

CRIME, COMMUNITY POLICING AND SOCIAL DISORDER IN IKOT EKPENE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF AKWA IBOM STATE

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Abstract

This study examined crime occurrence and the role of community policing in moderating its effect on the phenomenon of social disorder in Ikot Ekpene LGA. The incidence of criminal victimization in Akwa Ibom and Ikot Ekpene LGA in particular has raised concerns about social order. This paper adopted a qualitative method of research through the use of content analysis approach. The Normative Sponsorship Theory (NST) of Community policing and the Critical Social Theory (CST) were adopted for its theoretical framework. The study found out that the high rate of criminality which seemingly overwhelms the state security apparatus namely the police constitutes a state of social disorder in the society. It concluded that community-police partnership would be of a great advantage in controlling crime because it is more a preventive or proactive approach than reactive. It recommended, amongst others, that the police should cultivate a culture of service based on humanitarian principles visible in acts of accountability, inclusiveness, objectivity, openness, and being apolitical and sensitive to public opinions and expectations rather than the cruel, forceful and less productive authoritarian style of service that they are used to.

Keywords: Social disorder, Crime, Community policing, Victimization, Problem-solving approach.

1.0 Introduction

Man is a rational being with freewill to act. Since antiquity, this freewill and rationality of the human person has evolved both in positive and negative ways. The desire to fulfill basic necessities of life, sometimes at all cost has made many to resort to acts that are antisocial. This was the case of the Hobbesian state of nature characterized by social disorder when no one had yet surrendered their rights and will to the Leviathan. For Sowmyya (2014), crime is one of such antisocial behaviours. It is an act or omission which is offensive to the law of the state and is disapproved by the public.

There has been an increasing rate of crime within Ikot Ekpene urban and rural areas for a considerable number of years. This prevalence of criminality has brought about deep-seated tensions and questions on how it can be abated. The public seem to blame this neighbourhood malady on police inefficiency thereby losing faith in their ability to defend them or exercise their formal duties of social control (Sunshine & Tyler 2003; Jackson & Sunshine 2007). Again,

some measures adopted by the police to control this menace such as imposition of dusk to dawn curfew and the restriction of motorbikes from certain locations and times of the day, particularly from six pm seemed to have increased the sufferings of innocent citizens and brought about adverse effects on their economic activities and productivity. Those who wouldn't bear these strict measures had always fallen out with the police in one way or the other, bringing about violent reactions from the police and parties involved. Consequently, feel of the general public is that of confidence in the police since these measures rarely prevented criminality especially within the rural areas where they often experienced a door to door armed robbery at nights or the snatching of phones and other electronic gadgets at gunpoint.

In addition to this state of insecurity, other failures of the police have become the bane of social order, namely the indiscriminate stops, barricades, search, arrests, harassment of youths, abuse of due process, failure to respond to call or complaint and wrong diagnosis of the crime problem (Loader & Mulcahy, 2003). The outcome of these is a seeming state of anarchy where there is an emergence of various informal security groups or individuals adopting various means and also employing diabolical and violent apparatus to safeguard lives and properties within communities. There is no doubt that there are several abuses carried out by these individuals or groups who claim to provide security in place of the lacuna created by the law enforcement agencies. These atrocities include extra-judicial punishments and various forms of victimization of the general public. Often times, they lay heavy burdens of taxes in form of security levies on the people, who are often left at the mercy of criminal offenders whenever they fail to comply. It is this state of volatility that characterizes social disorder across the Local Government Area. Hence, this study sets out to investigate the prevalence of criminal offending and the role of community policing in moderating its effect on the phenomenon of social disorder in Ikot Ekpene LGA.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the Normative Sponsorship Theory (NST) of Community Policing by Tiedke et al (1975) and the Critical Social Theory (CST) by the Frankfurt School (Dant, 2003). Normative sponsorship theory assumes that the majority of people have goodwill and that they would cooperate with others to enable the building of consensus. According to Umar & Bappi (2014), the NST of community policing holds that the more various groups share common goals, values and beliefs, the more likely they would agree on common goals through their interaction for the purpose of improving their neighborhoods. In the words of Oke, Braimah & Masajuwa (2021), this theory posits that cooperation and the people's goodwill are conditions necessary for a safe community or society. On the other hand, critical social theory focuses on how and why people band together to surmount the socioeconomic and political hindrances to their well-being (Dant, 2003). Umar and Bappi (2014) observe that there are three important areas of critical social theory which comprises enlightenment, empowerment and emancipation. Respectively, these mean that people must become educated about their circumstances before they can lobby for change, they must take action to improve their condition and therefore achieve liberation through reflection and social action.

