

COMMUNITY POLICING STRATEGIES FOR CRIME CONTROL IN PORT HARCOURT METROPOLIS, RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

This study examined community policing strategies for crime control in Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers State. The study was guided by three research questions. The study adopted a descriptive survey design with a population of 1,234 residents consisting of police officers, members of community policing groups (neighbourhood watch group) and volunteers from Community Based Organisations in Port Harcourt metropolis. The sample of the study was 343 respondents. The proportionate stratified sampling technique was adopted in selecting the population from each stratum of the population (Police officers, members of community policing groups and CBOs). A researcher designed questionnaire titled "Community Policing Strategies for Crime Control Questionnaire" (CPSCCQ) was used for data collection. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha statistics. Reliability coefficients of 0.88, 0.79 and 0.86 were obtained for the three clusters of the instrument respectively. The retrieved data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation statistics. The findings of the study revealed among other things that neighbourhood watch strategy is used for crime control through arresting of criminals by neighbourhood watch group, reporting of criminal activities to the police, exposure of hideouts of criminals to the police and helping the police to identify potential criminal zones in the city. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that Government at federal and state levels and other stakeholders should provide a legal framework through enactment of legislations to enforce the creation of neighbourhood watch groups in all parts of Nigeria. This would deal with the rising spate of insecurity in the nation.

Keywords: Community Policing, Strategies, Crime Control

Introduction

Crime control in urban cities is one of the challenging responsibilities of government and security agencies all over the world. The unending migration of people from less developed settings to urban areas comes with some attendant security challenges. Supporting this view, Ojo and Ojewale (2018) asserted that fast paced urbanization generates both opportunities

and challenges for the government and urban dwellers. Insecurity is one of the anxieties that sometimes accompany fast paced urbanization. Insecurity takes the form of increased cases of armed robbery, cultism, kidnapping, internet fraud, crude oil theft, politically motivated violence etc. With the increasing number of people that move into urban cities in search of

“greener pastures”, these cities become overpopulated and available job opportunities may not be sufficient to meet the increasing demands of the population. Subsequently, those who may not have any legitimate means of livelihood often take to different crimes in a bid to make ends meet. This among other reasons explains why there is increasing crime rate in most urban centres.

This is the case in Port Harcourt metropolis of Rivers State. Port Harcourt is a crude oil and agricultural residue of Nigeria. It is situated in the region known as the South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria with a population of 1,382,592, according to 2006 census. This population has increased significantly over the years due to high immigration of people from rural areas and other parts of the country to the city. Port Harcourt City as it is popularly known also, lies along the Bonny River (an eastern tributary of the river Niger), about 66 km upstream from the Gulf of Guinea (Bamidele & Ugochukwu, 2019).

Port Harcourt metropolis covers Port Harcourt City and Obio/Akpor Local Government Areas of Rivers State. The urbanized nature of this metropolis poses security challenges in this area. The metropolis is one of the most urbanized cities in Nigeria as it plays host to several multinational companies, business organisations and industries. Since it is the capital city of a state blessed with the abundance of crude oil, there has been a steady migration of people from rural communities and other cities into the metropolis in search of better opportunities. Consequently, this has led to increased population with high unemployment rate and increased cost of

living. This may account for why the city has experienced increasing crime rate ranging from armed robbery, cult related activities, kidnapping, to oil bunkering and the likes. For example, the Vanguard Newspaper of 2nd July, 2021 reported that the operatives of the Nigerian Police Force in Port Harcourt arrested and paraded 36 criminals for different offences in the metropolis and other parts of the state. A total of 14 guns and over 200 ammunitions were recovered from the suspects. Similarly, it was reported in BBC news Pidgin (2021) that gunmen attacked and killed eight security officers at a military checkpoint close to the Port Harcourt airport road on Sunday, 25th April, 2021. These are just a few among similar security concerns in the metropolis.

Furthermore, successive administrations in the state have devised various approaches and strategies to fight crime and improve the security situation in the metropolis and other parts of the state. The state government over the years have supported security forces (Police, Army, Navy and State Security Service) with vehicles and other materials to aid their work. Communities have also set up vigilante groups and other similar outfits to curb crime.

