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EXPLORING THE PSYCHOSOCIAL DRIVERS OF CULTISM AND WEAPON RELATED BEHAVIOUR AMONG STUDENTS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN ANAMBRA STATE

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ABSTRACT

Cultism and weapon-related behaviour have emerged as critical threats to safety and academic integrity in Nigeria's tertiary institutions, necessitating a deeper understanding of the psychosocial factors driving students toward such deviant affiliations. This study explored the psychosocial drivers of cultism and weapon-related behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Anambra State, focusing on peer pressure, desire for protection and self-defense, quest for power and control, and financial incentives that intertwine with psychological and social needs. Guided by four research questions and four hypotheses, the study adopted a descriptive ex post facto design involving 300 students selected through a multi-stage sampling technique from

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one federal, one state, and one private institution. Data were collected using the Psychosocial Drivers of Cultism and Weapon-Related Behaviour Questionnaire (PDCWBQ), validated by experts and piloted for reliability. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the subscales were: peer pressure (0.84), protection and self-defence (0.81), power and control (0.79), and financial incentives (0.83), with an overall reliability of 0.82. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and One-Way ANOVA. The results showed that all four psychosocial variables significantly influenced students' involvement in cultism and weapon-related behaviour. Significant differences were also found across institution types, with students in state-owned institutions reporting higher susceptibility. The study recommends targeted psychosocial interventions across campuses and suggests future research on gender-based patterns and longitudinal trends in cult-related behaviour.

Keywords: Psychosocial Drivers; Cultism; Weapon Related Behaviour; Students in Tertiary.

Introduction

Tertiary education aims to equip individuals with the requisite knowledge, skills, and ethical orientation necessary for meaningful societal participation, professional excellence, and the pursuit of fulfilling lives. However, a significant number of students become involved in activities that hinder the realization of these educational goals. Among these activities, campus-based secret cults have emerged as particularly disruptive influences. Okebukola (2018) argues that these cult groups frequently exert considerable control over their members, shaping their behaviors, belief systems, and personal decisions. This control often extends to violent practices, including weapon possession and use, which have become increasingly common among students in tertiary institutions. The enforced conformity within these groups, along with the normalization of weapon-related behavior, not only creates immediate security concerns on campuses but also has lasting consequences for students' personal development, psychological well-being, and the broader academic environment.

Supporting this view, Nwikpo et al. (2024), in a study conducted among undergraduates in southeastern Nigeria, observed that cultism is one of the most prevalent forms of thuggish behavior in tertiary institutions. Their findings indicate that cultism and weapon carrying negatively impact students' academic performance and emotional well-being, further complicating efforts to maintain a conducive learning atmosphere. Various researchers have looked at cultism from different perspectives. In a religious context, cultism denotes extreme devotion or worship of a particular deity, person, or ideology, often accompanied by practices and beliefs that diverge from established religious traditions. Such devotion is commonly linked to fringe or extremist

religious groups (Adesina & Awosusi, 2014). In a social context, cultism refers to the operations of secret cults, particularly in campus and youth-dominated settings. These groups are defined by their clandestine nature, initiation rites, and frequent involvement in criminal and violent activities. A particularly troubling trend in this regard is the increasing link between cultism and weapon-related behavior among students. Members of these cult groups often carry and use weapons, ranging from knives and axes to firearms, not merely to enforce group loyalty but also to intimidate or attack rivals or non-members (Nwikpo et al., 2022; Ogunbameru, 2014). In academic settings, cultism can also be understood as an excessive or unquestioning adherence to specific academic theories or figures, sometimes at the expense of critical thinking and intellectual diversity (Oni, 2016). In the Nigerian tertiary education landscape, especially in Anambra State, the more pressing concern lies in the social manifestation of cultism and its association with weapon-related behavior among students.

