Research Article

Community Policing as a Strategy for Crime Reduction in Nigeria: A Case Study of Yola North Local Government Area of Adamawa State

Hyellavala Joseph Fomnya*, Tunenso Saidu Umar, Kazabu Ahmed Amshi

Abstract: Community policing is a symbiotic and concerted effort of the police and members of the host communities to reduce the incidence of crime and criminal activities. Nigeria, as a country, has embraced the concept of community-based policing to forestall crime and criminal activities since the return of democracy in 1999. This research critically scrutinizes the ideology and beliefs of community policing in the Nigerian context, aiming to offer solutions to the major setbacks of community policing in Nigeria. A non-probability sampling technique was employed for the current study. Self-constructed questionnaires were used to acquire data. Results revealed that the community members are in constant healthy relationship with the police, but the police collaboration with the community members regarding crime control/detection is not encouraging. The effort of the police authority in crime detection and control is commendable, and the fear of crime has been declining since the initiation of community policing. Success was attributed to the constant collaboration of the police with other security agencies. The residents fully supported the concept of community policing. Still, they suggested that massive employment, funding security agencies, and organizing skill acquisition programs to engage the unemployed will greatly help in crime reduction in addition to the concept of community policing. The challenges faced by the security agencies include recruitment of unqualified personnel, insufficient crime-fighting equipment/patrol vehicles, inadequate remuneration of the security personnel, and lack of trust in the security agencies by the residents.

Keywords: Community policing, Crime rate, Crime reduction, Nigeria Police, Yola North Local Government Area

Introduction

Crime and criminal activities have been humanity's major challenge [1]. Sunday Ehindero, a one-time Nigerian Inspector General of Police, delivered a lecture on national security threats at the National War College, Abuja, saying that crime and criminal activities constitute a major proportion of any country's national security threat. Ugwuoke [2], also affirms that crime and criminal activities have existed since time immemorial. Crime and criminal activities are inevitable in each society [3]. Marshall observed that no society is without deviants, from the simplest and primitive society to the most complex and civilized society. Considering the inevitability of crime and criminal activities, every society needs a functional mechanism to checkmate all crime and criminal activities [4,5].

According to the table of crime statistics of Adamawa State Police Command, a total of 8,318 major crimes were committed between 2016 and 2020 in the state, while 1,365 of the major crimes came from Yola North Local Government, among the crimes listed between 2016 and 2020, theft and other forms of stealing obtained by trick (OBT), housebreaking, armed robbery, burglary, and grievous harm and wounding recorded the highest incidence.

The history of crime reduction and control in Nigeria dates back to pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras. The pre-colonial era mainly involved using palace guards, society messengers, and other secret societies in crime reduction and control [6]. The colonial era involved the use of colonial police to protect only the interest of the colonialists; many scholars have faulted this pattern of policing as the policing system does not favor the masses in crime reduction and control [7,8,9,10].

The post-colonial era is also the prototype of the colonial era in that post-colonial policing is geared towards protecting the interests of the leaders. Contemporary policing, which came decades after independence, still favors the government of the day more than the populace, though it has undergone a series of reforms. [11]. Recently, police organizations have demonstrated a drastic improvement in their operations, especially with the advent of community policing [12]. Community policing was first instituted in the US in the 1970s when the government realized that effective crime control would only be possible when the host communities were highly involved [13,14,15]. The community's safety is directly proportional to the active involvement of the residents, local authorities, clergy, social groups, and other relevant agencies [16].

Methodology

A cross-sectional study design was adopted for the research. This is to compare different variables simultaneously, within the shortest possible time, using a representative of a given population [17]. This study design was adopted because results obtained from the sample population were generalized to the study population.

Study Area

The study is in Jimeta city, in Yola North Local Government Area of Adamawa State. Jimeta City is known as the seat of public administration of the state. The state has about 21 Local Government Areas out of the 777 Local Government Areas found in Nigeria [18]. Adamawa State has an estimated population of about 4,902,100 and a land mass of 36,917 square kilometers. The study area's population is estimated to be 336,648 (49% males and 51% females) and occupies a land mass of 714.8 square kilometers. The respondents were limited to 18 years of age and upwards, who are presumed to be informed about crime and criminal activities in the area [19, 20].

Sample Size

This was obtained from the target population utilizing the concept involved in simple random samples without replacement formula. The sample size shall be statistically determined using the formula given below:

n = (Z)^2 × PQ ÷ (B)^2.