Despite these efforts made, the metropolis and most communities in the state are still grappling with different kinds of crimes and security issues which have affected development adversely. Eji (2016) attributed this to the fact that the strategies adopted places too much emphasis on the government and traditional policing with little or no attention paid to the communities who have the potential to assist in curbing crimes in their neighborhood.

This underscores the urgent need for a shift from traditional policing to a more inclusive and democratic strategy of curbing insecurity where community members will be fully involved and responsible for their safety and that of their communities. This will ensure a lasting process of peace building which will in turn encourage development effort and this is what community policing is all about.

Community policing is collaboration between the police and the community that identifies and solves community problems. With the police no longer the sole guardians of law and order, all members of the community become active allies in the effort to enhance the safety and quality of neighborhoods (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1994). `Obia in Onyesom (2009) noted that the aim of community policing is to find a common ground, where all factions of a community can work together to attain a broader approach in solving community problems. It involves a partnership between the police and the rest of the community where each is accountable to the other.

The primary goal of community policing is the building of relationships between the police and the community through interactions with local agencies and community members, creating partnerships and strategies for the reduction of crime and disorder (Robert, 2007). This approach to crime fighting is borne out of the fact that when there is a synergy between the community and the police, there is effective information sharing between both parties. This of course would curb crime to a high extent because the community members understand the terrain where crimes are

carried out and they sometimes know the perpetrators of these crimes. Effective community policing where the communities understand their stake in ensuring their own safety and security will result in communities giving the police useful information that will lead to arrest of culprits.

The practice of community policing, though relatively new in Nigeria, dates back to the 1960s when the civil rights movement in America exposed the weaknesses of the traditional policing model. Massive protests and riots that took place at that time drew the government's attention to the racial discrimination and injustices perpetrated by the police. The police was widely criticised by the public for treating the minorities (blacks) more harshly than the white citizens. It was in response to this civil unrest that the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice in America (1967) recommended a different approach to policing that would make them more responsive to the challenges of a rapidly changing society and improve the hostile relationship between the police and the minorities. This informed the introduction of "team policing" which was the earliest manifestation of what is known as community policing today (Law Library, 2013).

Like most other countries of the world, community policing was embraced by the Nigeria Police Force on the principle that in a democratic society, the citizens expect the police to protect and serve the masses' basic rights to freedom, equality and justice under the law. The police must be a part of, not apart from the people or communities they serve if they must fulfill

this privileged role. Community policing was officially launched in Nigeria on the 27th of April, 2004 (The Dawn Newspaper in Okeshola & Mudiare, 2013). This approach was introduced as a way to change policing to a modern and professional way to crime fighting and promoting peace and development in communities across the nation.

In practice, community policing entails the use of various community based strategies in crime fighting. Some of these strategies as adopted by communities across different countries include the neighborhood watch strategy, weed and seed strategy, and the door-to-door strategy among others. Each of these strategies has been adopted to curb specific security issues.

The most common among the community policing strategies is the neighbourhood watch strategy. Neighbourhood Watch usually involves community members coming together in small groups in a local residence to share information about local crime problems, share crime prevention strategies and develop plans for “watching” the neighbourhood and reporting crimes. This strategy has been adopted in communities across the world including Nigeria. For instance, in 2016, Enugu State Governor, Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi in response to the incessant killings by herdsmen and other related crimes adopted the community policing model when he instituted the “Neighborhood Watch Scheme” in all the 470 communities in the State. A total of 25, 000 persons were employed with 50 persons from each community nominated by the community leaders (Punch Newspaper, 2016). Agbo (2016) noted that the setting up of this

neighborhood watch in Enugu State has ensured relative peace.

Similarly, the Rumuolumeni Community Policing outfits in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State is working with the Rumuolumeni Divisional Police station using the neighbourhood watch strategy and has successfully established a synergy between the police and the community members.

According to the United States Department of Justice (2004), the primary purpose of neighborhood watch strategy is to control violent crime, drug trafficking, and drug-related crime in designated high-crime neighborhoods and provide a safe community free of crime and drug use for residents. The Weed and Seed strategy brings together Federal, State, and local crime-fighting agencies, social service providers, representatives of the public and private sectors, prosecutors, business owners, and community members under the shared goal of weeding out violent crime and gang activities while seeding in social services and economic revitalisation. Weed and Seed began with three pilot sites in 1991 and spread quickly to more than 300 high-crime neighborhoods across the US.

