

## URBANISATION AND CRIME IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

Crime is a universal problem, which varies due to several factors. This paper looks into the relationship between crime and urbanization. The basic assumption is that the urban setting with its abundance of wealth and goods provides ample opportunities for various types of crimes. Thus, it is expressed here that (a) since urban dwellers are more prone to temptations and are also exposed to non-conventional ways and means, social control poses great problems, (b) factors which militate against social control and thus enhance the prevalence of crime include: (i) Increased interaction (due to high population density) in urban areas and anonymity which make crime detection a difficult task; (ii) Improved mobility and increased physical environmental heterogeneity. For example, a neighborhood which combines industrial commercial land use with family dwellings tends to harbour the potentials for almost any crime; (ii) Demographic and regional patterns also influence the kind(s) of crimes. For example, property crimes are less common in low-density areas. Importantly, since people are alienated and isolated, the sense of insecurity is on the high side. This paper also highlights the implications for crime prevention.

**Keywords:** Urbanisation, Urban/metropolitan, Crime: Demographic/Regional patterns; Urban/Rural patterns

### INTRODUCTION

Crime is a universal phenomenon, which poses great threat to peace and many people. It has been in existence for generations and unfortunately, it is here to stay. The past years have been trying periods for the federal, state, local governments and community members as they have all been pre-occupied with one kind of crime prevention approach or the other. Incidentally as official rates of crime have soared, so have the expenditures on its prevention and attempts to combat the rising rates. For example, the passage of the Armed Robbery and Fire Arms Decree in 1970, soon after Nigeria's civil war, marked the beginning of the recognition that crime is

a serious problem that must be dealt with decisively- as the Federal Government allocated funds to be spent on improving law enforcement and the criminal justice system.

Even though reliable figures about the total national expenditures for crime prevention and criminal justice are not readily available, particularly, since philanthropic individuals and the private sector are now actively involved in funding these, it can be estimated that spending in these areas run into the order of billions of Naira yearly. A careful review of newspapers reports on crime and current efforts to prevent it shows that many state governments

established different forms of "OPERATION" mechanism to combat crimes. For example, both the federal and state governments have one form of response approach code named, "Rapid Response", "Fire for Fire", "Sweep", "Wedge", "Gbale", "Storm", "Flush", etc., as their crime combating mechanisms. Some states have also purchased millions of Naira worth of bullet-proof vests for its "operation "Sweep" contingent, including electronic crime prevention devices. The controversial "Operation Fire for Fire", which requires the police to shoot armed robbers on sighting them, demonstrates government's concern for the safety of its people. Despite these mammoth expenditures and efforts, several crimes are still being committed daily by dare-devil criminals in broad daylight. In fact a survey on the mood of some people in Abeokuta toward urban problems shows that over 90 percent of respondents claimed that they nurse the fear of falling victims of armed robbery attack. A very small proportion (only 22 percent of those surveyed) felt that the conventional urban problems - housing, pollution, transportation, and urban renewal, were of major concern. Interestingly, when the problems of electricity and water supplies were considered, only about 50% feel that power failure pose as much danger to them as crime. This population represents the landlords, tenants, who were middle class and educated respondents. The greatest issues of concern to most of the other residents (about 78%) included crime, armed robbery occultism - secret cult, kidnapping, public immorality and delinquency (Shopeju, 2006a). To this extent, well over 95% of the neighbourhoods in Abeokuta and environ, have installed

metal gates or bars to restrict vehicular movement between 11 p.m. and 5.00 a.m. daily. Also, many communities have employed the services of vigilante groups or guards to patrol the areas, both during the day and night.

Urban life is becoming a condition of people across the world. The city is not just looked upon as the place which provides people with housing and stores, education and employment, banks and shops, but also as the place where people should be able to live in dignity, security, and harmony. It is also viewed as a place of prestige where people can have access to the great achievements of modern civilization and the ageless pleasures accorded by (its) natural beauty.

The fact that crime, poses problems to people is of importance to this paper. In the same light, the notion that crime varies with geographical areas is also important. Some of the questions which this paper attempts to address include how and why urbanization encourages crime and the implication of this phenomenon for social control of crime. Finally, it delves into what (if anything) could be done to alleviate these problems?