Where:
N = Sample size
Z = 95% confidence level (1.96 in Z test table)
Q = Proportion (1-P = 47.5%)
B = Allowable error (4.0%).
P = Percentage of informed population about the topic (52.5%) [21].

n= (1.962)^2 (0.525×0.475) ÷ (0.04)2
n= 3.849 (0.249) ÷ 0.0016
n= 0.958 ÷ 0.0016
n= 598.750
n=600 (approx.)

The sample size is 600, and data will be collected from 600 respondents comprising adult males and females (18 years and above) residing in the study area.

Sampling Technique

A non-probability sampling technique was employed based on criteria, quota, and convenience. Studying the entire population will be costly, laborious, and time-consuming; therefore, the choice of sampling technique is aimed at using a representative sample from the population of interest for observation and analysis. To get a representative sample of the population of Yola North Local Government, the Local Government was divided into three axes. These are the Karewa/Dougirei, Jimeta, and Kofare/Jambutu axes. The researcher will first segregate the sample along gender lines to give each gender a good opportunity to be part of the sample. The adult males will constitute 49% of the sample, while adult females will constitute 51% of the sample: $49/100 \times 600/1 = 294$ adult males $51/100 \times 600/1 = 306$ adult females. This is in line with the gender proportion of the total population of Yola North Local Government Area. To derive the figure for each gender in the respective three axes, the total figure for males and females is divided by the number of axes. Thus: Adult males = 294/3 = 98 Adult females = 306/3 = 102. Therefore, each of the three axes would have 200 (98 + 102) respondents, giving 600 respondents.

Method of Data Collection

A questionnaire was used to collect data during the study. The results obtained were used to provide answers to the research questions asked. The questionnaire is a self-structured question designed as closed/open-ended questions. The questionnaire comprises two sections. The first section asked questions about the socio-demographic information of the respondents. In contrast, the second section asked questions about the respondent's perception of how the strategies adopted by community policing programs are effectively reducing crime.

Administration of Questionnaire

The researcher employed the services of two residents from each axis as research assistants to support the administration and collection of questionnaires. The reason for using residents is for adequate coverage of the axis and to make respondents comfortable, especially in interpreting questions for respondents when they find it difficult to understand the questions asked. The researcher held a short instruction class on questionnaire management to guide the research assistants. Criteria for selecting respondents include being an adult, a resident of the study area, and being male or female. Research assistants visited respondents at home, offices, or any place that the respondents may choose. This has helped to ensure a very good relationship between the respondents and the research assistants, especially when the respondent needs more clarification.

Ethical Consideration

Respondents' consent was sought before the administration of the questionnaire, and all sensitive information about the respondents was kept confidential; hence, personal information like names and addresses that would reveal the identity of the respondents was excluded from the questionnaire.

Technique of Data Analysis

The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results are presented using frequency and percentage tables.

RESULTS

Only 24 out of the 600 questionnaires distributed were not returned. The results are presented in tabular form using percentage and frequency of occurrence.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 provides some background information about the respondent's gender, age, education, occupation, marital status, and religious affiliation.

Respondent's knowledge of the incidence, being victims, occurrence, and types of crime

From Table 2, 80.2% of the residents reported being aware of community crime incidences. In comparison, only 19.8% of the residents responded that they had never heard about crime incidents in their area. 38.9% of the respondents have been victims of criminal acts, while 61.1% confirmed not to have been victims of any criminal activity. The frequency of crime occurrence was found to be primarily monthly or weekly. It can be deduced that the crime rate is high in Yola North LGA. Theft (43.9%) appeared to be the most rampant crime in Yola North LGA, followed by other criminal offenses (24.1%). Different forms of criminal offenses being committed in Yola North LGA not listed include but are not restricted to smuggling, forgery, burglary, fraud, child trafficking, and affray.

Crime statistics from 2016 to 2020 of Yola North LGA of Adamawa State

The comprehensive crime statistics of Yola North LGA are shown in Table 3 as obtained from the Adamawa State Police Command. Theft and other forms of stealing appear to be the most frequently occurring criminal activities. Armed robbery and Burglary are also serious challenges, among others.

Respondent's assessment of crime rate, police visibility, crime detection, and police collaboration

From Table 4, the crime rate in the area under study is moderate to high-moderate (65.1%). The result also showed excellent police visibility in the study area and the tremendous effort of the police in crime detection and control. A good percentage of the respondents (54.3%) reported a healthy collaboration between police and the host community in crime prevention and detection. Based on the data obtained, it can be said that the crime rate is high-moderate in Yola North LGA. Most of the respondents reported that police visibility is high, and they are encouraged by the efforts of police in dictating and controlling crime.

