

URBANIZATION AND HOUSING CHALLENGES IN OREROKPE: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF SLUM DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract This sociological study investigates the relationship between rapid urbanization and the development of slum housing in Orerokpe, a semi-urban town in Delta State, Nigeria. While urbanization is often associated with economic opportunity, in Orerokpe it has produced a distinct pattern of housing deprivation, overcrowding, and infrastructural decay. The research adopts a qualitative ethnographic case study design, drawing on in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and direct observation conducted between January and April 2025. A sample of forty-five household heads was purposively selected from three recognized slum clusters within Orerokpe. The findings reveal that slum development in Orerokpe is not a random occurrence but a structured outcome of weak land-use planning, unregulated private sector housing, and the withdrawal of state-provided social housing. The study further finds that residents experience chronic housing challenges including lack of drainage systems, absent sanitation facilities, insecure land tenure, and exploitative rental arrangements. These conditions reproduce social inequalities and limit upward mobility. The study concludes that slum formation is a manifestation of structural violence embedded in governance failures. Recommendations include the implementation of participatory slum upgrading, the enforcement of building codes, and the provision of affordable housing loans for low-income residents. The study contributes to urban sociology by demonstrating how local urbanization dynamics produce distinct slum ecologies without requiring the megacity framework common in global slum literature.

Keywords: *Slum formation, housing deprivation, urban informality, spatial exclusion, structural violence*

1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of urbanization in sub-Saharan Africa has accelerated over the past two decades, yet the accompanying housing crisis remains underexamined in smaller towns and semi-urban settlements. Orerokpe, the administrative headquarters of Okpe Local Government Area in Delta State, Nigeria, exemplifies this overlooked reality. Traditionally an agrarian society, Orerokpe has witnessed steady in-migration driven by proximity to industrial zones in Warri and Sapele, as well as the expansion of local government bureaucracy. Between 2010 and 2023, the population of Orerokpe is estimated to have grown by over forty per cent, yet the housing stock has not expanded proportionally, nor has it improved in quality (Efetobor & Okonofua, 2022). This disjuncture between population growth and housing supply has given rise to distinct slum zones characterized by makeshift dwellings, absent road networks, and shared pit latrines.

Understanding slum development in Orerokpe requires more than a description of physical decay; it demands a sociological lens that interrogates the social structures, power relations, and institutional failures that produce and sustain slum conditions. Previous studies on Nigerian slums have concentrated on Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Kano, leaving medium-sized towns like Orerokpe understudied (Adebayo & Ogunleye, 2021). This gap is significant because the drivers of slum formation in smaller towns often

differ from those in megacities. In Orerokpe, the absence of formal mortgage institutions, the dominance of customary land allocation systems, and the near-total lack of municipal housing inspection create a permissive environment for slum proliferation. The central problem this study addresses is that while urbanization in Orerokpe continues unabated, housing policies remain absent at the local government level, and residents are left to navigate an informal housing market that prioritizes profit over habitability.

The purpose of this sociological study is to examine the processes through which slum development occurs in Orerokpe, to document the lived housing challenges of residents, and to explain how social structural factors perpetuate these conditions. The study is guided by three research questions. First, what are the housing characteristics of slum areas in Orerokpe? Second, what social and institutional factors explain the emergence and persistence of these slums? Third, how do residents experience and respond to housing deprivation? By answering these questions, the study contributes to urban sociology, housing policy discourse, and the growing literature on secondary city urbanization in Africa. The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform evidence-based interventions that are sensitive to the local political economy of housing.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Urbanization as a Phenomenon

Urbanization represents one of the most

transformative demographic processes of the twenty-first century, particularly in the Global South. Sociologically, urbanization is understood not merely as population concentration in cities but as a fundamental reorganization of social relations, economic structures, and spatial arrangements (Odumosu & Adeleke, 2023). The classical sociological tradition, particularly the work of the Chicago School, conceptualized urbanization as a natural ecological process involving competition for space, social disorganization, and the emergence of new forms of community life. Park and Burgess (as cited in Ogunbiyi, 2023) famously described the city as a mosaic of natural areas, wherein different population groups sorted themselves spatially according to economic capacity and social status. This ecological model, while influential, has been criticized for its organicist assumptions and its failure to account for power differentials and state intervention in shaping urban space.

Contemporary scholarship on urbanization in Africa challenges the Eurocentric assumptions of earlier models. Scholars such as Mbembe and Nuttall argue that African cities are not deficient copies of Western cities but are distinctive formations shaped by colonial history, postcolonial governance, and global economic integration. In the Nigerian context, urbanization has been characterized as "urbanization without industrialization," wherein rural-urban migration is driven more by the

collapse of rural livelihoods and the attraction of informal sector opportunities than by formal sector employment (Odumosu & Adeleke, 2023). This pattern has significant implications for housing, because migrants arrive with limited financial resources and are forced into the cheapest and most precarious housing options, thereby fueling slum expansion.

The relationship between urbanization and housing supply is mediated by institutional factors including land governance, building regulations, and public housing investment. In many African countries, the state withdrew from direct housing provision during the structural adjustment era of the 1980s and 1990s, leaving housing to the private market. However, private markets supply housing only for those who can afford it, creating a gap for low-income urbanites that is filled by informal self-construction and slum development (Mensah & Adjei, 2024). This gap is particularly acute in secondary towns like Orerokpe, where municipal governments lack the revenue base and technical capacity to enforce building codes or invest in public housing. The result is a permissive environment for slum proliferation, wherein developers build substandard housing because they face no regulatory consequences and tenants accept substandard conditions because they have no alternative.

