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Community Relations Strategies and Prevention of Neighborhood Crime: Implications for Sustainable National Security in Nigeria

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Abstract

The rising magnitude of criminal activities at the community level despite the enormous amount allocated to security in successive National and State budgets is the major factor that triggered this study. The huge resources expended on the military, Nigerian police force and other law enforcement agencies in the country appears not to have yielded the desired results as the wave of crimes have continued to rise. This study examines how community engagement and perception influence neighborhood crime prevention. The study adopted descriptive survey while data was collected from sampled respondents through questionnaire. The population of the study comprised rural dwellers resident in ten (10) communities in Ado local government area of Ekiti state, Nigeria. Simple random sampling was used to select five (5) out of the ten (10) communities while purposive sampling technique was used to select 100 respondents from each community. In all, a total of 500 participants were selected. Data collected was processed and analysed using simple linear regressions. Results of the investigation revealed that the four (4) proxies of community relations strategies have positive and significant effects on neighborhood crimes prevention and have the potential of sustaining national security in Nigeria. It was recommended that local governments should establish community policing frameworks and provide regular public education campaign on crime prevention.

Introduction

Insecurity has continued to escalate globally, with many attributing this trend to the neglect of essential community relations strategies (Gibbons, 2004). Neighborhood crimes, when left unchecked, often contribute significantly to national insecurity, as local disturbances serve as the foundation for broader threats to societal stability. The

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community, being the microcosm of the larger society, consists of individuals, groups, and institutions that share common interests, values, histories, and identities, as well as geographic proximity (whether in neighborhoods, towns, or broader regional settings). Communities function as cohesive units that bind people together, fostering collective aspirations, mutual needs, and shared values.

In this context, community relations become critical, as they serve as the mechanism through which harmony, trust, and social cohesion are established. Despite this, research indicates that the reliance on militarized approaches and the deployment of security forces in Nigeria has not significantly curbed rising insecurity. Studies by Ogunode, Abereola, and Olowe (2019) and Ogunode and Abereola (2013) have demonstrated that the escalation of insecurity persists, particularly in urban and suburban areas, where violent crimes, such as armed robbery, frequently result in loss of life, destruction of property, and a notable decline in economic productivity. These crimes, especially when occurring at the neighborhood level, have the potential to not only devastate local communities but also to contribute to broader national instability.

Considering the significant impact of neighborhood crime on both local and national security, it is imperative to explore the role of community relations strategies in mitigating crime and fostering safety. Traditional approaches that rely on coercion and force have largely failed to address the root causes of insecurity. Therefore, this study aims to empirically investigate the influence of community relations strategies on the prevention of neighborhood crime in Nigeria. It is crucial to understand whether fostering stronger, more cohesive relationships within communities can contribute to the reduction of crime, thereby enhancing national security.

Although there is a growing global interest in community-based crime prevention; most empirical studies have focused on urban areas and often overlooked rural neighborhoods (Stern & Griffith, 2015). In Nigeria, this gap is even more pronounced, despite the rising security challenges in rural communities. The present study addresses this gap by exploring community relations as a sustainable strategy for crime prevention. Unlike traditional law enforcement approaches, which rely on coercion and force, this study highlights the value of social cohesion and community participation in addressing crime.

Statement of Problem

Rural areas in Nigeria have become increasingly synonymous with a wide range of criminal activities, contributing to a rise in insecurity that has permeated various regions of the country. Despite the considerable financial resources allocated to security in successive national and state budgets, including investments in military operations and law enforcement, the prevalence of crime at the community level continues to grow at an alarming rate. This disturbing trend suggests that the use of advanced weaponry and increased security measures by the police and military have not been able to deliver the much-desired peace and stability.

Scholars such as Jaliliyan and Heydari (2014), Ogunode et al. (2019), and Crutchfield and Geerken (1982) have advocated for the prioritization of community-based crime prevention efforts over a reliance on law enforcement agencies. While prior studies emphasize national security (e.g., Dambazau 2016), few have explored the micro-level impact of community community relations on crime reduction within rural settings.

However, more recent research highlights a significant gap in the availability and implementation of community relations strategies in most Nigerian communities. Studies by Saferworld (2014) and Dambazau (2016) reveal that many communities continue to depend heavily on external security forces, including the Nigerian Police Force, the Nigerian Army, and other agencies, to address local security challenges. This dependency has proven ineffective, as crime rates have not only persisted but have worsened, spreading across both urban and rural areas.