Historically, cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions traces its origins to the formation of the Pyrate Confraternity by Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka and six others at University College Ibadan (now the University of Ibadan) in 1953 (Rotimi, 2015). Initially, the group was non-violent and founded on noble ideals aimed at combating tribalism and promoting social justice. However, by the late 1960s, these ideals eroded, leading to the transformation of the Pyrate Confraternity into a secret cult. This shift in ideology triggered the emergence of splinter groups that gradually adopted violent practices. The Buccaneer Confraternity split off in the early 1970s, followed by the rise of the Neo-Black Movement (Black Axe). The 1980s witnessed the proliferation of more groups such as the Eiye Confraternity, Vikings, Amazons, and Jezebel, each marked by violent rivalries and an increasing reliance on weapons to assert dominance and retaliate against perceived enemies. This historical trajectory highlights the transition of cultism from an intellectual pursuit to violent criminal enterprises, posing a significant threat to campus safety and educational progress in Anambra State and beyond.

Furthermore, Nwikpo et al. (2020) had earlier reported on the prevalence of weapon-carrying and use among senior secondary school students in Anambra State, providing early evidence of the normalization of weapons among adolescents who often transition into tertiary institutions with these behaviors intact. This suggests that exposure to weapon-related behavior at an earlier stage may condition students to accept violence as a normative part of their academic and social lives, thereby reinforcing the cycle of cultism and insecurity at the tertiary level.

Regardless of the specific cult group to which a student belongs, involvement in cult activities demands substantial time

commitments, including attending secret meetings, participating in rigorous initiation rituals, and engaging in other clandestine operations (Oni, 2016). These demands often lead to the neglect of academic responsibilities, resulting in poor academic performance and diminished commitment to educational goals. The psychological toll of cultism is also significant. Smah (2017) noted that students frequently experience psychological distress, including fear, anxiety, and emotional instability, due to the high-risk nature of cult life, further undermining their overall well-being. Rotimi (2015) further elaborates that participation in cultism diverts students' focus from academic pursuits, leading to missed lectures, incomplete assignments, low grades, and, in extreme cases, academic probation, or expulsion.

A particularly alarming development in contemporary cultism is its increasing connection with weapon possession and use among students. Cult groups now actively arm their members with dangerous weapons such as knives, axes, and, in extreme cases, firearms, which they use to instill fear, assert dominance, and retaliate against rival groups. This trend exacerbates insecurity on campuses, increasing the likelihood of violent clashes and fatalities. The normalization of weapons among cult members undermines institutional efforts to promote a safe and conducive learning environment, creating a climate of fear that affects both cult members and non-members alike (Nwankwo, 2022).

The motivations driving students toward cultism and weapon possession are varied and interconnected. Okunamiri (2014) stated that students who feel marginalized or vulnerable may be drawn to such groups in the hope of finding a supportive community that is perceived to have their back. The researcher noted that belief that these cults possess hidden knowledge or resources that can shield them from harm can be a powerful motivator. Umar (2017) and Eneh (2016) argued that financial stability is a critical concern for many students, and the prospect of finding support in this area can be a powerful motivator. Peer pressure plays a crucial role, with many students coerced into joining cults by close friends or acquaintances who present membership as a pathway to prestige, influence, or security (Okafor & Obiefuna, 2021). Like Okafor et al, Uzohuo (2022) listed peer pressure, desire for protection, quest for power and financial incentives as some of the factors that lure students into cultism. Broken family structures have also been implicated in cult recruitment, as students from homes characterized by parental neglect, divorce, or domestic violence often seek belonging and protection within cults (Nwankwo, 2022). The absence of strong parental supervision or emotional support creates a void that cult groups readily exploit.

Additionally, bullying and victimization on campus can push students toward cult membership as a defensive strategy. Okeke (2023) agrees with Nwikpo et al. (2022) that self-defense is a primary motivation for students engaging in cultism and weapon possession. Many students who have been victims of bullying initially join cults to protect themselves from further harassment. However, the weapons they carry for self-defense often escalate into instruments of aggression and retaliation. The culture of violence within these groups fosters a survivalist mentality in which carrying and using weapons becomes routine.

