

Extent of Protection of Lives and Properties of Community Members by the Vigilante Security Group in Abia State, Nigeria.

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Abstract: *The study examined the extent vigilante security group protects lives and properties in Abia State. A research question and a null hypothesis guided the study. Using purposive sampling technique, 726 respondents comprising of 648 Town Union Executives (TUEs) and 78 policemen in 10 local government areas with registered vigilante units were selected for the study. Questionnaire was the tool used for data collection. Data were analyzed using mean and t-test statistics. The results revealed that the vigilante protects lives and properties of community members to a high extent in the war against crime. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that the government should establish vigilante units at the local government areas where the units are nonexistent. This is because the vigilante security group has been found to be serving a useful function and complimentary to the police in protecting lives and properties as well as reducing the fear of crime among community members.*

Index Terms: *Protection, Lives and Properties, Community members and the Vigilante.*

Introduction

Protection of lives, properties and welfare of citizens is a crucial matter in every society because it plays a critical role in the overall wellbeing and development of any society. It is considered as foremost in the developmental strides in any progressive society because a country which is devoid of security and safety will eventually be doomed and may go into extinction. For existence to be meaningful, lives and properties have to be valued and secured. As enshrined in the fundamental human right, every individual has the right to life and property. Right to life should be guaranteed to citizens by providing social welfare and security for the common good of the people. In pursuant of the fundamental human right, the Nigerian constitution (1999, Section 33 as amended) states that welfare and security of the citizens shall be the primary responsibility of the government. It is therefore a constitutional duty of the government to protect lives and properties of the citizens irrespective of their religion, ethnic or political affiliations (Louis-Udeh, 2018).

Protection of lives and properties in this paper implies shielding someone from danger, pain, discomfort, harm, threat or disease. It further implies providing devices or approaches which could guard a person or community members against a broad range of hazards which may include crime, violence and other emergency situations such as the present covid-19 pandemic, Cattle herdsmen, bandits, armed robbers and kidnappers.

Protection of lives and properties in any nation is paramount because a peaceful and secured society provides peace of mind, attracts investment, economic growth and development while insecurity causes stress, poverty, diseases, hazards, unemployment and poor investment which seems to be the case in Nigeria at the present time. Obodoechina (2017) stressing on the importance of security noted that any nation which does not pay attention to the overall well-being of life and properties of her citizens does not deserve to exist. In line with the notion of Obodoechina, it is the view of this paper that every government should take appropriate measures to safeguard lives and properties of her citizens.

In Nigeria, in pursuant to the objective of safety of lives and properties, the Nigerian police force was set up in the year 1889 by the British colonial administration (Okeke as cited in Elekwa, 2019). This was done not to undermine the efforts of ‘ndinche’ community guards or neighbourhood watch existing in the Southeast Nigeria at that time (Ajayi, 2007). However, unfortunately, the colonial police were neither used as an agent for promoting the rule of law, human rights, community safety nor delivering social services, rather, it was used more as an instrument for riot control, oppression and suppression of community members (Chukwuma 2000; Garba, 2012; Nwanze, 2014;). The body also serves personal interests of the elites and politicians (Yahaya, 2019). This development alienated the police from the people and caused disconnect, suspicion and distrust by the people for the police. This led

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to rising wave of insecurity which threatened the corporate existence of the country (Ewetan 2011). This level of insecurity caused enormous loss of lives and properties and created an atmosphere of fear and tension in the country (Obidiegwu & Elekwa, 2019) which compelled many states in Nigeria to start taking up their security responsibilities in their own hands by setting up vigilante security groups. Vigilante security group can be defined in this study as an informal security group which works at the grass-root to complement and supplement the efforts of the police in different societies in fighting crime. As noted by Alemika and Chukwuma (2004) and Yahaya (2019) the emergence of the Vigilante Security Group is in response to the community members' quest for safety and security of lives and properties which may be seen as a welcome development in different societies. However, Silke (2001) observed among other issues that sometimes vigilantes embark on unlawful punishment of alleged wrong-doers and oftentimes their perception of what constitute deviant behavior is not shared by the legal system.

