banners and signposts were designed to promote the campaign anthem: ***"My School, My Safe Haven: Students Say No to Gangs and Cults"***, ***"Say No to Gangsterism and Cults"***.

- A follow-up strategy to develop and distribute educational materials (posters, leaflets, brochures) was initiated.
- Principals organize school-based events (assembly lectures, dramatizations, debates, quiz competitions).
- The Elders Council of the Saint Patrick's Church Asaba took action to raise the perimeters of their fences, cut down bushes that served as dens for cult initiations, guns and ammunition hideouts.
- Other Community leaders and religious centers amplified the advocacy at church meetings and service that challenged church members to support and collaborate on the designed DEVCOMM strategies to save, protect and prevent their wards and children from being recruited.
- A media advocacy and policy drive were initiated for the establishment of a hotline for reporting cult activities and provide counseling services for children, parents and schools.

#### **Evaluation:**

- Continuous monitoring of campaign reach and impact through surveys and feedback.
- Track changes in student behavior and attitudes towards cultism following interventions.
- Assess the effectiveness of school administration and management strategies.
- Evaluate the success of community engagement and collaboration efforts.
- Review the number of prosecutions and convictions under the Delta State Anti-Terrorism and Anti-Cultism Law of 2016.

By implementing these Development Communications Strategies, we can continue to create a safe and supportive environment for students in Delta State and mitigate the effects and dangers of anti-social behaviors and activities, particularly gangsterism and cultism.

In conclusion, the *"My School, My Safe Haven: Students Say No to Gangs and Cults"* campaign offers a comprehensive approach to addressing the issue of cultism among female students in Delta State. By engaging students, parents, teachers, school administrators, community leaders, and the general public, we can create a safe and supportive environment that promotes positive values and behaviors.

It should be noted that children want to trust their parents and guardians implicitly if they show they can be trusted too. Children are loyal to carers or someone who really listens to and understands them; someone who can empathize with them and guide them without intimidation or threat.

However, when secret-gang-cults present themselves as better alternatives, and children join such groups, then as teachers, parents, and guardians, it may be because we did not do enough. To all

parents who are giving their best, they are admonished not to relent as the age of adolescence is often a trying rite of passage to both parents, guardians and children as well. It-takes-a-village to work together to build a society that values education, moral guidance, and the well-being of our children.

This investigation into secret cults and gangsterism in female students in Delta State was supported by Code for Africa, Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigation (REWON), LightRay Media, Pointer Newspaper.

Partnership with Bridge Radio 98.7 FM and Trend FM for media advocacy provided parents with the tips, tools, home communication strategies to manage their interaction with their children. In addition, the radio media DEVCOMM campaign inspired the Delta State House of Assembly and the Government Executive to actualize passage of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act.

The Delta State Government was tasked to provide the Anti-Cult Unit with funding and logistical tools to effectively do their jobs as a mitigating strategy to prevent the further recruitment of young women and girls into gangsterism and secret-gang-cults in Delta State.

### **Conclusion:**

Human influence, particularly parental influence, plays a significant role in shaping students' experiences and vulnerabilities.

When harassment, bullying, assault, and intimidation go unchecked, students seek protection from outside themselves, leading to the formation of gangs and secret cults. This desire for protection creates a culture of fear, making it difficult for students to leave or denounce their membership.

This term paper recommends a development communication strategy that includes:

- Awareness campaigns to educate students, teachers, and parents about the effects of gang violence and intimidation.
- Establishment of safe spaces for students to report incidents and receive support.
- Training for teachers and school administrators to identify and respond to gang-related issues.
- Community engagement to involve local leaders and stakeholders in addressing gang violence and intimidation.
- Comprehensive sexuality education and support services for girls facing sexual exploitation and pressure.
- Parental support and education to promote positive parental influence and reduce undue pressure on students.
- Collaboration with law enforcement agencies, such as SACU and CACC, to eradicate secret-gang-cults and cult-related offenses.

## **Recommendations:**

- Policy makers should develop and implement policies that address gang violence and intimidation in schools.
- School administrators should establish clear reporting mechanisms and provide support services for victimized students.
- Community leaders should engage with students, parents, and teachers to promote a culture of silence-breaking.
- Parents and guardians should provide guidance and support for their children, especially girls, to navigate the challenges of adolescence.
- The Delta State Government should provide adequate resources, logistics, manpower and support to SACU and CACC to effectively tackle the menace of secret-gang-cults in schools.
- The judiciary should strengthen laws and sentencing for secret-gang-cult related offenses.
- Remand homes and rehabilitation centers should be established to support the rehabilitation of arrested suspects.

By adopting a development communication approach, we can create a safe and supportive environment for students like Akudo, Dumebi, and Millicent, and promote a culture of silence-breaking in Delta State.

Akudo and Dumebi's action in resorting to the school's counsellor for support and guidance paid off. The school assembly DEVCOMM Social Change Campaign inspired at least 150 students to trust the system to protect them and refused to be lured into cultism after been poached. Stealing and hyper sexual behaviour in students and anti-social behaviour are now better managed with a significant positive change in behaviour by students, parents and schools alike in reducing the numbers of cultists within schools.

The efforts of SACU and CACC are commendable, but more needs to be done to address the scale of the problem. The Delta State Government must demonstrate its commitment to tackling the menace of secret-gang-cults in schools by providing adequate resources and support.

The campaign "*My School, My Safe Haven: Students Say No to Gangs and Cults*" will continue to inspire positive change and encourage stakeholders to take action against cultism as everyone make the effort to create a safer and more supportive environment for all.

\*Names of victims have been changed.

**References:**

News Report (Ejiro Umukoro): <https://reportwomen.org/amp/secret-cult-gangs-the-disturbing-rise-of-female-secondary-school-members-in-delta/>

Undercover Audio Confession: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6-5VD3XdR8>

<https://www.pressreader.com/nigeria/thisday/20190312/281874414724642>