This strategy involves a two-pronged approach to crime prevention: law enforcement agencies and prosecutors cooperate in “weeding out” violent criminals and drug abusers, while community-based organisations work together to “seed” much-needed human services, including prevention, intervention, treatment, and neighbourhood restoration programmes. There are four basic components to the weed and seed programme: law

enforcement; community policing; prevention, intervention, and treatment; and neighbourhood restoration. Four fundamental principles underlie the weed and seed strategy: collaboration, coordination, community participation and leveraging of resources (U.S. Department of Justice, 2007).

Mlangeni (2013) noted that the door-to-door visit strategy has been adopted in places like Entokozweni in South Africa and this saw a collaboration of the local police and the Community Policing Forum (CPF) who carried out periodic visits to neighborhoods to ensure potential crimes are prevented. These visits led to the reduction of criminal activities associated with the use of drugs in the study area. It is against this background that this study seeks to examine the various strategies adopted in the community policing model for controlling crimes in Port Harcourt metropolis.

Statement of the Problem

No society can achieve stability and progress when there is increased crime rate. This affects businesses and day-to-day operations in the society. This explains why successive governments over the years in Rivers State and Nigeria alike come up with their peculiar blueprints for controlling crimes and criminality in the state or nation.

It has been observed in recent times that Port Harcourt metropolis, like most urban centres around the world, has experienced increasing crime and criminal activities. This ranges from armed robbery, kidnapping, rape, internet fraud and oil theft among others. In a bid to control these crimes, the traditional approach of equipping security agencies with ammunition and other materials needed

have been adopted. In spite of these efforts made, crime rate has been observed to be on the increase in the metropolis with cases of kidnapping and theft reported on daily basis. This underscores the need for a change in policing approach to accommodate residents in the efforts of controlling crime. The question is will the integration of residents in policing efforts enhance crime control in Port Harcourt metropolis? Providing answer to this question, therefore, is the problem of this study.

Purpose of the Study

The study examined community policing strategies for crime control among urban dwellers in Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. find out how neighbourhood watch strategy of community policing is used for crime control in Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers State;
2. determine how the weed and seed strategy of community policing is used for crime control in Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers State; and
3. examine how the door-to-door visits strategy of community policing is used for crime control in Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers State.

Research Questions

1. How is neighbourhood watch strategy of community policing used for crime control in Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers State?
2. How is weed and seed strategy of community policing used for crime control in Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers State?

3. How is door-to-door visits strategy of community policing used for crime control in Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers State?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design with a population of 1,234 residents consisting of Police officers, members of community policing groups (neighbourhood watch group) and volunteers from Community Based Organisations in Port Harcourt metropolis. The sample of the study was 343 respondents. The proportionate stratified sampling technique was adopted in selecting the population from each stratum of the population (Police officers, members of community policing groups and CBOs). A researcher designed questionnaire titled “Community Policing Strategies for Crime Control Questionnaire”(CPSCCQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by two experts, one in Community Development and another in Community Policing. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha statistics. The instrument was administered on members of Community Based Organisations and Community Policing

Outfit (OSPAC) in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State which is outside the study area. Their responses to the questionnaire were analysed using Cronbach alpha statistics. Reliability coefficients of 0.88, 0.79 and 0.86 were obtained for the three clusters of the instrument respectively. The researchers administered the instrument to the police officers and neighbourhood watch members through the assistance of the head of the neighbourhood watch group in Rivers State who was an ex-police officer. Copies of the questionnaire were retrieved personally by the researchers. The retrieved data were analysed using mean and standard deviation statistics. A criterion mean of 2.50 was adopted in taking decisions on the items in the table. Any item with mean score of 2.50 and above was tagged “Agree” while those below 2.50 were regarded as “Disagree”.

Results

Research Question one: How is neighbourhood watch strategy of community policing used for crime control in Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers State?

