

Economic hardship, youth grievances, and perceived radicalization vulnerability: implications for counseling in Nigeria

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ABSTRAK

Nigeria menghadapi tantangan sosial ekonomi yang berkelanjutan, yang ditandai oleh pengangguran, inflasi, kemiskinan, dan terbatasnya peluang ekonomi, yang dapat berkontribusi terhadap keluhan kaum muda dan kerentanan sosial yang lebih luas. Penelitian ini mengkaji persepsi responden mengenai kesulitan ekonomi, keluhan kaum muda, kerentanan terhadap radikalisasi, serta potensi peran konseling dan pemberdayaan ekonomi terintegrasi dalam mendukung resiliensi kaum muda di Nigeria. Penelitian menggunakan desain survei kuantitatif *cross-sectional* dengan melibatkan 300 responden. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan kuesioner terstruktur dan dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif serta *independent-samples t-test*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa responden secara umum memandang pengangguran, kemiskinan, inflasi, keterbatasan peluang karier, dan ketidakpercayaan terhadap institusi sebagai faktor yang relevan dengan keluhan dan kerentanan kaum muda. Responden juga menunjukkan persepsi positif terhadap konseling dan dukungan psikologis untuk regulasi emosi, coping, pemecahan masalah, dan resiliensi. Perbedaan gender yang signifikan ditemukan pada beberapa dimensi ekonomi dan konseling, meskipun tidak konsisten pada seluruh indikator. Secara keseluruhan, temuan menunjukkan relevansi integrasi konseling dan dukungan psikologis dengan program pemberdayaan ekonomi dalam upaya memperkuat resiliensi kaum muda di Nigeria.

Kata Kunci: konseling; kesulitan ekonomi; pemberdayaan ekonomi; kerentanan terhadap radikalisasi; keluhan kaum muda

ABSTRACT

Nigeria faces persistent socioeconomic challenges characterized by unemployment, inflation, poverty, and limited economic opportunities, which may contribute to youth grievances and broader social vulnerability. This study examined respondents' perceptions of economic hardship, youth grievances, vulnerability to radicalization, and the potential role of counseling and integrated economic empowerment in supporting youth resilience in Nigeria. A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was employed involving 300 respondents. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and independent-samples *t*-tests. The findings indicated that respondents generally perceived unemployment, poverty, inflation, limited career opportunities, and institutional distrust as relevant to youth grievances and vulnerability. Respondents also expressed favorable perceptions of counseling and psychological support for emotional regulation, coping, problem-solving, and resilience. Significant gender differences were identified on selected economic and counseling-related dimensions, although differences were not consistent across all items. Overall, the findings highlight the perceived relevance of integrating counseling and psychological support with economic empowerment initiatives as part of broader efforts to strengthen youth resilience in Nigeria.

Keywords: counseling; economic hardship; economic empowerment; radicalization vulnerability; youth grievances

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1. INTRODUCTION

Economic hardship remains a major source of social instability, particularly in contexts characterized by unemployment, inflation, poverty, and limited opportunities for social mobility. Material deprivation rarely operates in isolation; rather, it interacts with psychological and structural vulnerabilities that may increase individuals' receptiveness to extremist narratives (Shafieioun & Haq, 2023). Young people are particularly exposed to these pressures because restricted access to employment, education, and economic advancement can generate frustration, disillusionment, and a diminished sense of social belonging. Across African contexts, persistent unemployment has also been associated with youth grievances and increased vulnerability to conflict and social instability (Chigudu, 2025). These conditions highlight the importance of examining not only the structural dimensions of economic hardship but also the psychological responses that may emerge from prolonged experiences of deprivation.

Relative deprivation provides a useful perspective for understanding how economic difficulties may translate into grievances. Feelings of deprivation are shaped not only by absolute material conditions but also by perceptions of inequality and unequal access to social and economic resources. In Nigeria, multidimensional poverty continues to affect social well-being and perceptions of socioeconomic stability (Akoji & Abaji, 2025). When individuals perceive that opportunities, resources, or recognition are distributed unfairly, dissatisfaction may develop into distrust toward institutions and broader social structures. In such environments, marginalized individuals may become more receptive to narratives that offer simplified explanations for social problems, alternative forms of identity, material incentives, or a sense of belonging.

