

Sociological Examination of Role of Women in Crime Control and Prevention: A Study of Nigerian Women

Archibong. E¹, Udobong. R², Antia. C³

¹Department of Sociology, University of Calabar, CRS, Nigeria

^{2,3}University of Calabar Teaching Hospital, CRS, Nigeria

Abstract: *The resurgence of corruption and criminal activities in Nigeria society has become a 'pain the neck' of government bodies and institutions. Official crime statistics across the nation is substantial even though the data are largely limited to those incidents which the public choose to report to the police, and which the police in turn record. Tragic loss of lives and injuries, loss of possessions and livelihood, sexual crimes, theft and burglary, arson, white collar crimes, murders, terrorism and others too numerous to mention are simply incalculable. This has in no small measure, threatened the Nigerians emergent democracy. Reducing levels of crime in Nigeria relies on a multifaceted strategy that involves resources and skills of a variety of role players. Crime prevention is in fact everyone's job involving activities that intervene more broadly to change the social, economic or other conditions which are thought to have casual significance to crime. In conjunction with government police service and other key role players, the Nigeria women are assumed to have an important role to play in controlling and preventing crime in local communities and nation as a whole. Using G. Trade and Durkheim's social structural theories, the paper examines the role and contributions of women towards reduction and control of crime and corrupt practices in Nigerian society. It therefore recommends that government should recognize that interventions and preventions can be more effective if they integrate a gender perspective, coupled with little education of women directly related to crime prevention to be undertaken by city / rural governments to enhance their recognizing and reporting of anti-social/criminal activities in their neighborhoods.*

Keywords: Women, Crime prevention, Socialization, Gendered- perspective.

1. Introduction

There is no universally acceptable definition of crime. However, crime is defined in various contexts. For some people, crime could be defined as something that causes serious injury to the community, or something generally believed to be capable of doing so. Crime could also be seen as something, which offends the morality of society, or something which violates the divine law. Crime is defined by law, as an act or act of omission that violates the law and is punishable by the state. It includes both the act, or *actus rea*, and the intent to commit the act, or *mens rea*. [1]. In some societies crime consists of any conduct which causes a disruption of order and a decline of public security. In other societies, crime simply connotes a steady descent into social chaos [2]. Indeed, according to [3] any important aspect of sociological thinking about crime should place an emphasis on the interconnections between conformity and deviance in different social contexts. It can also be seen as anti social behaviour; a behaviour that violates the norms of society. A norm is any standard or rule regarding what human beings should or should not think, say or do, under given circumstances. This sociological definition of crime is very broad and more encompassing than the narrower definition of crime from the legal point of view.

Crime in Nigeria has increased dramatically since the late 1980s. since then serious crime has grown to nearly epidemic proportions, while recent evidence suggests that much of the country's recorded crime takes place in the major cities and urbanized areas characterized by rapid growth and change, by stark economic inequality and deprivation, by social disorganization, and by inadequate government service and

law enforcement capabilities, this is not to overlook those not accounted for even in rural areas. Published crime statistics are probably grossly understated, because most areas of the country are virtually unpoliced, as the police are concentrated in urban areas where only about 25 percent of the population live and public distrust of the police contributed to underreporting of crimes.

In this climate, crime has exploded. Area boys, armed robbers, and the like have taken over market areas and neighborhoods, there are reports of widespread armed muggings, assaults, burglary, carjacking and extortion, often involving violence, roadblock robberies and armed break – ins occur often, with victims sometimes shot by assailants for no apparent reason. Reports of armed robberies in broad daylight on rural roads in the northern half of the country appear to be increasing. According to [4] the crime wave is exacerbated by worsening economic conditions and by the ineffectiveness, efficiency, and corruption of the law enforcement authorities.

1.1 Crime Prevention

Crime prevention refers to those activities that are intended to reduce or prevent the occurrence of specific types of crime (or the fear thereof). This can be done either by altering the environment in which they occur, or by intervening more broadly to change the social or other conditions which are thought to have causal significance with regard to them. According to the views of [5] reducing crime also demands a process of analysis to determine the cause of specific types of criminal actions (and their costs for particular groups of victims) as well as the co-ordination of resources and skills

of a range of role players to develop and implement appropriate interventions [6]. These requirements mean that crime prevention programmes are most likely to be effective if developed in the localities where the problem occurs, rather than at national level. This requires a targeted approach which focuses various activities towards a single crime problem. The most viable crime prevention strategies are those which aim at a particular crime (or particular group of crimes) and aim to put in place a focused programme of preventive measures.