Theorizing urbanization as a sociopolitical process rather than a demographic arithmetic is essential for

understanding housing challenges. Urbanization involves contestation over land, resources, and political representation, and slums are often the spatial expression of the marginalization of the urban poor from these contests. Akinwumi and Olaniyan (2021) argue that the Nigerian state's failure to manage urbanization constitutes a form of structural violence, wherein systematic inaction and policy neglect harm the most vulnerable populations. This perspective is adopted in the current study because it directs attention away from individual-level explanations of slum conditions (such as laziness or cultural backwardness) toward structural and institutional explanations that can inform policy reform.

2.2 Housing Challenges in Nigerian Secondary Towns

The housing crisis in Nigeria is well-documented at the national level, but the specific challenges facing secondary towns remain undertheorized. The Nigeria Housing Survey (2022) estimates a national housing deficit of approximately twenty-two million units, with the majority of this deficit concentrated in towns with populations between fifty thousand and two hundred thousand. This statistic indicates that the housing crisis is not exclusively a megacity phenomenon but affects smaller urban centers where institutional capacity is weakest. In these settings, the private sector builds almost exclusively for middle- and high-income groups,

leaving the poor to construct their own housing on unserviced land, often without formal tenure rights.

Research by Falola and Ayodele (2024) on similar semi-urban towns in Ondo State found that over seventy per cent of residents in informal settlements lack access to improved sanitation, and sixty per cent rely on untreated groundwater. These figures highlight the nexus between housing quality and environmental health, wherein poor housing is compounded by the absence of basic infrastructure. The situation is further exacerbated by land tenure insecurity. Since most land in secondary towns is held under customary tenure, informal settlers cannot use their homes as collateral for loans, nor can they access government compensation in the event of demolition. This insecurity discourages long-term investment in housing improvement, locking residents into a cycle of physical deterioration (Ogu & Ogbuozobe, as cited in Nwosu & Idemudia, 2021).

Housing challenges in secondary towns are not limited to physical inadequacy but extend to social and economic dimensions. Rent-to-income ratios in informal settlements are often exploitative, with tenants paying a disproportionate share of their earnings for substandard accommodation. Adebayo and Ogunleye (2021) found that in Oyo State secondary towns, rent consumes over forty per cent of household income for slum dwellers, leaving insufficient resources for food, healthcare, and education. This

housing-induced poverty perpetuates intergenerational disadvantage, as children growing up in overcrowded, unhealthy conditions are less likely to complete school and more likely to experience poor health outcomes. The absence of formal tenancy agreements compounds these problems, as tenants have no legal recourse against arbitrary eviction or rent increases. Eze and Nwachukwu (2022) describe this as a system of "negotiated exploitation," wherein landlords and tenants operate in a regulatory vacuum that systematically favors property owners. The political economy of housing in Nigerian secondary towns is characterized by a triangular relationship between customary chiefs, local government officials, and private developers. Chiefs control land allocation under customary tenure systems and often sell or lease land to developers without proper planning approval. Local government officials, who are supposed to enforce building codes and collect property taxes, are frequently complicit in this arrangement, accepting bribes to overlook violations or turning a blind eye because they lack the resources to inspect properties (Nwosu & Idemudia, 2021). Developers, in turn, maximize profits by minimizing construction costs, using substandard materials, and avoiding the expense of installing infrastructure such as roads, drains, and water pipes. This triangular relationship produces a built environment that is unplanned, unsanitary, and socially exclusionary.

2.3 Slum Development and Slum Formation

A critical conceptual clarification is necessary before proceeding: in this study, "slum development" and "slum formation" are used interchangeably to refer to the processes through which slum areas emerge, expand, and persist over time. Some scholars distinguish between slum formation (the initial emergence of slum conditions) and slum development (the ongoing processes of deterioration and expansion), but this distinction is not consistently maintained in the literature, and it is not analytically useful for the Orerokpe case, where slum conditions have been persistent for decades. Therefore, the terms are used synonymously in this study to capture both the emergence and the perpetuation of slum housing.

Slums are typically defined by the United Nations as residential areas where inhabitants lack one or more of the following: durable housing, sufficient living space, access to improved water, access to improved sanitation, and secure tenure (UN-Habitat, 2021). This definition is useful because it is multidimensional, recognizing that slums are defined not only by physical decay but also by social and legal exclusion. In the Nigerian context, the definition must be adapted to local realities. For example, durable housing in Nigeria might be defined differently than in Europe, given differences in building materials and climatic conditions. Nevertheless, the core principle remains: slum

housing is housing that fails to provide adequate protection from the elements, adequate space for healthy living, and adequate access to basic services.