3.0 Conceptual Review

Concept of Crime

The existence of crime is as old as the history of humanity. This is evident in the primordial biblical stories particularly that of the murder of Abel by Cain. In classical times too, philosophers like Aristotle and Plato also condemned acts that brought about social harms such as murder, theft, rape, etc and recommended severe punishments as deterrence (Encyclopedia.com, 2019). Roman Empire perceived crime as purely an act against the state which was punishable through whipping and fines. However, those who committed more severe crimes such as treason, adultery, corruption, homicide and kidnapping received punishments such as banishment, slavery deprivation/starvation or death (Miric', 2017). Christians of the Middle Ages associated crime with religion and understood it an act against God whose punishments were violent and cruel yet equated with carrying out God's mandate (Encyclopedia.com, 2019).

Modern attempts at the definition of crime have tried to demonstrate that it is an act or omission disapproved by the society or which violates the law of the state (Sowmyya, 2014). It is an antisocial behaviour. It is said to be a social construct since each society has its own perspective of what constitutes a criminal act. Hence, whatever is agreed upon by the community as morally right or wrong determines what amounts to crime. In other words, the understanding of crime as a concept has not just the legal leanings but also a sociological foundation based on or rooted in the norms of a culture (Curra, 2000). Idowu & Imo (2014) qualify crime as acts which the society strongly disapproves and finds impossible to accept. Generally, however, there are four important elements needed for act to be termed criminal, namely, the individual, the *mens rea* or criminal intention, *actus rea* or an external act and an injury or hurt which violates a law of the state (Sowmyya, 2014).

There are various types of crimes which include personal crimes, property crimes, white-collar crimes, organized crimes, juvenile delinquency, computer crime and violation of public safety (Sowmyya, 2014). Adebayo (2013) observes that Nigeria has experienced a commonness of criminality as noted on the global crime map since 1980s. According to Dambazau (2007) the nature of these crimes includes armed robbery, murder, rape, car theft, burglary, fraud, bribery and corruption, food and drug adulteration, gambling, smuggling, human trafficking, kidnapping, drug traffic king, money laundering, internet scam, advanced fee fraud and other illegal activities.

The causes of crime are numerous and may vary from society to society, depending on peculiar factors. Some of these causes enumerated by Sowmyya (2014) include family/social disorganizations, upbringing of the individual, defective education, media hype, substance abuse, war and post-war conditions; poverty, unemployment, industrialization and urbanization; intellectual/mental weakness, personal characteristics and emotional instability; age, gender, body types and hormonal causes; larger populations, poorly managed neighbourhoods and high residential mobility.

Crime has various adverse effects on the society. According to Dube (2019), crime brings about depopulation of the community, less neighbourliness, environmental poverty, trauma, fear,

devaluation of properties/assets, lower investment, decline in economic productivity, reduction in tourism, undermining authorities, pain, suffering and loss of life.