The risks associated with economic hardship may be intensified by structural marginalization, limited employment opportunities, unequal access to resources, and declining confidence in public institutions. These conditions can reduce legitimate avenues through which grievances are expressed or resolved and may therefore increase vulnerability to alternative or extremist forms of mobilization. Shafieioun and Haq (2023) emphasize that radicalization should be understood within a broader societal context in which structural and psychological pressures interact. In Nigeria, vulnerability to violent extremism has likewise been associated with combinations of socioeconomic insecurity, community-level risk factors, and broader conditions of instability (Ikpe et al., 2023). Consequently, economic hardship should not be interpreted as an isolated or deterministic cause of radicalization, but as one component within a wider set of social and psychological vulnerabilities.

Existing scholarship in Nigeria has extensively examined political violence, insecurity, poverty, and terrorism from structural and political perspectives. Okonkwo and Akanji (2025), for example, discuss political violence in relation to broader sociopolitical realities, while Solomon (2026) approaches terrorism and the Boko Haram insurgency through a political-economy perspective. Similarly, Ikpe et al. (2023) examine vulnerability to violent extremism within communities in northeastern Nigeria, emphasizing contextual and regional risk factors. These studies provide important explanations of the structural environment surrounding insecurity and radicalization. However, comparatively less attention has been directed toward how individuals perceive the psychological consequences of economic hardship and the possible role of counseling and resilience-oriented support in responding to such vulnerabilities. This creates an important space for counseling research, particularly in understanding how psychological support may complement economic and social interventions rather than operate independently from them.

Counseling may be particularly relevant in situations where prolonged economic stress contributes to frustration, emotional distress, distrust, and difficulties in coping with social pressure. Previous research within the Nigerian context has highlighted the relevance of psychological resources to adolescent well-being (Enwere & Iloakasia, 2024) and the broader role of counseling in responding to psychosocial challenges (Iloakasia, 2024a). Counseling approaches may assist individuals in processing grievances, strengthening emotional regulation, reframing stressful experiences, and developing constructive coping strategies. The contribution of counselors to resilience-oriented community initiatives has also been emphasized in previous Nigerian research (Iloakasia, 2024b). Within the context of radicalization prevention, such approaches are better understood as components of broader resilience-building efforts rather than substitutes for economic development or institutional reform. This perspective is consistent with the argument that responses to radicalization vulnerability require attention to both societal conditions and psychological processes (Shafieioun & Haq, 2023). Integrating counseling support with economic empowerment may therefore provide a more comprehensive framework for addressing the interconnected economic and psychological pressures experienced by vulnerable populations.

Despite the growing recognition of socioeconomic and psychological factors in youth vulnerability, an important gap remains in understanding how these issues are perceived within the Nigerian context, particularly regarding the potential contribution of counseling to resilience and radicalization prevention. Much of the existing literature emphasizes structural causes, political insecurity, or community-level vulnerability, whereas the perceived role of counseling in helping individuals manage frustration and cope with economic

pressure remains less clearly explored. The present study addresses this gap through a quantitative cross-sectional survey examining respondents' perceptions of economic hardship, youth grievances, vulnerability to radicalization, counseling support, and integrated economic empowerment. Specifically, the study examines how respondents perceive the contribution of economic hardship to youth grievances and vulnerability to radicalization, how they perceive the potential role of structured counseling approaches in supporting frustration tolerance among economically vulnerable youths, and how they view the integration of counseling services into economic empowerment programs for sustainable youth resilience. In addition, the study examines whether perceptions across these dimensions differ between male and female respondents. Accordingly, the investigation is guided by questions concerning the extent to which respondents associate economic hardship with youth grievances and radicalization vulnerability, their perceptions of counseling as a means of supporting frustration tolerance, their views regarding the integration of counseling with economic empowerment initiatives, and the presence of gender-based differences in these perceptions.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was employed to examine respondents' perceptions of economic hardship, youth grievances, vulnerability to radicalization, counseling support, and the integration of counseling into economic empowerment initiatives in Nigeria. A total of 300 respondents participated in the study. The respondents represented individuals within the Nigerian context who were familiar with or affected by issues related to economic hardship, youth vulnerability, and the broader dynamics associated with radicalization.

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising statements organized according to the major dimensions examined in the study. The questionnaire assessed respondents' level of agreement with statements concerning economic hardship and youth grievances, the perceived role of counseling in supporting frustration tolerance and psychological resilience, and the integration of counseling services into economic empowerment programs. The questionnaire was administered uniformly to the participating respondents to ensure consistency in the data collection process.

Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were employed in the data analysis. Respondents' demographic characteristics were summarized using frequencies and percentages. Responses to the questionnaire items were analyzed using mean scores, standard deviations, and standard errors of the mean (SEM) to describe patterns of agreement across the study dimensions. Independent-samples *t*-tests were subsequently conducted to examine whether statistically significant differences existed between male and female respondents in their perceptions of the issues investigated.

