

An Appraisal of the Contributions and Challenges of Islāmic Institutions in Curbing Crime among Muslim Youth in Lagos State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The phenomenon of youth crime challenges societal development, prompting various institutions to keep addressing it. In Lagos State, Islāmic institutions have been tackling youth crime among Muslims. However, their efforts and challenges have not received thorough academic examination. Based on the concepts of *Maqāṣidu-s-Sharīʿah*, *Tazkiyyah*, and *Amr bil Maʿruf wa Nahy anil Munkar*, this paper appraised the contributions and challenges of Islāmic institutions in curbing crime among Muslim youth in Lagos State. The study adopted a qualitative research methodology. A content analysis was used to analyse the data sourced from semi-structured interviews with key informants, including Islāmic clerics/scholars and administrators in Lagos State, and relevant literature/documents. The study found that Islāmic institutions' contributions in combating crime among Muslim youth in Lagos State are experiencing a dichotomy. On the one hand, these institutions have proven to have the potential to substantially reduce the problem of youth crime among Muslims through avenues such as Islāmic moral education, welfare programmes, and sensitisation against involvement in criminal activities. On the other hand, this potential is affected by challenges such as the non-application of *Sharīʿah*, the poor attitudes of government towards Islāmic education, and Islāmophobia tendencies. The study recommended and concluded that, among other things, there is a serious need for a persistent

promotion of Islāmic education and the commonalities between Christianity and Islām, in the areas of moral values and criminal justice, so as to allow Islāmic institutions robustly and efficiently contribute to the development of Lagos State by fighting youth crime among Muslims.

Keywords: Crime, Islāmic Institutions, Lagos, Muslim Youth.

Introduction

The importance of youth to development cannot be over-emphasised, as they are at the productive age in society. However, the prevalence of youth crime is a phenomenon that challenges their productivity to societal development. While various societies and governments have continued to respond to this problem through various measures to ensure security, stability, peace, and development, the perpetration of crime persists, albeit to varying degrees of prevalence. Lagos State has historically been associated with a diverse range of crimes among youth, varying in nature, pattern, and severity (Olawoyin, 2005; Fourchard, 2006; Heap, 2012; Tade, 2013; Ellis, 2016; Oyenuga, 2017; Adetunji-Adeoye, 2022). Available records show that some young Muslims in Lagos State, like individuals from any group, are not immune to being involved in criminal activities. Many individuals associated with the criminal underworld in Lagos State's history have names suggesting an Islāmic identity. Examples include Bello Salami Jaguda, Isiaka Busari (Mighty Joe), Lasisi Lawal, Jimoh Ishola (Ejigbadero), and

Ramoni Abass (Hushpuppi) (Olukoju, 2018; Adetunji-Adeoye, 2022).

Although data on young Muslim women's involvement in crime is scarce, an example, in the context of prostitution, is Asabi Olowo Abe, whom Aderinto (2015:52) notes that, she “acquired the capital to start a successful textile business from prostitution, and was well known for her philanthropy within the Lagos Muslim community.” Sanni (2025 b:87-89) cited data from the 2020 3rd edition publication of the Lagos State Rapid Response Squad (RRS), pointing out that out of 99 suspected criminals and ex-convicts, 35 (representing 35.35%) have names suggesting an Islāmic identity. The involvement of Muslim youth in criminalities is however against the provision of their religion, which set punitive measure against crime. For example, in Qur'an 5:38 Allāh says:

وَالسَّارِقُ وَالسَّارِقَةُ فَاقْطَعُوا أَيْدِيَهُمَا جِزَاءً بِمَا كَسَبَا نَكَالًا مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

As for the thief, the male and the female, amputate their hands in recompense for what they committed as a deterrent (punishment) from Allāh. And Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise.

Indeed, the provision of Islām on punishments serve as cautionary, exemplary, rehabilitative, corrective, and retributive measures to combat crimes, as well as to preserve the religion of Islām, life, intellect, progeny, and properties (Chukkol, 2010: 542-544; Bambale, 2023:226-231). It has been argued that one of the reasons crime continues fester among Muslim youth in Nigeria, particularly in the southern region, is the non-application of *Sharī'ah* (Islāmic Law), especially on criminal matters (Makinde, 2018:307-308; Amoloye-Adebayo, 2018; Sanni, 2022b). Despite this challenge, various Islāmic institutions have continued to play significant roles on issues

related to public welfare and security. In Qur'an 5:2, 4:104,110 Allāh says: *وَتَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْبِرِّ وَالتَّقْوَىٰ وَلَا تَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ* . . . and cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression. And fear Allāh; indeed, Allāh is severe in penalty,” *وَأَلْتَمِسْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ* “And let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to (all that is) good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful,” and

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَلَوْ ءَامَنَ أَهْلُ الْأَكْتَابِ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُمْ مِّنْهُمْ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَأَكْثَرُهُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ

You are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allāh. If only the People of the Scripture had believed, it would have been better for them. Among them are believers, but most of them are defiantly disobedient.