Sociological explanations of slum formation have evolved from ecological theories of urban growth to more critical political economy frameworks. The classic Chicago School model posited that slums emerge through a natural process of invasion, succession, and ecological competition, wherein poorer populations are pushed into deteriorating zones as cities expand (Park et al., as cited in Ogunbiyi, 2023). While this model offers a descriptive account of spatial distribution, it fails to explain the structural inequalities that make slums the only option for low-income urbanites. In contrast, contemporary scholars adopt a political economy approach that identifies slums as products of deliberate state withdrawal from public housing and the financialization of urban land (Rolnik, as cited in Mensah & Adjei, 2024). From this perspective, slums are not aberrations but are functional to capitalist urban development because they absorb surplus labor while minimizing state expenditure on housing.

In the Nigerian context, Akinwumi and Olaniyan (2021) argue that slum development is best understood through the lens of structural violence, wherein government inaction, corrupt land allocation, and weak building code enforcement systematically harm the urban poor. This theoretical

position is adopted in the current study because it moves beyond victim-blaming narratives and instead interrogates the institutional arrangements that allow slums to thrive. Furthermore, the concept of informality, drawn from the work of Portes and Haller, is useful for understanding how residents navigate housing scarcity through extra-legal arrangements, including tenancy at will, verbal rental agreements, and self-built structures (as cited in Eze & Nwachukwu, 2022). However, informality is not a free choice but a constrained adaptation to state failure.

The social consequences of slum living extend beyond physical health. Living in a slum is associated with stigma and spatial stigmatization, wherein residents are labelled as disorderly, lazy, or morally deficient by outsiders (Wacquant, as cited in Adegoke & Bamidele, 2022). This stigma affects access to formal employment, credit, and even political representation. In some Nigerian cities, slum dwellers report being denied voter registration because their addresses are not recognized by local government authorities. Thus, slum development is not merely a housing issue but a mechanism of social exclusion that perpetuates intergenerational poverty. The current study builds on these insights by investigating whether similar dynamics operate in Orerokpe, which has not been subjected to empirical sociological analysis.

2.4 Orerokpe: Historical and Sociopolitical Context

Orerokpe, the administrative headquarters of Okpe Local Government Area in Delta State, is a town with a rich but under-documented history. The town is situated in the Okpe kingdom, one of the oldest and most established kingdoms in the Niger Delta region. Traditionally, the Okpe people were agrarian, cultivating yams, cassava, and palm produce, and they maintained a hierarchical political system headed by the Orodje (king) of Okpe, supported by a council of chiefs representing various quarters and families. Colonial administration disrupted this system but did not entirely supplant it; customary authority continued to operate alongside modern local government structures, creating a dual governance system that persists to this day (Efetobor & Okonofua, 2022).

The modern history of Orerokpe is closely tied to the political economy of the Niger Delta. The discovery of oil and the establishment of industrial zones in neighboring Warri and Sapele drew migrants from other parts of Nigeria, as well as from within Delta State, to the area in search of employment. Orerokpe, being strategically located between these industrial centers and the hinterland, became a transit point and eventually a settlement for migrants who could not afford housing in the more expensive towns. The expansion of the local government bureaucracy, which established its headquarters in

Orerokpe, further fueled in-migration, as civil servants and their families relocated to the town (Delta State Ministry of Lands and Housing, 2021). Despite its administrative status, Orerokpe has not benefited from commensurate investment in infrastructure or housing. The town lacks a master plan, and development has occurred in a haphazard manner along the main roads and in unplanned extensions. Land is predominantly held under customary tenure, with family heads and village chiefs controlling allocation. This system, while culturally legitimate, has been criticized for its lack of transparency and its exclusion of women and non-indigenes from land ownership (Efetobor & Okonofua, 2022). Migrants who cannot access land through customary channels are forced to rent from landlords who have acquired land through patronage networks, often at exploitative terms.

Religiously, Orerokpe is predominantly Christian, with a significant minority of adherents to traditional African religions. Pentecostal churches are particularly influential, and they play a role in community life that extends beyond spiritual matters to include social welfare, education, and even housing assistance for members. Politics in Orerokpe is dominated by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), reflecting Delta State's broader political alignment, but local politics is often personalized and factional, with rivalries between aspiring politicians

shaping access to state resources (Adebayo & Ogunleye, 2021).

Previous scholarly works on Orerokpe are limited and do not address housing or slum development. Efetobor and Okonofua (2022) provide demographic estimates but do not analyze housing conditions. Delta State Ministry of Lands and Housing (2021) offers a policy perspective but lacks empirical grounding in the lived experiences of residents. No known sociological study has systematically examined the relationship between urbanization and housing challenges in Orerokpe, leaving a significant gap that this research aims to fill. By documenting the housing characteristics, social consequences, and institutional drivers of slum development in Orerokpe, this study contributes to the limited literature on secondary town urbanization in Nigeria.

2.5 Gap in Literature

The literature review has revealed several significant gaps that this study addresses. First, while there is extensive research on slum development in Nigerian megacities such as Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Kano, secondary towns like Orerokpe have been largely ignored. This gap is problematic because the drivers of slum formation in secondary towns may differ from those in megacities. For example, secondary towns often lack the institutional capacity and revenue base to manage urban growth, yet they are growing at comparable rates to megacities. Ignoring secondary

towns means ignoring a significant portion of the urban population experiencing housing deprivation.

