

Extent of Reduction of Criminal Activities by the Vigilante Security Group in Abia State

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the extent of reduction of criminal activities by the vigilante security group in Abia State. A research question and a null hypothesis guided the study. Using purposive sampling technique, 726 respondents comprising of 648 Town Union Executives (TUEs) and 78 Policemen in 10 Local Government Areas with registered vigilante units were selected for the study. Questionnaire was the tool used for data collection. Data were analyzed using mean and t-test statistics. The results revealed that the activities of the vigilante security group have reduced criminal activities to a high extent. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that innovative strategies and new technologies should be provided for the vigilante. Furthermore, constant in-service and refresher training on skills such as problem solving, community organization, negotiation, communication, networking, conflict management, resolution and mediation should be planned and implemented for the Vigilante, community members and the police. This will aid developing a sustainable problem solving strategy which will enhance a secured and crime free environment.

Keywords: Reduction, criminal, vigilante, Extent.

INTRODUCTION

Criminal activity is a menace to human life, security and freedom. Sanitizing any nation from criminal activities is a major concern of every progressive society. A secured environment provides peace of mind, good health and confidence for community members to focus on greater things to achieve. According to [1], crime is an illness which attacks the rights of individuals and affects lives and properties. Human security is concerned with protecting and safeguarding people from threats and violence and empowering them to take care of their own lives. Insecurity constitutes threat to lives and properties and retards all forms of development [2]. In line with this view, Maslow in [3] observed that the need for protection, security, order, law, stability and freedom from fear are inseparable from human existence and development. Security of citizens is a human right and every nation has the fundamental responsibility for providing security to her citizens. Failure to provide security is related to violation of right to life and

liberty which is among the basic human rights.

However, provision of secured environment needs to be seen as a shared responsibility among security agencies and community members. In relation to this view, in all societies, there is need for formal and informal crime control mechanism. According to [4] police is an example of formal crime control mechanism. The Institution relies on the law and official government agencies to curb crime and criminal actions, while informal crime control mechanism relies on social and moral institutions such as vigilante, church and philanthropy to curb crime and promote lawful behavior. Further to this idea, [5] noted that any comprehensive strategy to reduce crime must not only include the contribution of police and the criminal justice system, but in addition, should include vigilante security group, effective prison and jail provisions which affect the prevalence of crime.

In Nigeria, according to [6], in the pre-colonial era, policing in most communities

was informal in nature. At that time, many local communities in Nigeria maintained warrior groups which comprised of able-bodied young men from specific age grades who not only engage invaders from neighboring communities, but also enforce law and order and impose sanctions against criminals within their domain. For instance, in the South-east Nigeria, in Igbo land, community policing is not a novel idea. Their existed traditional groups commonly known as "Ndinche" which means community guards (formed by volunteers in the villages) who would arrest and arraign criminals in front of the village square to their shame. However, from the colonial period, police services were used to discourage criminals and criminal activities. However, according to [7] the colonial police were used more as an instrument of oppression, riot control, suppression and violence rather than promoting community safety, harmony and social service which could have brought the police closer to the people. This development alienated the police from the people and further caused some measure of distrust between the police and the citizens [8]. This situation led to the emergence of vigilante in most states and communities in Nigeria to supplement the efforts of the police and gain more confidence in the security of lives and properties. According to [9] the rising wave of insecurity in Nigeria threatened her corporate existence as a geographical entity. This caused enormous loss of lives and properties and created an atmosphere of fear and social tension. For example, there was high incidence of armed robbery in the South-west, terrorism in the North, Kidnapping and youth restiveness in the South-south and South-east zone [10]. In the present time this threat to lives and menace is getting even worse with Boko Haram, kidnapping and cattle rustling in the North.

Abia State was not left out among the States which set up the Vigilante group to minimize the incidence of crime which has been on the increase in the State and her surroundings since the colonial period. The State was gripped with lawlessness, armed robbery, kidnapping,

rape and other forms of violent crimes and extortions by armed gangs. This State of lawlessness led to the legalization of Abia State Vigilante under the Abia State of Nigeria, Law No. 8 of 2002 which was officially known as the Abia State Vigilante Group (ASVG).