The key point from the above verses is that the principle of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong can influence Muslims to act morally, even without *Sharī'ah* application in criminal matters in Lagos State. This moral guidance can lead to activities that promote security, stability, peace, and development. To this end, the roles, contributions, and challenges of Islāmic institutions in curbing youth crime among Muslims in Lagos State are assessed in this paper, through the programmes and activities of Islāmic educational institutions, organisation, associations, and bodies, as well as individual Islāmic scholars/clerics.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The paper adopts a qualitative research methodology and employs a content analysis to analyse data sourced from semi-structured interviews with informants including Islāmic clerics/scholars and administrators in Lagos State, and relevant literature and documents. The paper is based on three concepts of *Maqāshidu-s-Sharī'ah*, *Tazkiyah*, and *Amr bil Ma'ruf wa Nahy anil Munkar*. *Maqāshidu-s-Sharī'ah*

refers to the objectives or goals of Islāmic law, which include preserving faith, life, intellect, family, and wealth (Auda, 2008:4). *Tazkiyah* emphasises the importance of spiritual purification and character development, which according to Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawzī and Abū Ḥamīd Al-Ghazālī could be achieved through self-reflection, struggling against one's base desires, having trust in Allāh, *dhikr* and *'Ibādah* (remembrance and worship of Allāh), and keeping good company (Farid, 1993; Ihsan, Munir, and Irawan, 2021). *Amr bil Ma'ruf wa Nahy anil Munkar* refers to promoting good and preventing evil. These concepts help understand how Islāmic institutions curb crime among Muslim youth.

Literature Review

This literature review is conducted on two themes: the phenomenon of crime among youth and the roles of Islāmic institutions in addressing crime in Lagos State. Some works have discussed poor family structure, urbanisation, economic competition, and environmental influence as the causes of youth crime in Lagos, as well as government's measures to combating them, particularly in the colonial period (Olawoyin, 2005; Fourchard, 2006; Aderinto, 2007; and Heap, 2012). There are some other works which present the changes in the nature, pattern, and responses in the phenomenon of crime in Lagos State, particularly from the 1960s to 2000 (Osifodunrin, 2007; Ikuomola, Okunola, Heap, 2009; Nwalozie, 2011; and Olukoju, 2018). These works contend that armed robbery, 419 (fraud), drug trafficking, touting, and hooliganism are the major criminal activities that characterised Lagos State during this period, to which successive military governments responded to through various stringent measures and security facilities/outfits. While Ellis (2016) historicises the phenomenon of crime in Nigeria since the colonial period, Adetunji-Adeoye (2022) documents it from the 1970s, both

emphasising on economic crimes, such as fraud and cybercrime, drug trade, as well as smuggling and trafficking as the rampant crimes in Lagos State in the period after Nigeria's independence.

Ojo and Ojewale (2019) examine the dominance of various lethal and non-lethal crimes including cultism, theft, armed robbery, and so on, identifying urbanisation as the key cause for their prevalence in Nigeria, particularly in cities like Lagos State. Some works also focus on the phenomenon of 'Yahoo Yahoo' among youth in Nigeria, with the central argument that technology and spiritual elements are intensely shaping youth's culture in Nigeria in a degree that allows new forms of criminal tendencies antithetical to African cultural values (Tade, 2013; Oludare, 2016; Adejoh, 2019; and Oludayo, 2019). Beyond the prevalence of cybercrime, Ajaegbu (2012), Nwankwo and Okolie-Osemene (2016), and Ajaegbu (2012) argue that armed robbery, rape and murder are recurring crimes in Nigeria, with Lagos State as one of the major areas of occurrence, in the early 2000s. A major cause of this recurring problem as identified in these studies is the prevalence of unemployment and poverty among youth.