Second, the existing literature on urbanization in Nigeria tends to treat urbanization as a demographic and economic process, with insufficient attention to the sociopolitical dimensions of housing. There is a need for more sociological research that interrogates the power relations, governance failures, and social inequalities that produce and sustain slum conditions. The structural violence framework, while applied in some studies, has not been systematically used to analyze housing challenges in secondary towns. This study adopts this framework and applies it to the Orerokpe case, thereby extending the theoretical reach of the concept.

Third, the literature on Orerokpe specifically is almost nonexistent. While some demographic and administrative data exist, there is no sociological research on the town's urban development, housing conditions, or social dynamics. This absence of research is surprising given Orerokpe's status as a local government headquarters and its strategic location in the Niger Delta. This study fills that gap by providing the first systematic sociological investigation of urbanization and housing challenges in Orerokpe.

Fourth, the relationship between slum development and social consequences such as health outcomes, social stigma, and political exclusion is

underexplored in the Nigerian secondary town context. While studies have documented these consequences in megacities, it is unclear whether similar dynamics operate in smaller towns. This study provides evidence on the social and health consequences of slum living in Orerokpe, contributing to the comparative literature on slum conditions across urban scales.

Finally, the literature on coping strategies among slum residents tends to focus on megacities and may not capture the specific strategies employed in secondary towns, where social networks and institutions may differ. This study documents the coping strategies used by Orerokpe slum residents, including the role of traditional rotating savings groups (*esusu*) and community development associations, thereby contributing to the literature on urban informality and resilience.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative ethnographic case study design, which is appropriate for investigating the lived experiences of slum residents in their natural settings. A qualitative approach was chosen over a mixed-methods approach because the research seeks depth of understanding regarding social processes, meanings, and structural mechanisms rather than statistical generalizability. The ethnographic case study allows the researcher to spend extended time in the community, observe daily routines, and capture the nuanced ways residents negotiate

housing deprivation. The single case of Orerokpe was selected because it represents a typical Nigerian secondary town experiencing rapid but unmanaged urbanization, and its slum areas have not been previously documented in academic literature. Data collection occurred over a three-month period from January to March 2025, during which the researcher resided in Orerokpe to facilitate sustained observation and relationship building with community members.

Participant selection was purposive and criterion-based. The target population consisted of household heads living in three recognized slum clusters within Orerokpe: Ugborikoko Layout, Adagbrasa Extension, and Amukpe Backlands. These areas were identified through preliminary mapping and consultation with local community development association leaders. Inclusion criteria required that a household head had resided in the area for at least two years and was over eighteen years of age. A total of forty-five household heads participated in in-depth interviews, with fifteen drawn from each cluster. Additionally, three focus group discussions were conducted, each comprising eight to ten participants stratified by gender and length of residence. Semi-structured interview guides explored housing history, rental arrangements, access to water and sanitation, experiences with landlords and local authorities, and perceptions of the future. All interviews were conducted in a mixture of English and Urhobo (the local language),

digitally recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Field notes from daily observations were maintained in a reflexive journal.

Data analysis followed the thematic analysis framework proposed by Braun and Clarke. Transcripts and field notes were read repeatedly to achieve familiarization, then coded manually using an inductive approach. Codes were grouped into potential themes, which were reviewed and refined against the original data. The final thematic structure included five main themes: housing materiality and overcrowding, land tenure and rental exploitation, infrastructural exclusion, health and social consequences, and coping strategies. Trustworthiness was ensured through prolonged engagement in the field, member checking with a subset of participants, and peer debriefing with two sociologists familiar with urban studies but not involved in the research. Ethical approval was obtained from the research ethics committee of the affiliated university, and all participants provided written informed consent. Pseudonyms are used for all participants to protect anonymity.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Housing Materiality and Overcrowding in Orerokpe Slums

The first research question concerned the housing characteristics of slum areas in Orerokpe. The findings reveal that the overwhelming majority of dwellings are constructed from non-

durable materials, including corrugated iron sheets for walls and thatch or tarpaulin for roofs. Only thirty-eight per cent of respondents lived in structures with cement block walls, and only twenty-two per cent had plastered interior surfaces. Flooring was predominantly compacted earth, which becomes muddy during the rainy season. Window openings, where present, are often covered with plastic sheeting rather than glass or netting, leading to poor ventilation and high indoor temperatures. These material conditions align with the UN-Habitat (2021) definition of inadequate shelter, as dwellings lack durability and protection from the elements.

Table 1a and Table 1b present the distribution of housing materials across the three slum clusters. It is important to clarify that the unit of analysis in this study is the household, not the building. In Orerokpe slums, a single building or compound often contains multiple households, sometimes up to ten, each occupying a single room or partitioned section. In this study, the forty-five participants (household heads) are distributed across fifteen buildings in Ugborikoko Layout, fourteen buildings in Adagbrasa Extension, and sixteen buildings in Amukpe Backlands. Some buildings house multiple respondent households, which is why the total number of buildings (45) corresponds to the number of households—each household head was interviewed from a distinct building, though some buildings housed additional households not included in the sample. The tables

below report the material characteristics of the building occupied by each household head.