Prior to interpreting each independent-samples *t*-test, Levene's test for equality of variances was examined at a significance level of .05. When Levene's test was not statistically significant ($p > .05$), the equal-variances-assumed result was interpreted; when the test was statistically significant ($p < .05$), the equal-variances-not-assumed result was considered. Statistical significance for the gender comparisons was evaluated at $p < .05$.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Respondent Characteristics

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	19	6.3	6.3	6.3
	Female	281	93.7	93.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Table 1 presents the gender distribution of the 300 respondents. Female respondents constituted the substantial majority of the sample, accounting for 93.7% ($n = 281$), while male respondents represented 6.3% ($n = 19$). Thus, the sample was predominantly female, an important characteristic to consider when interpreting subsequent gender-based comparisons.

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-25 years	13	4.3	4.3	4.3
	26-38 years	273	91.0	91.0	95.3
	39-45 years	14	4.7	4.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 presents the age distribution of the respondents. Most participants were aged 26–38 years, representing 91.0% ($n = 273$) of the total sample. Respondents aged 18–25 years accounted for 4.3% ($n = 13$),

while those aged 39–45 years represented 4.7% ($n = 14$). The age distribution therefore indicates that the sample was highly concentrated within the 26–38-year age category.

B. *Perceptions of Economic Hardship and Youth Grievances*

Table 3. Group Statistics Showing Mean and Standard Deviation for Gender Responses on Economic Hardship and Youth Grievances

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
High unemployment significantly increases youth grievances.	Male	19	4.00	.000	.000
	Female	281	3.37	.615	.037
Extreme poverty drives youth vulnerability in Nigeria.	Male	19	3.84	.375	.086
	Female	281	3.31	.463	.028
Financial struggles make youths feel abandoned by government.	Male	19	3.37	.496	.114
	Female	281	3.09	.778	.046
Basic survival needs are difficult for local youths.	Male	19	3.37	.761	.175
	Female	281	3.04	.731	.044
Inflation worsens economic frustration among adolescents.	Male	19	3.84	.375	.086
	Female	281	3.46	.499	.030
Economic hardships push vulnerable youths toward desperation.	Male	19	3.47	.513	.118
	Female	281	3.38	.616	.037
Young citizens lose trust in public institutions.	Male	19	4.00	.000	.000
	Female	281	3.66	.497	.030
Financial instability limits access to career opportunities.	Male	19	3.84	.375	.086
	Female	281	3.19	.611	.036
Unmet financial expectations create anger among youths.	Male	19	4.00	.000	.000
	Female	281	3.55	.499	.030
Economic deprivation acts as a catalyst for unrest.	Male	19	3.84	.375	.086
	Female	281	3.46	.520	.031

Table 3 presents the descriptive responses of male and female participants regarding economic hardship and youth grievances. Mean scores for both groups were generally above the midpoint of the response scale, indicating overall agreement with the statements presented. Among male respondents, the highest mean scores ($M = 4.00$) were recorded for statements concerning unemployment and youth grievances, declining trust in public institutions, and unmet financial expectations. Female respondents also reported relatively high levels of agreement, particularly regarding declining trust in public institutions ($M = 3.66$), unmet financial expectations ($M = 3.55$), inflation-related frustration ($M = 3.46$), and economic deprivation as a catalyst for unrest ($M = 3.46$).

Other dimensions also received generally positive responses. For example, male respondents reported mean scores of 3.84 for extreme poverty, inflation-related frustration, limited career opportunities, and economic deprivation as a catalyst for unrest, while female mean scores across the items ranged from 3.04 to 3.66. Overall, the descriptive findings indicate that respondents generally perceived economic pressures as relevant to the development of youth grievances, institutional distrust, frustration, and broader social vulnerability.

Table 4. Independent Samples T-Test Analysis of Gender Differences on Economic Hardship and Youth Grievances

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
High unemployment significantly increases youth grievances.	Equal variances assumed	88.963	.000	4.435	298	.000	.626	.141	.348	.904
	Equal variances not assumed			17.083	280.000	.000	.626	.037	.554	.699
Extreme poverty drives youth vulnerability in Nigeria.	Equal variances assumed	13.997	.000	4.902	298	.000	.532	.109	.319	.746
	Equal variances not assumed			5.898	21.898	.000	.532	.090	.345	.720