This paper does not attempt to explain the causal factors but tries to show that some areas predispose some people to crime with the understanding that the factors involve very complex and controversial processes. Causal factors have been thoroughly debated from several sociological points of view (See Cloward and Ohlin, 1960; Jefferey, 1977; Omisakin, 1998), and it is still being debated. However, from the foregoing, it can be deduced that individuals are

influenced by, factors which may or may not lead them into committing crimes. For example, two people from the same geographical location, within the same socio-economic class (education, wealth, status, etc) may exhibit different social behaviours. For example, one may commit crime (i.e. robbery), while the other may not. In short, this paper is concerned with the resultant effect of perceived social creations such as urbanization and economic development on human behaviour. According to Lewis, the culture of poverty is marked with apathy, cynicism helplessness and mistrust of institutions, such as the police, courts and government, which prevents the impoverished (poor) from taking advantage of the conventional opportunities that are available to them (Lewis, 1966). It is also believed that the experience of poverty takes its toll on the poor and their families and that the poor economic and social conditions are the root cause of delinquency (crime). In short, those who go into crime do so as a means of survival, self-esteem, and revenge on the society (Siegel and Senna, 2000: 130). In relation to Nigeria, there are reports of criminals who apologize to their victims rubbing them, while blaming society for their woes. This also shows that the economic condition of Nigeria is a factor in crime causation.

#### ***Clarification of Terms***

At this junction, it is pertinent to define/explain the meaning of certain terms that appear in this paper in order to facilitate better understanding.

Urban/metropolitan will be used interchangeably in this paper to mean cities and other incorporated areas, which pos-

sess at least 2,500 people and/or densely settled/populated areas. The areas with a population of less than 2,500 will be called rural areas.

The rural-urban term is a continuum, because it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between these two terms. The factor responsible for this is the transitional revolutions, which have succeeded in supplying the rural areas with a network of communication and transportation. Communication, particularly today with the introduction of readily available mobile telephone system, and transportation have a way of bringing everyone closer to the cities and many urban amenities to people wherever they live. These factors have implications for the types and rates of crime in this area.

#### ***Urban crimes: Predisposing Factors***

It has been further argued that urbanization reduces the possibility of social control (Christiansen, 1967; Glaser, 1967). For example, our culture today, encourages people to amass wealth and also provides the impetus for people who are less willing to subordinate their personal wishes to those of their communities. Therefore, as Clarke (1992) says, people are “daily seeking ways to expand their mobility and freedom of choice, which according to routine theory is the main reason for crime”. Underlying this assumption is the notion that urbanized citizens are exposed to many non-conventional ways/means and are therefore prone to temptations more easily than their rural counterparts. This poses questions about the relationships, between urbanization and modernization on one hand and the temptations to commit crimes on the other. The key concept of the urban systems is interaction, which is increased in a

system with numerous effective linkages. Since an urban system fits this model and also provides anonymity, which is a necessary ingredient to avoid detection, it enhances the opportunities for the commission of crime (Harries, 1980:30). Thus, it can be inferred that modernization brings with it several forms and patterns and rates of crime. In relation to Nigeria, Omisakin (1998) by looking at the crime figures for the period between 1960 and 1984 observed that crime rate was directly proportional to the level of development - that is the more developed areas have more crimes.

The urban system in conjunction with modernization potentially enhances crime patterns in 2 basic ways. First, crime opportunities are enhanced through improved mobility, increased potential interaction, and increased physical environmental heterogeneity. For example, increased diversity of land use has been said to offer high potentials for the occurrence of crimes. Diversity also makes law enforcement more difficult. For instance, a neighbourhood, which combines industrial and commercial land uses with single and multi-family dwellings, harbours the potential for almost every possible crime. Also, the set-up of banks today is decentralized when compared to those in the olden days. Banks used to be directly opposite to or very close to the offices of security agents. With the present day location of banks and perhaps shopping centers, opportunities for robbery have greatly increased. With freeways and routes close by, it is not uncommon for robbers to "strike" and then get lost or mixed up in traffic. This has formed the trend of armed robbery, car snatching and

