



The fear of crime and public safety in urban Nigeria: Implications for policy options.

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Abstract

Fear of crime has been a serious social problem, especially after the country gained independence from the British Colonists. In the recent time, there has been an upsurge in the criminal activities all over the country, ranging from terrorists attacks to herders/ farmers clashes to armed robbery to kidnapping to militancy uprising to militia unrest to students' violence and to domestic assault. This increase in the prevalence of crime across the country has brought correspondence increase in its fear in the land. Fear has engulfed the heart of every citizen in the country including the rich and the political class. Nobody can sleep with the two eyes closed again. Consequently, political regions in the country are agitating for their separate security platforms to rescue their respective regions from the jaws of insecurity. Therefore, the aim of the study is to highlight the fear of crime among the urban dwellers in Nigeria, the socio-psychological impact of the fear of crime and how it can be controlled in the society. It also considered the fear concept of crime, the reason for its fear and what government can put in place to allay the fear. The study is basically theoretical and conceptual in approach and made use of secondary data from newspapers, articles, journals and books.

Keywords: Crime, Fear, Safety, Government, Policy

1.0 Introduction

Community is the origin of crime and one of the major threat of crime for both the community where it originates and the citizens living in the community is the fear of crime (Donnelly, 1989). The intense at which the prevalence of criminal activities is increasing has become a major threat to the stability and peaceful co-existence of many countries in the world, Nigeria inclusive. As communities increase in their scopes, capacities, and boundaries, there is concern about the decline in the sense of community

and increase in the prevalence of crime among the inhabitants. The escalating crime has resulted to an increased fear of crime among the citizens who feel that they are always at risk of being a victim (Nasar & Jones, 1997). It has been discovered that the fear of crime is a channel to instability in the society (Perkins & Taylor, 2002). Nevertheless, there is no consensus to what constitutes crime (Usman, Yakubu, & Bello, 2012). This is because the concept is vast in terms of scope, relative and subjective in nature. Relative in the sense that what



constitutes a crime in society A may not necessarily constitute crime in society B. It is subjective in the sense that crime keeps changing in nature, technique and procedure with time, what was referred to as crime in the last decade may be regarded as a way of life now. Notwithstanding, Crime can be seen as associated with harm and violence, an act harmful not only to some individuals but also to a community, society and the state in general. (Morrison, 2013). It is an unlawful behaviour and/or act punishable by the state (Oguntunde & Ojo, 2018). The concept of crime involves the idea of a public as opposed to a private wrong with the consequent intervention between the criminal and injured party by an agency representing the community as a whole. Crime has become part of our social life and it has constituted what we have to face and live within our daily life (KENECHUKWU, 2012; Morrison, 2013).

Crime in Nigeria is seen as serious violations of standardized ways of behaviour, custom and the tradition of the people. Crime can be coined to mean an act which has negative and adverse effects on social consequences not only for offender but also their associates. Consequences of crime in a given situation may result in maiming or even death, if care is not properly taken (KENECHUKWU, 2012). The current explosion in the Nigerian population and high rate of unemployment in the country has made the prevalence of crime to be on increase across the country (Andresen, 2006; Omotor, 2009). Insecurity in the society on the fear of crime has been identified as predatory factor that can erode the wellbeing of the citizens as well as the stability and cohesion of the society (Jackson & Stafford, 2009). Nigerians now think twice before embarking on any assignment (either official or private)

beyond their domain, not only this, citizens are being robbed, kidnapped and even assassinated right inside their private residence. Infact, the real risk of crime has made the fear of it inevitable. In the pre-colonial era, citizens were free to move about the country without any act of molestation, harassment and/or intimidation; we even had a situation in which farm produce will be placed by the roadside with the selling price placed beside it. Any interested buyer will buy such produce and equally put the money at same spot the good was placed, yet nothing will happen to the money till when the farmer comes (Yusuf, 2017). But now, despite the fact that the constitution guarantees freedom of movement and right to life, people are still living in perpetual fear of crime. It has been observed that fear of crime can affect the state of psychological wellbeing of the victims as well as distort their itineraries and the social activities. The fear of crime can also constitute a clog in the wheel of public health thereby increasing the prevalence of mental health among the citizens (Stafford, Chandola, & Marmot, 2007). It has negative implications on the health and wellbeing of the victim and also represents a complex set of responses to the neighbourhood and can be a catalyst in mediating environmental impacts on mental state and conditions (Lorenc et al., 2013).

2.0 Literature Review

In this section, a review of the related books, journal and articles was conducted. This means those contributions and the views of other scholars on general concept of crime, its fear among the citizens and how the fear can be addressed. The review was done under the following sub-headings:

i. Dimension of Crime.

ii. Factors influencing fear of Crime.

