PUBLIC PERCEPTION, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF COMMUNITY POLICING ON ARMED ROBBERY CONTROL IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The community policing programme was designed so that the public in collaboration with members of the police will fight crime. However, the spate of armed robbery attack in Enugu State seems to suggest that the security system in the area is ineffective. This study therefore investigated public perception and challenges of community-policing on armed robbery control in Enugu State. The area of the study was Enugu State in South-East, Nigeria. Data collected through the in-depth interview were analysed using content analysis. The hypotheses were tested using Chi-square test of significance. The study found that the public perceive community-policing as being ineffective for the control of armed robbery. The study equally found that the police present brutal attitude on the public and this account for poor public compliance to the community policing programme. The study also found that the greatest challenge to community policing is that the police are too rough to the public and this explains why the public is not friendly with the police. The study recommended that there should be police reorientation on the need to involve the public in the security arrangement. The study also recommended the establishment of state police and the sensitization of some of the operations of the police.

Keywords: Community Policing, Armed Robbery, Public Perception,

INTRODUCTION

The placement of security need as the second priority of man suggests that security of life and property is one of the greatest challenges of mankind throughout the ages. Karl Marx (1818-1883), a social thinker, philosopher and sociologist noted that inequality in society tends to put very few numbers of individuals in a state of affluence against the greater number of individuals in abject poverty and lack. The former tends to use their economic power to secure political and economic powers to lord over the greater number of the masses. Implicit from this disposition is that the those found at the poverty level appear to deviate from the norms in order to meet the unavoidable socio-economic challenges of life.

Armed robbery is one of such economic crimes that cut across all societies. Okolo (2002) affirmed that armed robbery involves stealing, during which force and violence or threats of violence are employed. It is an endemic crime that is as old as human kind and cuts across human societies. Thomton (2019) conceptualised armed robbery from the criminal law view point. He noted that armed robbery is an aggregated form of theft that involves the use of lethal weapon to perpetuate violence or the threat of violence (intimidation) against a victim. He further affirmed that armed robbery is a serious crime and can permanently traumatise its victims both physically and psychologically. Yecho (2010) stressed that a successful robbery entails the direct loss of property on an individual.

In view of the fact that armed robbery occurs in all human societies, individuals have always been desirous to make their societies crime free. This is carried out by adopting policing system that would carter for their security needs. One of such measures is the community policing system. Prior the incursion of colonial rule in Nigeria, various ethnic groups had methods of checkmating deviant behaviour including armed robbery and other violent crimes. Igbo (2006), Ugwuoke (2010), Dambazau (2008) affirmed that prior the colonial rule in Nigeria, law enforcement challenges were handled through intermediate process of various informed policing institutions such as use of secret societies, oracles, priests and priestesses of various shrines, diviners and organizers of trial by the use of traditional

chiefs and village elders of guards, messengers and age grades. However, the advent of colonialism in Nigeria brought about the departure from this traditional policing system and heartened the bureaucratic and formalised policing system.

Igbo (2006) maintained that the introduction of formal policing system in Nigeria was not in the interest of Nigerians but rather, for Britain to actualise their master plans of economic exploitation, political subjugation and cultural alienation. At the end of colonial rule, the ruling political class adopted the colonial policing system undiluted. The consequence is that the negative attitude of the police seems to be accentuated in their relationship with the public who should not only be the best friend to the police but partners in the fight of crime in society. The expected relationship is borne out of Robert Peel's disposition in the newly created London Police District during the early 19th century that "police are the public and the public are the police. This was however not the case in Nigeria. The Nigeria public's displeasure on formal police operations and attitude impacted on their views and relationships with the police, leading to seeming unabated criminal activities, most prominent among them is financial crimes of which armed robbery seems to be a daily occurrence.

Community policing has been exercised enthusiastically by police forces across the developed countries. Most notably the United States of America, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia as a response to crime and disorder in the city with a view of re-establishing the relationship between the police and the community. Community policing was launched in Nigeria on the 27th day of April 2004 by the then inspector general of police and Enugu state was used as the pilot state (Ikuteji 2009). It is against the backdrop that the study aims at investigating the influence of community Policing on the control of armed robbery in Enugu state.