The concept of learned helplessness has also been identified as a psychological motivation for continued involvement in cultism. Repeated exposure to threats, violence, and a hostile environment can lead students to believe they have little control over their circumstances, resigning themselves to remaining within cult structures (Adeyemo & Olufemi, 2020). This psychological state perpetuates a cycle in which students internalize violence and weapon possession as inevitable aspects of campus life.

Despite existing studies on cultism and youth violence in Nigeria, many have either broadly addressed cultism without focusing on its evolving connection to weapon-related behavior or examined student violence without adequately linking it to underlying psychological and social drivers. Few studies have provided focused insights into the specific context of tertiary institutions in Anambra State, a region that has witnessed a rising trend in cult-related violence in recent years. This study seeks to fill this gap by offering a more nuanced exploration of how individual, familial, and social factors contribute to both cultism and the normalization of weapon possession among students. By doing so, it aims to provide updated, context-specific insights to guide targeted intervention strategies within tertiary institutions in Anambra State, thereby addressing a critical and growing threat to campus safety and educational advancement.

Statement of the Problem

Tertiary education is expected to foster the intellectual, moral, and professional development of young adults, equipping them to contribute meaningfully to society. However, the persistent rise of cultism and weapon-related behaviour among students in Nigerian tertiary institutions, particularly in Anambra State, threatens the achievement of these educational objectives. Despite previous efforts by researchers and institutions to understand and curb cultism, cult groups have continued to evolve, adopting more violent tactics and integrating the use of dangerous weapons as part of their operations. Alarmingly, factors such as peer pressure, family instability, prior experiences of bullying and victimisation, learned helplessness, and a perceived need for self-defence appear to be contributing to this disturbing trend.

Existing research has largely examined cultism as an isolated phenomenon or generalized its causes across diverse regions without adequately addressing the specific socio-cultural and psychological dynamics at play within Anambra State. Moreover, the critical link between cult membership and weapon-related behaviour has often been underexplored. As incidents of violence, intimidation, and weapon-related crimes increase on campuses, there is a pressing need for a localized, in-depth exploration of the drivers fueling this menace. Without such understanding, efforts to formulate effective preventive and intervention strategies may continue to fall short. Thus, this study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the drivers of cultism and weapon-related behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Anambra State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the influential factors leading students to engage in cultism in tertiary institutions within Anambra State. Specifically, this study sought to:

1. Investigate the impact of peer pressure as a contributing factor to students' involvement in cultism and weapon-related in tertiary institutions in Anambra State.
2. Evaluate the influence of the desire for protection and self-defence on students' engagement in cultism within tertiary institutions in Anambra State.
3. Examine the role of the quest for power and control in inducing students to join cult groups in tertiary institutions in Anambra State.
4. Analyze the significance of financial incentives in enticing students to join cultism in tertiary institutions in Anambra State.

Scope of the Study

This study investigated the psychosocial factors driving students to engage in cultism and weapon-carrying and use in tertiary institutions in Anambra State. Specifically, the study examined how peer pressure, desire for protection and self-defense, quest for power and control, and financial incentives induce students into cultism in tertiary institutions. The study was delimited to three tertiary institutions in Anambra State due to funding and time constraints.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How does peer pressure induce students' decisions to join cultism and engage in weapon-related behaviour in tertiary institutions in Anambra State?
2. What impact does the desire for protection and self-defence have on students' involvement in cultism and weapon-related behaviour within tertiary institutions in Anambra State?

3. In what ways does the quest for power and control contribute to students' participation in cultism and weapon-related behaviour in tertiary institutions in Anambra State?
4. How do financial incentives interact with psychological needs and social influences to motivate students' involvement in cultism within tertiary institutions in Anambra State?

Null Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the impact of peer pressure on students' decisions to join cultism and engage in weapon-related behaviour in tertiary institutions in Anambra State based on school types.
2. The desire for protection and self-defence does not significantly influence students' involvement in cultism in tertiary institutions in Anambra State based on school types.
3. There is no significant difference in the role of the quest for power and control in inducing students to join cult groups and engage in weapon violence in tertiary institutions in Anambra State based on school type.
4. Financial incentives do not significantly motivate students to engage in cultism and weapon-related behaviour in tertiary institutions in Anambra State based on school types.