From an Islāmic perspective, Sidiq (2010) explores the causes and effects of unethical behaviours among Muslim youth and the broader society, arguing that a significant number of Muslim youth in the Ebute-Metta area of Lagos State are involved in adultery/fornication, gambling, consumption of *khamr* (intoxicants), and breach of public peace. Sanni (2025a), using Lagos State as an example, contends that the permissibility of certain forms of gambling contradicts the government's

responsibility to protect lives and property, which are key reasons gambling is prohibited and criminalised in Islām. It has also been argued that the lack of enforcement, prosecution, and commensurate punishment on criminals have allowed crimes to continually fester among youth in not only Lagos State, but Nigeria as a whole (Maisuna, 2020; Paramole, 2022b; and Sanni, 2022b).

Nevertheless, some studies have identified mosques, Islāmic educational institutions, and Islāmic organisations as avenues by which young Muslims are morally guided and revolutionised (Bidmos, 2009; Adeniyi, 2009; and AbdulKareem, 2020). Some scholars have further argued that religious teachings play a key role in creating a crime-free society because religious individuals are driven by their faith to maintain a high sense of morality (Odumuyiwa, 2001; Obasola and Obasola, 2014; Ayoola, 2016; Paramole & Sanni, 2021a; Sanni, 2022b). Paramole and Sanni (2021b) also contend that Islāmic socio-economic mechanisms like *waqf* (endowment) can help reduce crime. Although Oloyede (2015) notes that Islāmic societies in Nigeria aim to promote Islāmic morality and Muslims' welfare, his work and others do not thoroughly examine the contributions and challenges of Islāmic institutions in curbing crime among Muslim youth in Lagos State.

Roles of Islāmic Institutions in Curbing Crime among Youth in Lagos State

A. Islāmic Educational Institutions

To achieve a stable life, a harmonious society, and a secure hereafter, Muslims pursue Islāmic education,

which guides them in living a balanced, moral, and spiritual life. To achieve this goal, starting from the 18th century, Qur'ānic schools were founded in mosques, where the basics of Islām, including morals were taught (Gazali, 2005; Fanfuwa, 2018:57-62). By the end of the twentieth century, there had been numerous educational institutions, from primary to tertiary levels, fashioned along the traditional Arabic and Islāmic studies institutions (*Madrasahs*) and western-styled schools, owned by individuals and governments, where Islāmic education is acquired (Adetona, 2009). The point is that at all levels of Islāmic educational pursuits, Muslims, especially the young ones, are taught various aspects of Islāmic morals as contained in the Qur'ān and *Aḥādīth* (sayings) of the Prophet ﷺ.

At the tertiary level, there are courses dedicated to teaching of Islāmic ethics. At the Islāmic Studies Unit, Department of Religions, University of Lagos, there are Islāmic Ethics (ISS 126), Fiqh III: Islāmic Anti-Crime Formula (ISS 411), and *Sharī'ah* in the Contemporary World (ISS 417) (K. A. Adegoke, personal communication, July 19, 2024). Also, at the Islāmic Studies Unit, Department of Religions and Peace Studies, Lagos State University, Islāmic Ethics (ISS 107) is taught (M. A. Bello, personal communication, July 25, 2024). Bello added that lecturers teaching courses like Textual Study of the Qur'ān and *Aḥādīth* are expected to link some of the contents of these courses to contemporary issues, such as the incessant moral decadence among youth. According to Bello, works like Y. M. A. Ondigo's *Forty Hadiths on Poisonous Social Habits with Short Commentaries* and *Forty Hadiths on Good Moral*

Values are introduced to students, especially at the master’s level, to show how behaviours impact individuals and society. Similarly, numerous academic works including articles, undergraduate projects, masters’ dissertations, Ph.D. theses, journal articles, edited chapters, and books have been written to promote Islāmic morals among youth in Lagos State and other parts of Nigeria.

Some works on Islāmic ethics by lecturers/researchers affiliated to Islāmic Studies unit, University of Lagos, Akoka, and Lagos State University, Ojo.