Table 1a: Wall Materials in Orerokpe Slum Clusters (n=45)

Wall Material	Ugborikoko Layout (n=15)	Adagbrasa Extension (n=15)	Amukpe Backlands (n=15)	Total (n=45)
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Cement block walls	7 (46.7%)	5 (33.3%)	5 (33.3%)	17 (37.8%)
Iron sheet walls	6 (40.0%)	8 (53.3%)	8 (53.3%)	22 (48.9%)
Tarpaulin/thatched walls	2 (13.3%)	2 (13.3%)	2 (13.3%)	6 (13.3%)

Source: Author's field survey, Orerokpe, March 2025

The data in Table 1a reveal that iron sheet walls are the most common wall material across all three clusters, accounting for nearly half of all dwellings. Ugborikoko Layout has slightly better wall materials compared to Adagbrasa Extension and Amukpe Backlands, with nearly half of its households living in cement block walls. This is likely due to Ugborikoko's relative proximity to the main road and its earlier development, which allowed some residents to build with more durable materials before the area became overcrowded. However, even in Ugborikoko, fewer than half of dwellings have cement block walls, indicating that substandard housing is the norm rather than the exception.

Table 1b: Floor Materials in Orerokpe Slum Clusters (n=45)

Floor Material	Ugborikoko Layout (n=15)	Adagbrasa Extension (n=15)	Amukpe Backlands (n=15)	Total (n=45)
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Cement floor	3 (20.0%)	2 (13.3%)	1 (6.7%)	6 (13.3%)
Earth floor	11 (73.3%)	13 (86.7%)	14 (93.3%)	38 (84.4%)
Wood floor	1 (6.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.2%)

Source: Author's field survey, Orerokpe, March 2025

Table 1b shows the overwhelming dominance of earth floors across all three clusters, with over eighty percent of households walking on earth floors. This uniformity suggests that the housing crisis in Orerokpe is not limited to marginal pockets but affects the majority of low-income settlements. The absence of cement floors has serious implications for hygiene, as earth floors cannot be effectively cleaned and harbor parasites, worms, and disease vectors. During interviews, residents frequently mentioned that their floors become muddy and slippery after rain, leading to falls and injuries, particularly among children and elderly occupants. The marginal difference between clusters suggests that location within Orerokpe does not significantly predict housing quality, pointing to a systemic rather than localized housing failure.

Overcrowding emerged as a universal feature of slum life in Orerokpe. The average number of persons per room was 4.3, with some households reporting up to seven persons sharing a single room measuring approximately ten square meters. This far exceeds the internationally accepted standard of two persons per room. Overcrowding is not merely a matter of space but has cascading effects on sleep quality, domestic violence, and privacy, particularly for adolescent children living with parents. One respondent, a mother of four living in a single room in Adagbrasa Extension, stated, "My daughter is fifteen years old, and she has nowhere to change her clothes except behind a cloth I hung. The landlord said we cannot hang more cloth because it damages his wall." Such narratives reveal that overcrowding is experienced as a violation of basic dignity, not merely a logistical constraint.

4.2 Land Tenure and Rental Exploitation

The second theme emerging from the analysis concerns the insecure land tenure and exploitative rental arrangements that characterize housing in Orerokpe slums. Only twelve percent of respondents reported having any form of written tenancy agreement. The vast majority operate under verbal agreements with landlords who are often absent or living in better neighborhoods. This informality leaves tenants vulnerable to arbitrary rent increases, sudden evictions, and complete absence of maintenance. During the study period, three households in Amukpe Backlands were evicted with twenty-four hours' notice because the landlord claimed to have sold the land, despite tenants having paid rent for the full year in advance. No tenant was able to recover their advance payment because no written record existed.

Table 2a: Tenancy Agreements in Orerokpe Slums (n=45)

Type of Agreement	Ugborikoko Layout (n=15)	Adagbrasa Extension (n=15)	Amukpe Backlands (n=15)	Total (n=45)
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Written agreement	2 (13.3%)	2 (13.3%)	1 (6.7%)	5 (11.1%)
Verbal agreement only	13 (86.7%)	13 (86.7%)	14 (93.3%)	40 (88.9%)

Source: Author's field survey, Orerokpe, March 2025

Table 2a confirms the near-total absence of formal tenancy agreements in Orerokpe slums. The overwhelming majority of residents operate under verbal agreements, which offer no legal protection and leave tenants at the mercy of landlords. The slightly higher proportion of written agreements in Ugborikoko Layout and Adagbrasa Extension (13.3% each) compared to Amukpe Backlands (6.7%) may reflect the slightly better economic status of residents in the former clusters, though even there, written agreements remain a minority practice.

Table 2b: Rent Payment Schedule in Orerokpe Slums (n=45)

Rent Payment Schedule	Ugborikoko Layout (n=15)	Adagbrasa Extension (n=15)	Amukpe Backlands (n=15)	Total (n=45)
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Monthly rent payment	10 (66.7%)	9 (60.0%)	8 (53.3%)	27 (60.0%)
Annual rent payment	5 (33.3%)	6 (40.0%)	7 (46.7%)	18 (40.0%)

Source: Author's field survey, Orerokpe, March 2025

The data in Table 2b indicate that the majority of slum dwellers pay rent monthly, which is less burdensome in the short term but can lead to accumulated arrears if income is irregular. However, a significant minority (forty percent) pay annually, which is extremely burdensome given their income levels. Residents who pay annually often have to borrow money at high interest rates to make the lump-sum payment, and they risk losing all their money if evicted before the year is up.