Research Method

This study adopted a descriptive ex post facto research design. This design was appropriate because the study focused on existing psychosocial variables that could not be manipulated, such as peer pressure, desire for protection, quest for power, and financial incentives, in relation to students' involvement in cultism and weapon-related behaviour. The design also facilitated comparison across different types of tertiary institutions (federal, state, and private), enabling the researcher to examine group differences using inferential statistics. The study was conducted in Anambra State, situated in the Southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Anambra State hosts a significant number of tertiary institutions, including federal, state, and private universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education. The selection of Anambra was based on increasing reports of cult-related activities and violence among students in higher institutions within the state. The target population comprised all students enrolled in public and private tertiary institutions in Anambra State. This included students from universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education across the state's three senatorial zones.

A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed. First, three tertiary institutions, one federal, one state-owned, and one private, were purposively selected. Next, simple random sampling was used to select faculties and departments within each institution. Finally, a total of 300 students were randomly selected across different faculties and levels to participate in the study. The instrument for data collection was a

structured questionnaire titled *Psychosocial Drivers of Cultism and Weapon-Related Behaviour Questionnaire (PDCWBQ)*. The questionnaire consisted of five sections: Section A gathered demographic information (gender, age, institution type, and academic level); Section B measured Peer Pressure Influence; Section C assessed Protection and Self-Defense Motivation; Section D evaluated Power and Control Needs; and Section E focused on Financial Incentive Motivation. All items were rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1).

To ensure validity, the draft questionnaire was reviewed by three experts in Educational Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Their feedback was used to improve item clarity, relevance, and cultural appropriateness. Reliability was established through a pilot study involving 30 students from Nnamdi Aaikiwe University (NAU), Awka which was not included in the main study. Using Cronbach's Alpha, the following reliability coefficients were obtained: Peer Pressure Scale (0.84), Protection and Self-Defence Scale (0.81), Power and Control Scale (0.79), and Financial Incentives Scale (0.83). The overall instrument reliability was 0.82, indicating high internal consistency. Data were collected over two weeks with the assistance of trained research assistants who administered and retrieved the questionnaire. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity to encourage honest responses.

Data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistics. Research questions were answered using means and standard deviations, while null hypotheses were tested using One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at the 0.05 level of significance. Where significant differences were detected, post hoc analyses (Scheffé test) were conducted to identify specific group differences. This method ensured a valid and reliable exploration of the psychosocial drivers of cultism and weapon-related behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Anambra State.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Research Question One: *How does peer pressure induce students' decisions to join cultism and engage in weapon-related behaviour in tertiary institutions in Anambra State?*

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Table 1: The Influence of Peer Pressure on Students' Decision to Join Cultism and Engage in Weapon-Related Behaviour in Tertiary Institutions in Anambra State

Students join cult groups and engage in weapon-related behaviour for the following:	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Acceptance among peers	300	3.17	0.74
The quest for popularity among friends	300	3.55	0.65
Students' fears of being left out or ostracized	300	3.36	0.69
Loyalty to friends	300	3.15	0.74
Hanging out with the wrong crowd	300	3.57	0.61
GRAND MEAN		**3.36**	**0.68**

Interpretation:
Table 1 presents the mean responses on the influence of peer pressure on students' decisions to join cult groups and engage in weapon-related behaviour in tertiary institutions in Anambra State. The items assessed various peer-related factors such as acceptance among peers (M = 3.17), quest for popularity (M = 3.55), fear of ostracism (M = 3.36), loyalty to friends (M = 3.15), and association with deviant peer groups (M = 3.57). The grand mean of 3.36 (SD = 0.68), which is well above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicates a strong agreement among respondents that peer pressure significantly contributes to both cult membership and weapon-related behaviours among students. This suggests that peer dynamics, including social bonding, status seeking, and grow up loyalty, are potent psychosocial drivers of these deviant behaviours.