Author	Title and Year of Publication	Affiliated Institutions
Late Professor M. Adetona	“Asceticism: A Panacea for Moral Decadence,” (1993); and “Murder: A Capital Crime in Islam” (1999) (Busari and Uthman, 2025).	Lagos State University, Ojo.
Professor L. Adedeji	“Perceived Effects of Religious Education on Moral Development in Nigerian Secondary Schools,” (2010); “Enhancing Societal Values through Islamic Ethics: The Nigerian Experience,” (2020).	University of Lagos Akoka
Professor K. Paramole	<i>Scholarly Insights on Islāmic Ethics</i> (2016); <i>Ethical Themes in the Traditions of An-Nawawi</i> (2021); Family ‘Bedrock to a Corrupt free Nation: Prophets Dawud and Sulayman Models,” (2022); “Crisis Management in Nigeria Government: An Islamic Perspective,” (2022); and “Islam and the Challenges of the 21st Century: Family Values and Social Etiquettes,” (2022).	Lagos State University, Ojo
Associate Professor K.	“Problem of Child Upbringing in Nigeria: An	University of Lagos Akoka

A. Adegoke	Islāmic Perspective,” (2000) ‘Ethical Teachings of the Qur’ān as a Vital Instrument of Social Harmony,” (2011); and “The Principle of <i>Sadd Adh-Dhara'i'</i> in the Sharī‘ah Framework: the Case of Zina and Sharqah” (2014).	
Dr. M. A. Bello	<i>A Concise Study of the Moral Teachings of Islam</i> (2021); “Islamic Ethical Perspective of Environmental Abuse in Lagos State Nigeria,” (2022).	Lagos State University, Ojo.
Dr. U. O. Sidiq	“Child Upbringing and Behavioural Modification of Youths in Islam: A Model for National Security,” (2014); “An Analytical Study of Contemporary Illicit Occurrences in Nigeria (1999-2012) in the Light of Qur’ānic Discourse on Fasad (Ph.D. Thesis, 2018); ‘An Appraisal of <i>Fasād</i> (Mischiefs) in the Qur’an: An Implication for 21st Century Society,” (2019).	Lagos State University, Ojo
Dr. M. O. Sanni	“Religiosity and Moralism: Siamese Twins for Security, Peace and Development in Nigeria” (2022); “An Interrogation of the Prescribed Punishments Mentioned in Qur’ān 5: 32-34 as a Panacea to Crime Prevalence in Nigeria,” (2022); “An Islamic Perspective on the Cost-Benefit Analysis of Gambling,” (2025); and “Historical Review of Youth’s Involvement in Crimes and the Application of Islāmic Justice System in Lagos State, Nigeria (1967-2023),” (Ph.D. Thesis, 2025).	Lagos State University, Ojo

The argument is that academic works on Islāmic ethical teachings have continually addressed various moral decadence and crime-related issues affecting society, particularly Lagos State. These works serve as a guide and character builder for readers, especially students. They also have the potential to help policymakers formulate moral and crime-related laws and policies.

A. *Daʿwah* Activities

One of the Islāmic associations that occupies a strategic position in *daʿwah* (Islāmic propagation) activities is the Federation of Muslim Women Association in Nigeria (FOMWAN). The chapter's lead counsellor stressed that to tackle the growing issue of drug abuse among youth – which the association sees as a major factor leading to other crimes – they established their counselling advocacy centre in Borno, Kano, and Lagos States in 2018 (G. O. Ayomaya, personal communication, June 10, 2024). In 2018, the Lagos chapter counselling centre commenced activities during its Train-the-Trainer (TOT) workshop, where papers were presented on the theme “Train-the-Trainers for Counselling Drug Addiction.” In 2020, it had its second seminar tagged: “Say No to Drug Abuse, Misuse and Addiction,” organised for secondary school children in Lagos State (FOMWAN, 2024). On every World Drug Day, June 26, the association usually make visitation to markets, mosques and schools, and other public places to organise programmes to enlighten the youth on the danger of drug addiction and abuse.

The counselling centre of the association also features supportive counselling, pre-marital, single mother and marriage counselling. In the area of marriage counselling sessions geared towards rebuilding of broken marital homes, as well as reuniting couples and families, the centre as of mid-2024 has recorded ten marriage/family counselling cases (G. O. Ayomaya, personal communication, June 10, 2024). The Lagos State chapter of the Association's 36th *Idul-Fitri* Family Day Celebrations lecture, themed “Parental Guidance: Building Collaborative Approaches for Sustainable Marital Relationship” and delivered by Professor Ishaq Oloyede, highlights the association's effort to combat some root causes of crime among Muslim youth in Lagos State. In her welcome address, the chapter's *Amīrah* (leader) said the theme of the event was necessary, “to address the social vices especially now that the society is seemingly crumbling, the role of family as the bedrock of the society cannot be underestimated” (S. O. Ajagbe, personal communication, June 10, 2024). Furthermore, as of mid-2024, the association has taken into custody, thirty prostitutes, out of which twenty have been reformed and successfully learnt various skills for self-employment (G. O. Ayomaya, personal communication, June 10, 2024). Additionally, the association has been collaborating with relevant government agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and sister bodies in the bid to combating crime especially among young Muslims. For example, on April 26, 2021, as a partner, the Chairman of National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) commended the association on its

efforts to rid society of drug abuse and other social vices.