Table 2c: Rent-to-Income Ratio in Orerokpe Slums (n=45)

Rent-to-Income Ratio	Ugborikoko Layout (n=15)	Adagbrasa Extension (n=15)	Amukpe Backlands (n=15)	Total (n=45)
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Rent > 40% of income	6 (40.0%)	7 (46.7%)	8 (53.3%)	21 (46.7%)
Rent 31-40% of income	7 (46.7%)	6 (40.0%)	5 (33.3%)	18 (40.0%)
Rent ≤ 30% of income	2 (13.3%)	2 (13.3%)	2 (13.3%)	6 (13.3%)

Source: Author's field survey, Orerokpe, March 2025

The findings in Table 2c indicate a systematic pattern of housing exploitation. The average monthly rent of NGN 7,500 (approximately USD 5) appears low in absolute terms but constitutes over forty per cent of the average monthly income of NGN 18,000 for slum residents. This rent-to-income ratio far exceeds the internationally recommended maximum of thirty per cent, leaving households with insufficient resources for food, healthcare, and children's school fees. In Amukpe Backlands, over half of households pay more than forty per cent of their income on rent, representing the most severe housing-induced poverty burden.

During focus group discussions, participants recounted experiences of landlords entering rooms without notice, demanding additional fees for water or electricity that were ostensibly included in rent, and threatening eviction for any complaint. As one elderly respondent noted, "After rent, we eat once a day. Sometimes we eat garri with salt because we cannot afford soup." This testimony illustrates the direct link between housing exploitation and food insecurity.

The insecurity of tenure also precludes home improvement. Several respondents expressed willingness to repair leaking roofs or install basic wiring but refrained from doing so because they feared eviction would result in loss of their investment. Landlords, knowing that tenants cannot claim improvements under verbal agreements, have no incentive to upgrade properties. This creates a classic prisoner's dilemma wherein both parties lose; tenants live in deteriorating conditions, and landlords lose potential rental income from higher-quality housing. The persistence of this arrangement is explained by the absence of a functioning small claims court in Orerokpe and the collusion between some local chiefs and

landlords, who together enforce customary norms that favor property owners over tenants (Eze & Nwachukwu, 2022).

4.3 Infrastructural Exclusion and Environmental Health

The third major finding concerns the systematic exclusion of slum areas from basic municipal infrastructure. None of the three studied clusters have paved roads, piped water supply, sewers, or solid waste collection services. Roads are narrow, unpaved, and become impassable after moderate rainfall, isolating residents from emergency services and the main market. Water is obtained from shallow hand-dug wells that are often located downstream from pit latrines, creating a direct pathway for fecal contamination. During the study period, an outbreak of diarrhea affected twenty-three households in Adagbrasa Extension, all of whom relied on well water. The local health center recorded a three hundred percent increase in pediatric diarrhea cases during the same month.

Table 3a: Water Sources in Orerokpe Slums (n=45)

Water Source	Ugborikoko Layout (n=15)	Adagbrasa Extension (n=15)	Amukpe Backlands (n=15)	Total (n=45)
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Piped water	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Protected well	4 (26.7%)	3 (20.0%)	2 (13.3%)	9 (20.0%)
Unprotected well	11 (73.3%)	12 (80.0%)	13 (86.7%)	36 (80.0%)

Source: Author's field survey, Orerokpe, March 2025

Table 3a starkly illustrates the complete absence of piped water supply in all three clusters. The majority of households rely on unprotected wells, which are shallow and susceptible to contamination from surface runoff and pit latrines. The reliance of eighty percent of households on unprotected wells is particularly alarming given the known contamination risks. Water samples collected from three wells during the study tested positive for fecal coliforms, confirming the health risks reported by residents. Even the minority who use protected wells face risks, as "protected" in this context often means merely having a concrete lining around the well opening, without any guarantee of water quality.

Table 3b: Sanitation Facilities in Orerokpe Slums (n=45)

Sanitation Type	Ugborikoko Layout (n=15)	Adagbrasa Extension (n=15)	Amukpe Backlands (n=15)	Total (n=45)
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Flush toilet	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Pit latrine (shared)	8 (53.3%)	10 (66.7%)	11 (73.3%)	29 (64.4%)
Open defecation	7 (46.7%)	5 (33.3%)	4 (26.7%)	16 (35.6%)

Source: Author's field survey, Orerokpe, March 2025

The data in Table 3b show that no household has access to a flush toilet, and the majority rely on shared pit latrines that are often in advanced states of disrepair. Over one-third of households practice open defecation, which has serious implications for public health and dignity. The absence of formal waste collection means that refuse accumulates in open drains and vacant lots, attracting vermin and creating breeding grounds for malaria vectors.

Table 3c: Electricity Access in Orerokpe Slums (n=45)

Electricity Source	Ugborikoko Layout (n=15)	Adagbrasa Extension (n=15)	Amukpe Backlands (n=15)	Total (n=45)
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Grid electricity (legal)	2 (13.3%)	1 (6.7%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (6.7%)
Illegal electricity connection	11 (73.3%)	12 (80.0%)	13 (86.7%)	36 (80.0%)
No electricity	2 (13.3%)	2 (13.3%)	2 (13.3%)	6 (13.3%)

Source: Author's field survey, Orerokpe, March 2025

Electricity access is highly precarious, with eighty per cent of households relying on illegal connections. These connections are not only illegal but also dangerous, having caused two house fires in the previous year according to local

reports. The absence of legal electricity access means that residents cannot formally complain about power outages or poor service, and they face the constant threat of disconnection or prosecution. The 13.3% of households with no

electricity rely on kerosene lamps and candles, which pose fire risks and contribute to indoor air pollution.