In order to actualize the dire need for safety of lives and properties of members, Abia State of Nigeria set up vigilante security group in the year 2002 in order to supplement and compliment the efforts of the police and abate crime. In the light of the continuing critical situation of distrust and suspicion between community members and police, some agencies (Everbridge, 2020; National Institute of Justice, 2020) observed that a good rapport between community members and police would promote partnership and provide problem solving techniques to proactively and intelligibly abate insecurity for public safety. This agrees with Travis (2005) who noted that increase in police and vigilante surveillance and partnership allows the police and the vigilante to gain knowledge about the issues or problems plaguing a community or increased synergy. According to Obidiegwu and Elekwa (2019), protection of lives and properties in any country is actualized when it involves inclusive and participatory strategies involving the formal and informal policing. This implies that if the government is not meeting the expectations of the people by providing security for them, citizens could share such responsibility for their common good which involves taking care of their security and other emergency situations which may threaten their existence through community policing. Furthermore, community policing emphasizes collaboration and proactive efforts by the citizens in order to nip crime at the bud and reduce criminal activities to its lowest ebb. In consonant to this view, Obeagu (2014) pointed out that community policing offers invaluable services towards protecting lives and properties of residents from armed robbers and thieves. Nevertheless, Musa (2016) expressed concern that in spite of the fact that Vigilante Security Group is charged with the responsibility of rendering lawful assistance to the Police in times of emergencies and threats, there are still incidences of crimes such as menace of cattle herdsman, house breaking and car theft which often occur during the daytime, perpetrated mainly by criminals who are residents and have knowledge of the security loopholes of their environment.

Presently in Nigeria and Abia state in particular, the rate of crime, violence and killings increases each day. The loss of lives is enormous and quite worrisome. Mutual suspicion among ethnic groups breeds antagonism and general mistrust among different ethnic groups (Folami, 2017). In Southern Kaduna and in different parts of Nigeria, killings by Boko-haram insurgents, bandits, cattle herdsman, kidnapping, armed robbery, rape occurs on regular basis. This situation, in addition to the global Covid-19 pandemic throws the nation into pandemonium and reveals more of the security and socio-economic gaps cutting across the entire nation. This unsatisfactory situation calls for continuous reinforcement of the vigilante security group and further determination of the extent the group protects the lives and properties of community members in order to fill necessary gaps in their performance for safety in the society.

In Abia State, the vigilante group was registered as a voluntary entity under the Abia state Nigeria law No.8 of 2002 and was officially known as Abia State Vigilante Group (ASVG). Since 2002, the ASVG has performed her function for 18 years and needs to undergo regular assessment following the opinion and perspective of different stakeholders so that any gap identified in her performance will be filled for a better society.

The respondents to this study comprised of town union executives, who represented the interest of the community members living in rural and urban areas as well as policemen working in different locations (Rural & urban communities) in Abia state. In order to enhance effective security of lives and properties of community members in Abia state, many efforts have been made to achieve effective security services and crime-free environment. However, the researchers still deemed it quite germane to embark on this study in order to determine the extent vigilante security group protects lives and properties of community members in Abia state so as to unravel the areas of their strengths and weaknesses which need improvement for greater effectiveness, decision making, action plan, policy making and implementation for public safety.

Statement of the Problem

Any progressive society is expected to exist with minimal incidences of crime and violence for peace of mind, increased investment and productivity among citizens. Presently in Nigeria, the volume of different kinds of crime has been quite overwhelming. The boko-haram militant group and herdsman continue to terrorize farmers and communities. Armed bandits parade as cattle herdsman. Kidnapping, raping and different kinds of crime is prevalent causing untold security challenges, poverty and unemployment to people. The situation is worsened by the ravaging covid-19 pandemic. As it presently stands high level of distrust and disconnect exist among community members and the police. Vigilante security group seems more reliable and trustworthy public security outfit as perceived by Yaqub and Olaniyi (2005); Onwuegbusi (2017); and Akin-Samuel (2018). It is therefore quite expedient that constant assessment of the vigilante security group be carried out for improvement of the group for sustainable protection of lives and properties by filling

identified gaps to enable the citizens have peace of mind and be productive. Hence, this paper seeks to determine the extent vigilante security group protects lives and properties of community members in the rural and urban communities of Abia state.