Table 1: Frequency distribution of the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

CHARACTERISTICS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
SEX:		
Male	291	50.5
Female	285	49.5
Total	**576**	**100**
AGE:		
18-27	356	61.8
28-37	138	24.0
38-47	50	8.7
Above 48	32	5.5
Total	**576**	**100**
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION:		
No formal education	28	4.9
Completed primary school	62	10.8
Completed post-primary school	184	31.9
Higher education	302	52.4
Total	**576**	**100**
OCCUPATION:		
Business	65	11.3
Teaching	40	6.9
Civil service	147	25.5
Others	324	56.3
Total	**576**	**100**
MARITAL STATUS:		
Single	362	62.9
Married	192	33.3
Divorced	18	3.1
Widowed	4	0.7
Total	**576**	**100**
RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION:		
African traditional religion	16	2.8
Christianity	321	55.7
Islam	232	40.3
Others	7	1.2
Total	**576**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 2: Percentage distribution of respondent's knowledge on the incidence, being victims, occurrence, and types of crime in Yola North LGA

VARIABLES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Knowledge of incidence of crime:		
Yes	462	80.2
No	114	19.8
Total	**576**	**100**
Knowledge of being a victim of crime:		
Yes	224	38.9
No	352	61.1
Total	**576**	**100**
Knowledge of how often crime occurs:		
Daily	105	18.2
Once a week	181	31.4
Once a month	215	37.3
Scarcely (Occasionally)	75	13.1
Total	**576**	**100**
Idea on the kind of crime that is rampant:		
Theft	253	43.9
Armed robbery	82	14.2
Rape	42	7.3
Murder	36	6.3
Kidnapping	24	4.2
Other criminal offences	139	24.1
Total	**576**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 3: Crime statistics from 2016 to 2020 of Yola North LGA of Adamawa State

Type of crime	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Theft and other forms of stealing	51	58	66	74	97	346
Armed robbery	23	19	29	34	49	154
Rape	6	9	14	23	27	79
Murder	7	11	10	14	16	58
Kidnapping	-	-	7	13	21	41
Grievous harm and wounding	13	22	26	32	17	110
Fraud	6	9	6	10	19	50
Forgery	5	13	16	9	17	60
Burglary	15	21	23	48	42	149
Housebreaking	13	11	29	38	66	157
Store breaking	7	5	9	11	13	45
Arson	-	-	1	-	2	3
Child trafficking	1	2	-	3	1	7
Smuggling	-	-	3	1	1	5
Impersonation	1	-	2	-	3	6
OBT	11	13	10	27	34	95
Grand total	**159**	**193**	**251**	**337**	**425**	**1,365**

Source: Adamawa State Police Command

Respondent's knowledge of community policing, the performance of trained police officers, the relationship of officers with sister agencies and the host community

From Table 5, 60.2% of the respondents fully know community policing as a concept of crime reduction in Yola North LGA of Adamawa State. Even though many of the respondents are aware of community policing, 16.9% of them have no idea about community policing. This means that there is a need to increase awareness of community policing. 47.6.9% of the respondents found the performance of the trained community policing officers in crime prevention and control encouraging with good results. Only 26.9% of the respondents found the performance of the trained community policing officers discouraging. In comparison, 25.5% of the respondents cannot assess the performance of the trained community policing officers in crime prevention and control. Most respondents (67.9%) reported a cordial relationship between the police and other security agencies.

Table 4: Percentage distribution of respondent's assessment of crime rate, police visibility, crime detection, control, and collaboration in Yola North LGA

VARIABLES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Assessment of crime rate:		
High	261	45.3
Moderate	114	19.8
Low	72	12.5
No idea	129	22.4
Total	**576**	**100**
Police visibility:		
Daily	235	40.8
Once a week	152	26.4
Once a month	102	17.7
Scarcely (Occasionally)	87	15.1
Total	**576**	**100**
Efforts in crime detection and control:		
Encouraging	301	52.3
Discouraging	214	37.1
Don't know	61	10.6
Total	**576**	**100**
Collaboration with other security agencies:		
Yes	313	54.3
No	145	25.2
No idea	118	20.5
Total	**576**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 5: Percentage distribution of respondent's knowledge of community policing, performance of trained police officers, relationship of officers with sister agencies and the community in Yola North LGA