The concept of spatial exclusion is useful for interpreting these findings. Slum areas in Orerokpe are not merely underserved; they are actively excluded from the circuits of municipal resource allocation. While the local government secretariat, located less than two kilometers from Ugborikoko Layout, enjoys paved roads, treated water, and sewage systems, slum residents live in conditions resembling pre-industrial rural settlements. One focus group participant described the situation: "The government does not know we exist. When the council chairman drives past, he does not look this way. We are invisible people."

This exclusion is not accidental but results from a political calculus wherein slum dwellers are perceived as non-voters (due to lack of recognized addresses) and therefore not worth courting. Furthermore, local government officials openly expressed the view that providing infrastructure to slums would encourage more rural-urban migration, a perspective that blames victims for their own deprivation. This finding aligns with the structural violence framework (Akinwumi & Olaniyan, 2021), wherein the state systematically withholds resources from the poor while simultaneously condemning their living conditions.

4.4 Social Consequences and Health Impacts

The fourth theme concerns the social and health consequences of slum housing in Orerokpe. Residents reported a high prevalence of waterborne diseases (diarrhea, typhoid), vector-borne diseases (malaria), and respiratory infections linked to poor ventilation and indoor biomass cooking. Over the twelve months preceding the study, forty-two percent of households reported at least one episode of typhoid fever, and sixty-seven percent reported malaria at least twice. These rates are substantially higher than the Delta State average, as reported in the State Health Statistics (2023). Healthcare costs consume a significant portion of household income, and many respondents reported selling assets or borrowing money to pay for treatment.

Table 4a: Self-Reported Health Outcomes in Orerokpe Slums (n=45)

Health Indicator	Households with Condition (n)	Households with Condition (%)	Households without Condition (n)	Households without Condition (%)
Typhoid fever in past 12 months	19	42.2%	26	57.8%
Malaria (≥ 2 episodes) in past 12 months	30	66.7%	15	33.3%
Diarrhea in child under 5 (past 3 months)	25	55.6%	20	44.4%
Respiratory infection in child under 5 (past 3 months)	40	88.9%	5	11.1%
Household member with chronic cough	22	48.9%	23	51.1%

Source: Author's field survey, Orerokpe, March 2025

Table 4a provides quantitative confirmation of the qualitative accounts of suffering. The high prevalence of respiratory infections among children under five (88.9%) is particularly alarming and is likely attributable to indoor air pollution from cooking with firewood and kerosene, compounded by poor ventilation. During home observations, it was noted that most households cook inside their sleeping rooms because there are no separate kitchens and cooking outdoors is unsafe at night. Consequently, smoke accumulates and is inhaled by all household members for several hours daily.

The high prevalence of chronic cough among adults (nearly half of households) is likely also attributable to indoor air pollution, compounded by overcrowding and poor ventilation. The fact that 66.7% of households reported malaria at least twice in the past year reflects the absence of mosquito control measures and the presence of standing water around slum dwellings, which serves as mosquito breeding habitat.

Table 4b: Healthcare-Seeking Behavior in Orerokpe Slums (n=45)

Healthcare-Seeking Behavior	Households (n)	Households (%)
Used patent medicine vendor for last illness	32	71.1%
Used public health center for last illness	8	17.8%
Did not seek care due to cost	5	11.1%

Source: Author's field survey, Orerokpe, March 2025

The data in Table 4b show that the majority of slum dwellers seek care from patent medicine vendors, who operate outside the formal health system and often provide inappropriate or substandard treatment. This preference is driven by the lower cost and proximity of these vendors. However, this preference also leads to inappropriate antibiotic use and delayed diagnosis of serious conditions. Only eighteen percent used public health centers, despite free primary healthcare under state policy. Respondents reported that even though consultation is nominally free, they are asked to pay for registration, cards, and medications, and that health workers are often absent or rude. Eleven percent of households did not seek care at all due to cost, indicating that even basic healthcare is unaffordable for some.

The social consequences extend beyond physical health to include psychological distress and social withdrawal. Many respondents described feelings of shame, hopelessness, and anger about their housing situation. One young man in Ugborikoko Layout explained, "I cannot bring a girlfriend here. If she sees this place, she will run. So I am alone." Another elderly woman stated, "My children who have moved to Warri do not visit. They say this place is too dirty and they are ashamed to tell their friends where their mother lives." These narratives illustrate how slum living produces what sociologists call stigmatized identity, wherein residents internalize societal contempt and withdraw from social relationships. This withdrawal further reduces access to social capital, which is a known pathway out of poverty.

4.5 Coping Strategies and Resistance

Despite the dire conditions, residents of Orerokpe slums are not passive victims. The study identified multiple coping strategies and forms of everyday resistance. At the individual level, households employ strategies such as reducing meal frequency, sending children to live with relatives in better-served areas during school terms, and forming rotating savings groups (*esusu*) to pool resources for rent payments. At

the collective level, residents have formed community development associations that negotiate with landlords on behalf of tenants, organize self-help garbage collection, and maintain communal pit latrines. These associations represent a form of collective efficacy that mitigates some of the worst effects of slum life.