A school of thought as opined by [7] has proffered that until something realistic is done about poverty, and ignorance which stare the average man on the face in most families in developing societies, there can be no crime control measure that will succeed in these places. This is why [8] has averred that property crime such as theft, arson, burglary, etc is rapidly increasing and becoming one of the major problems of developmental process in Nigeria. The individual and his family and his social environment are all involved and changes in economic conditions affect the amount of crime. The task of the social reformer is to determine the causes of crime in a given society and to apply measures of reform and prevention.

From a sociological approach which accounts for the broader context in which crime occurs, a sociological understanding of crime will enable reformers to achieve a solid understanding of crime and will enable them to be very strong in confronting it. [9] asserts that primary prevention must address individual and family level factors correlated with criminal participation. According to him, the intervening variable between crime and family is the socialization process. This is because much of primary socialization takes place within the family and the family is the basic unit of the society. Therefore, consistent parenting skills and involvement in pro-social activities are likely to decrease the probability of criminal involvement. Crime prevention is everyone's job in the community; the government regards the prevention of crime as a national priority. This applies not only to the Cabinet, and the departments concerned with security and justice, but also to all other civil individuals who are able to make a contribution to a reduction in crime levels. It is therefore, a tool developing and encouraging crime prevention partnerships or networks.

1.2 What Causes Crime?

Crime prevention works because it is based on a sound understanding of what causes crime. It is only by thinking through the causes of a problem that you will be able to prevent it. Crime is not caused by any one event but rather results from a combination of many factors. Whether or not a crime is committed usually depends on three sets of characteristics: those of the offender, those of the potential victim, and those of the 'environment' where a crime is likely to be committed. The environment includes the physical location, the people, and activities in an area that might deter or encourage the offender in his or her actions. Recent studies conducted by [9] among students in Benin City to ascertain the cause of criminal activities among them revealed that 53.6% of them were motivated by their peers and 46.4% blamed their attitude toward lack of parental care.

[9] also pointed out that increase in social problems arise due to unemployment, poor housing and other social factors involving poor socialization and social interaction in which the youths try to conform to the sub-cultural norms that exist either in their homes or among their peer-groups. Sutherland argued that criminal behaviour was learned, not an inherited trait.

Exposure to crime, either through relatives or peers, give a youth frustrated with his or her social status a choice to pursue crime. These bad influences could be lessened by good relationships with parents, teachers, an employer, or the community. [10] On the other hand believe social changes occurring in the Nigerian society, such as an industrial economy (industrialization) and the growth of cities (urbanization), as well as its attendant family and social instability has affected crime levels. They claim such a poor social, family and economic environment could produce all types of crime.

2. Theoretical explanation of cause of crime

2.1 Imitation Suggestion

This theory of crime attempts to explain why or how certain things are related to criminal behaviour. In the late 1880s Gabriel Tarde a French Sociologist criticized the physical typology theories of Lombroso and his followers. Although Tarde did not deny the relevance of biological factors in enhancing criminal tendencies, he asserted that the causes of crime are chiefly social. His basic theory on the causes of crime was founded on laws of imitation. Tarde believed that persons predisposed to crime are attracted to criminal activity by the example of other criminals. He also felt that the particular crimes committed and the methods of committing those crimes are the products of imitation.

The predisposition to crime, while in part reflecting many factors, is explained principally by the offender's social environment, particularly the environment of his younger years. Tarde was also one of the first to study the professional criminal. He noted that certain offenders pursue careers of crime. These career criminals may engage in periods of apprenticeship that are similar to those that characterize training for entry into other professions. [11].

Another French social theorist is Emile Durkheim, who believed that the causes of crime are present in the very nature of society. According to Durkheim, crime is related to the loss of social stability. Durkheim used the term anomie to describe the feelings of alienation and confusions associated with the breakdown of social bonds. According to Durkheim, individuals in the modern era tend to feel less connected to a community than did their ancestors, and thus their conduct is less influenced by group norms. Since the early work of Tarde and Durkheim that proposed a link between social interactions and criminal motivation, sociological theories of crime are also engaged in identifying the particular social groups that affect criminal motivation and the process by which criminal socialization occurs.

3. What Role can Nigerian Women Play in Crime Prevention?

Reducing levels of crime in Nigeria relies on a multi-faceted strategy that draws on the resources and skills of a variety of role players. This is because crime cannot be ended through policing interventions alone. General crime prevention is based upon the premise that private citizens can play a major role in preventing crime in their neighborhoods. Their programs focus on increasing the participation of individual citizens, small groups (women and youths), and voluntary community organizations in activities designed to reduce crime and to improve the quality of neighborhood life [12]. According to the theory of informal social control, crime prevention involves strengthening or resurrecting traditional agents of social control – families, churches, schools, ethnic solidarity, traditional values – and improving community cohesion.