While the growing population of Nigeria, combined with the effects of globalization, may have undermined the efficiency of community-led crime prevention, this does not negate the importance of community involvement. It is argued that community efforts, particularly in identifying and addressing crime at its early stages, are critical to curbing insecurity before it escalates. Collaboration between community members and formal law enforcement agencies could yield more sustainable outcomes in reducing crime, but there is a need to evaluate how well communities are equipped to fulfill this role.

Moreover, past studies have predominantly focused on the influence of urban crime on rural communities (Carey, 1975; Wirth, 1938; McKenzie, 1925), with the assumption that the influx of people from cities is the primary driver of rising crime rates in rural areas. While these studies provide valuable insights, their relevance in the Nigerian context has diminished due to the passage of time, changes in societal dynamics, and the emergence of new patterns of crime. The outdated nature of these findings underscores the need for a more contemporary, context-specific investigation.

Despite significant financial investments in law enforcement, crime rates remain high in many Nigerian neighborhoods, highlighting a need for alternative prevention strategies. This study responds to the gap in literature on rural community relations by investigating how local engagement, social media use, and crime prevention programmes can mitigate crime. By addressing crime at its roots in rural communities, the study aims to contribute to sustainable national security frameworks.

Consequent upon the foregoing, the researchers hypothesized as follows:

H_{o1}: *Community engagement does not significantly influence neighborhood crime prevention in Nigeria.*

H_{o2}: *Perception of crime does not significantly influence neighborhood crime prevention.*

H_{o3}: *Social media influence does not significantly influence neighborhood crime prevention.*

H_{o4}: *Crime prevention programmes does not significantly influence neighborhood crime prevention.*

Literature Review

Community Engagement

Effective community engagement is crucial for fostering trust between law enforcement and residents, which can lead to enhanced crime prevention outcomes. Research indicates that community policing strategies that incorporate resident input are more successful in addressing local crime issues. For instance, studies have shown that when

police and residents share perceptions about crime and safety, there is a greater likelihood of implementing effective crime prevention initiatives (Stein, & Griffith, 2015). In Nigeria, fostering community engagement can help bridge the gap between law enforcement agencies and citizens, leading to collaborative efforts in reducing crime rates.

Crime Perceptions

Understanding how communities perceive crime is essential for developing effective prevention strategies. A qualitative study conducted in Alabama revealed that fear of crime significantly impacts mental health and community cohesion (Stager, Whitfield, Osborne, Adedoyin, Okoro, Carley, Schoenberger, Crawford, Thompson, Stafford, & Bateman, 2024). In Nigeria, similar dynamics may exist, where perceptions of crime contribute to social disintegration and distrust among community members. Addressing these perceptions through targeted education and awareness campaigns can empower residents to participate actively in crime prevention efforts.

Social Media Influence

Locality-based social media platforms have emerged as powerful tools for shaping community perceptions of crime and safety. A study highlighted that individuals who actively create content on these platforms tend to perceive less crime and feel safer compared to passive consumers of content (Zahnow & Smith, 2024). In the Nigerian context, leveraging social media can enhance community awareness about crime trends and encourage proactive measures among residents. Promoting balanced engagement on these platforms can facilitate information sharing and collective action against neighborhood crime.

Crime Prevention Programs

Community-based crime prevention programs have shown promise in various contexts, including high-crime areas. Research from Seattle demonstrated that community-led initiatives could effectively reduce calls related to drug-related incidents and disorderly conduct without displacing crime (Telep & Hibdon, 2018). In Nigeria, implementing similar community-driven programs could address localized crime issues by mobilizing resources and fostering collaboration among residents, local organizations, and law enforcement. Such programs should be tailored to address specific neighborhood challenges while promoting social cohesion.

Community Relations

Community means different things to different people depending on the context of its usage. To a business organization, it means the active involvement of its management and staff in public programmes and activities related to the welfare of the community within which it operates (Offonry, 2015). Viewing it from another dimension, Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman and Toth (2014) describe community relations as public relation function which involve engaging in active and continuing participation with and within a community to maintain and enhance environmental stability to the benefit of the people within the community. Lattimore, *et al's* (2014) definition will be adopted in this study since the focus of the study is on the benefits of community relations as it affects peaceful coexistence among people living in the community to foster peace and national security.