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Financial struggles make youths feel abandoned by government.	Equal variances assumed	.825	.365	1.523	298	.129	.276	.181	-.081	.632
	Equal variances not assumed			2.246	24.459	.034	.276	.123	.023	.529
Basic survival needs are difficult for local youths.	Equal variances assumed	2.076	.151	1.916	298	.056	.333	.174	-.009	.675
	Equal variances not assumed			1.850	20.312	.079	.333	.180	-.042	.708
Inflation worsens economic frustration among adolescents.	Equal variances assumed	180.362	.000	3.248	298	.001	.379	.117	.150	.609
	Equal variances not assumed			4.172	22.566	.000	.379	.091	.191	.568
Economic hardships push vulnerable youths toward desperation.	Equal variances assumed	1.086	.298	.642	298	.521	.093	.145	-.192	.378
	Equal variances not assumed			.754	21.668	.459	.093	.123	-.163	.349
Young citizens lose trust in public institutions.	Equal variances assumed	105.741	.000	2.991	298	.003	.342	.114	.117	.566
	Equal variances not assumed			11.520	280.000	.000	.342	.030	.283	.400
Financial instability limits access to career opportunities.	Equal variances assumed	6.091	.014	4.628	298	.000	.657	.142	.378	.936
	Equal variances not assumed			7.039	24.994	.000	.657	.093	.465	.849
Unmet financial expectations create anger among youths.	Equal variances assumed	2025.375	.000	3.945	298	.000	.452	.115	.227	.677
	Equal variances not assumed			15.196	280.000	.000	.452	.030	.393	.511
Economic deprivation acts as a catalyst for unrest.	Equal variances assumed	69.563	.000	3.183	298	.002	.387	.121	.148	.626
	Equal variances not assumed			4.231	22.969	.000	.387	.091	.198	.576

Table 4 presents the independent-samples *t*-test results examining gender differences in perceptions of economic hardship and youth grievances. The interpretation of the *t*-test results was based on Levene's test for equality of variances. Where Levene's test was statistically significant, the equal-variances-not-assumed result was considered; otherwise, the equal-variances-assumed result was interpreted.

Statistically significant gender differences were observed for perceptions concerning high unemployment, extreme poverty, inflation-related frustration, declining trust in public institutions, limitations in career opportunities, unmet financial expectations, and economic deprivation as a catalyst for unrest ($p <$

.05). For these items, male respondents generally reported higher mean levels of agreement than female respondents.

In contrast, no statistically significant gender differences were found for perceptions that financial struggles cause youths to feel abandoned by government ($p = .129$), that basic survival needs are difficult for local youths ($p = .056$), or that economic hardship pushes vulnerable youths toward desperation ($p = .521$). These findings indicate that gender differences occurred on several dimensions of economic pressure and youth grievances, although the differences were not consistent across all items.

C. *Perceptions of Counseling and Frustration Tolerance*

Table 5. Group Statistics Showing Gender Responses on Counseling Support and Frustration Tolerance

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Therapy effectively improves emotional regulation among distressed youths.	Male	19	3.84	.375	.086
	Female	281	3.28	.449	.027
Counseling sessions help young people manage daily frustrations.	Male	19	3.47	.513	.118
	Female	281	3.44	.565	.034
Narrative therapy assists youths in reframing experiences.	Male	19	3.47	.513	.118
	Female	281	3.52	.522	.031
Psychological interventions reduce susceptibility to extremist narratives.	Male	19	3.53	.513	.118
	Female	281	3.31	.671	.040
Professional guidance builds resilience against peer pressure.	Male	19	3.37	.761	.175
	Female	281	3.12	.893	.053
Counseling programs enhance critical thinking during crises.	Male	19	3.47	.513	.118
	Female	281	3.49	.568	.034
Targeted therapy lowers aggressive tendencies in adolescents.	Male	19	3.84	.375	.086
	Female	281	3.49	.501	.030
Safe therapeutic spaces help youths process grievances.	Male	19	4.00	.000	.000
	Female	281	3.57	.606	.036
Mental health support improves problem-solving abilities.	Male	19	3.84	.375	.086
	Female	281	3.21	.649	.039
Coping strategies prevent young people from destructive choices.	Male	19	3.47	.513	.118
	Female	281	3.23	.625	.037

Table 5 presents male and female respondents' perceptions of counseling-related approaches and their potential role in supporting frustration tolerance and psychological resilience. Mean scores across both groups were generally above the midpoint of the response scale, indicating favorable perceptions of counseling and psychological support.