[7] Posits that the family, in traditional societies like Nigeria, can be a veritable strategy for long –term crime prevention and control within the ambit of its socialization role because of the fact that the family exerts more influence than other socialization agents, such as peer groups, schools, churches or mosques and the mass media. It is important to note also that the personality of each individual takes shape within the family, and this presupposes that children can be guided in each society so that they can become well integrated into societal norms and values. Parents, most especially, the women in families play significant roles in the early formative stages of the child's development. The kind of foundation which these parents and members of the family established for the children in such homes at their formative stage will to a large extent form the genesis of desirable or undesirable behaviour that will manifest in the lives of these children later in life.

[12] Sees a healthy home environment as the single most important factor necessary to keep children from becoming delinquent. To this end, she describes women's role in terms of dedication and devotion to their families, a role which grants them trust from their male counterparts and also conforms to the traditional conception of women as caretakers at home and in the community at large, a role which have been defined and shaped along biological and cultural lines. Nigerian women have indeed come a long way as far as national development is concerned. They have proved their mettle when given the opportunity to play any role. [13] noted that women have made progress to varying degrees in the criminal prevention field in many countries and are increasingly filling positions traditional occupied by men, e.g. as correctional officers, wardens, attorneys, judges and law enforcement officers. Women are generally perceived to be patient, independent and proactive and their work considered being objective and thorough. In fact, women are natural mothers, and their greatest pleasure and true fulfillment lies in initiating peace and contributing their quota to the overall nation building process. Against this backdrop, the women can also be a channel of crime prevention and control by adhering to their learning function. As they perform their learning role towards their members, internalization of norms and values will take place, thereby enabling the individuals to become integrated into the society. Crime prevention is every citizen's obligation.

Women are not left out in the war against criminal activities. They are important actors in the quest for crime prevention and control program going on in the country. If, however, Nigeria is to truly attain the goal of crime control, then women must be involved and aided to participate. Clearly more women need to be working in this field. Women, in conjunction with the Nigeria police service and a variety of other role players, have an important role to play in controlling and preventing crime [14].

It is important to recognize the benefits in connecting women with the area of crime prevention. One of these benefits is that the connection brings with it a wider group of players and stakeholders concerned with crime prevention, and who are committed to developing effective prevention strategies to counter in general.

Following a UN Security Council open debate on women and peace and security, in New York, 28 October, 2011, the Secretary –General Ban Ki-moon emphasized repeatedly that involving women in crime /conflict prevention and mediation is essential for building peace and reinforcing the foundations of democracy. This understanding was further acknowledged by the award of this year's Nobel Peace Prize to three extraordinary women peacemakers and crime fighters: President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and Leymah Gbowee of Liberia; and Tawakkul Karman of Yemen. He further asserted that their examples should inspire the other countries government to intensify efforts to ensure women's full participation in all crime prevention and conflict resolution process most importantly, in the level of community crime prevention.

[15] noted that since women who are the major victims of violence and crime are most times ready to initiate more proactive prevention strategies, they become critical role players in strengthening the capacities of national, regional and international actors in security programmes and policies. [15] further stressed that women's participation in recognizing and preventing crimes is not an optional, but an essential ingredient of nation building and would mean bringing women from the margins of crime prevention and conflict mediation into the centre, where they belong. Adequate crime information is vital for the effective crime controls. [16] emphasized that it is important to improve public information and harness greater citizen responsibility and involvement in crime prevention. In this wise, women are better tools to enhance crime awareness, sharing of information and experience to underpin the development of strong community values and social pressure against criminality.

Women have become “the eyes and ears” of police, using the well-accepted tactic of documenting and reporting suspicious behaviour to police and looking out for one another's homes. This community anti-crime programs which integrate gender perspectives have been successfully launched in American cities [17]. Their actions to record the details of what they observe, to alert the authorities, and to report those details to the Police Service have proven to be a very effective crime prevention tool. It is well – established fact that violence against women is underreported for various reasons: the woman who is abused is frequently very much ashamed to speak out or threatened. Nevertheless, according to [18]

campaigns have been launched in many countries to raise public awareness on the issue of gender –based violence and domestic violence. As it gains more visibility, more women learn to recognize these forms of violence as crimes, tend to report them and seek legal redress; consequently, this goes a long way in controlling or eliminating violence against women and other gender-based crimes. [19] added that situational crime prevention approaches targeting women’s safety in public have often produced warning leaflets for women with a series of safety tips for women to adopt. This approach has been effective because it places the responsibility for on to the woman, and the woman is being asked to manage her own risks. [20] argues that women already take precaution in their daily lives and have elaborate strategies devised to minimize their experience of men’s violence and crime. [21] believe that women can already be described as experts in surviving danger. According to them, “Most women don’t simply walk down the street at night – the walk involves being aware of who is on the street, where others are and what they are doing; they assess alternative routes, and act assertively”. This shows that the primary responsibility for preventing opportunistic crime rests with women. These core functions can play a critical role in reducing crime.

