

Social Factors Affecting Effective Crime Prevention and Control in Nigeria

Anthony Abayomi Adebayo

Department of Sociology, Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria

Abstract Every society across the globe has its peculiar problems and challenges. Nigeria is not an exception. As a developing country, she faces her own share of social, political, economic and cultural problems which has in no small measure affected the well-being of the populace. One of such problems bedevilling the country is the rising wave of crime. This study examined the increasing wave of crime in Nigeria and the factors incapacitating the police and other security agencies in the task of crime prevention and control. This study reveals that the security agencies are inadequately equipped and motivated, coupled with poverty, unemployment and the breakdown of family values among others have made crime prevention and control a difficult task. The paper proffered that the police should be better motivated and greater effort should be made to address poverty and unemployment.

Keywords Society, Crime, Prevention, Control, Effectiveness, Security Agencies

1. Introduction

The prevalence of crime in the world today is a cause for serious concern for all and sundry. It undermines the social fabric by eroding the sense of safety and security. Crime impacts on society in a variety of ways according to the nature and extent of crime committed. It constitutes a problem when its incidence is so rampant in the society as to constitute a threat to the security of persons and property, as well as social order and solidarity.[1] The costs of crime are tangible and intangible, economic or social, direct or indirect, physical or psychological, individual or community. In fact, it is from the cost that the consequences of crime are derived. The cost of crime can be incurred as a result of actual experience of criminal activities, when there is physical injury, when properties are stolen, damaged or destroyed. It could also be in the form of psychological and emotional pains as a result of shock due to the crime done against the victim. Also the cost of crime can be incurred in an attempt to prevent or control crime. As a consequence of the prevalence of crime in society, the demographic composition may be altered through mass movement of people from crime-prone areas to areas perceived to be relatively crime-free. This can also lead to brain-drain and other socio-economic problems.

Crime is a threat to the economic, political and social security of a nation and a major factor associated with

underdevelopment; because it discourages both local and foreign investments, reduces the quality of life, destroys human and social capital, damages relationship between citizens and the states, thus undermining democracy, rule of law and the ability of the country to promote development. Emile Durkheim considered crime to be an integral aspect of society and a “normal” social phenomenon in the sense that it has existed in all societies throughout history. Durkheim believe that *mala prohibita* crimes (crimes which violates social norms) functions in society as a means of defining the limits of acceptable behaviour, serving as vehicle for social change by extending and testing those boundaries.[2]

2. The Notion of Crime

Crime is like other concepts in social sciences, which have no generally accepted definition. At first sight, it seems easy to define crime as doing something wrong or relating crime to immorality. Is there any agreement over what is morally wrong or right? Should all moral wrongs be crimes? It could also be asked whether all crimes are moral wrongs. In a strict legal sense, crime is the breaking of rules or laws for which some governing authority (via mechanisms such as legal systems) can ultimately prescribe a conviction. Crime in the social and legal framework is the set of facts or assumptions that are part of a case in which there were committed acts punishable under criminal law, and the application of which depends on the agent of a sentence or security measure criminal. In criminal law, crime is an act of omission which attracts sanctions such as fines, imprisonment or even death. [3] According to Oxford Dictionary of Sociology (2009:139) “a crime is held to be an offence, which goes beyond the

* Corresponding author:

adebayo_nthny@yahoo.com (Anthony Abayomi Adebayo)

Published online at <http://journal.sapub.org/ijas>

Copyright © 2013 Scientific & Academic Publishing. All Rights Reserved

personal and into the public sphere, breaking prohibitory rules or laws, to which legitimate punishments or sanctions are attached, and which requires the intervention of a public authority... for crime to be known as such, it must come to the notice of, and be processed through, an administrative system or enforcement agency. It must be reported and recorded by the police (or other investigator); it may then become part of criminal statistics; may or may not be investigated; and may or may not result in a court case.”[4]

Furthermore, a normative definition views crime as a deviant behaviour that violates prevailing norms – cultural standards prescribing how human beings ought to behave normally.[5] This approach considers the complex realities surrounding the concept of crime and seeks to understand how changing social, political, psychological and economic conditions may affect the current definitions of crime and the form of legal, law enforcement and penal responses made by society. For example, as cultures change and the political environment shifts, certain behaviour may be ‘criminalized’ or ‘decriminalized’, which will directly affect the statistical crime rates, determine the allocation of resources for the enforcement of such laws and influence general opinion.