The example of *Nadwat-ul-Ahli-Islam* of Nigeria (NADWAT) could also be cited. According to S. A. Bada, the *Imām* (leader) in charge of NADWAT's national headquarters, the association has invited security experts on various occasions to enlighten members, particularly youth, on the need to avoid criminal activities and how to identify prospective criminals in their surroundings (S. A. Bada, personal communication, July 23, 2024). For example, during the 1445 (2024) Ramaḍān period, of the the association founding members, Alhaji Hakeem Olawepo invited some security personnel to sensitise members of the association on the rudimentary of security consciousness in their immediate communities. Again, some of the association's missionaries have continued to engage top members of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), whose members are believed to be associated with violence, hooliganism, cultism, and other forms of criminality. The purpose of this engagement is to encourage them through preaching/admonition to shun social vices, and persuades the leaders of the union to empower the boys. The result has been that many of these 'area boys' have been employed in various government agencies at both state and local government levels, thus reducing the crime rate in Lagos Island (S. A. Bada, personal communication, July 23, 2024).

Another point to be noted is that most Islāmic associations and organisations in Lagos State have 'Youth Wing' where Muslim youth are trained to become good ambassadors of Islām. For example,

there is the *Majlis Khuddamul Ahmadiyyah* – MKA (Ahmadiyyah Muslim youth organisation), which has been actively responsible for campaigns against various forms of crime. According to the coordinating missionary of *Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at*, Lagos State, A. A. Olowonmi, the organisation campaign, usually tagged "Stop the Crime" has continued to be organised for various secondary schools and post-secondary schools in Lagos to sensitize young Muslim students against engaging in criminalities (A. A. Olowonmi, personal communication, July 6, 2024).

According to a former Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN) general secretary/coordinator for secondary school affair in Lagos State, Q. D. Okeshola, this sort of sensitisation is a major domain that the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN) has been embarking on through its series of *da'wah* activities– spiritual, academic, moral, and vocational (Q. D. Okeshola, personal communication, July 16, 2024). The point to be noted is that through these activities, MSSN has continued to produce generations of outstanding leaders in all spheres of life, while encouraging its members on certain minimum standards of national ethos.

B. Welfare Supports of Islāmic Organisations/Associations

In Islām, Allāh instituted various socio-economic mechanisms, including *zakāt* (obligatory tax), *ṣadaqah* (voluntary charity) *waqf* (endowments), *mirāth* (inheritance), and so on, to cater for people's welfare. They are a part of what is regarded as **الذرائع السد** – *Sadd Adh-Dharā'i'* (means to blocking things than can lead to evil) in the Islāmic legal system. In

Lagos State, numerous Muslim individuals and Islāmic organisations have been practicing these sustainable socio-economic mechanisms. Examples include the Zakāt and Sadaqah Foundation (ZSF), NASFAT Agency for Zakāt and Sadaqah (NAZAS), Lekki Muslim Ummah Zakat Committee (LEMUZAC), and FOMWAN. In the 2023 second batch beneficiaries of ZSF *zakāt* distribution, for example, ninety widows were supported with about ₦14.2 million of cash and equipment, and forty orphans and indigent Muslims got ₦6.5 million for educational support, in Lagos State (Guardian, 2023). Similarly, between 2014 and 2022, NAZAS collected and distributed not less than ₦450 million cash and equipment to more than 50,000 less privileged families across Nigeria (Abubakar, 2022). Also, between 2019 and 2023, LEMUZAC distributed ₦225 million to 1,052 *zakāt* beneficiaries (Busari, 2023). Between April 2018 and January 2021, FOMWAN, Lagos chapter, disbursed about ₦253 million empowerment scheme donations to 21 individuals across the state for orphan scholarships and widow empowerment.