4. Recommendations

It is a well known and accepted fact that some of the causes of crime are deep rooted and related to the history and socio-economic realities of our society. For this reason, a comprehensive strategy must go beyond providing only effective policing. It must also provide for mobilization and participation of civil society, youth groups in assisting to address crime. To effectively reduce crime, it is necessary to transform and re-organize government and facilitate real community participation. Women need to be supported to weave a new social fabric, robust enough to withstand the stresses of rapid change in the society.

One cannot underestimate the role of education in the prevention and control of crime. [22] commented that “Better educated women are more likely to be security alert and active, to be employed, and likely to avoid situation of crime and violence”. Especially the prevention of urban violent crime through training and practical counteraction lends itself to a network of shared information charting the way for the crime prevention role players to apply those approaches, tools and techniques in practice.

Most fundamentally, this strategy requires that government moves beyond a mode of crisis management and reaction. Government must ensure that effective planning and sustainable success in reducing crime will reach well into the next century, a long –term prevention strategy should be encouraged for the sustenance of crime –free and tranquil society.

Policies that encourage civil participation and cooperation from security authorities will have to be developed. The present restricting environment which discourages women from contributing their best, e.g. conditions of abuse and vulnerability will have to be modified to one that facilitates cooperation and promotes empowerment of women. There is no doubt that serious efforts must be made to decrease the

vulnerability of women to being victims of crime and violence. This will only be fully achieved when discrimination against women is eliminated and women are entitled to the full range of rights in a society: civil, social, economic, political and cultural. At the same time, laws should ensure that women who are victims are not stigmatized by an insensitive investigation and prosecution process.

Local government should promote integrated spatial and socio-economic development that is socially just and equal for both men and women in the community. This implies that crime prevention principles are integrated with other aspects of local development, including economic development. Local governments should be encouraged to form partnerships with organizations in the community, especially where these agencies have expertise that is lacking in local government (such as expertise in crime prevention).

Crime is the product of many different factors. All organizations that can influence these factors must take part in projects to make a community safe. Because these organizations all have different perspectives and skills, their crime prevention activities need to be formalized and coordinated. Structures should be developed to increase the capacity to work in partnerships across government agencies, with NGO’s, women’s groups and community youths at the national and local levels.

The effectiveness of women’s safety initiatives is often linked to the quality of the partnerships maintained between different sectors and stakeholders, including government, business, civil society, non-governmental organizations and others. The role of women as active leaders in preventing crime should be explored. While tools that have been identified should be developed to assist in the implementation of effective, evidence-based programmes such as safety audits, tools, awareness-raising campaigns, etc.). Women can be offered personal safety courses at frequent intervals, educating women about risk reduction techniques, and crime prevention tactics; instill self-dependency through employment; help women understand the responsibility of making smart and safe decisions and the proper use of self-defense; and increase the women’s knowledge of their own physical power.

5. Conclusion

Crime Prevention Strategy that integrates the gender perspective represents a turning point in the battle against crime. Women are good machinery for crime prevention and control, this is rooted in the fact that less women than men are involved in crime activities in the society. For it to fully succeed it requires the support of all women who no longer wish to be victims or to live in fear. Testimonies from women, both town and rural residents have shown that the women feel more aware of their surroundings, more conscious of decisions that affect their safety, and more self –confident of their chances of defending themselves in the case of an attack. This paper outlines the development of parallel streams of work on crime prevention and control and argues that there is a need to integrate the women in a concerted gendered approach, particularly at the level of municipalities. It draws on developing work on women’s

safety, gender, and the role of women in decision making in local government.

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Author Profile

Dr Esther Archibong is a Lecturer in Sociology Department of University of Calabar. She graduated from the Department of Sociology, in 2002 and subsequently got Masters and PhD degrees in 2007 and 2012 respectively, specializing in the area of Medical Sociology. Her interest also includes women's health and gender issues. She is a NUFFIC Fellow at the University of Applied Sciences, Ede, Netherland. She has published extensively in her area of specialization and interest.

R. Udobong and C. Antia received the B.S. and M.S. degrees in Medical Sociology from University of Calabar. Both are PhD candidates presently in the same University. They are also staff of the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital. Their research interest centers on women's health.