Table 1: Ways Neighbourhood Watch Strategy are used for Crime Control

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	Neighborhoods watch personnel can arrest criminals and hand them over to the Police.	2.91	1.07	Agree
2.	Residents are encouraged to report incidences of cult activities to the Police or neighbourhood watch personnel for necessary action.	2.95	0.99	Agree
3	Since members of the neighborhood watch are residents of the city, they can easily expose hide outs of criminals to the Police.	3.16	0.88	Agree
4.	Helping the Police to identify potential criminals.	3.13	0.86	Agree
Grand Total		3.04	0.95	Agree

Data

analysis in table 1 revealed that majority of the respondents agreed that neighborhood watch strategy of community policing is used for crime control in Port Harcourt metropolis through arresting of criminals and handing them over to the Police (\bar{X} =2.91, SD=1.07), report of incidences of cult activities to the Police or neighbourhood watch personnel for necessary action (\bar{X} =2.95, SD=0.99), exposure of hide outs of criminals and cultists in communities (\bar{X} =3.16, SD=0.88)and helping the Police to identify potential criminal zones in

different parts of the city (\bar{X} =3.13, SD=0.86).

Given grand mean score of 3.04, the answer to research question 1 is that neighborhood watch strategy of community policing is used for crime control through arresting of criminals, report of cult activities to the police, exposure of hideouts of criminals to the police and helping the police to identify potential criminals and cultists.

Research Question 2: How is weed and seed strategy of community policing used for crime control in Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean Response of Respondents on How Weed and Seed Strategy is used for Crime Control

S/n	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	Engaging vulnerable youths in meaningful activities to discourage criminality among them.	2.66	1.05	Agree
2.	Collaboration with community based organisations to discourage criminal activities in the metropolis.	2.79	1.08	Agree
3.	Attracting funding for community policing outfit from government and the private sector sources.	2.66	1.17	Agree
4.	Empowering community members to prevent and tackle violence themselves.	2.71	1.04	Agree
Grand Total		2.71		Agree

Data analysed in Table 2 showed that majority of the respondents agreed that weed and seed strategy of community policing ensures crime control in the study area through engaging vulnerable youths in meaningful activities to discourage criminality among them(\bar{X} =2.66, SD=1.05), collaboration with community based organisations to discourage (\bar{X}

=2.79, SD=1.08), attracting funding for community policing outfit from government and the private sector sources(\bar{X} =2.66, SD=1.17)and empowering community members to prevent and tackle violence themselves(\bar{X} =2.71, SD=1.04).

With grand mean score of 2.71, therefore, the answer to research question 2 is that the weed and seed strategy of community

policing ensures crime control by engaging vulnerable youths in meaningful activities to discourage criminality among them, collaborating with community based organizations to discourage crimes, attracting funding for community policing outfit from government and the private

sector sources and empowering community members to prevent and tackle violence themselves.

Research Question 3: How is door-to-door visits strategy of community policing used for crime control in Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean Response of Respondents on how Door-to-Door Visits Strategy is used for Crime Control.

S/n	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
	Door-to-door visits as community policing strategy tackles crime in the following ways:			
1	Reduction of the rate of crimes in different parts of the city.	2.67	1.14	Agree
2	Ensuring easy dissemination of intelligence reports to the police or community policing personnel.	2.64	1.19	Agree
3	Improvement of response time to crime scenes.	2.24	1.11	Disagree
4	Building confidence between the police and the community.	2.56	1.11	Agree
5	Provision of intervention and counselling activities	2.66	0.99	Agree
	Grand Total	2.55		Agree

The analysed data in Table 3 revealed that majority of the respondents agreed that the door-to-door visits as community policing strategy ensures crime control through reduction of domestic crime rates in communities ($\bar{X}=2.67$, $SD=1.14$), ensuring easy dissemination of intelligence reports to the police or community policing personnel ($\bar{X}=2.64$, $SD=1.19$), building confidence between the police and the community ($\bar{X}=2.56$, $SD=1.11$), provision of intervention and counselling activities ($\bar{X}=2.66$, $SD=0.99$). It was also revealed that majority of the respondents disagreed that door-to-door visits can lead to improvement of response

time to domestic crime scenes ($\bar{X}=2.24$, $SD=1.11$).