While voluntary material charity (*ṣadaqah*) and *waqf* have continually been used by numerous living individuals to assist the less privileged, the wealthy deceased through the institution of *mirāth* and *waṣiyyah* also contribute to the welfare of the living. Indeed, aside the multitude of private practices of *mirāth* among Muslims in Lagos State, a study found that the Islāmic institution of inheritance by the Lagos Independent *Sharī'ah* Panel, the TMC Committee on *mīrāth*, among other Islāmic organisations and committees, is a vibrant and

effective mode of equitable wealth distribution for poverty alleviation, economic independence and empowerment, especially for Muslim women (Busari, 2023). The point is that some Islāmic organisations in Lagos State have been administering various Islāmic socio-economic mechanisms for the benefit of particularly Muslims in the areas of job and wealth creation for the youth, widows, unemployed, and educational support for the less privileged and the orphans who would have probably been influenced to commit crime in the name of poverty or unemployment.

C. Individual Islāmic Clerics/Scholars

Islāmic clerics and scholars have also been using various platforms including the mosque; open air and public lectures; wedding and naming ceremonies; conferences, seminars and workshops; and so on, to admonish their audience and congregations on Islāmic ethics. For example, in social occasions and gatherings, such as naming ceremony, the admonition of Luqmān to his son as contained in Qur'ān 31:13-19, is often used to call the attention of parents and well-wishers to the importance of child upbringing in the society. Individual Islāmic scholars and clerics have also taken it as a responsibility to take *da'wah* activities to areas susceptible to criminalities. For example, according to the assistant Imām of the University of Lagos Central Mosque, Imām Bashīr, he founded Hiyadullahi Foundation in February 2023 in order “to organise and take Islāmic lectures to the area boys in selected areas where they thrive like Mushin (A. Bashīr, personal communication, May 9, 2024).

Furthermore, many Islāmic clerics (*Alfas*), especially those who are associated with *Jalabi* (spiritual consultation) in Yorubaland, are often consulted to help exorcise individuals with criminal tendencies (Bello, 2009; Jimoh, 2018; Sanni, 2020) such as drug addiction, compulsive gambling, pilfering, armed robbery, hooliganism, cultism, and other social vices. In response to the consultation and request of their clientele, the *Alfas* often recite or chant various verses of the Qur’ān and some other supplications to attract Allāh’s healing on the criminals. In other cases, methods like *hantu* (a written prayer formula to be consumed or used in bathing), *asejẹ* (a concoction), *oṣẹ dudu* (black or magic soap), and *gberẹ* (incision) are used to purge the spirit of criminality from an individual’s mind. Importantly, some methods used by these *Alfas* have been effective in eliminating social vices from individuals they have treated (‘Isā Konigbagbe, personal communication, July 6, 2024). This explains why many people still believe in and seek out these *Alfas* for their spiritual guidance and practical help.

Challenges Facing Islāmic Institutions in Curbing Crime among Muslim Youth in Lagos State

1. Secularism, Multi-Religious State, and non-Application of the *Sharī’ah*

Secularism, a concept that indicates repugnance of state affairs in reference to God, and which seeks to pursue religious neutrality, is often erroneously used to argue against the provisions of Islām in fighting crime in Lagos State. However, it has been argued that Lagos State is not entirely secular. Instead, it is described as a "quasi-religious state" (Busari and Adegoke, 2023) and a multi-religious society. This

poses challenges to the application of Islāmic criminal law in addressing crime prevalence among Muslim youth (Sanni, 2022b). For instance, following reports of the scheduled inauguration of a *Sharī’ah* Court in Oyo State on January 11, 2025, some Nigerians expressed their disapproval, leading to the event's suspension (Afolabi, 2024). The development sparked a wave of negative comments on various media platforms, including: “We must resist it. Nigeria is a secular country with its laws and constitution. Those who want Sharia law and court can go to Afghanistan.” “Once you hear ‘Sharia law’, just run for your life. They will use it to kill, imprison, cut off people's limbs, torture, and institutionalise oppression. The poor and less privileged will be the biggest victims. We must speak out against it” (Okeke, 2024).

2. Government’s Poor Attitude towards Islāmic Education

There is also the challenge of government’s unwelcoming attitude towards Islāmic Studies. As noted by Bidmos (2020:57), “in Nigeria, education and religion have been dichotomised, and the dichotomisation has had its toll on the practice of Islām as several attempts have been mustered to ostracise Islāmic Studies from the general education system in the country.” This situation is increasingly eroding the value of Islāmic education in curbing criminal tendencies among Muslim youth in the state. According to the President of the Muslim Teachers’ Association of Nigeria (MUTAN), Lagos State chapter, F. Oladejo, there has been paucity of Islāmic Studies teacher employed in Lagos State schools, and the content of the curriculum of this

subject is said to be supervised largely by non-Muslim educationists (F. Oladejo, personal communication, June 10, 2024). In this type of situation, hardly can Islāmic morals be meaningfully taught and instilled in Muslim children. When



children are not morally brought up, moral decadence and social vices become rife in the state, the consequences of

which become detrimental to the stability of the state.