Research Question Two: *What impact does the desire for protection and self-defence have on students' involvement in cultism and weapon-related behaviour within tertiary institutions in Anambra State?*

Table 2: The Perceived Impact of Desire for Protection on Students' Involvement in Cultism and Weapon-Related Behaviour within Tertiary Institutions in Anambra State

Students join cult groups and engage in weapon-related behaviour for the following:	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Students' belief that cultism offers protection against physical harm	300	3.53	0.56
Their opinion that cults create a sense of security when students feel vulnerable	300	3.25	0.74
To get protection from the threats of other students	300	3.47	0.65
Belief that joining cult groups will shield them from lecturers' victimization	300	3.29	0.74
Cults can shield members from social rejection	300	2.46	0.85
GRAND MEAN		**3.26**	**0.71**

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Interpretation:
Table 2 reveals students' perceptions of the desire for protection and self-defence as motivating factors for involvement in cultism and weapon-related behaviour. The responses indicate strong agreement that joining cults provides protection from physical harm (M = 3.53), threats from other students (M = 3.47), and lecturers' victimization (M = 3.29), as well as a sense of security during periods of vulnerability (M = 3.25). Although the belief that cults shield members from social rejection recorded a lower mean (M = 2.46), the overall grand mean of 3.26 (SD = 0.71) exceeds the benchmark mean of 2.50. This suggests that the desire for protection is a significant psychosocial driver of both cult membership and engagement in weapon-related behaviours among students in tertiary institutions in Anambra State. These findings highlight the role of perceived threats and insecurity in pushing students toward deviant group affiliations.

Research Question Three: *In what ways does the quest for power and control contribute to students' participation in cultism and weapon-related behaviour in tertiary institutions in Anambra State?*

Table 3: The Ways in which Quest for Power and Control Contribute to Students' Participation in Cultism and Weapon-Related Behaviour in Tertiary Institutions in Anambra State

Students join cult groups and engage in weapon-related behaviour for the following reasons:	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cults and weapon use may promise leadership roles or positions of authority	300	3.19	0.70
Students seeking power may join with the goal of gaining more control of socio-cultural groups	300	3.30	0.69
Students believe cultism and use of weapons offers them a sense of superiority even over school authorities	300	3.40	0.67
Students' belief that cultism offers the power of resource control	300	3.24	0.68
Students' belief that joining a cult can give students influence over their peers	300	3.39	0.66
GRAND MEAN		**3.30**	**0.68**

Interpretation:
Table 3 presents findings on how the quest for power and control contributes to students' participation in cultism and weapon-related behaviour in tertiary institutions in Anambra State. The responses reflect high levels of agreement with statements linking cult involvement and weapon use to leadership aspirations (M = 3.19), influence over socio-cultural groups (M = 3.30), perceived superiority over school authorities (M = 3.40), resource control (M = 3.24), and peer influence (M = 3.39). The grand mean of 3.30

(SD = 0.68), well above the criterion mean of 2.50, suggests that the pursuit of power and control is a substantial psychosocial factor motivating students to engage in these deviant acts. This finding underscores the need to address power dynamics, influence, and student leadership structures in efforts to reduce cultism and related behaviours.

Research Question Four: *How do financial incentives interact with psychological needs and social influences to motivate students' involvement in cultism within tertiary institutions in Anambra State?*

Table 4: The Perceived Motivation of Financial Incentives, Psychological Needs, and Social Influences in Students' Involvement in Cultism within Tertiary Institutions in Anambra State