Neighborhood Crime
Neighborhood crime according to Olajide (2017) include but not limited to all forms of unlawful entry into other peoples' residential apartment for the purpose of committing a crime or offenses that constitute nuisance to the neighborhood. Such offences include fighting, rape, oppression, restiveness, and the likes which disrupt public peace. These crimes are committed freely in most communities in Nigeria without being checked and they have grown to become major threats to national security.

Situational Crime Prevention Theory

This study is anchored on the Situational Crime Prevention model. Situational Crime Prevention (SCP) is a theoretical framework aimed at reducing opportunities for crime by modifying the environment in which crimes occur (Eck & Clarke, 2019). The Situational Crime Prevention model was primarily developed by Ronald V. Clarke in the 1980s. Clarke's work emphasized the role of opportunity in crime commission and introduced various strategies to reduce these opportunities. His contributions have significantly shaped the field of criminology and crime prevention (Eck & Clarke, 2019).

The SCP model comprises several key components that work together to deter criminal behavior:

Opportunity Reduction: SCP focuses on reducing opportunities for crime rather than addressing the characteristics of offenders. This includes making potential targets less accessible or attractive to criminals.

Increasing Risks: By enhancing surveillance and guardianship in specific areas, SCP aims to increase the perceived risks associated with committing a crime. This can include measures such as improved lighting, neighborhood watch programs, and surveillance cameras.

Reducing Rewards: The model seeks to diminish the potential rewards that criminals might gain from committing offenses. This can involve measures such as target hardening (e.g., using locks or security systems) and community awareness campaigns that inform residents about crime risks.

Environmental Design: SCP incorporates principles from environmental criminology, advocating for modifications to physical spaces that deter criminal activity. This includes designing public spaces to enhance visibility and accessibility for law enforcement.

The Situational Crime Prevention model operates under several key assumptions:

Rational Choice: It assumes that offenders make rational decisions based on perceived risks and rewards associated with criminal behavior. Thus, if risks are increased or rewards decreased, the likelihood of crime will diminish.

Environmental Influence: The theory posits that environmental factors significantly influence criminal behavior. By modifying these factors, it is possible to prevent crimes from occurring.

Focus on Specific Crimes: SCP is designed to address specific types of crimes rather than general criminal behavior. This specificity allows for targeted interventions that are more likely to be effective.

Community Involvement: The model assumes that community engagement is crucial in implementing effective crime prevention strategies. Local residents play a vital role in monitoring their environments and reporting suspicious activities.

Dynamic Nature of Crime: The theory recognizes that crime patterns are not static; they evolve over time based on changes in society, technology, and law enforcement practices. Therefore, SCP strategies must be adaptable to remain effective.

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey while the population of the study comprised of rural dwellers resident in ten (10) communities in Ado local government area of Ekiti state, Nigeria. Simple random sampling was used to select five (5) out of the ten (10) communities while purposive sampling technique was used to select 100 respondents from each community. Purposive sampling was adjudged suitable for this study because only house owners, popularly referred to as landlord who have lived in the community for upward of ten (10) years were qualified and deem fit to participate in the study. In all, a sample of 500 participants were selected.

Questionnaire Structure

The study employed a structured questionnaire with a Likert-scale items ranging from 1(strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha yielded value above 0.7 for all constructs, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Participants were informed the study's purpose and their consents was obtained to ensure ethical compliance. Cronbach's alpha values indicated high reliability across the four variables, with a score above 0.7 for each component.

Data collected was processed and analysed using simple linear regressions.

Result

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Community engagement does not significantly influence neighborhood crime prevention in Nigeria

Table 1: Simple linear regression analysis showing the influence of community engagement on prevention of neighborhood crime.

	ANOVA					Model Summary		
Model	**Sum of Squares**	**Df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**	**R**	**R^2**	**Adj. R^2**
Regression	33295.418	1	33295.418			0.756	0.572	0.572
Residual	24945.167	2890	8.632	3857.411	0.000			
Total	58240.585	2891						

*p<0.05

The significant effect of community engagement on neighborhood crime prevention ($F_{1,2890}$=3857.411, p<0.05) suggests that fostering local involvement in policing initiatives can reduce crime rates. This finding underscores the need for local governments to establish structured community policing frameworks, which may involve neighborhood watch programmes or participatory security committees. This finding implies that the predictor variable is a factor that can exert influence on neighborhood. The value of the coefficient of determination indicates that the predictor variable accounted for 57.2% of the total variance in community engagement while the remaining 42.8% unexplained variance is largely due to other variables not included in the study that can curtail neighborhood crime.