VARIABLES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Knowledge of community policing:		
Yes	347	60.2
No	132	22.9
No idea	97	16.9
Total	**576**	**100**
Performance of trained police officers:		
Encouraging		
Discouraging	274	47.6
Don't know	155	26.9
	147	25.5
Total	**576**	**100**
Relationship between police and other security agencies:		
Cordial	391	67.9
Not cordial	108	18.7
Antagonistic	77	13.4
Total	**576**	**100**
The cordial relationship between police and the community:		
Excellent	158	27.4
Fair	288	50.0
Tough	51	8.9
Don't know	79	13.7
Total	**576**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Respondent's support for community policing, reasons for support, relationship, and fear of crime since the introduction of community policing

From Table 6, 77.6% of the respondents are in total support of the police partnering with the public, whereas 22.4% of the respondents do not support the partnership between the police and the public in crime prevention and control. One can safely say that the residents of Yola North LGA support community policing. About 77.6% (447 respondents) responded 'Yes' to community policing. 43.1% (248 respondents) reported that community policing will significantly reduce the rate of crime. In comparison, 34.5% (199 respondents) believe that community policing will provide timely information on crime and criminal activities to the police and the public. One hundred twenty-nine respondents (22.4%) did not give any reason. Community policing has seriously improved police relationships with the public, as 87.1% of the respondents attest that police relationships with the public are cordial. An excellent percentage of the respondents (84.2%) reported that the fear of crime has been reduced to low-moderate since the introduction of community policing in Yola North LGA.

Respondent's support for police/public partnership, perception of community policing, and strategies for enhancing a crime-free society.

From the data obtained in Table 7, it is evident that the majority (76.0%) of the respondents are in full support of police/public partnership for practical community policing duties, while few (14.6%) of the respondents do not support police/public partnership. However, 54 respondents (9.4%) remained neutral on the idea. More than half of the residents (58.7%) believe community policing is very good and should be maintained. In comparison, 36.3% of the residents believe that the strategies adopted in community policing should be improved. A very negligible population of respondents (5.0%) feel that community policing is discouraging and should be stopped. The strategies that the residents of Yola North LGA believe could enhance a crime-free society include employment (66.7%), proper funding of security agencies (18.7%), and skill acquisition (4.7%). In comparison, 9.9% of the respondents did not give any suggestions.

Table 6: Percentage distribution of respondent's support for community policing, reasons for support, relationship, and fear of crime since the introduction of community policing in Yola North LGA

VARIABLES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Support for community policing:		
Yes	447	77.6
No	129	22.4
Total	**576**	**100**
Reasons for supporting community policing:		
Focused on crime prevention.	248	43.1
Prompt information on crime	199	34.5
No suggestion	129	22.4
Total	**576**	**100**
Relationship between police and community since the inception of community policing:	502	87.1
	46	8.0
Cordial	28	4.9
Not cordial		
Antagonistic		
Total	**576**	**100**
Fear of crime since the introduction of community policing:		
High	91	15.8
Moderate	202	35.1
Low	283	49.1
Total	**576**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 7: Percentage distribution of respondent's support for police/public partnership, perception of community policing, and strategies for enhancing crime crime-free society in Yola North LGA

VARIABLES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Support for police/public partnership:		
Yes	438	76.0
No	84	14.6
Don't know	54	9.4
Total	**576**	**100**
Perception of community policing:	338	58.7
Very good	209	36.3
It should be improved.	29	5.0
Should be stopped		
Total	**576**	**100**
Strategies that could enhance a crime-free society:		
Employment	384	66.7
Funding security agencies	108	18.7
Skill acquisition	27	4.7
No suggestion	57	9.9
Total	**576**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Discussion

For effective community policing to be achieved in this dispensation, officers should be carefully selected by the selecting agencies and in a number to match the present community needs so that the officer will not be overstretched [22]. Community policing is a symbiotic and concerted effort of the police and members of the host communities to reduce the incidence of crime and criminal activities [23]. One of the encouraging factors is the mutual understanding that brings the police personnel and the residents of a particular area under one umbrella of crime detection and prevention. Thus, community policing strengthens a robust connection between the police and members of society, lessening the harmful effects of corruption, bribery, discrimination in arrest, and brutality [24]. Critical challenges in the police organization, such as poor funding, inadequate manpower, systemic corruption, partisanship, ethnicity, and lack of accountability, are the major setbacks of effective community policing [25].