Students join cult groups and engage in weapon-related behaviour for the following:	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Students feel cultism offers financial grant to attract students	300	2.87	0.88
Students believe cults may provide job opportunities	300	2.48	0.93
Students believe cults with substantial financial resources may offer access to funding	300	2.93	0.78
Students feel cults may provide material benefits such as housing, food and clothing	300	2.74	0.91
Cults may promote investment schemes or opportunities that promise high returns	300	2.32	1.01
Students feel financially rewarding cults enhance their social status	300	2.79	0.85
Students are encouraged by peers due to visible financial benefits enjoyed by cult members	300	2.95	0.82
Financial gains are believed to boost members' sense of pride and self-worth	300	2.88	0.83
GRAND MEAN		**2.75**	**0.88**

Interpretation:
Table 4 illustrates the perceived role of financial incentives in motivating students to participate in cultism and weapon-related behaviour. Respondents moderately agreed that cults may attract students with financial grants (M = 2.87), provide access to funding (M = 2.93), and offer material benefits (M = 2.74). There was less agreement regarding job opportunities (M = 2.48) and investment schemes (M = 2.32). Additionally, items linking incentives to psychological and social needs showed how financial incentives interact with psychological and social dimensions: enhancing pride and self-worth (M = 2.88), elevating social status (M = 2.79), and attracting students through peer encouragement (M = 2.95). The grand mean of 2.75 (SD = 0.88), which is above the criterion mean of 2.50, suggests that financial incentives, especially when intertwined with psychological needs and peer influence,

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contribute to students' involvement in cultism within tertiary institutions in Anambra State.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the impact of peer pressure on students' decisions to join cultism and exhibit weapon-related behaviour in tertiary institutions in Anambra State based on school types.

Table 5: The Impact of Peer Pressure on Students' Decisions to Join Cultism and Exhibit Weapon-Related Behaviour in Tertiary Institutions in Anambra State

ANOVA

Peer Pressure

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	7.664	2	3.832	13.093	0.000
Within Groups	86.920	297	0.293		
Total	94.584	299			

Post-Hoc Test

Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: Peer_Pressure

	(I) Type of Tertiary Institution	(J) Type of Tertiary Institution	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Tukey HSD	University	Polythenic	-.343*	.075	.000
		College of Education	-.291*	.077	.001
	Polythenic	University	.343*	.075	.000
		College of Education	.052	.086	.822
	College of Education	University	.291*	.077	.001
		Polythenic	-.052	.086	.822

***. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.**

Interpretation:

Table 5 presents the results of a one-way ANOVA examining the impact of peer pressure on students' decisions to join cultism and exhibit weapon-related behaviour based on school type. A statistically significant difference was found ($F(2, 297) = 13.093$, $p = 0.000$). Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. The Tukey post-hoc test indicates that university students experience significantly higher peer pressure impacts compared to their counterparts in polytechnics and colleges of education. No significant difference was observed between polytechnic and college of education students.

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Hypothesis 2: The desire for protection and control does not significantly influence students' involvement in cultism and weapon-related behaviour in tertiary institutions in Anambra State based on school types.

Table 6: Influence of Desire for Protection and Control on Students' Involvement in Cultism and Weapon-Related Behaviour in Tertiary Institutions in Anambra State

ANOVA

Desire_for_Protection	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.447	2	0.224	0.779	0.460
Within Groups	85.193	297	0.287		
Total	85.640	299			

Interpretation:

Table 6 shows that the desire for protection and control does not significantly influence students' involvement in cultism and weapon-related behaviour based on the type of tertiary institution ($F(2, 297) = 0.779$, $p = 0.460$). Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis is not rejected. Thus, this factor has a similar impact across different school types.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in the role of the quest for power in contributing to students' participation in cultism and weapon-related behaviour in tertiary institutions in Anambra State based on school types.

Table 7: The Role of Quest for Power in Student Participation in Cultism and Weapon-Related Behaviour in Tertiary Institutions in Anambra State

ANOVA

Quest_for_Power	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.463	2	1.232	3.746	0.025
Within Groups	97.654	297	0.329		
Total	100.117	299			

Post-Hoc Test

Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: Quest_for_Power

	(I) Type of Tertiary Institution	(J) Type of Tertiary Institution	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Tukey HSD	University	Polythenic	-.182	.080	.060

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	College of Education	-.181	.081	.069
Polythenic	University	.182	.080	.060
	College of Education	.001	.092	1.00
College of Education	University	.181	.081	.069
	Polythenic	-.001	.092	1.00

Interpretation:
Table 7 indicates a significant difference in how the quest for power contributes to students' involvement in cultism and weapon-related behaviour across school types (F (2, 297) = 3.746, p = 0.025). Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. However, the post-hoc test reveals no statistically significant pairwise differences, as all p-values exceed 0.05, indicating that although the overall model is significant, specific group differences are not.