assassinations nationwide. One is tempted to feel that the introduction of GSM and hand held mobile telephone sets, such acts will abate. This is not the case. The recent spate of attacks on banks and travelers on Nigerian highways show that this new introduction is yet to have positive effect on crime control. The second way in which urban systems may affect crime patterns is through the social flux and complexity made possible by the mobility which enhances the economic efficiency of the system (Harries, 1980:30-31). Migration and spatial sorting, further enhance crime. Migration occurs at both the international levels and interstate levels such as the importation of armed robbers (the case of Shina Rambo from the Republic of Benin readily comes to mind) and drug traffickers. A related factor is inter-regional migration such as, the exportation of criminals subculture from the south to the northern and western states. For example, the states with many cities which engage in high commercial activities, such as Lagos, Delta, and Anambra, are always reported to have a higher armed robbery (car snatching and burglary) and murder rates than other metropolitan areas such as the Federal Capital-Abuja, Kano and Ibadan (Arokoya and Obafemi, 1999). Thus, it is not uncommon for criminals to migrate from one part of the nation to another particularly as any of these adopts strict measures against crime. It is not uncommon for newly arrived Commissioners of Police to "warn" prospective criminals to stay away from their states of command. This shows that criminals seek areas of least resistance, risk and high payoff for their operation. Inter and intra-regional movements/migrations occur between rural and urban areas and within the cities and local government ar-

eas. "Exurbia" the movement from older to newer housing in the suburb has led to the creation of the areas called the inner cities. Lagos, Ibadan, Aba e.t.c.) are said to harbour the majority of the under-privileged, and socio-economic neighbourhood groups and the under-employed people. Due to lack of conventional ways of improving the social conditions of people, these areas are characterized with envy, frustration and deprivation all put together. These factors influence the mode of interaction and also provide ways of "justifying" or rationalizing the hostility directed toward the privileged sectors.

### ***The Trends of Crime***

This section, explores some of the patterns manifested by crime as they relate to (a) Demographic/Regional patterns; (b) Urban/Rural patterns; (c) City size and settlement types, and (d) Within city patterns. However, it should be stated that while specific studies on patterns of crime in Nigeria are few, the following have implications for the trend of crime (in Nigeria).

### ***Demographic/Regional Patterns***

Lunden (1942:72) states that the structural arrangement of the population in several localities to a large extent determines the amount and the types of criminality in these areas. For example, he claims that homogenous rural settlements always have less crime than heterogeneous urban mobile populations. He goes on to explain why this phenomenon is more prevalent in the urban areas by stating that, "the high degree of specialization in labor, heterogeneity of culture and increased mobility of urban society shatter the sym-

thetic relationship and group solidarity of society" (Lunden, 1942:72). This in turn increases psychosocial isolations (*alienation*) and weakens traditions and traditional social control mechanisms. Even though his analysis, particularly, his description of criminals and the predisposing factors are more than fifty years old, they are still valid and help to reinforce the notion that crime or criminality varies with demographic and regional patterns. For example, Fafchamps and Moser (2003), in a study in Madagascar, show that crime increases with distance from the urban centres and decreases with population density. They also claim that crime and insecurity are associated with isolation.

The review of some of the most extensive research done on the regional patterns of crime shows that one of the areas that received considerable analysis is the regional variation of crime rates (Herbert, 1982:19). As early as 1938, social scientists had started to identify some variations in the patterns presented by crime. For example, in the U.S.A., high murder rates were identified in the south-eastern states, while robbery were highest on an axis from Washington to Texas, and larceny rates were highest in the West (Lottier, 1938; Shannon, 1954; Harries, 1974). California, New York, Maryland, Nevada and Florida were classified as the most crime prone states, while North Dakota, Mississippi, West Virginia, Vermont the New Hampshire were among the least prone (Harries, 1974:30-32). In relation to the Nigerian scene, a review of daily newspapers reveals that murder (including ritual murder) are highly reported in the southern states such as Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, Abia (to mention a few). Also the spatial distribution of criminality in

Kwara State shows that the Ilorin, Kogi and Okene (areas that are highly urbanized) reported the highest rates of crime than the more rural areas such as Moro and Borgu (Oyebanji, 1982). Similar findings were reported for the intra-urban variations in Ile-Ife (Aguda, 1993). In fact, Arokoya and Oyebanji (1997) agree that there is a correlation between crime wave and geographical location in Nigeria.