Among male respondents, particularly high levels of agreement were reported for safe therapeutic spaces as a means of helping youths process grievances ($M = 4.00$), therapy for emotional regulation ($M = 3.84$), targeted therapy for reducing aggressive tendencies ($M = 3.84$), and mental health support for improving problem-solving abilities ($M = 3.84$). Male respondents also expressed positive perceptions regarding narrative therapy, psychological interventions, counseling programs, and coping strategies.

Female respondents similarly expressed favorable perceptions of several counseling-related approaches. The highest female mean was recorded for safe therapeutic spaces ($M = 3.57$), followed by narrative therapy for reframing experiences ($M = 3.52$), counseling programs for enhancing critical thinking during crises ($M = 3.49$), and targeted therapy for aggressive tendencies ($M = 3.49$). Counseling sessions for managing daily frustration also received a relatively high mean score ($M = 3.44$).

Overall, the descriptive results suggest that respondents generally viewed counseling, therapeutic support, and psychological resilience strategies positively as potential resources for coping with frustration, processing grievances, and responding constructively to socioeconomic pressures.

Table 6. Independent-Samples T-Test Analysis of Gender Differences in Perceptions of Counseling Support and Frustration Tolerance

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df				Lower	Upper
Therapy effectively improves emotional regulation among distressed youths.	Equal variances assumed	7.852	.005	5.358	298	.000	.565	.105	.357	.772
	Equal variances not assumed			6.271	21.646	.000	.565	.090	.378	.751

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower Upper		
Counseling sessions help young people manage daily frustrations.	Equal variances assumed	.655	.419	.243	298	.808	.032	.133	-.230	.294	
	Equal variances not assumed			.265	21.061	.794	.032	.122	-.222	.287	
Narrative therapy assists youths in reframing experiences.	Equal variances assumed	.211	.646	-.343	298	.732	-.042	.124	-.285	.201	
	Equal variances not assumed			-.348	20.598	.732	-.042	.122	-.296	.211	
Psychological interventions reduce susceptibility to extremist narratives.	Equal variances assumed	.212	.646	1.380	298	.169	.217	.157	-.092	.526	
	Equal variances not assumed			1.743	22.386	.095	.217	.124	-.041	.474	
Professional guidance builds resilience against peer pressure.	Equal variances assumed	.062	.803	1.196	298	.233	.251	.210	-.162	.664	
	Equal variances not assumed			1.375	21.494	.183	.251	.183	-.128	.630	
Counseling programs enhance critical thinking during crises.	Equal variances assumed	.792	.374	-.104	298	.918	-.014	.134	-.277	.249	
	Equal variances not assumed			-.113	21.094	.911	-.014	.122	-.268	.241	
Targeted therapy lowers aggressive tendencies in adolescents.	Equal variances assumed	236.333	.000	3.028	298	.003	.355	.117	.124	.585	
	Equal variances not assumed			3.897	22.590	.001	.355	.091	.166	.543	
Safe therapeutic spaces help youths process grievances.	Equal variances assumed	75.714	.000	3.068	298	.002	.427	.139	.153	.701	
	Equal variances not assumed			11.817	280.000	.000	.427	.036	.356	.498	
Mental health support improves problem-solving abilities.	Equal variances assumed	4.122	.043	4.216	298	.000	.636	.151	.339	.932	
	Equal variances not assumed			6.743	25.984	.000	.636	.094	.442	.829	
Coping strategies prevent young people from destructive choices.	Equal variances assumed	.146	.703	1.676	298	.095	.246	.147	-.043	.535	
	Equal variances not assumed			1.992	21.782	.059	.246	.123	-.010	.502	

Table 6 presents the independent-samples *t*-test results for gender differences in respondents' perceptions of counseling and frustration-related support. Statistically significant gender differences were

identified for perceptions concerning therapy and emotional regulation, targeted therapy and aggressive tendencies, safe therapeutic spaces for processing grievances, and mental health support for improving problem-solving abilities ($p < .05$).

By contrast, no statistically significant gender differences were observed for perceptions concerning counseling sessions for managing daily frustration, narrative therapy for reframing experiences, psychological interventions related to extremist narratives, professional guidance against peer pressure, counseling programs for critical thinking during crises, or coping strategies for preventing destructive choices ($p > .05$).

These findings indicate that male and female respondents shared broadly similar perceptions of several counseling-related dimensions, while significant differences were evident for selected forms of psychological and therapeutic support. Importantly, these results represent differences in respondents' perceptions rather than differences in measured treatment outcomes.