The conflict orientation sees crime in the perspective of the ruling class. They defined crime as an act or behaviour selectively identified by the few who governed in the society. Society consists of competing interest groups which are in conflict with each other, due to unequal distribution of wealth which results in inequality in economic and social powers. According to Quinney (1980), “dominant class creates laws that will protect their own interests. That lower class crime as a function of miserable life condition and conflict with the interest of the dominant class; and that the dominant class constructs beliefs about crime which makes the dominant class look good and the powerless look bad.” [6]

Dambazau (1994), defined crime as “an act or omission against public interest, and which is prescribed by law enacted by the legislature in the overall interests of the society, and to which prescribed punishment is attached in the event of violation and it involves four major principles which are public wrong, moral wrong, law and punishment for the criminal. Crime is also seen as a violation of the rules agreed to be respected by all members of the society, and upon which the rest members of the society mete sanction upon those guilty of the violation.[7] It is for the same reason that the legal system views crime as a public and moral wrong. For Mathews (1993), crimes are the outcome of social changes, which is brought about by social developments and exposure of Nigerians to the Western culture and their life style. Crime is in an important sense, a socially constructed phenomenon. Its meaning is profoundly influenced by considerations of time and space. Its construction is based upon the interaction of four key elements – victims, offenders, the state and the public. The interaction of four key elements which are – victims, offenders, the state and the public.[8] Criminologists infer that crime has two major elements, - criminal act which is

either a commission or an omission and mental element which is called the criminal intent/committed. Both of the elements may pose serious threat to the physical, mental health, life and property. Therefore, crimes must have these two elements and if either of them is lacking, then there is no crime.

3. Theoretical Framework

Durkheim (1933) believed that the specialized division of labour and the rapid expansion of industrialized society contained threats to social solidarity. They tended to produce a situation of anomie, which literally means normlessness. Anomie is present when social controls are weak, when the moral obligations that constrain individuals and regulate their behaviour are not strong enough to function effectively. He argued that crime is an inevitable and normal aspect of social life. It is inevitable because not every member of society can be equally committed to the collective sentiments (the shared values and moral beliefs) of society.[9] Durkheim saw a number of indications of anomie in late 19th century industrial society in particular in high rate of suicide and other crimes, industrial conflicts etc. With increased prosperity, desires increase; the traditional rules lose their authority and behaviours become more exigent and impatient of control. He believed that solution to anomie could be provided within the existing framework of industrial society. Globally, the police as an agent of government have the legal function to prevent and control crime in the society.

In the Nigerian context in the 21st century, the breakdown of family values, high unemployment rate, the prevalence of the twin evils of bribery and corruption, and the inability of the police to function effectively in the prevention and control of crime due to inadequate equipment and demoralized personnel, have all contributed significantly to the breakdown of law and order. It is a fact that there is a reign of chaos and terror in the polity and citizens sleep with virtually one eye open. On the highways and in the homes, every minute is lived on the edge as criminals may strike anytime. Criminal activities such as murder, rape, theft etc are on the increase and these have thrown the polity into greater confusion and fear. It is indeed a situation of normlessness as the anomie theory stipulates.

4. Crime Prevention and Control in Nigeria

Nigeria is among the developing countries of the world, and its experiencing a prevalence of rising crime waves, criminal intentions and varying degree of delinquencies. Nigeria has been on the global crime map since 1980s.[10] 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 trafficking, money laundering, internet scam, advanced fee fraud and other illegal activities.

It is preposterous that in Nigeria, there is no adequate will and genuine intention by any government to rid the society of the criminal tendencies and manifestations, as people in the leadership positions are also guilty of corruption and crime. An example of such flagrant disregard for diligent prosecution is the case of the former Governor of Delta State, Nigeria, Chief James Ibori who was found not guilty of corruption in Nigeria, but has since been jailed in the United Kingdom money laundering crime. The trial of many former Governors for corruption while in office has been going about 8 years with no end in sight, while they have moved on to other political offices while the trial drags on without diligent prosecution. Dambazzau (2007) defined crime as a pattern of attitudes and behaviours directed both at reducing the threat of crime and enhancing the sense of safety and security to positively influence the quality of life, and to develop environments where crime cannot flourish. It is also the anticipation, recognition and appraisal of crime risk and the initiation of some action to reduce or remove it.”[11]. He further asserts that crime control involves the idea of solving crime problems, arresting suspects, prosecuting and incapacitating offenders.[12] The control of crime, therefore, deals with the immediate situation and rests on the discovery of past criminal behaviour.