### *Urban/Rural Patterns*

It has been shown that most offenses against property are relatively more frequent in cities than in the rural areas (Christiansen, 1967). Using Denmark, Christiansen states that for every 100 criminal acts (committed) in towns and cities more than 80 of these will be related to property crimes. Explanations for this “strange” trend is as follows: the structures of rural societies make them close-knit society, thus respective members tend to know who has what and how these properties were acquired. Also, high spirit of community neighbourliness are expressed toward everybody, due to this, acts against properties tend to be less. In short, a common phenomenon is that members show concern toward the upkeep of their neighbours. For example, if Taiwo’s goat is seen straying, Bayo may inform the owner or even personally return it (to the owner). However, while crime against property may be found in both rural and urban areas, theft/pilfering is the single crime which is likely to prevail throughout the rural areas while white collar crimes such as embezzlement, fraud and other similar offenses are much more prevalent in cities.

### *City Size and Settlement Types*

The conclusions drawn from earlier studies on crime patterns state that crime rate is positively correlated with population size. That is the larger the city, the higher the crime rate. However, in his attempt to verify this assertion, Harries (1974:38-41), calculated the simple correlation between population size and total index crime rate for 189 SMSAs for the period between 1965 and 1969. While he was able to confirm the above finding in a general way, he concluded that the findings were not strong enough to suggest that population (size) alone was responsible for the crime rate, thus suggesting that other factors apart from population size contribute substantial amount (coefficient 0.44) to the rate (Harries, 1974:39). On examining the relationship between city size and rates of violent index crimes more closely, he found that the inter-correlation between violent crime and population indicates that of the four index crimes of violence (with the respective coefficients: murder, .26; rape, .44; robbery, .68; and assault, .19) robbery is the most size dependent, while assault is the least size dependent (Harries, 1974:39-41). In relating these findings (population size and crime) to the urban-suburban-rural settings, Harries (1974:41) states that crime rates generally diminish with the size of groups, with the lowest rates (crime) actually being recorded in the rural areas for property crime and offenses against person. These findings are corroborated by Fafchamps and Mosher (2003). In relation to Nigeria and based on newspaper reports, big cities tend to have well-established police departments which generally tend to and therefore report crimes more methodically than small poorly financed police posts found in small towns and rural areas.

Also, since low - density areas tend to have few concentrations of material wealth (combined with the fact that everybody knows everybody else), the incentive to commit crime is not as prevalent here as in big cities (with material wealth). The rising rate of the theft of mobile telephone handsets in cities tends to lend credence to this. Finally, rural areas in Nigeria, because of their cohesiveness are governed by traditions such that many problems are settled without resorting to police action. This factor probably contributes to the low rates of crime reported in rural areas. From newspaper reports, we know that the presence of the Nigeria Police in rural areas could result in the people deserting the area. This demonstrates the rural people's aversion to modern law enforcement agents.

#### *Patterns within Cities*

Several findings have reported on the patterns of crime within cities. All showing or reporting that the types and rates of crime vary with the location (Christiansen, 1967; Shaw, 1929; Shaw and McKay, 1942; Schmid, 1960 a and b; Winslow, 1977; Inciardi, 1978; Brantingham and Brantingham, 1980). Generally, crime rate and the patterns vary from the inner city to the suburbs. For example, of all types of offences known to the police, the central segment of the city contributes the largest proportion of all types of fraud and all types of robbery including purse snatching and non-residential robbery. The central segment also contributes more than half of the following offenses known to the police: assault, felonious, homicide, miscellaneous forms of robbery, residential robbery and highway robbery. The remainder of the city absorbs a greater

percentage of various types such as burglary, sex violation, except sexual perversions (Schmid, 1960 a; b; Winslow, 1977). Similar findings were made for the studies on the types and rates of crime in Port-Harcourt (Arokoya and Obafemi, 1999; Iwarimie-Jaja, 1998), and based on newspaper (particularly, armed robbery and assassination) show that a similar situation exists in Lagos. Overall, the findings show that violent crimes are prevalent in high socio-economic status neighbourhoods.

#### *Prevention*

Crime without a doubt poses serious problems to people in all societies and societies strive very hard to minimize it and its effects even if it cannot be totally eradicated. Thus, several approaches on crime prevention have been proposed. For example, one of the approaches suggests that crime could be prevented through social reorganization (Shopeju, 2000). This approach is grounded in the belief that people are predisposed to crime due to morale decadence, thus it is being suggested that the best way to minimize its occurrence is to reorganize the social values and beliefs of the people. Through this means, people can be reorientated to new social values, which emphasize morality and de-emphasize value of ownership of wealth and other vices as socially defined by their societies.