The ASVG was set up to make prompt report of suspicious and criminal activities to the police, keep effective and prompt surveillance of the communities, provide intelligence information to the police and alert community members on prevalent and emerging crimes [11]. However, these roles of the ASVG is found effective when community members work closely with the Group, provide them with information and assistance needed to detect, identify and arrest criminals in their hide outs. In corroboration with this view, [12] [13] [14] [15] affirmed that community policing is more effective when it is carried out as a collaborative and collective responsibility among stakeholders. The entire community share ownership, responsibility and accountability for reducing incidents of crime and violence in their neighborhood. Community policing promotes partnership of all stakeholders for proactive problem solving, crime prevention and control, improved safety, neighborhood revitalization and confidence. [16] equally observed that close liaison or networking among vigilante, police and community members is quite effective especially with intelligence sharing, security planning and operations. [4] equally noted that the vigilante security group in close liaison with the police arrests persons whose activities are considered suspicious and hand them over to police. Furthermore they supply critical, timely information, pertinent intelligence, which is considered a very effective strategy in reduction of crime [8].

Reduction of crime in this paper implies minimizing crime; hence, this paper seeks to determine the effectiveness of the Vigilante in minimizing identified existing crimes in both urban and rural areas by the operations of ASVG in Abia State. This makes it imperative to seek the opinion of some stakeholders (community members & policemen) on this cogent issue. The

respondents to this study comprised of Town Union Executives (TUE) who represented the interest of community members living in rural and urban areas and policemen working in different locations (rural & urban) in Abia State, hence, location is an important variable in this study. In order to reduce crime and have a secured environment in Abia State, many efforts have been made to promote community policing. However, the researcher still deemed it quite necessary to embark on this study in order to determine the extent of reduction of crime by the ASVG in order to add to existing knowledge in the area. This will facilitate policy development, decision taking, implementation of programmes and service delivery by the vigilante in Abia State and beyond.

Statement of the Problem

Crime and criminality is seen as a major problem which requires attention in every society. There is no society that is devoid of criminal activities; for this reason, there is continuous need for every progressive government to put in place mechanisms for crime control. In all societies, there is need to set up formal and informal crime control mechanisms for healthy and peaceful existence. In Abia State, the vigilante was registered in 2002 with the corporate commission to compliment and supplement the efforts of the police in community policing which involves checkmating the activities of the hoodlums, identifying their hideouts, providing intelligence information on criminal activities and protecting lives and properties in the rural and urban centers in Abia State. Despite the existence of both police and vigilante security group in the State, there are still incidences of criminal activities such as theft, rape, armed robbery, kidnapping, among others. This situation calls for the need to determine the extent of reduction of criminal activities by the vigilante security group in Abia State for better planning, decision taking, policy effectiveness and

improvement towards achieving a crime free environment in the State.

Research Question

The following research question guided the study:

To what extent does the vigilante security group reduce criminal activities in Abia State?

Null Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of Significance:

Town Union Executives and Policemen in both the urban and rural areas do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent to which the vigilante security group reduced criminal activities in Abia State.

Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 726 respondents comprising of 648 Town Union Executives and 78 Policemen. Two sets of instrument (For the TUEs & Policemen) titled Vigilante Security Group and Reduction of Crime Scale (VSGRC) were validated and used for the study. Four point rating scale with the following response categories: Very High Extent (VHE) 4 points, High Extent (HE) 3points, Low Extent (LE) 2 points and Not At All (NAA) 1 point was used for data collection. The instruments were subjected to validation by experts. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach alpha coefficient to establish the internal consistency of the items. The hypothesis was tested using t-test. The data collected was analyzed using weighted mean. Decision rule was based on the true limit of the four point rating scale. Thus, a mean score 2.50 and above was adjudged as high extent of reduction of crime, while mean scores below 2.50 was regarded as low extent of reduction of crime. Based on the decision rule the null hypothesis would be rejected if the t-cal was greater than the t-crit at 0.05 level of significance otherwise it would not be rejected.

RESULTS

The data collected were presented and interpreted in Table 1.

Research Question: To what extent does the vigilante security group reduce criminal activities in Abia State?

Table 1: Mean Ratings of the Respondents on the Extent of Reduction of Criminal Activities by the Vigilante Security Group in Abia State.

S/No	Items	Tue (N=648)	Police (N=78)	Mean	Remark
1.	The presence of vigilante makes criminals afraid to operate freely in your community	2.55	3.00	2.78	High Extent
2.	Some criminal hideout are identified and demolished by the vigilante in your community	2.52	2.77	2.65	High Extent
3.	Kidnapping in your area has been reduced because of the emergence of vigilante	2.46	2.54	2.50	High Extent
4.	Human trafficking has reduced due to the presence of the vigilante in your community.	2.47	2.73	2.60	High Extent
5	Daily robbing of people's home has been reduced since the inception of vigilante in your area	2.52	2.99	2.76	High Extent
6	Raping of innocent girls in your community has reduced because of the presence of the vigilante	2.52	2.67	2.60	High Extent
7	Murder and assassination of people in your community has reduced due to the emergence of the vigilante	2.58	2.63	2.61	High Extent
Mean				2.64	High Extent

Table I shows that the mean scores of the respondents (TUE & Policemen) ranged from 2.50 to 2.78, with a grand mean of 2.64. This implies that with reference to the decision rule, the vigilante security group reduces criminal activities to a high extent in Abia State.