3. Faulty Family Structure

Faulty family structure including irresponsible parenting, poor child upbringing, broken homes, and bearing of multiple children un-catered for is also challenging to the roles of Islāmic institutions in Lagos State. For example, in an interview with four young boys at a pedestrian bridge in Oshodi, two 15-year-old boys, Abdul-Azīz and Mubārak, cited their parents' separation and lack of care as the reason for leaving home to hustle for survival. However, observation revealed that despite claiming to work as load carriers, they were substance abusers.

Fig. 1. Four young boys smoking on a pedestrian bridge at Oshodi. **Source:** Author.

As aptly put by Paramole (2022a:42) “whenever parents pay lackadaisical or apathetic attitudes to (their) responsibilities, the society will pay for it. It is believed that the social vices from children are apparent to lack of parental care, understanding, love

and proper upbringing.” Recently, some parents are increasingly abetting their children in the commission of crime such as ‘yahoo yahoo,’ which has led to the emergence of appellate like ‘association of yahoo mothers’ (Ramon, 2019). Some parents are also too busy to oversee the upbringing of their wards, and thus making it difficult for the efforts of Islāmic institutions to be felt in purging Lagos State off social vices.

4. Unscrupulous Clerics

Some clerics, known as *Alfa onijalabi* (spiritual consultants), offer ritual services that cater to criminal acts. Their practices are often fetish-like and syncretic, similar to those of a *babalawo* (herbalist). It is common to read in the media captions like: “Muslim Cleric Arrested with Human Parts in Lagos,” “I Use Human Skull for Internet Fraud Ritual, Boost Traders’ Sales, Says Imam,” “Police Nab Islamic Cleric, Community Chief, Eight other Suspected Ritualists in Lagos,” and so on. Evidently, in public spaces and occasions, basically because of financial insecurity, young *Alfas* are increasingly and erroneously promoting *Jalabi*, and somewhat given credence to some criminal activities especially ‘yahoo yahoo.’ As noted by Bello (2009:78-79):

Jalb has been the major vocation of traditional Muslim scholars apart from teaching and preaching, and it conferred on them over the ages both societal relevance and assured means of sustenance . . . Other categories of scholars who get involved in this vocation are graduates of Arabic schools who are forced to take spiritual consultancy for economic survival due to the fact that the system which produced them did not provide any means of gainful employment for them.

Indeed, nowadays, some *Jalabi* practitioners, to use the words of Yahaya, “now operate from cozy environment with posh cars, expensive wears, gold and luxurious wrist watches, sophisticated shoes, and other accessories, giving semblance of a dignified profession” (2020:420). With this identity, these *Alfas* might attract patronage, earning material rewards from wealthy individuals and potential crime figures, which could inadvertently contribute to crimes the persistence and prevalence of crime.

5. Disunity among the Muslims

In Nigeria, theological divisions and conflicts between *Sūfi/Tariqah* orders and *Ahlus-Sunnah/Salafi* groups, as well as other societies (Sanni, 2016; Akintola, 2018) have made it hard for Muslims to unite in promoting Islāmic values, culture, and morals. It is worthy to note that the most prominent organisation for Muslim youth in Nigeria (MSSN) is not free from this polarisation. Sanni (2020) in a study titled “A Study of the Theological Polarisation of Muslim Students’ Society of Nigeria (MSSN), UNILAG Branch” found that Muslim students in UNILAG lack integration as a result of ideological differences, the consequence of which has robbed many Muslim students the benefits embedded in the society. The argument is that the disunity among Muslims in Lagos State adversely affects Islāmic institutions to unite in providing a comprehensive, deliberate, and focus-driven solutions as instituted by Islām to addressing the phenomenon of crime among Muslim youth.