In taking a cue from the above approach, a working definition for crime prevention should be any strategy used to minimize the incidence of particular criminal acts by reducing the opportunity structure for would be criminals. Inherent in this definition is the notion that crime must be resisted. One approach, which falls in line with this definition, is the situational crime prevention approach. Situational crime prevention is a recent term used for the control of crime (Clarke, 1980; Clarke and

Mayhew, 1980). Basically, situational crime prevention relies simply upon reducing opportunities for committing crime by making it more difficult or risky for the criminals (Clarke, 1992:3). The approach can be tailor-made for/directed at specific kinds of crime. Its major technique is to manipulate or manage the immediate environment in a systematic and permanent way so as to increase the effort and risks of committing crime and by so doing, reduce the reward as perceived by the offenders. Basically, this strategy engages target hardening, the use of more sophisticated forms of technology such as intruder alarms, close circuit cameras and recorders in public places, increased surveillance of the areas with high crime rates, community policing block or neighbourhood watch and watchdogs.

Situational crime prevention approach could involve the use of human beings. For example, the Odua Peoples' Congress (OPC), a political Yoruba group which was formed during the military era to cater for the rights of the Yorubas, is now currently being used as guards. The OPC formed itself into a social control group and a strong and sometimes brutal force against indiscipline. Another socio-cultural group which has also turned to crime prevention is the Bakassi Boys in the Ibo speaking cities of Eastern Nigeria. The activities of these groups are known to have clashed with those of the Nigeria Police Force and had in many cases led to the loss of lives. Simply put, the OPC and the Bakassi boys could be considered to be no nonsense groups that act as the law enforcers, judge, jury and executioners that do not spare their culprits. Since their political activities were limited by the re-

turn to democratic rule in 1999, many of their members have had to realign themselves with the current and immediate needs of their environment for survival, and have, whether by design or not, turned into a crime prevention or control organizations which readily provide needed security against criminals (for a fee). This approach also provides the members, many who are young and jobless, with employment and ultimately keeps them away from trouble. This approach (using OPC as guard) has proved to be useful and successful in many areas within the city of Abeokuta, Ogun State. Focus will be on Asero Estate, Abeokuta. An interview with some selected tenants and landlords shows that about four years ago the rate of armed robbery attacks, burglary and entry on the residents was considered to be very high. The residents were dreadful of night fall. The major approaches used by the residents include (1) securing the aid of the OPC for night patrol. Today, armed robbery particularly at night is a rare occurrence (Shopeju, 2006b). (2) another approach that is currently being employed is the use of guard dogs. There are anticipated advantages in owning a dog (a) dogs, particularly Alsatian, are noisy and will always announce the arrival of an intruder (whether old or new); (b) People are generally scared of dogs as they believe that they can be unpredictable. In short, nobody wants to risk getting a dog bite, also associated with this is the fear of being bitten by a rabid dog!! This has other implications for criminals. No criminal wants to be identified. The person who gets bitten by a dog will need medical attention, apart from having to pay the high cost of treatment (currently about N45000.00), and he will have to identify the dog and the location for health reasons



and (c) dogs can not be caught unaware or napping, they would have sensed the impending danger. While the use of guard dogs is not a foolproof protection against robbery/crime, it calls the necessary attention to would be intruder and offence and thus serves as a preventive measure. The main aim of this approach is to let the intruder know that somebody is aware and alert to the unwanted visit.

### CONCLUSION

The cost of crime is very high to the society in general in terms of lives, bodily injury, trauma, property, and finance. There is no doubt that the estimated cost of the loss to auto theft, robberies and burglaries would run into billions of Naira, but it is impossible to attach cash value to the trauma and personal sufferings associated with criminal activities. The problem is enormous, as the rate of crime and criminal activities tends to increase as the economic conditions become worse.

I have reviewed the relationships which exist between crime and urbanization, and have shown that various patterns of crime exist and that there is no "crime free" zone - crime comes in a variety of patterns. Finally, since crime exists everywhere whether urban, suburban, or rural, all preventative measures should be taken to avoid falling victims to it.

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