The establishment of other agencies like State Security Service (SSS), Independent Corrupt Practices and other offences Commission (ICPC), and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) is a laudable effort towards crime prevention and control, their narrow focus and few personnel inhibits them from functioning in a broad day to day manner like the police. Some of them apart from the State Security Service that is consigned to the gathering of intelligence reports don't exist even at the State or Local Government levels. The leaves the day to day policing of the entire country more at the door-steps of the police.

The capacity of the police and other security agencies in Nigeria to effectively prevent and control crime in has often been called to question. As a matter of fact, many have lost faith in the security agencies going by the incessant increase in the crime rate. According to Okunola (2002), crime prevention basically involves the disruption of mechanisms, which cause crime events. In other words, the central question to crime prevention is how to disrupt the causes of crime. Crime prevention is a pattern of attitudes and behaviours directed at both reducing the threat of crime and enhancing the sense of safety and security to positively influence the quality of life and to develop environments where crime cannot flourish. Also crime prevention is defined as “the anticipation, recognition and appraisal of a crime risk and the initiation of some action to remove or reduce it.[13] Crime prevention and control are, however, closely related and their elements overlap. Crime prevention involves the community, government as well as individuals; crime control involves the whole of the criminal justice system, that is, the police, courts and prisons.[14]

Models of crime prevention vary across countries, but for

Robert (2003), Criminologists have adopted three perspectives of crime prevention as primary, secondary and tertiary preventions.

a. Primary Prevention: This attempt to change environmental conditions that provide opportunities for or precipitate occurrence of criminal acts. At this stage, the police are the primary focus and three main issues are involved which are – increasing the effort, increasing the risk of committing crime, and reducing the reward for the potential offender.

b. Secondary prevention: This involves engagement in early identification of potential offenders by seeking to intervene to prevent criminal behaviour from developing. In other words, it seeks to change people especially those at high risk of embarking upon criminal career before they do so. The mass media, various bodies and organizations like Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and propaganda are involved.

c. Tertiary Prevention: This measure deals with actual offender and interventions aimed at preventing further criminal acts. It also focuses upon the truncation of the criminal career in length, serious and frequency of offending. The intervention or treatment of known criminals is centered at the prisons and probation services.[15]

5. The Factors Affecting the Effectiveness of Crime Prevention and Control by the Police in Nigeria

Section 4 of the Police Act No 23 of 1979, specified the functions of the Nigeria Police Force as: the Police shall be employed for the prevention and detection of crime, apprehension of offenders, the preservation of law and order, the protection of life and property, and due enforcement of all laws and regulations with which they are directly charged, and perform military duties within or without Nigeria as may be required of them by, or under the authority of this or any other Act. According to Critchley (1978) the police was founded to deal with social problems.[16] However, the following are some of the factors militating against the efficiency of the police as required by this provisions of this Act.

1. *Inadequate equipment*: The police lack modern equipment to effectively combat crime in Nigeria. A former Inspector General of Police, Mr. Sunday Ehindero, in 2008 observed that infrastructural facilities and the much needed equipment are in short supply in the police force. Vehicles, communication equipment, scientific tools for investigation, intelligence gathering control equipment are grossly inadequate. Less than 5% of policemen in the States and Federal Capital Territory have walkie-talkie for communication during patrols. Less than 20% of the Police Stations have telephones to respond to distress calls from the public during emergencies. In terms of vehicles, about 5% of the commands have one or no lorry and other operational vehicle.[17] The situation has not really changed till now. According to Michael Askew, retired Superintendent, Metro

politan Police, at a training workshop for senior officers of the Nigeria Police in Uyo “Inadequate funding can hamper Police efforts in Nigeria. If they do not have the necessary tools to work; you will be providing room for what will aid corruption in the sector. The police officers in UK and Nigeria do the same job, they want to save the community, deal with crime, terrorism but the difference is that there is great infrastructure in the UK, every officer has a radio, have access to vehicles, petrol but here, a police officer does not even have enough money to put petrol in the police cars. The basic job is the same but Nigeria has less resource that is needed on the ground... inadequate resources and infrastructures have made the Police less effective, and is responsible for the corruption experienced in the force... government must rise to the responsibility of providing sufficient resources to make the Nigeria Police effective in fighting crime as well as efficient in service delivery”.[18]