Community Policing

Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS, 2008) defines community policing as a social contract entered into by the police and the public to help spot and solve problems related to crime within a given neighborhood. Community policing focuses mainly on problem-solving and active engagement of the community members through partnership in the quest to prevent and control crime for the safety of the community (Cordner, 1998 in Arisukwu, Igbolekwu, Oye, Oyeyipo, Asamu, Rasak & Oyekola (2020). According to Lee, Cao, Kim & Woo (2019), for a style of policing to be regarded as community policing there must be elements of consultation with the police or collaboration between the police and locals which must be aimed at identifying, prioritizing and solving problems.

OACP (2012) defines community policing as the practice where police together with community members unite to advance the wellbeing of the community, providing security and ensuring safety of lives and property through mutual crisis identification, examination, reaction and evaluation. Several other scholars like Diarmaid (2018) have contended that community policing framework is a superlative form of policing and an essential strategy for crime control since by its very nature demands partnership between the police and the public to thrive.

Globally, community policing has been a sought after panacea for crime problem. Since the 1970s, the initiative of community policing was informed by the need to create conducive institutional apparatus to facilitate more sense of responsibility in the police in the discharge of their duty. This idea emerged from first world countries like the USA, UK and then shifted to Africa and other developing countries within a space of ten years (Rowe, 2008). Hence, Crawford & Evans (2012) observe that community partnership with the police is the basis of policing in the contemporary world. However, Nigerians generally depend first on the police as the lawful authority on crime and crime control issues. Consequently, the police manpower becomes encumbered with the heavy burden of enforcing laws across all communities in various parts of the country. Hence, According to Arisukwu, Igbolekwu, Oye, Oyeyipo, Asamu, Rasak & Oyekola (2020), the evolution of community policing in Nigeria can be traced to public distrust and loss of confidence in the ability of the Nigeria police to protect lives and properties.

Social Disorder

Thomas Hobbes provides a famous description of social disorder in *Leviathan* written in 1651 where he terms life as solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, short, a survival of the fittest and man being wolf unto man. Within the discipline of sociology, social disorder is synonymous with social instability. It is often defined by different types of civil unrest. It is a lack of required social or ethical status-quo, a breakdown of standards and values and other elements of state failure such as criminal and political violence, ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic hostilities, use of terror, weak institutions, insufficient infrastructure and basic food shortages, etc (Rotbrg (2002) in Denis (2023). According to Ekeopara (2011), social disorder occurs when situations of life or activities within the community are not controlled as they should be and

where persons fail to carry out their respective functions or duties in the society It is could be considered as an aberration of social order, an irregularity of life in the society in relation to the traditions, norms, values, customs and structures which constitute the society. Social disorder leads to social instability and severing of good interpersonal relationship as well as human relations with their environs. Social disorder prevents development and advancement of the society in all aspects (Ekeopara & Ogbonnaya, 2014).

Conversely, social order is a state of peace and security within the society or community (Onunwa, 2008). Social order is the attainment of essential goals like justice, peace, personal and group actualization as well as the general well-being of the society (Ujomu 2001).

4.0 Crime, Community Policing and Social Disorder in Ikot Ekpene

The effect of crime on social order in Ikot Ekpene has been established in our preliminary considerations. Beyond this context, the various literatures reviewed have also shown a significant relationship between these variables globally. Consequently, the theories of community policing namely the normative sponsorship theory and the critical social theory shall explain within context the prospects of community policing in Ikot Ekpene in the face of high rate of criminality. The arguments of these theories can be weaved into one to explain the possibility and effectiveness of policing the society and Ikot Ekpene in particular using the apparatus of the community. It is taken for granted that there are individuals who have goodwill in the different communities in Ikot Ekpene who would be ready to make sacrifices to see to the safety of their communities. However, the principle of enlightenment under the critical social theory would also be of help in motivating goodwill through educating the public on the benefits of community policing to them. Actually, many are ignorant of what community policing is, how it works and how they can employ it to help their communities. They are also ignorant of ways to get out of the high rate of criminal victimization they face daily.