Table 2: Simple linear regression analysis showing the influence of community engagement on prevention of neighborhood crime.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)		
(Constant)	12.205	.159		76.898	.000
community engagement	.483	.008	.756	62.108	.000

*p<0.05

The regression result in the above table 2 reveals that the influence of community engagement on prevention of neighborhood crime is statistically significant at p<0.05 level (t=62.108, p<0.05). This implies that community engagement had significant influence on prevention of neighborhood crime.
The regression equation showing the linear relationship between the dependent and independent variables can therefore be given as follow:
Y =12.205+ 0.483X

Hypothesis 2: Perception of crime does not significantly influence neighborhood crime prevention.

Table 3: Simple linear regression analysis showing the influence crime perception on neighborhood crime prevention in Nigeria

	ANOVA					Model Summary		
Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	R	R^2	Adj. R^2
Regression	25635.855	1	25635.855			0.663	0.439	0.439
Residual	32750.492	2890	11.332	2262.183	0.000			
Total	58386.347	2891						

*p<0.05

The significant effect of perception of crime on neighborhood crime prevention ($F_{1,2890}$=2262.183, p<0.05) suggests that ability to perceive crime at the community level

and nip it on the bud before it escalates to the larger society can reduce crime rates. This finding implies that the predictor variable is a factor that can exert influence on neighborhood. The null hypothesis was rejected, and this implies that the predictor variable (perception of crime) provides a significant explanation for the variation in neighborhood crime prevention. The table shows that there are significant positive multiple correlations between the predictor variable (perception of crime) and neighborhood crime prevention ($R=0.663$, $p<0.05$). This implies that the predictor variable is a factor that can exert influence on neighborhood crime prevention. The value of the coefficient of determination indicates that the predictor variable accounted for 43.9% of the total variance in neighborhood crime prevention while the remaining 56.1% unexplained variance is largely due to other variables not included in the study that can account for neighborhood crime prevention.

Table 4: Simple linear regression analysis showing perception of crime on neighborhood crime prevention in Nigeria

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)		
(Constant)	11.410	.220		51.777	.000
perception of crime	.510	.011	.663	47.562	.000

*p<0.05

The regression result in the above table reveals that the influence of perception of crime on neighborhood crime prevention is statistically significant at $p<0.05$ level ($t=47.562$, $p<0.05$). This implies that perception of crime had significant influence on neighborhood crime prevention.

The regression equation showing the linear relationship between the dependent and independent variables can therefore be given as follow:

$Y = 11.410 + 0.510X$

Hypothesis 3: Social media influence does not significantly influence neighborhood crime prevention.

Table 5: Simple Linear Regression analysis showing social media influence on Neighborhood crime prevention.

	ANOVA					Model Summary		
Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	R	R^2	Adj. R^2
Regression	24709.110	1	24709.110			0.650	0.423	0.423
Residual	33687.157	2890	11.656	2119.779	0.000			
Total	58396.267	2891						

*p<0.05

Results in the Table 5 above shows a significant effect of social media influence on neighborhood crime prevention ($F_{1,2890}$=2119.779, p<0.05). This indicate that building a strong social media platform can serve as veritable tool to combat crimes in the neighborhood. The null hypothesis was rejected which implies that the predictor variable (Social media influence) provides a significant explanation for the variation in neighborhood crime prevention. The table shows that there is significant positive multiple correlations between the predictor variable (social media influence) and neighborhood crime prevention (R=0.650, p<0.05). This implies that the predictor variable is a factor that can exert influence on neighborhood crime prevention. The value of the coefficient of determination indicates that the predictor variable accounted for 42.3% of the total variance in neighborhood crime prevention while the remaining 57.7% unexplained variance is largely due to other variables not included in the study that can account for neighborhood crime prevention.

Table 6: Simple linear regression analysis showing the effect of social media influence on Neighborhood crime.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)		
(Constant)	13.777	.179		77.169	.000
Social media influence	.411	.009	.650	46.041	.000

*p<0.05

The regression result in the above table reveals that social media influence on neighborhood crime prevention is statistically significant at p<0.05 level (t=46.041, p<0.05). This implies that social media influence had significant influence on neighborhood crime prevention.
The regression equation showing the linear relationship between the dependent and independent variables can therefore be given as follow:
Y =13.777+ 0.411X

Hypothesis 4: Crime prevention programmes does not significantly influence neighborhood crime prevention.