2.1 Dimensions of Crime in Nigeria



In recent time, there has been an upsurge in the criminal activities all over the country, ranging from terrorists attacks to herders/farmers clashes to kidnapping to militancy uprising to militia unrest to students' violence to corruption/sharp practises to armed/gang robbery and to domestic assault.

According to the statistics released by the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics in 2016, Lagos, Abuja, Delta, Kano, Plateau, Ondo, Oyo, Bauchi, Adamawa and Gombe States made the top ten list of states with high number of crimes (Oguntunde & Ojo, 2018). It has been revealed that armed and gang robbery dominate the crime scene in Nigeria and this constitutes almost 50% of total of 8,516 deaths in 3,840 fatal incidents between June, 2006 and September, 2015 throughout the country (Ukoji & Okolie-Osemene, 2016). The increase in the prevalence of crime across the country shortly after the independence have made every successive government in the country including the military government to introduce many security measures and platforms. Notwithstanding, these seems not to be working in the right direction, as the insecurity keeps surging in different parts of the country. These high incidences of insecurity have given birth to different militia groups in different geo-political zones across the country like Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC) in southwest, Bakasi Boys in the southeast, Civilian JTF in the northeast, Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) in the south-south region and recently, the launch of Amotekun security outfit by the states government in the southwest Nigeria. It was purposely meant to be combating this ever rising insecurity in the country. The insecurity in the land has increased fear of crime, every Nigerian is now a potential prisoner and victim of criminal behaviour

(KENECHUKWU, 2012). To be a victim of criminal behaviour has a grave and severe consequences for the citizens and the society (Odekunle, 2004). Every neighbourhood in most urban cities now have their private security arrangement, mostly referred to as vigilante, to guard the streets against any invasion by the marauders. This is because in 2002, a survey conducted by the Centre for Criminal Justice Research and Education on the public's perception of police performance indicated that over 65% of persons interviewed had little or no confidence in the ability of the law enforcement agencies to prevent or solve crimes. But, the question is "*how prepared are the vigilantes*" considering the fact that they have little capacity to confront the armed gang and protect the society.

2.2 Factors Influencing Fear of Crime.

(a) Psychology of Risk Perception: The rising in criminal activities has sent fear into the mind of citizens. Every citizen is now living in the fear of being a victim of crime at any time. Like a proverb in Nigeria which says *live ready*. Here the fear is psychological and emotional in nature. This happens when the emotion and worrying of crime and the aftermath danger of being a victim (Gray, Jackson, & Farrall, 2011; Warr, 2000). According to (Berenbaum, 2010), the psychology of the fear of crime can be of three forms:

- i. the thought of crime occurring in the nearest future in which one can be a victim,
- ii. the thought of what will be the outcome of the crime which is very uncertain and unknown
- iii. having a thought of being a victim and the outcome of a crime are unpleasant.

Psychology risk in the fear of crime has been seen as a very big challenge than the issue of crime in itself because of its consequences on the prevalence of

emotions, depression, interpersonal distrust and mental health (Scarborough, Like-Haislip, Novak, Lucas, & Alarid, 2010)

(b) The Influence of Neighbourhood Concept: The condition of the environment and how an environment is designed is one of the factors usually considered by criminals in deciding whether or not to commit an act of crime (Loukaitou-Sideris & Eck, 2007). Crime has been extensively linked to the sustainability in urban conditions while unsustainable neighbours are mostly illustrated with a high crime prevalence, poor standard of living, fear of crime and homelessness (Cozens, 2008). Studies have shown a relationship actually exists between the environment where one resides and the fear of crime (Ratnayake, 2016). The design and how the environment is built and arranged is believed to be one of the predatory factors influencing deviant behaviour and criminal activities which give rise to some level of fear of crime in the society. The mental state of the citizens concerning fear of crime varies considerably depending on the attitude and practises towards environmental conditions (Sakip, Johari, & Salleh, 2012). Citizens residing in high-rise and low-rise buildings are likely to have fear for crime while in their various houses especially at the dusk (Rollwagen, 2016).