D. Perceptions of Integrating Counseling into Economic Empowerment Programs

Table 7. Group Statistics Showing Mean and Standard Deviation for Gender Responses on Integrating Counseling into Economic Empowerment Programs

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Economic empowerment programs should incorporate professional counseling.	Male	19	4.00	.000	.000
	Female	281	3.37	.615	.037
Integrated support programs build stronger youth resilience.	Male	19	3.84	.375	.086
	Female	281	3.31	.463	.028
Financial aid alone prevents youth radicalization risks.	Male	19	3.37	.496	.114
	Female	281	3.09	.778	.046
Combined initiatives are more effective for stability.	Male	19	3.37	.761	.175
	Female	281	3.04	.731	.044
Government empowerment policies need mandatory psychological support.	Male	19	3.84	.375	.086
	Female	281	3.46	.499	.030
Vocational training paired with counseling secures futures.	Male	19	3.47	.513	.118
	Female	281	3.44	.565	.034
NGOs successfully bridge gaps in youth support.	Male	19	3.47	.513	.118
	Female	281	3.52	.522	.031
Holistic development protects youths from radicalization risks.	Male	19	3.53	.513	.118
	Female	281	3.31	.671	.040
Sustainable programs require collaboration between agencies and communities.	Male	19	3.37	.761	.175
	Female	281	3.12	.893	.053
Structured institutional support ensures lasting socio-economic stability.	Male	19	3.84	.375	.086
	Female	281	3.28	.449	.027

Table 7 presents respondents' perceptions of integrating counseling services into economic empowerment programs for sustainable youth resilience. Both male and female respondents generally expressed agreement with the proposed forms of integrated economic and psychological support.

Among male respondents, the highest level of agreement was recorded for the incorporation of professional counseling into economic empowerment programs ($M = 4.00$). Relatively high mean scores were also reported for integrated support programs as a means of strengthening youth resilience ($M = 3.84$), the inclusion of psychological support in government empowerment policies ($M = 3.84$), and structured institutional support for socioeconomic stability ($M = 3.84$).

Female respondents also expressed favorable views toward several forms of integrated support. The highest female mean was reported for the role of NGOs in bridging gaps in youth support ($M = 3.52$), followed by psychological support within government empowerment policies ($M = 3.46$), vocational training paired with counseling ($M = 3.44$), and the incorporation of professional counseling into economic empowerment programs ($M = 3.37$).

Overall, the descriptive findings indicate generally favorable perceptions toward combining counseling, psychological support, vocational development, and broader economic empowerment initiatives as complementary forms of support for youth resilience.

Table 8. Independent Samples T-Test Analysis of Gender Differences on Integrating Counseling into Economic Empowerment Programs

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances								
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Economic empowerment programs should incorporate professional counseling. Integrated support programs build stronger youth resilience.	Equal variances assumed	88.963	.000	4.435	298	.000	.626	.141	.348	.904
	Equal variances not assumed			17.083	280.000	.000	.626	.037	.554	.699
	Equal variances assumed	13.997	.000	4.902	298	.000	.532	.109	.319	.746
	Equal variances not assumed			5.898	21.898	.000	.532	.090	.345	.720
Financial aid alone prevents youth radicalization risks.	Equal variances assumed	.825	.365	1.523	298	.129	.276	.181	-.081	.632
	Equal variances not assumed			2.246	24.459	.034	.276	.123	.023	.529
	Equal variances assumed	2.076	.151	1.916	298	.056	.333	.174	-.009	.675
	Equal variances not assumed			1.850	20.312	.079	.333	.180	-.042	.708
Government empowerment policies need mandatory psychological support.	Equal variances assumed	180.362	.000	3.248	298	.001	.379	.117	.150	.609
	Equal variances not assumed			4.172	22.566	.000	.379	.091	.191	.568
	Equal variances assumed	.655	.419	.243	298	.808	.032	.133	-.230	.294
	Equal variances not assumed			.265	21.061	.794	.032	.122	-.222	.287
NGOs successfully bridge gaps in youth support.	Equal variances assumed	.211	.646	-.343	298	.732	-.042	.124	-.285	.201
	Equal variances not assumed			-.348	20.598	.732	-.042	.122	-.296	.211
	Equal variances assumed	.212	.646	1.380	298	.169	.217	.157	-.092	.526
	Equal variances not assumed			1.743	22.386	.095	.217	.124	-.041	.474
Sustainable programs require collaboration between agencies and communities.	Equal variances assumed	.062	.803	1.196	298	.233	.251	.210	-.162	.664
	Equal variances not assumed			1.375	21.494	.183	.251	.183	-.128	.630

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	Test for Equality of Sig.	t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Structured institutional support ensures lasting socio-economic stability.	Equal variances assumed	7.852	.005	5.358	298	.000	.565	.105	.357	.772
	Equal variances not assumed			6.271	21.646	.000	.565	.090	.378	.751

Table 8 presents the independent-samples *t*-test results examining gender differences in perceptions of integrating counseling into economic empowerment programs. Statistically significant gender differences were observed for the incorporation of professional counseling into economic empowerment programs, the perceived role of integrated support programs in strengthening youth resilience, the inclusion of psychological support in government empowerment policies, and structured institutional support for lasting socioeconomic stability ($p < .05$).