Analysis of the null hypothesis was presented as follows:

Hypothesis

Town Union Executives and Policemen in both the urban and rural areas do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent to which vigilante security group reduces criminal activities in Abia State.

Table 2: t-test comparison on the extent to which the Vigilante Security Group Reduces Criminal Activities in Abia State.

Variable	N	X	SD	DF	t-cal	t-crit	LS	Decision
TUE	648	2.52	0.02	76	-1.09	1.96	0.05	Not sig.
POLICE	78	2.76	0.03					

Table 2 shows that at 0.05 level of significance and 76 degree of freedom, the calculated t-value (-1.09) is less than the critical t-value (1.96). Therefore, the hypothesis which states that the Town

Union Executives and Policemen in both the urban and rural areas do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent of reduction of criminal activities in Abia State was not rejected.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The findings of the study revealed that the vigilante security group reduces criminal activities to a high extent in Abia State. This implies that the vigilante security group synergizes with the police in community policing functions to ensure stability and reduction of crime in Abia State. Thus, the presence and activities of the vigilante and police have helped in reducing criminal activities in most of the communities across the local government areas which have registered vigilante unit covered by this study. This agrees with [11] who noted that any comprehensive strategy to reduce crime must not only include the contribution of the police, but it should be a shared responsibility between the vigilante and community members. Other researchers [7]; [8] equally observed that community policing is effective when the police and vigilante are in close liaison and share ownership, responsibility and accountability in minimizing crime and criminal activities. [12] noted that the operations of the vigilante security group may not succeed when the community members whom they are meant to partner with and protect do not give them the required support. This may be one of the reasons why the mean scores to some items are close to the borderline of the decision rule. To foster synergy and support, [1] noted that the vigilante security group should work

cooperatively with community members because everybody is seen as a stakeholder in community policing and community members are more likely to understand and recognize her public safety more than any other group. In consonant with the view of [5] agreed that the vigilante, police as well as community members must work together as equal partners to identify and solve problems such as crime, fear of crime, social and physical disorder for improved safety for community members, neighborhood revitalization and confidence. This will improve the overall quality of life and health of community members in the society. The test of the null hypothesis showed that there was no significant differences in the mean ratings of town union executives and policemen in both rural and urban areas on the extent to which the vigilante security group reduce criminal activities in Abia State. Thus, town union executives who represent the interest of community members and policemen serving in rural and urban areas agreed that the vigilante security group reduce criminal activities in Abia State. Hence, the complementary role of the vigilante security group in no small measure has reduced the prevalence of crime in both the rural and urban communities in Abia State.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that the vigilante reduces criminal activities in Abia State to a high extent. This implies that the vigilante partner effectively with the police and the community members to minimize crime.

The cooperation existing among the vigilante security group, community members and the police will enhance the much needed community policing and secured environment in the rural and urban communities in Abia State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. All local Government areas in Abia State should set up registered vigilante units for effective security services and reduced criminal activities in the state.
2. Innovative strategies and new technologies should be provided and put in place by the Abia State local government Areas and

communities to further promote and strengthen the activities of the ASVG for sustainable security in Abia State. Security committees which will comprise of vigilante, town union executives, traditional rulers and the police should be set up at the local government levels to regularly hold interactive meetings on security and crime control. This committee should

- meet periodically to discuss security matters in the communities in order to develop a problem solving strategy which will enhance a sustainable secured environment. Educating community members on their roles and responsibilities on security matters through their 'Igwes and Ndi-ezes' and town Union executives will go a long way towards fostering a safe and secured environment.
3. As part of measures to reduce crime, government should embark on awareness campaign or public enlightenment on the need for community members to support the vigilante security group and the police towards enhancing effective crime reduction, detection and control in Abia State.
 4. Constant in-service and refresher training on skills such as problem solving, community organization, negotiation, communication, networking, conflict management, resolution and mediation planned for the Vigilante, community members and the police should be planned and implemented. This will foster motivation, cooperation and mutual respect for committed, dedicated service, procedural justice, best security services and relationship among the stakeholders. This could promote in them the value and attitude of not-to-use-force as a conflict resolution strategy.

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