Table 5: Coping Strategies Employed by Slum Households (n=45)

Coping Strategy	Households Using Strategy (n)	Households Using Strategy (%)	Households Not Using Strategy (n)	Households Not Using Strategy (%)
Reduce number of meals per day	37	82.2%	8	17.8%
Borrow money for rent (informal loan)	32	71.1%	13	28.9%
Send children to live with rural relatives	17	37.8%	28	62.2%
Participate in esusu (rotating savings)	20	44.4%	25	55.6%
Self-help garbage collection	16	35.6%	29	64.4%
Self-help water distribution (communal well cleaning)	14	31.1%	31	68.9%
Withhold rent in protest (past 12 months)	7	15.6%	38	84.4%
Organize collective complaint to landlord	10	22.2%	35	77.8%

Source: Author's field survey, Orerokpe, March 2025

Table 5 demonstrates that slum dwellers actively work to improve their circumstances even in the absence of state support. The most

common strategy, reducing the number of meals per day (82.2%), reflects the severity of housing-induced poverty; households

prioritize rent over food, leading to chronic food insecurity. Borrowing money for rent is also common (71.1%), often from informal moneylenders who charge exorbitant interest rates, trapping households in cycles of debt.

The esusu system, a traditional rotating savings arrangement, allows households to access lump sums for rent or emergencies without paying the exorbitant interest charged by informal moneylenders. Participation in esusu (44.4%) indicates that social solidarity remains intact despite material deprivation. However, participation in esusu also carries risk, as default by one member can collapse the entire group.

Self-help initiatives such as garbage collection (35.6%) and well cleaning (31.1%) represent collective efforts to compensate for the absence of municipal services. These initiatives require significant time and labor but are often the only means of preventing environmental degradation. Withholding rent in protest (15.6%) is a risky tactic because verbal agreements offer no protection against retaliatory eviction. However, some tenants have organized collective complaints to landlords who rent to multiple families (22.2%), thereby leveraging collective bargaining power.

These findings challenge deficit-based narratives that portray slum residents as helpless or pathological. Instead, they reveal a population that

is resourceful and collectively organized, albeit within severe structural constraints. The absence of formal tenancy rights means that even the most organized tenant association can be evicted without cause. Therefore, the ultimate constraint on coping strategies is not lack of community spirit but the absence of legal recognition and state protection. As one community leader stated, "We can clean our streets, we can repair our wells, but we cannot force the government to give us water pipes or stop a landlord from throwing us out. That power belongs to them alone."

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This sociological study set out to examine the relationship between urbanization and housing challenges in Orerokpe, with a specific focus on slum development. The findings conclusively demonstrate that rapid in-migration, combined with the complete withdrawal of the state from housing provision and regulation, has produced a landscape of severe housing deprivation. The slums of Orerokpe are characterized by non-durable building materials, chronic overcrowding, absent infrastructure, and exploitative rental arrangements. These material conditions produce cascading social and health consequences, including elevated rates of infectious disease, food insecurity, social stigma, and psychological distress. Importantly,

the study reveals that slum formation is not an accident or a natural ecological process but a structured outcome of governance failures, including the absence of building code enforcement, the non-recognition of tenant rights, and the systematic exclusion of slum areas from municipal infrastructure budgets.

The theoretical contribution of this study is to demonstrate that the structural violence framework applies not only to megacities but also to secondary towns experiencing rapid but low-income urbanization. Furthermore, the study challenges the assumption that slums are necessarily transitional spaces that will disappear with economic growth. In Orerokpe, slum conditions have persisted for over two decades and show no signs of spontaneous improvement because the political economy of land and housing privileges property owners over tenants and excludes slum dwellers from decision-making. The practical implication is that piecemeal or market-led solutions will fail; only a coordinated state intervention that addresses land tenure, infrastructure, and housing finance simultaneously can break the cycle of slum reproduction.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are offered. First, the Okpe Local Government Council should immediately conduct a participatory slum mapping and upgrading exercise in the three

clusters studied, prioritizing the installation of paved drainage channels, communal water taps, and sanitary latrines. This upgrading must be done in consultation with residents to ensure that designs meet their needs and that they are not displaced during construction. Second, the Delta State Government should enact and enforce a Tenancy and Land Use Reform Law that mandates written tenancy agreements for all rental properties, caps rent-to-income ratios at thirty percent, and establishes a small claims court in Orerokpe to adjudicate landlord-tenant disputes without expensive legal representation. Third, a community land trust should be piloted in one of the slum clusters, whereby residents collectively own the land under their homes and pay nominal ground rents into a fund for infrastructure maintenance. Fourth, the National Housing Fund should be decentralized to allow low-income residents of secondary towns to access micro-mortgages for home improvement, with interest rates subsidized by the state. Fifth, the local government should invest in public health outreach specifically targeting slum areas, including weekly water chlorination, seasonal malaria chemoprophylaxis for children, and health education on indoor air pollution reduction. Finally, academic institutions should prioritize further sociological research on secondary town urbanization, as these settings remain understudied despite housing

conditions comparable to or worse than those in major cities.

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