With grand mean score of 2.55, the answer to research question 3 is that door-to-door visits as community policing strategy is used to control crimes through the ways listed above.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study in research question one showed that neighborhood watch strategy of community policing is used for crime control in Port Harcourt metropolis. The result of the analysed data showed that neighbourhood watch strategy is used for crime control through arresting of criminals by neighbourhood

watch group, reporting of criminal activities to the police, exposure of hideouts of criminals to the police and helping the police to identify potential criminal zones in the city. This finding is supported by the New York State Police (2013) when they found out that neighbourhood watch is one of the most effective and cheapest ways of preventing crime and reducing fear. This strategy fights the isolation that crime creates and feeds upon. It creates bond among community members, reduces crimes and improves the relationship between police and the communities they serve. This finding is further supported by the finding of a study carried out by Meyer and Graan (2011) which revealed that the establishment of the Roodekrans Neighbourhood Watch in South Africa led to the successful mobilisation of a total of 1097 residents as members. These members successfully implemented night patrols between midnight and the early hours of the morning. Over one hundred patrols are currently done per month in this inconvenient timeslot, which has resulted in a significant decrease in crime at night, but has led to an increase in daytime crime. However, violent crimes such as armed robberies and carjacking now constitute only 2% of crime in the neighbourhood.

The finding of the study in research question two showed that the weed and seed strategy of community policing is used for crime control through engaging vulnerable youths in meaningful activities to discourage criminality among them, collaborating with community based organisations to discourage crimes, attracting funding for community policing

outfit from government and the private sector sources and empowering community members to prevent and tackle violence themselves. This is similar to the finding of the US Department of Justice (2004) which reported that the Weed and Seed strategy brings together Federal, State, and local crime-fighting agencies, social service providers, representatives of the public and private sectors, prosecutors, business owners, and community members under the shared goal of weeding out violent crime and gang activities while seeding in social services and economic revitalisation. This finding is further supported by the report given by the United States National Institute of Justice (2014) which revealed that there have been reductions in the numbers of crimes committed in the Central District of Seattle since the inception of Weed and Seed as illustrated by the fact that murders steadily dropped from 11 in 2000 to 2 in 2007. Similar reductions have been observed in robberies and non-residential burglaries. From 2007 to 2012, assaults dropped from 693 in 2007 to 445 in 2012. Similarly, robberies dropped from 225 in 1992 to 125 in 1997.

In the most recent years of the practice of Weed and Seed in Seattle, 2012 and 2015, violent crime levels also diminished in the East Precinct. The total levels of homicides, robberies, and assaults have dropped substantially, while the number of property crimes has been relatively constant.

The finding of the study for research question three revealed that door-to-door visits as community policing strategy could be used for crime control rates in the city, ensuring easy dissemination of

intelligence reports to the police or community policing personnel, building confidence between the police and the community and provision of intervention and counselling activities. This finding is supported by the finding of Laycock in Centre for Evidence-Based Crime (2018) which revealed that in the 12 month period of the launch of door-to-door strategy in three distinct villages in the United Kingdom, there was a 40% reduction of burglaries reported in the target area. This is further supported by the findings of Mlangeni (2013) which revealed that the door-to-door visits strategy adopted in Entokozweni in South Africa saw a collaboration of the local police and the Community Policing Forum (CPF). These visits led to the reduction of criminal activities associated with the use of drugs in the study area.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that the adoption of community policing strategies such as neighbourhood watch, weed and seed strategy and door-to-door visits could enhance crime control in Port Harcourt metropolis through partnership of residents of the city with the Nigerian Police Force to fight crime. This partnership can take the form of setting up neighbourhood watch outfits, initiating door-to-door visits by the Police and engaging in a more holistic approach with the government to ensure social services are improved to discourage criminal tendencies.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Government at federal and state levels should provide a legal framework through enactment of legislations to enforce the creation of neighbourhood watch groups in all parts of Nigeria. This would deal with the rising spate of insecurity in the nation.
2. The Nigerian Police Force should partner with all community based organizations in various communities in Nigeria to build confidence of people in the Police and to encourage community participation in securing themselves and communities.
3. The government, multinational companies, philanthropists and other stakeholders should make concerted effort in funding community policing outfits in virtually all communities in Nigeria.

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