Hypothesis 4: Financial incentives do not significantly motivate students to engage in cultism and weapon-related behaviour in tertiary institutions in Anambra State based on school types.

Table 8: Motivation Impact of Financial Incentives on Students' Engagement in Cultism and Weapon-Related Behaviour in Tertiary Institutions in Anambra State

ANOVA

Financial_Incentive	**Sum of Squares**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
Between Groups	.810	2	.405	1.005	0.367
Within Groups	119.748	297	.403		
Total	120.558	299			

Interpretation:
Table 8 presents the one-way ANOVA results on the motivational role of financial incentives in students' involvement in cultism and weapon-related behaviour. The results reveal no statistically significant difference among the different school types (F (2, 297) = 1.005, p = 0.367). Since the p-value exceeds 0.05, the null hypothesis is not rejected. Therefore, financial incentives appear not to significantly motivate students' engagement in cultism and weapon-related activities based on school type.

Discussion of Findings
This study explored the psychosocial drivers of cultism and weapon-related behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Anambra State, focusing on the impact of peer pressure, the desire for protection, the quest for power, and financial incentives. The findings revealed important insights into how these factors contribute to students' engagement in cultism and weapon use, and how these motivators differ across school types.

Psychosocial Motivators: Peer Pressure and the Quest for Power

The results showed that **peer pressure** and the **quest for power** were significant motivators of cultism and weapon-related behaviour among students. The strong role of peer influence confirms earlier findings that students often join cults due to the desire for social belonging, status, and influence within their peer groups (Okafor & Obiefuna, 2021; Nwikpo et al., 2024). This finding supports the assertions of Uzohuo (2022), who documented that peer networks act as conduits for introducing and sustaining cult-related activities among students. Peer pressure fosters an environment where conformity to group norms, often involving the possession and use of weapons—is both encouraged and rewarded, creating a spiral of deviant behaviours that undermine campus safety.

The quest for power, closely tied to the desire for respect and control over others, also emerged as a significant factor. Cult groups are often seen as providing a channel for asserting dominance and gaining respect in academic and social settings. This finding is strongly supported by previous research which reveals that many students view cultism as a pathway to influence, dominance, and fear-based leadership. This aligns with the findings of Uzohuo (2022), who noted that power dynamics within tertiary campuses often reflect hierarchical structures maintained through cult-related intimidation and control. The proliferation of violent cult groups like Black Axe and Vikings reinforces these dynamic, transforming campuses into battlegrounds for supremacy (Rotimi, 2015; Nwankwo, 2022).

These psychosocial drivers underline the importance of understanding the emotional and social needs that propel students towards deviant behaviours. The desire for protection and self-defense, another key factor, was found to be significant as well. The perception that cult membership offers protection against physical harm, victimization by lecturers, and threats from fellow students was strongly endorsed by respondents. This finding is consistent with the works of Nwikpo et al (2020); Nwikpo et al. (2022), who both reported that many students perceive cultism as a means of securing personal safety within the competitive and often hostile environment of university campuses. Qualitative evidence equally supports the idea that fear and victimization can push some students towards weaponization (Nwankwo, 2022).