2. *Lack of motivation for the police:* Motivation is a serious factor as far as efficiency in any endeavour is concern. Motivation goes a long way to encourage a worker to work to maximum capacity. There are policemen who have been on the same rank for fifteen (15) years. It is a fact that less than 25% of the policemen in Nigeria have Barrack accommodation. Also a visit to some of the barracks will reveal the sorry state of the barracks. Some of the barracks are in various states of dilapidation and squalor and are in dire need of renovation to make it habitable for decent conditions of living for the policemen.[19] Also, Sulaiman Musa noted in a Saturday column of Weekly Trust, 4-10 March 2006, page 48 that “the Nigeria police cannot be said to be functional. Apart from the fact that they are underfunded and reduced to mere object of degradation with meagre salaries, they also have to operate in less habitable places as offices in addition to poor shelters (barracks)... Our police are demoralized and yet they are the ones assigned the tedious and dangerous jobs of patrolling our highways, chasing armed robbers, fishing out criminals, as well as restoration of peace... And are quick to blame them once they perform below our high expectation; unmindful of the condition under which they have to operate.[20] Though this has improved slightly over the years, but much more still needs to be done in order to motivate the rank and file of the police.

3. *Lack of co-operation from the public and negative perception of the police:* Crime prevention and control is a collective responsibility. The police cannot do it alone. But the vast majority of Nigerians do not believe in the saying that ‘police is your friend’, either because of past experience with police or for some other reasons known to them. The public perception of the police in Nigeria has greatly affected the level of support given to the police in combating crime. As a result of this, many refrain from giving valuable information which could have helped to checkmate crime to the police. Public participation is very important in assisting the police to achieve the desired effective crime prevention and control.

4. *Poverty:* According to Oxford Dictionary of Sociology,

poverty is a state in which resources, usually material but sometimes are lacking. Poverty in absolute terms refers to a state in which the individual lacks the resources necessary for subsistence.[21] In other words, poverty is the state of one who lacks a certain amount of material possessions or money. Absolute poverty or destitution refers to the deprivation of basic human needs, which commonly includes food, water, sanitation, clothing, shelter, health care and education. Relative poverty is defined contextually as economic inequality in the location or society in which people live. Poverty is pronounced deprivation in well-being, and comprises many dimensions.[22] It includes low incomes and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity. Poverty also encompasses low levels of health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of voice, and insufficient capacity and opportunity to better one’s life. Poverty may also be understood as an aspect of unequal social status and inequitable social relationships, experienced as social exclusion, dependency, and diminished capacity to participate, or to develop meaningful connections with other people in society.[23] The poverty level in Nigeria is very high and this has resulted in an increase in criminal activities. Many have taken up to crime to make ends meet and as a result, the police are over-stretched both in personnel and equipment.

5. *Unemployment:* In Nigeria, the unemployment rate is worrisome. It has consistently increased in the last few years. Recently, a former presidential aspirant in Nigeria, Pat Utomi, wonders why Nigeria experiences rising rate of unemployment despite its rating as one of the fastest growing economies in the world.[24] Unemployed youths are readily available for anti-social criminal activities that undermine the stability of society. The rising rate of unemployment has further affected the effectiveness of the police to combat crime. The police are most time overwhelmed with the enormity and frequency of crime committed.[25] Because unemployment readily creates a large army of potential criminals, effective policing has remained a mirage in Nigeria.

6. *Family breakdown:* The role of the family in maintaining a stable and crime free society cannot be over-emphasized. The increasing rate of family marriage breakdown and its attendant effect on the children and the society at large has become ticking time-bomb because it has given rise to increase in criminal activities by the children of the broken homes. For Iain Duncan Smith, UK Work and Pensions Secretary, “it is important that we recognize the role of marriage in building a strong society, especially if we want to give children the best chance in life. Children from broken homes are nine times more likely to commit crimes than those from stable families. Seven out of 10 offenders come from broken homes... According to the Centre for Social Justice estimate, the direct cost of family breakdown is up to £24billion...but research indicated that the extra costs brought about by the effects of broken homes could quadruple that figure... This is not some abstract debate.