Research Question

The following research question guided the study:

To what extent does the vigilante security group protect lives and properties of community members in Abia State?

Null Hypothesis

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

Town Union Executives and Policemen in both the rural and urban areas do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent to which the vigilante security group protect lives and properties of community members in Abia State.

Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 726 respondents comprising of 648 Town Union Executives and 78 Policemen. Two sets of instrument (For the TUES & Policemen) titled Vigilante Group Protection of Lives and Properties Scale (VGPLPS) was used for the study. Four point rating scale with the following response categories: Very High Extent (VHE 4 points, High Extent (HE) 3 points, Low Extent (LE) 2 points and Not at All (NAA) 1 point was used for data collection. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient. For testing the hypothesis, t-test was used. The reliability of the sections of the instrument was found to be high 0.72 and 0.70 for TUE and police respectively. Thus, the instrument was highly reliable. The data collected was analyzed using weighted mean. Decision rule was based on the true limit of the four point rating scale. Thus, any mean score that is up to 2.50 and above was seen as high extent of protection while mean scores below 2.50 was seen as low extent of protection. Null hypothesis was rejected if the t-cal was greater than the t-crit- at 0.05 level of significance, otherwise it was not rejected.

Results

The data collected were presented and interpreted in Table 1:

Research Question: To what extent does the vigilante protect lives and properties of community members living in rural and urban areas in Abia State?

Table 1: Mean Ratings of the Respondents on the Extent Vigilante Security Group Protects Lives and Properties of community members

S/No	Items	Tue (N=648)	Police (N=78)	Mean	Remark
1	House breaking has been reduced since the inception of the vigilante in your community	2.46	2.31	2.39	Low Extent
2	Killing of innocent people by criminals has been tackled by the vigilante in your community.	2.47	2.68	2.58	High Extent
3.	Early morning robbery of commuters has reduced in your community since the inception of the vigilante	2.49	2.96	2.73	High Extent
4.	Frequent harassment of people by criminals has reduced in your community due to the presence of the vigilante.	2.49	2.85	2.67	High Extent
5.	Destruction of crops by herdsmen has reduced in your community due to the presence of the vigilante	2.48	1.83	2.16	Low Extent
6.	Human trafficking has reduced in your community due to the presence of the vigilante				

7.	Kidnapping has been combated by the vigilante in your community.	2.49	2.42	2.46	Low Extent
		2.43	2.99	2.71	High Extent
8.	Car theft has reduced since the inception of vigilante in your community				
		2.50	2.04	2.27	Low Extent
Mean				2.50	High Extent

Table 1 shows that the mean scores of the respondents (TUE & the Policemen) ranged from 2.16 to 2.73 with a grand mean of 2.50 which is at the border line (With reference to the decision rule). This implies that the vigilante protects lives and properties of community members to a high extent in Abia State.

The analysis of the null hypothesis was presented as follows:

Hypothesis

Town Union Executives and Policemen in both the rural and urban areas do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent to which vigilante security group protects lives and properties of the community members in Abia State.

Table 2: t-test comparison on the extent to which the Vigilante Security Group Protects Lives and Properties of Community Members in Abia State

Variable	N	X	SD	DF	t.cal	t.crit	LS	Decision
TUE	648	2.47	0.04					
				76	-0.16	1.96	0.05	Not sig
POLICE	78	2.51	0.02					

Table 2 shows that at 0.05 level of significance and 76 degree of freedom, the calculated t-value (-0.16) is less than the critical t-value (1.96). Therefore, the hypothesis which states that the Town Union Executives and Policemen in both the rural and urban areas do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent of protection of lives and properties of community members in Abia State was not rejected.