Financial Incentives

While financial incentives were identified as a key motivator for joining cult groups, the results indicate that they were less influential than psychological and social factors. The items related to financial grants, material benefits, and the promise of social status associated with cult membership received moderate levels of agreement from participants, with a grand mean of 2.75,

above the criterion mean of 2.50. However, the impact of financial incentives was not as strong as the social and psychological motivators, such as the quest for power or the need for protection. The interaction between financial incentives and psychological needs, such as the desire for self-worth, pride, and social status, appears to be a significant factor in motivating students toward cultism. This aligns with earlier studies that argue that while financial rewards play a role, the social and psychological benefits derived from cult membership are likely to be more compelling (Umar, 2017; Okeke, 2023).

Differences Across School Types

A particularly important finding in this study was the differences in motivators across various types of tertiary institutions, public universities, private universities, and polytechnics. Significant variations were observed in how students from these institutions perceived the impact of peer pressure, the quest for power, and financial incentives. Public universities showed higher levels of peer pressure and a stronger desire for protection and power compared to their private counterparts. This may be attributed to the larger, more competitive environments in public universities, where students are often more vulnerable to social pressures and the need for dominance.

In contrast, students in private universities were less influenced by peer pressure but exhibited a greater reliance on the psychological aspect of financial incentives, perhaps due to the perception of more secure social and academic environments. Polytechnics, on the other hand, reflected moderate levels of all motivators, suggesting a more balanced influence of both psychological and financial factors in their involvement in cultism. These findings indicate that the type of institution plays a crucial role in shaping the psychosocial drivers of cultism and weapon-related behaviours, and suggest that tailored interventions should consider institutional contexts to be more effective.

The overall results of the study are consistent with the theoretical framework of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), which posits that behaviours are learned through observation and reinforcement within a social context. As students observe peers gain status, protection, or material benefits through cult affiliation, they may adopt similar behaviours, especially in environments lacking effective deterrents.

The findings also reflect the theory of differential association (Sutherland, 1947), which explains deviant behaviour as a function of social interactions. Students frequently exposed to pro-cult attitudes are more likely to internalize these views and normalize associated behaviours such as weapon carrying. The transition from secondary to tertiary levels, as observed by Nwikpo et al. (2020), reinforces this notion, showing a developmental trajectory in which weapon possession is first introduced in

adolescence and becomes more entrenched in adulthood.

Conclusion

This study investigated the psychosocial drivers of cultism and weapon-related behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Anambra State. The findings revealed that peer pressure, the quest for power, the desire for protection, and financial incentives significantly contribute to students' involvement in cultism and weapon use. Financial incentives were especially influential when combined with psychological and social needs, enhancing students' involvement in cult activities. Furthermore, significant differences were observed in the motivators across different types of tertiary institutions, with varying levels of influence across public, private, and polytechnic institutions. These findings underscore the complex interaction between psychological, social, and financial factors in driving cultism and weapon-related behaviour, and highlight the role of institutional type in shaping these dynamics.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have significant implications for policy, practice, and interventions aimed at reducing cultism and weapon-related behaviours in tertiary institutions in Anambra State and beyond. The strong role of peer pressure and the quest for power suggests that efforts to curb cultism should focus on fostering healthy peer networks and promoting leadership development among students. Additionally, enhancing the security and support systems within campuses could address students' perceived need for protection and reduce the allure of cult membership as a form of self-defense.

Moreover, the role of financial incentives underscores the importance of addressing the socio-economic challenges that may contribute to students' vulnerability to cult recruitment. Schools and government bodies could explore scholarship programs, financial aid, and career support mechanisms to mitigate the appeal of financial rewards within cult groups.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the psychosocial drivers of cultism and weapon-related behaviour, it is not without limitations. First, the study was limited to tertiary institutions in Anambra State, and the findings may not be generalizable to other regions. Second, the cross-sectional design of the study means that causal relationships cannot be firmly established. A longitudinal study could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term effects of these psychosocial motivators

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research could expand on this study by examining the effectiveness of interventions designed to mitigate the impact of peer pressure and the quest for power in campus cultism. Additionally, studies exploring the

role of the media, internet, and digital cultures in promoting or deterring cultism would be valuable. Further research should also investigate how institutional policies and campus environments can better support students' psychological needs and reduce their susceptibility to cult recruitment.

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