Family life affects all of us – what happens on our streets; in our communities; and in our economy. What you learn from a very early age has a great deal to say about the person you will eventually become and the life you lead." [26]

7. *Bribery and Corruption*: The Nigeria police is well known for its rottenness as many of the police officers are known to be corrupt. Bribery and Corruption are twin cankerworms that have eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian society. The police are known not to be exempted from this reckless orgy of financial ignominy. Funds released to the police are known to have been diverted into private pockets. Also, criminals are known to usually bribe their way through and escape the long arm of justice. This has led to the increase in criminal activities since the criminals know that the police could be bought at a price. Arrested criminals are back on the streets again the next day if they or their god-fathers can negotiate and pay an agreed sum. This has greatly affected the effectiveness of the police in crime prevention and control in Nigeria.

6. Recommendations and Conclusions

The role of the police as enshrined in the Constitution of the Federal republic of Nigeria, as it concerns crime prevention and control cannot be over-emphasized. The development of a society largely depends on the rate of crime. If the crime rate is high, it could scare away or discourage investors. Also the safety of lives and property is an issue of priority in any given society. Consequently, the government needs to increase its funding for the police so that modern and adequate equipment to combat crime could be acquired. However, such funds are to be properly monitored to avoid diversion into private pockets and also rid the Nigeria police of its corrupt elements. It is also important that the police must be motivated through regular promotion, good salary, decent accommodation. There is need to strengthen the family institution as well as develop a welfare programme for the children from broken homes, as well as unemployed youths as this will prevent them from being recruited into criminal gangs. If crime is to be reduced to the barest minimum, the government must take pro-active measures towards poverty alleviation. Poverty readily offers a breeding and fertile ground for crime. As such, any effort made towards poverty alleviation automatically translates to effort made towards crime prevention and control in the society. The police cannot fight crime alone. Intelligence gathering is a veritable tool for crime prevention and control. This is why the members of the public must wake up to assist the police in its functions. The public should be ready at all time times to give necessary information to the police. This is because, crime is a challenge that all and sundry must confront headlong for a stable and safe society.

REFERENCES

- [1] Onoge, O.O. (1988) *Crime and Control in Nigeria: The Problem of Robbery in Ukwu*. Dimensions of Social Problems in Nigeria. Kuru: NIPSS
- [2] Unpublished Thesis
- [3] en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crime
- [4] Scott, J, and Marshall, G (eds). (2009). *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [5] Unpublished Thesis
- [6] Quinney, R. "Structural Characteristics, Population Areas, and Crime Rates in the United States," *The Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science*, 57(1), p. 45-52
- [7] Dambazau, A.B. (1994). *Law and Criminality in Nigeria*. Ibadan: University Press.
- [8] Mathews, R. (1993) 'Squaring Up to Crime' *Sociology Review*, Vol. 2. No. 3
- [9] Haralambos, M. & Holborn, M. (2007). *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*, 7th Edition. London: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.
- [10] Dambazau, A.B. (1994).
- [11] Dambazau, A.B. (2007) *Criminology and Criminal Justice* 2nd Edition. Ibadan: University Press.
- [12] Dambazzau, A.B. (2007)
- [13] Okunola, R. (2002) *Crime in Society* cited in *Current Perspectives in Sociology*.
- [14] Dambazzau, A.B. (2007)
- [15] Robert, W. (2003). "Situating Crime Prevention: Models, Methods and Political Perspectives". *Crime Prevention Studies*. Vol. 15.p23
- [16] Critchley, T. A. (1967) *A History of the Police in England and Wales*. London: Constable
- [17] Dambazzau, 2007.
- [18] National Daily Newspaper, 25 January 2013
- [19] Dambazzau, 2007.
- [20] Weekly Trust, 4-10 March 2006,
- [21] Scott J. And Marshall G. (2009) *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* (3rd Edition.) Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [22] <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY>
- [23] Silver, H. (1994) *Social Exclusion and Social Solidarity* in *International Labour Review*, 133 5–6
- [24] Dambazzau, 2007.
- [25] Dambazzau, 2007
- [26] Telegraph, 6th February 2013