One way of kick starting a good community policing outreach is availability. According to Folashade, Okeshola and Mediara (2013), community policing demands that “the police should be highly visible in community through foot patrols and should integrate themselves into communities to ensure confidence and trust from their hosts.” Community policing in the pattern the critical social theory would also require a great deal of activities from the locals. Different groups including local guards, vigilante groups, hunters, youths, traditional rulers and religious leaders must be ready to be deployed into the services of the conventional policing system so as to accomplish an effective crime fighting at the grassroots (Oke, Braimah & Masajuma, 2014). Being primary victims of criminality their approach to any problem-solving will not just be concrete and contextual but also passionate.

Community dwellers in Ikot Ekpene seem to have lost a great deal of confidence in the police because of various antecedents of inefficiency and victimization. However, when enlightened on their benefits in cooperating, there could be renewal of trust between the inhabitants of communities and the police. Accordingly, Arisukwu et al., (2020) observes that the main challenge facing community involvement or partnership with the police for crime control is that of shared suspicion between the police and the public due to lack of trust. The people become apprehensive towards the police due to poor service delivery and maltreatment,

while the police themselves dread possible hostility because of their sense of indebtedness to the public for poor service delivery and cruelty. In addition, the non-implementation of community policing framework has been due to misunderstanding or outright lack of understanding of what it means and requires. This failure and ineffectiveness of community policing is also attributed to miniature nature of public deliberations on how it can be beneficial to the society (Friedmann, 1996 in Zikhali, 2019). Hence, confidence building through enlightenment would be a crucial element in ensuring effective police partnership in Ikot Ekpene.

Having being empowered to work hand in hand with the police, the third principle of the critical theory recommends that every social action by the people must point to liberation and never social disorder. For social order to arise and be maintained, people must be able to cooperate to attain common goals. Cooperation entails people working together for the same end. It brings about a sense of active participation and freedom as against the feeling of alienation which could lead to revolution against the system. With such a remarkable of amount of involvement in law enforcement, individual will learn to jettison unrest, restiveness, private revenge, mob action and violence as reactions to crime incidences.

When the above principles are considered for community policing in Ikot Ekpene, the issues of problem solving and crime control which has long neglected the inputs of members of the community would be settled. Hence, professional policing would no longer be perceived as a reactionary crime handling apparatus but rather be seen as a proactive step where the public are engaged in preventing and solving crime problems.

5.0 Conclusion

Community policing promotes a spirit of the social solidarity between the police and the various communities. It brings about interaction between governance and the culture of the people as a way of ensuring compliance with laid down laws and regulations. The sense of belonging it creates in the people projects a people-oriented character of governance and a sense of acceptance and goodwill which makes social order easily achievable. According to Crawford & Evans (2012), this innovative approach recognizes that the causes of crime recline far from the reach of the criminal justice system. It admits that there is no lone outfit that has answer to the crime problem because of its complexity in both causes and consequences. Moreover, it affirms the need for social response to crime which mirrors the nature of the phenomenon itself. It allows for a comprehensive approach to crime and community safety while affording opportunity for adequate management of issues through bringing together resources, data and know-how. It is indeed more a preventive or proactive approach than reactive.

6.0 Recommendations

Deducing from above findings and conclusion on the subject matter, the following recommendations are made;

- i. The police should cultivate a culture of service through some humanitarian principles visible in acts of accountability, objectivity, inclusiveness, openness, being apolitical and sensitive to public opinions and expectations rather than the cruel, forceful and less productive authoritarian styles

- ii. The police should recruit members of the community who would have to play allies to law enforcement towards enhancing the safety and security of neighbourhoods.
- iii. Adoption of problem-solving approach to tackling crime through public participation and teamwork where the members of the community are involved in security decision-making so as to elicit confidence from the process.
- iv. The peculiar nature of various cultural patterns, social, political and economic milieu should be brought into high consideration before attempting an introduction of community policing policy into any context.

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