No statistically significant gender differences were identified for perceptions concerning financial aid alone as a means of preventing radicalization risk, combined initiatives for stability, vocational training paired with counseling, the role of NGOs in youth support, holistic development, or collaboration between agencies and communities ($p > .05$).

Overall, the findings indicate that male and female respondents differed in their levels of agreement on selected institutional and counseling-related dimensions, while showing broadly comparable perceptions across several other aspects of integrated youth support. The results therefore provide evidence of gender-based differences in perception on specific items rather than evidence that the proposed programs themselves produced measurable intervention effects.

E. Discussion

The findings indicate that respondents generally perceived economic hardship as closely associated with youth grievances and broader social vulnerability. Mean responses across the economic hardship items were generally above the midpoint of the response scale, suggesting substantial agreement that unemployment, poverty, inflation, limited career opportunities, unmet financial expectations, and declining trust in public institutions are important concerns in understanding youth grievances in Nigeria. Gender-based comparisons further showed statistically significant differences on several of these dimensions, including unemployment, extreme poverty, inflation-related frustration, institutional distrust, restricted career opportunities, unmet financial expectations, and economic deprivation. However, significant gender differences were not observed across all items, indicating that male and female respondents shared comparable perceptions on some aspects of economic pressure.

These findings are broadly consistent with previous research emphasizing the socioeconomic conditions surrounding youth frustration and vulnerability. Chigudu (2025) highlights the consequences of persistent youth unemployment for conflict and peace across African contexts, while Akoji and Abaji (2025) demonstrate the multidimensional character of poverty in Nigeria and its broader implications for socioeconomic well-being. Similarly, Okonkwo and Akanji (2025) connect political violence with wider sociopolitical and economic realities. The present findings complement this literature by showing that respondents themselves associate economic pressures with youth grievances, frustration, institutional distrust, and social instability. Nevertheless, because the present study is based on perceptions, the findings should be understood as evidence of how respondents view these connections rather than as direct evidence that economic hardship independently causes radicalization.

The findings concerning counseling also reveal generally favorable perceptions of psychological and therapeutic support. Respondents expressed positive views toward counseling for managing frustration, emotional regulation, narrative reframing, problem-solving, coping, and the processing of grievances. Gender differences were significant for selected counseling-related dimensions, particularly perceptions of emotional regulation, targeted approaches to aggressive tendencies, safe therapeutic spaces, and mental health support for problem-solving. In contrast, male and female respondents did not differ significantly in their perceptions of several other areas, including counseling for daily frustration, narrative therapy, professional guidance against peer pressure, and coping strategies.

These findings also align with previous Nigerian research emphasizing the relevance of psychological resources and counseling in responding to psychosocial challenges. Enwere and Iloakasia (2024) reported the relevance of self-esteem to psychological well-being among adolescents, while Iloakasia (2024a) emphasized the broader role of counseling in addressing adverse psychosocial experiences. Although these studies did not

(Adaobi Jennifer Iloakasia)

examine radicalization directly, they reinforce the importance of psychological support within wider resilience-oriented approaches.

These findings are consistent with the broader argument that psychological and societal processes should be considered alongside structural conditions when examining vulnerability to radicalization. Shafieiou and Haq (2023) emphasize that radicalization develops within a wider societal context and cannot be understood solely through individual or security-based explanations. From this perspective, the favorable perceptions of counseling found in the present study suggest that psychological support may be considered a relevant component of broader resilience-building strategies. The findings, however, represent respondents' assessments of the potential usefulness of counseling rather than measured therapeutic outcomes. Consequently, they support the perceived relevance of counseling but do not establish the clinical effectiveness of any particular therapeutic approach.

Respondents also generally expressed favorable views toward integrating counseling services with economic empowerment initiatives. Professional counseling within empowerment programs, psychological support in government policies, vocational training combined with counseling, and structured institutional support received generally positive responses. Significant gender differences were found for selected institutional dimensions, including the incorporation of professional counseling, integrated support for resilience, psychological support within government empowerment policies, and structured institutional support. On several other dimensions, however, male and female respondents demonstrated comparable levels of agreement.