Orngy Tormuba, Luman, and Bauchi (2013) affirm that there is an increase in the incidence of robbery than for any other index offence. Robbery takes place on the average of once in every seventy-five seconds. The author further noted that half of the robberies known to the police are committed on the street, the remainder occur within households and business

establishment. Ugwuoke, (2010) stressed that the manner with which armed robbery attack citizens in Nigeria is quite alarming Ugwuoke, (2010) noted that a situation whereby armed robbers could barge into the house to the mother of the then president of Federal Republic of Nigeria seems not to conjure hope of security of life and property.

In view of the foregoing, it therefore becomes necessary to investigate the What is the public perception of community policing in the control of armed robbery in Enugu state and to understand challenges militating against the same community policing. This was carried out using mixed method, which involved interviews (primary data source) and elaborate secondary materials.

The Concept of Community Policing

Kpae and Adishi (2017) conceptualized community policing and an organization – wide philosophy and management approach that promotes community government and police partnership, proactive problem solving and community engagement to address the cases of crime and other community issues. It is a security process that has the essence of returning to the day when safety and security are participatory in nature for the general health of the community not just to select a few but, not just the safety of a few but absolutely everyone in the community. Community-policing is anchored on a systematic relationship between the police and the entire citizenry. Police roles and functions are not simply law enforcement but also include tackling a huge range of community problem. It is a philosophy and practice, a veritable vehicle for police reforms (Okiro, 2007).

Okeshola and Mudiare (2013) noted that community-policing is a paradigm shift that seeks to focus on constructive engagement with peoples who are the end users of the police service and re-negotiate the contract between the people and the police, thereby making the community co-producers of justice and quality police service. The maintenance of law and order in any security has usually been the exclusive role of conventional police and other law enforcement agents in the absence of active participation of the wider members of the community. During those days the police not only faced difficulty in tackling crime but also

criticized for unfriendly nature of the relationships with members of the public (Mulugeta and Mekuriaw, 2007).

Armed Robbery

Armed robbery is one of such crimes that seem to cut across all societies especially in the contemporary times. Somaha (2008) affirmed that armed robbery consists of two crimes namely theft and assault. The author noted that theft is accomplished under circumstances calculated to terrorise the victim. The negative effect of armed robbery seems not to underscore the reason why protection of life and property of the citizens is one of the fundamental functions of the police in all societies. Ugwuoke (2010) observed that armed robbery is one of the worst criminal activities. It is the most dreaded, violent and prevalent criminal act. Armed robbery is a form of robbery which involved theft of property and carrying (or pretence) of a weapon. It is considered a higher category of offenders relating to thefts and the use of force (Johnson, 2012).

Theft is taking personal property that belongs to another with intent to deprive them of the property (as opposed to) just borrowing the item. The second element of an armed robbery charge is the use of force. The use of force is not limited to a physical touch. It can also be through other actions or words. Actions could include destruction of other property, such as throwing coin or breaking objects to get a victim intimidated or frightened enough to comply with a theft. The third and most crucial element of armed robbery charge is the use of pretense or display of weapon. Thus, a robbery is committed while in possession of a weapon, the crime will be labeled as an armed robbery. The weapon or deadly weapon is what sets a theft allegation apart from a robbery without a weapon.

Theoretical Framework

Theory used to adequately situate this study to its social linkages is the Functionalist Theory. The theory was propounded by a French Sociologist; Emile Durkheim (1858-1917). The theory is one of the grand theories in social sciences. Durkheim in his study of the society theorized that the society is like a biological organism which has parts and these parts are

interrelated. When one part is affected, it will affect the other component units that make up the whole. Functionalists believe that the society functions by maintaining on equilibrium balance among the institutions that make up the society. For them, social changes should not be allowed to destabilase the existing order within the society, rather when changes occur, the internal mechanisms through the principles of homeostasis should be allowed to absorb the changes.

Community-policing is a security system which believes that the community cannot be effectively policed without involving members of the community. Thus, for the police to function as it were, members of the community who know the nooks and crannies should be fully involved in the security process of the land. Implicitly, where members of the community are not functionally involved, certainly, crime will be on the high side which not only brings about social disorder but equally lay bare the weakness or the dysfunction of the traditional police whose statutory function it is to fight crime. Functionalist theory has been criticized on a number of ways. It tends to view the society as static. Social change can be both exogamous and endogamous and absorbing the changes cannot be the function of the internal mechanisms of the society alone. However, in spite the criticism raised against the theory, the researcher finds it very relevant to the study.