Discussion of Results

The findings of the study revealed that the Vigilante Security Group in Abia State protects lives and properties of community members to a high extent, however, information provided in Table 1 shows that critical attention need to be paid to areas such as housebreaking, crop and human destruction by cattle herders, human trafficking and car theft. This implies that the presence and activities of the vigilante has helped in curbing criminal activities across the communities in the ten local government areas covered by the study. This finding of satisfactory performance by the Vigilante is in consonant with the findings of Yahaya (2019) which revealed that Vigilante took responsibility for crime control in Gezawa local government area of Kano State. The study by Yahaya further found that the Police in the State performed poorly which led to the formation of the Vigilante in the local government area. The emergence of the Vigilante Security Group is in response to the community members' quest for safety and security of their lives and properties (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2004).

In a similar finding, Onwuegbusi (2017) equally shows that the people of Anambra State were at home with the Vigilante though as the researcher noted, the Vigilante has their areas of weaknesses such as poor training and undue loyalty to political stalwarts because of monetary and selfish gains. Another study by Obidiegwu and Elekwa (2018) shows that community members perceive the Vigilante's performance as satisfactory and effective in curbing crime in Abia State which abates crime in the area. However, Silke (2001) noted that sometimes vigilantes embark on unlawful punishment of alleged wrong-doers and oftentimes their perception of what constitute deviant behavior is not shared by the legal system.

In addition, the view of this study on the benefit of partnership in community policing is in consonant with Obeagu (2014) who pointed out that in ensuring a more secured environment, community policing offers invaluable services in protecting lives and properties of residents from armed robbers and thieves. Community policing reinforces the safety of citizens because the vigilante and the police rely on community members for useful information or intelligence reports on emergency situations and difficult terrains. The test of the null hypothesis showed that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of town union executives and policemen in both the rural and urban areas on the extent to which the Vigilante Security Group protect lives and properties of community members in Abia State. Thus, town union executives who represent the interest of community members and policemen

serving in the rural and urban areas agreed that the vigilante security group protects lives and properties of community members in Abia State. This implies consistency in their responses. This further implies that true dialoguing; liaison and partnership among the stakeholders in community policing could promote quality of discussion, negotiation, and collaboration. Furthermore, synergy of thoughts, sense of belonging and relationships could be fostered among the stakeholders who can come together to pursue a common course for sustainable safety and security in their communities.

Conclusion

The Vigilante Security Group protects lives and properties of community members to a high extent in Abia State. Substantial efforts have been made by the vigilante and police in crime prevention and control in the rural and urban communities in Abia State, however, there is need to reinforce and re-strategize the group in some areas of safety need for sustainable state and national security.

Recommendations

1. Community members should mobilize action for establishing vigilante units at the local government areas where the units do not presently exist. This is because the Vigilante Security Group has been found to play indispensable role in complimenting the efforts of the Police and protecting lives and properties in communities in Abia State.
2. The government should reinforce the functioning of the vigilante security group by providing state of the arts equipment, communication gadgets, patrol vehicles, motor bikes and other logistics for them, in order to meet international best practices; boost morals of the Vigilante and facilitate their efforts in combating crime. There should be some measure of reward and welfare packages to the members which could serve as incentive and motivation to enhance their services.
3. Government through the National Orientation Agency should embark on constant awareness campaign, public enlightenment and training to orient and reorient community members on issues of community policing and neighbourhood watch using sensitization and advocacy strategies such as jingles, fliers and bulk SMS. Train the trainer programme is also quite necessary for sustainable security to be achieved. Such training programmes for traditional leaders, president generals, leaders of market associations, youths and age grades will go a long way to reinforce Vigilante Security Group and the Police on crime prevention and control in communities in Abia State.
4. A co-coordinating platform for training vigilante and community leaders on criminal justice code, deviant behaviour and their penalties should be set up and maintained. This will foster fairness and justice in crime control mechanisms and equally help to promote the confidence of the community members on the vigilante in the rural and urban communities to the lowest level.
5. Traditional leaders, president generals and town union executives should permanently reside in their communities as chief security officers of their communities for easy liaison with the vigilante, police and state government on monitoring and dealing with security issues facing their communities.
6. Anti – criminal laws should be enforced. Those caught in criminal activities should face the wrath of the law. Members of the society who compromise criminal activities should be prosecuted and send to jail. Boko-haram insurgents should be prosecuted and issue of their rehabilitation jettisoned. Extortion of community members by the police or the vigilante should be duly punished for meaningful security to be achieved.

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