Table 7: Simple linear regression analysis showing the influence of crime prevention programmes on neighborhood crime prevention.

	ANOVA					Model Summary		
Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	R	R^2	Adj. R^2
Regression	23304.007	1	23304.007					
Residual	35118.013	2890	12.152	1917.779	0.000	0.632	0.399	0.399
Total	58422.021	2891						

*p<0.05

The significant effect of crime prevention programmes on neighborhood crime prevention ($F_{1,2890}$=1917.779, p<0.05) is an indication that when crime prevention programmes are instituted, it assists the community in enforcing implementation. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected meaning that the predictor variable (crime prevention programmes) provides a significant explanation for the variation in neighborhood crime prevention. The significant positive multiple correlations between the predictor variable (crime prevention programmes) and neighborhood crime prevention (R=0.632, p<0.05) shows that the predictor variable is a factor that can exert influence on neighborhood crime prevention. The value of the coefficient of determination indicates that the predictor variable accounted for 39.9% of the total variance in neighborhood crime prevention while the remaining 80.1% unexplained variance is largely due to other variables not included in the study that can account for neighborhood crime prevention.

Table 8: Simple linear regression analysis showing the influence of responsive and legitimate institutions on neighborhood crime prevention

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Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)		
(Constant)	13.332	.197		67.820	.000
Crime prevention programmes	.431	.010	.632	43.792	.000

*p<0.05

The regression result in the above table reveals that the influence of crime prevention programmes on neighborhood crime prevention is statistically significant at p<0.05 level (t=46.041, p<0.05). This implies that crime prevention programmes had significant influence on neighborhood crime prevention.

The regression equation showing the linear relationship between the dependent and independent variables can therefore be given as follow:
Y =13.332+ 0.431X

Discussion

The findings from a multiple regression analysis conducted on community relations strategies and prevention of neighborhood crime in Ekiti State, Nigeria, demonstrated a significant and positive effect. The studies of España and Nabe (2023) in Spain; Jaliliyan and Heydari (2014) in Japan and Ogunode *et al.* (2019) in Nigeria validate the findings that community engagement is statistically significant in preventing neighborhood crime. Additionally, the study of Olajide, Lizarm, and Akinbola (2017) in Malaysia assessed the burdens of residential neighborhood crime; employed regression and Pearson correlation analysis and the findings showed that perception of crime had significant influence on crime prevention. This finding agreed with the result of this study. Similarly, the finding of this study corresponds with findings of Eck and Clarke (2019). The researchers in their study on situational crime prevention: theory, practice and evidence confirmed that the

four proxies of community relations have both positive and significant influence in curbing neighborhood crime.

While previous studies in urban areas (e.g., Stein & Griffin, 2015) have reported mixed results regarding community engagement, this study demonstrates it significant effect in rural Nigerian context. However, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias, and future studies could incorporate observational methods to validate these findings.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Crime which is an ugly phenomenon has become societal menace and it usually springs from the neighborhood and spread to the larger society if not identified and nip in the bud at the early stage. Both the individuals living in the neighborhood has major roles to play in order to curtail neighborhood crime. To this extent, this study concludes that community engagement, social media influence, and crime prevention programmes play vital roles in reducing neighborhood crime.

To enhance the impact of these strategies, it is recommended that local governments establish community policing frameworks and provide regular public education campaign on crime prevention. More so, the social media platforms should be more strengthened while drastic efforts should be made by individual at the community level to understand its usage especially in combating criminal activities in the neighborhood.

Policy Implications

The findings from various studies underscore the need for policymakers to integrate community relations strategies into national security frameworks. A multidimensional framework developed in Davao City identified key factors contributing to neighborhood crime, emphasizing the importance of social control and cohesion (España& Nabe, 2023). In Nigeria, policymakers should consider these factors when designing interventions aimed at enhancing public safety. Establishing Local Safety Contracts or similar agreements can formalize partnerships between communities and law enforcement, ensuring that strategies are aligned with local needs and priorities. In conclusion, addressing neighborhood crime through effective community relations strategies is vital for enhancing national security in Nigeria. By focusing on engagement, understanding perceptions, utilizing social media, implementing targeted prevention programs, and aligning policies with community needs, Nigeria can foster safer neighborhoods conducive to sustainable development.

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