It is expected that members of the neighbourhood watch would be the 'eye' through which the police 'see' the community. Implicitly actions taken by this group is acceptable by the police whose duty it is to maintain peace and order. However, what appears disturbing in Nigeria is that community-policing seems to be existing on papers. The rate at which crime and criminal activities plays in the country is unimaginable; a situation whereby armed robbers could barge into the house of the mother to the former President of Nigeria speaks volume of the enormity of such dastardly act in Nigeria (Ugwuoke, 2010). On the other hand, the establishment of community-policing should make the security network function effectively. Members of the community are recognized to be a functional element in the security of life and property.

Public Perception of Community Policing and Implication on Armed Robbery Control

Cossyleon (2019) affirmed that community policing is a philosophy and practice that treats police-community interaction and communication as basis for reductions in crime and fear of crime. It is generally believed that crime exist within a social circle and the community is in a position to tease out the personality of individuals that live within their areas. Community policing efforts include hiring and training of local manpower with the aim of preventing crime in the bid to solve community problems. The use of excessive force to deter criminals without fully involving the community do not field positive result hence community-policing (Adinde, 2019). Through community-based crime prevention or what some have called practice problem-solving, police officers dedicate attention to the roots of perceived problem instead of solely focusing on incidents themselves trained to gather pertinent information about criminal events, police seek to find the likely source of social problems to avoid further criminal incidents. (Crossyleon, 2019).

Community policing strategy has been incorporated into modern policing so that the police will respond to democratic system of governance. The system should be welcomed not only because traditional policing has been failing because it is reactive rather than proactive, but also the police personnel are part and parcels of the community policing quite distinct from traditional policing community partnership, organizational transformation and problem-solving. Ibrahim, Saleh and Mukhtar (2016), Presidents Tasks Force on 21st Century Policing (2015) noted that community policing is a process of bringing police and citizens together to prevent crime and solve problems, emphasizing the prevention of crime rather than responding to crime after it happens.

In the United Kingdom, it is often noted with some justifications that the British are obsessed with their police. The very notion that the public own the police and the police also own the public conveys the relevance of people as an integral point of policing in London (Bradford and Jackson, 2009). Thus, whether formally defined or otherwise, the British policing system recognises the efficacy of citizens in the security land. As aptly noted by

Tylehe and Huo (2002), in a democratic society, police authority rests on public consent. Without this consent, policing cannot be effective. Public, perception and consent of policing is evidenced in a number of ways. Including compliance with the law, reporting crime events, the supply of voluntary information about suspicious behavior and participation in community meetings and activities like the Neighbourhood Watch.

Indeed, Okeshola and Mudare (2013), observed that in spite numerous efforts by various police administration to curtail crime and criminal activities in Nigeria, crime and social disorder still persist in the country. The duo further-emphasized that the wide spread of corruption in the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) is fueling abuses against ordinary citizens and severally undermining the rule of law in Nigeria on daily basis. Implicit from thus disposition is that the Nigeria Police Force is yet to understand and accept members of the Nigeria society as veritable force in the fight against crime and criminal behavior.

Interviews support the above assertions as respondents noted that community police will help control armed robbery as community policemen and women will do all within their power to prevent crime in localities entrusted to them, which are also likely to be their homes. In the words of a respondents:

> *If I am employed and equipped to police my village, I will ensure that I drive away any armed robber that will come to destroy and steal from my people. Another thing is that local police also know all the criminal and bad ones within our community. So, they cannot escape when we start community police* (Field Survey, 2021).

Another respondents was also excited about the prospect of community policing, relating it to the currently banditry, robbery and kidnapping, insisting that there will be nowhere to hide as all and sundry in the community will be involved proactively in information gathering and actual policing. According to her;

> *We do not trust these policemen they bring for us. They do not care whether we live or die. They collect money from armed robbers and free them. Afterall, it does not concern them because it is not their village or community. When we have our own children policing us or people we can reach, people who have something at stake in our communities, like family or property, then they*

will care what happens to us. Only then can they properly police us (Field Survey, 2021).

Police Attitude to the Public and Community-Policing Procedure

Tyler and Huo (2002) observed that the police represent and embody a social group most people want to, need to and indeed do feel part of. The duo noted that the attitude of the police can influence the policed in more consensual and less confrontational ways particularly in an environment where the character of the state upholds the fundamental rights of persons. Under such circumstance, the people submit their loyalty, cooperation and support which are the basic elements needed in the structure, formation and effective functioning of the community policing.