Most people in Yola North Local Government Area (LGA) are aware of the high incidence of crime in the area, with theft being the most frequently committed crime, but only a few have been direct victims. Continuous collaboration of the public with the police authority is a prerequisite to achieving result-oriented community policing [26], and the residents of Yola North LGA were discovered to have a constant healthy relationship with the police authority and are seriously supporting community policing even though a few portions of the population did not understand the concept of community policing. The submission given by Ordu and Nnam [27] agrees with the respondent's idea that the primary reason for supporting community policing is that community policing focuses more on crime prevention, thereby drastically reducing the crime rate. According to them, community policing also provides timely information on crime and criminal activities to the police and the public. It was also discovered that the fear of being a victim of crime and criminal acts has reduced drastically with the advent of community policing. The residents also believe that strategies like massive employment, adequately funding security agencies, and organizing skill acquisition programs to engage the unemployed will greatly help in crime reduction and police collaboration with the host community in fighting crime.

According to the respondents, the effort of the police authority in crime detection and control is excellent and commendable. The successes achieved by the police in the war against all forms of criminal activities are because of the continuous collaboration with other security agencies in their operations. Despite the commendable efforts of the police in fighting crime, the residents of Yola North LGA believe there is still a need for improvement in the following areas.

i. Collaboration with the public or host communities for the effective discharge of their duties
ii. Updating their knowledge and skills in community-based policing
iii. Increasing their visibility, especially on the outskirts of their area of responsibility

CONCLUSION

The concept of community policing is built on beliefs and actions that are geared toward the achievement and sustenance of a crime-free society. This involves the active and continuous participation of all well-meaning community members. Community policing is a technique that enhances the effectiveness of police operations in detecting, preventing, and controlling crime, which normally reduces the workload of police personnel. This is evident especially when the public is included in the police's day-to-day activities. Community policing is essential in peace and conflict resolution, managing communal clashes, internal crime, terrorism, and religious and post-election crises.

The introduction of community policing strategy has recorded a significant achievement in terms of crime reduction in Yola North LGA of Adamawa State, Nigeria, especially in terms of fostering a robust police-public collaboration, crime surveillance, political/religious tolerance, positive utilization of social media, and building trust through transparency and intelligence gathering. Although the enormous challenges affecting community policing strategies must be tackled for better results, one can safely say that community policing is the best approach for crime reduction. Most of these challenges observed by the public during police activities revolve around ethical and social issues, including but not limited to injustice, falsification, savagery, criminal tendencies, deceit, and dishonesty.

Recommendations

Based on the results obtained and the constraints of this research, the following research is a result of this recommended:
   i.   The understanding of community policing as an essential technique for reducing crime in Nigeria, replication of this study elsewhere.
   ii. Community policing is a success or failure in the Nigerian context.
   iii. Community policing and Crime fighting in Nigeria so far.

In terms of policy implementation to foster the activities of the Nigeria police, the following policies are as a result of this recommended:
   i.   Government, non-governmental organizations, and peer groups should organize an awareness campaign to educate Nigerian police personnel and the public on the importance of community-based policing and the need for collaboration.
   ii. Government and non-governmental organizations should join hands in training and equipping the police and other security agencies, putting more emphasis on junior officers.
   iii. More responsible, qualified, and educated men should be employed as security agents to increase police visibility and improve professionalism within the security sector.
   iv. All security agencies should stop brutality of any kind and ensure that they do not betray the trust of their informants, as this will encourage continuous and timely reports of viable information related to crime and criminal acts.

Acknowledgments

Disclosures

None.

Authors

Hyellavala Joseph Fomnya, DVM, MS*

Dr. Hyellavala Joseph Fomnya is a Veterinarian, Biomedical Research Scientist, Public Health and Security Enthusiast, and a scholar in the Department of Criminology and Security Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, National Open University of Nigeria, Yola Study Centre.
E-mail: josephhyellavala@gmail.com
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5488-5420

Tunenso Saidu Umar, PhD

Dr. Saidu Tunenso Umar is a professor of Sociology with an interest in Security Studies, aggression, violent extremism, and Conflict Management. He is a peace consultant and an Erudite Scholar in the Field of Sociology and Anthropology. Presently the Head of Department in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, Adamawa State University, Mubi, Nigeria.

E-mail: saidutunenso@gmail.com
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3494-7839

Kazabu Ahmed Amshi, DVM

Dr. Kazabu Ahmed Amshi is a Veterinarian, Security Consultant, and Assistant Commissioner of Police in charge of the Police Force Veterinary Services, Department of Operations, The Nigeria Police Force, State Headquarters, Yola, Nigeria.

E-mail: kazabu15@gmail.com
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7097-3914

*Corresponding author.

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