(c) Representation of Risk of Victimisation through communication and Mass Media: News about criminal activities in the society has also been identified as one of the factors that determine the fear of crime among the citizens. The awareness and the knowledge of the citizens about a crime is primarily taken from its depiction in the media. The media affects the perception of the citizens on crime and punishment and its attitude towards the police. But it has been

discovered that crime stories are covered extensively by the media in order to sell their newspaper. It is believed that citizens who expose themselves to many sources of crime stories and news have the tendency to develop fear of crime (Smolej & Kivivuori, 2006). Spending time watching and listening to crime related news on the television can influence one's perception of fear of crime (Chiricos, Eschholz, & Gertz, 1997). Mass media is an avenue that triggers the fear of crime within the society (Heath & Gilbert, 1996). It is often said that media most times exaggerate on their reportage of crime scene which have a substantial impact on the daily public perception of crime and this will result in victims becoming increasing fearful of being victimised.

3.0 Theoretical Framework

Theory is the lifewire of any study in the social sciences. Theory explains social phenomenon and past social issues. Without theorisation, a study will be as good as a soup without salt. Consequently, this study will make use of Lifestyle Theory.

3.1 Lifestyle Theory

Lifestyle theory is based on the principle that citizens may become the victims of crimes because of their lifestyles and choices. The theory states that the likelihood an individual suffers a personal victimisation will depend on the mode of lifestyle. In other words, a person's lifestyle makes them an attractive crime target (Pratt & Turanovic, 2016). Lifestyle theory holds that crime is a developmental process guided by a continuous relationship among three variables; incentive, opportunity, and choice. During each stage of the criminal behaviour (initiation, transition, maintenance, burnout/maturity), incentive, opportunity, and choice take on different values and meanings (Walters, 1994). The theory focuses on an



individual's social action in the society, in this sense, the behaviour an individual exhibits in the society puts such an individual at the risk of being a victim of crime (Pratt & Turanovic, 2016). In a study on the lifestyle changes and the risk of criminal victimization, it was revealed that a person's daily activities can expose them to crime. The study maintained that individuals with high levels of night-time activities outside the residence were more likely to remain victims of crime (Miethe, Stafford, & Sloane, 1990). The Nigerian society has been characterised by exhibition of affluence by individuals. Citizens build high rising residences, with all sorts of sophisticated equipment and this can increase the prevalence of crime and the resultant fear of crime. Nigerians are always at the centre of social events every weekend spraying various naira denominations and lavishing naira on themselves, despite embargo on spraying of money at parties by the Central Bank of Nigeria. The lifestyle of citizens drifting to the urban areas thereby populating the areas making it a security risk which can result in the fear of crime in those areas. The security in the urban centres is a threat to the quality of life, the standard of living, human rights, social and economic stability and sustainable development.

4.0 Conclusion

It is generally believe that what kills faster is the fear of crime. The Nigeria citizens especially those residing at the urban centres have been living at the fear of crime. This has had a major effect on the citizens both socially and psychologically. The fear of crime has even reduced the productivity of an average Nigerian living in the cities. The fear of crime if not quickly and properly handled can lead to reduction in the life expectancy of the citizens. Government and

individuals should endeavour to reduce the fear of crime. The reduced crime fear will definitely lead to improve productivity and high life expectancy.

5.0 Recommendations

Re-organisation of Neighbourhood: Since it has been known from different scholars that the fear of crime is subject to the way the environment is arranged, efforts should be put in place to make the buildings and arrangement of buildings in the country security friendly. The government agency (ies) saddled with the responsibility of urban and town planning should be made to wake up from its moribund state and be alive to its duties and responsibilities. Building of residential houses and the type of residential houses should be strictly monitored by the government to ensure that the buildings are security friendly. For instance, the local authority in Korea has been carrying out urban regeneration programmes to improve the nature of the environment of the low-rise neighbourhood. This is because most dilapidated neighbourhood in the country usually witness high crime prevalence (Lee, Park, & Jung, 2016).

Media Control Board: There should be a census board to control the content of news broadcast by the media houses especially as it relates to crime and security news. This will definitely reduce the fear of crime among the citizens, because media consumption and fear of crime, especially physical attacks or muggings. Such media representations tend to lead to a distorted perception of crime among the majority of the public, exaggerating its threat and unnecessarily increasing the public's fear of crime.

Low-key lifestyle: Citizens should cultivate a low-key lifestyle to and exercise some degree of self-control measures to avoid being victims of crime. Crime may be very



unpredictable, but there are factors that increase a person's chances of being a victim. One factor is lifestyle choices, or the way individuals choose to behave and live as they carry out routine activities. Flamboyant lifestyle choices lead to higher risk of victimisation. Criminals often select their victims based on signals given off by their potential target. Hence an individual is constantly communicating to the world through their actions and mannerisms, which may later be a target of crime. For instance, if a kidnapper is targeting a hostage for ransom, he will target the victim based upon a display of wealth or information given to him from someone who knows the victim intimately.

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