In addition to community acceptance is police leveraging them by corroborating with them, expunge the abysmal abuse of the fundamental rights of individuals Tyler (2008) stated that; to be effective in lowering crime and creating secure communities, the police must be able to elicit cooperation from community residents. Brogden and Nijihar (2005) have argued that in most countries, the impact of introducing community-policing have been harmful mainly because they take no account either of local community conditions (in particular how communities' police themselves or the state of the local police forces who are frequently corrupt, violent, feared, hated and or despised).

Challenges and Prospects of Community Policing in the Control of Armed Robbery

Major challenge of policing in general includes manpower shortage, inadequate funding, inadequate logistic support and infrastructure lack of serviceable information and technological equipment to cover all the areas of the state (Mamnus, 2010). Expectedly, these same challenges will extend to community policing. However, we expect that some of these challenges (such as logistics) will be adequately taken care of through community policing as it would be easier to recruit and post from the locality, rather than the current posting of federal policemen and women, which is laced with personnel and logistics problems.

Also, the federal might is opposed to it as it believes it will undermine or rather diminish the absolute power enjoyed at the centre. This is not only based on security concerns

but also on political matters. There is also the fear that powerful members of the community will use community police to intimidate and harass other locals in the event of conflicts that may arise which may include family conflict, land dispute, chieftaincy tussle, inheritance and so on. Traditional police resistance to community-policing is attributed to the perception, it is a move away from traditional law enforcement practices to a softer style of policing the community can be disempowered when offering solutions if police dominate as the crime and disorder expects. Police are still reluctant to share information with the community (Mekuriwa, 2017).

In Enugu state and elsewhere in Nigeria, Okeshola and Mudiare (2013) affirmed that police and indeed institutional corruption pose challenge to the realization of community-policing objectives. The duo noted that countless ordinary Nigerians are accosted by armed police officers who demand bribes and commit human right abuses. These abuses range from ordinary arrest and unlawful detention to threats and acts of violence including sexual assault, torture, extra-judicial killings among other inhuman treatments (Human Right Watch, 2021). Consequent upon this, the public is unwilling to cooperate with the police in community-policing programme. Even when the Nigeria Police Force tried to boycott the entire community members and make use of Police-Community Relation Committee, the process is still challenges by the non-supportive attitude of the public. Marenin (2008) observed that the sense of personal and communal insecurity is pervasive. This will certainly be taken care of through community policing.

It is also found that in Enugu State, the operations of the *neighbourhood watch* have an established laws guiding them. If the operation was to mean a cultural oriented programme, some of which could by mystical or spiritual, the idea to bring to laws to guide the operations would not be relevant. This implies that community-policing programme in order the full control of the state. The state in its nature would always protect the police. This perhaps may not be out of the reasons why the police unleash violence to the public in spite of the acclaimed community-policing and democracy in Nigeria and indeed African countries in general.

Ozomaro (2008) also observed that one of the challenges of community-policing effort is that it had little or no financial gratification. As such, the very few who opt to be used by the police seem to engage in financial crimes in collaboration with members of the police. This to a large extent leads to withdrawal attitude by members in giving desired security information to either the police or their collaborators. Cosgrove and Ramshaw (2015) affirmed that more tune and energy may have to be invested with vulnerable people or people who lack trust in police to improve their perceptions. Historical mistrust can prevent some groups from wanting to engage with the police (Myhill, 2012) but officers and staff may be able to break down barriers by demonstrating procedural justice and or better understanding of different social groups (Bullock and Johnson, 2017).

In spite of the above outlined challenges and associated prospects, a number of other direct benefits can be garnered from community policing. As Abolition Research Group (2017) noted, community police are used in the United States to bolster the legitimacy of the police when they are undermined by protest and crisis. Community policing is used to bolster the legitimacy of the police when they are undermined by protest and crisis. Community-policing can also extend police presence and surveillance into everyday life and turns social problems into police problems. This no doubt will help control armed robbery in every locality.

Conclusion

This study surmises that the community policing programme was designed so that the public in collaboration with members of the police will combat crime from the perspective of the grassroot. One of the greatest areas of need in crime fighting in Enugu State in particular is armed robbery, which has steadily been on the increase. Although there have been challenges associated with community policing in this regard, prospects are accruable. In view of the foregoing, it can be deduced that community police is a viable compliment to the every increasing spade of armed robbery in the community. It should be noted that (as was deduced),

it aims to serve as complimentary services to the community and mankind and not to replace Federal and possibly state police.

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