This pattern supports an integrated understanding of youth vulnerability in which economic and psychological concerns are addressed together rather than separately. Economic assistance may respond to material pressures, while counseling and psychological support may address frustration, coping, emotional regulation, and the processing of grievances. The broader importance of practical skill development within economic empowerment is also reflected in Nigerian research linking skill development with job readiness among undergraduates (Onyiorah, 2025). This interpretation is compatible with existing research emphasizing the multidimensional character of poverty and insecurity in Nigeria and the importance of broader institutional responses to violent extremism (Akoji & Abaji, 2025; Ikpe et al., 2023; Solomon, 2026). Rather than demonstrating that integrated programs are empirically more effective than economic assistance alone, the present findings show that respondents generally endorse a more comprehensive model of support combining socioeconomic and psychological components.

Taken together, the findings suggest three related patterns. First, respondents perceive economic hardship as an important context for youth grievances and social vulnerability. Second, counseling and psychological support are viewed favorably as potential mechanisms for strengthening coping and resilience. Third, respondents generally support combining counseling with economic empowerment and institutional support. These patterns reinforce the importance of approaching youth vulnerability through a multidimensional framework while recognizing that the present evidence concerns perceptions and gender-based differences rather than experimentally measured intervention effects.

F. Implications for Counseling Practice in Nigeria

The findings have practical implications for counseling practice and youth-support initiatives in Nigeria. Respondents' favorable perceptions of counseling suggest that psychological support may have an important place within programs addressing youth frustration, economic stress, and vulnerability to harmful social influences. Professional counselors can contribute by helping individuals develop constructive coping strategies, process grievances, strengthen emotional regulation, improve problem-solving abilities, and respond to economic and social pressures in ways that support psychological resilience. The potential contribution of counselors to broader resilience-oriented community initiatives has also been recognized in the Nigerian context (Iloakasia, 2024b).

The findings also suggest value in linking counseling services with existing economic empowerment and vocational development initiatives. Economic support addresses material needs, whereas counseling can provide a complementary psychological component focused on coping, frustration tolerance, decision-making, and resilience. Such integration may be particularly relevant for individuals experiencing prolonged unemployment, financial insecurity, or declining confidence in social institutions. Rather than treating counseling and economic empowerment as separate responses, youth-support programs may benefit from coordinated approaches that recognize the interaction between socioeconomic pressures and psychological well-being.

Institutional collaboration is also relevant to this approach. Government agencies, educational institutions, community organizations, NGOs, and counseling professionals can play complementary roles in providing accessible psychological and socioeconomic support. Sustainable programs may therefore require coordination between counseling services, vocational initiatives, community-based support, and broader youth

development policies. Such coordination is consistent with respondents' positive perceptions of integrated and institutional forms of support.

Importantly, these implications should be viewed as practice-oriented applications of the respondents' perceptions rather than evidence that specific counseling modalities have already been demonstrated to reduce radicalization. The findings primarily support the relevance of counseling within a broader preventive and resilience-building framework and provide a basis for future intervention-based studies to evaluate specific counseling approaches more directly.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined respondents' perceptions of economic hardship, youth grievances, vulnerability to radicalization, and the potential role of counseling and integrated economic empowerment in supporting youth resilience in Nigeria. The findings indicate that respondents generally perceived unemployment, poverty, inflation, limited economic opportunities, and institutional distrust as important conditions associated with youth grievances and broader social vulnerability. Gender differences were observed across several dimensions of economic hardship and institutional concerns, although such differences were not consistent across all items.

Respondents also expressed generally favorable perceptions of counseling and psychological support, particularly in relation to emotional regulation, coping with frustration, processing grievances, problem-solving, and psychological resilience. Similarly, there was broad support for integrating counseling services with economic empowerment, vocational development, and institutional youth-support initiatives. These findings suggest that addressing youth vulnerability may benefit from approaches that consider psychological support alongside socioeconomic empowerment rather than treating these dimensions separately.

Overall, the study highlights the perceived relevance of counseling within broader efforts to strengthen youth resilience in Nigeria. The findings support greater consideration of counseling and psychological support within youth development and economic empowerment initiatives. However, as the study assessed respondents' perceptions rather than actual intervention outcomes, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence of the effectiveness of specific counseling modalities or as establishing causal relationships between economic hardship and radicalization. Given the substantial imbalance in the gender composition of the sample, the gender-based comparisons should also be interpreted with caution. Future research may build on these findings by directly evaluating counseling and integrated empowerment approaches using intervention-based and longitudinal research designs.

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