6. Islāmophobia Tendencies

Islāmophobia, an irrational fear of, hostility towards, or prejudice against the religion of Islām or Muslims in general, has become a global phenomenon (Iftikhar, 2021). The practice of *Sharīʿah*, the use of *ḥijāb* (female veil), and an erroneous depiction of *jihād* (striving in the cause/path of Allāh) have been the major causes of prejudice against Islām in the New World Order (Kissinger, 2014; Abubakar, 2015’ Abubakar, 2016; and Akintola, 2018). The global spread of misinformation about these features of Islām is increasingly portrayed in bad light in the mass media, especially by the non-Muslims. According to Akintola “the unsettled knotty issues like *Sharīʿah* and the *ḥijāb* question have further confirmed that the so-called peaceful coexistence in the Southwest is either a mirage or a peace of graveyard” (2018:326). In a society with widespread Islāmophobia, Islāmic institutions will struggle to operate fully and effectively, especially in curbing crime among Muslim youth.

Findings

The general finding of the paper is that Islāmic institutions experience a dichotomy in combating and preventing crime among Muslim youth in Lagos State. On the one hand, Islāmic institutions have made contributions to preventing crime among Muslim youth in the State through the teaching of Islāmic moral education, *daʿwah* activities, welfare programmes. For instance, ZSF’s ₦14.2 million and ₦6.5 million, NAZAS’s ₦450 million, LEMUZAC’s ₦225 million, and FOMWAN’s ₦253 million, distributed to vulnerable people between 2018 and 2023, are strides towards preventing Muslim youth from engaging in crime. These initiatives

demonstrate the positive impact of Islāmic institutions in promoting peace and security. By providing educational support and empowerment programmes, these organisations have helped keep Muslim youth on a positive path, reducing the likelihood of involvement in criminal activities. Their efforts showcase the potential of Islāmic institutions in fostering social cohesion and community development.

Similarly, various Muslim organisations in Lagos State, such as NADWAT, FOMWAN, and MSSN, have demonstrated the potential of Islāmic institutions in combating crime among Muslim youth through numerous public lectures, counselling, and sensitisation programmes. For instance, FOMWAN's rehabilitation of thirty prostitutes, with twenty successfully reformed and acquired skills for self-employment, showcases this potential. Also, NADWAT have showcased the potential of Islāmic institutions in combating crime among youth through impactful initiatives. For instance, they engaged with groups like the NURTW to promote moral values and discourage social vices, while also collaborating with government agencies to provide opportunities for at-risk youth, thereby contributing to a safer community.

However, some challenges have hindered the effectiveness of Islāmic institutions in preventing and combating crime among Muslim youth in Lagos State. These challenges include inadequate support for Islāmic education in government schools and parents' neglect of their children. For instance, cases like Mubarak and Abdul-Aziz, who were abandoned by their parents, highlight the difficulties in instilling

moral education that prevents children from engaging in criminal activities. Furthermore, theological dissensions among Muslim scholars hinder Islāmic institutions' ability to present a united front against crime, making it challenging to effectively combat factors that contribute to crime among youth in Lagos State.

Recommendations and Conclusion

1. **Increased support for Islamic education:** The Lagos State government should make deliberate efforts to support Islamic education, spreading and instilling Islamic values in Muslim children and educating non-Muslims, policymakers, and the public about Islam's moral values.
2. **Collaboration and government support:** The government should provide support to Islāmic institutions, enabling them to effectively combat crime and promote community development.
3. **Islāmic institutions' continued role:** Islāmic institutions should continue to play an active role in preventing and combating crimes among Muslim youth in Lagos State through *da'wah*, teaching, writings and publications, sensitisation, counselling, and welfare programmes.
4. **Promoting commonalities and Islāmic values:** Religious scholars, clerics, political actors, and the media should promote the commonalities between Muslims, Christians, and traditional believers, highlighting Islām's moral values and limiting Islāmophobia.

5. **Managing differences:** Islāmic organisations and Muslim leaders should work to manage their differences, focusing on the core principles and universal values of Islām that unite Muslims worldwide.
6. **Eliminating unscrupulous elements:** With government support, Islāmic institutions should eliminate unscrupulous elements that contradict Islām's true teachings.

In conclusion, by implementing these recommendations, Islāmic institutions can more effectively prevent and combat crime among Muslims, leading to a safer and more secure society. This, in turn, can enhance the security and development of Lagos State, making it a model for other states, societies, communities, and religions grappling with youth criminality. By demonstrating the effectiveness of Islāmic institutions in preventing and combating crime, this study highlights the need to support and empower these institutions, ultimately reducing crime rates and fostering a safer environment for all.

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