Strategies and Challenges of Community Policing in Karu Community of Nasarawa State, Nigeria

[1]**Osayekemwen Ojo-Ebenezer,** [2]**Sunday Olutayo Fakunle**
[1]*Baze University, Abuja, Nigeria,* [2]*Redeemer's University, Ede, Nigeria*
Corresponding Author: Osayekemwen Ojo-Ebenezer, osayekemwen.ojo@bazeuniversity.edu.ng

Abstract:
This study examined the strategies utilised to enhance community participation in crime prevention and the challenges hindering effective community involvement in Karu community, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. A purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample of 22 participants from the Karu community. In-depth, face-to-face interviews served as the primary research instrument, with thematic and content analysis methods employed for data analysis. The findings revealed the adoption of various community policing strategies within Karu community while also identifying several challenges that impede effective community participation in crime prevention.

Keywords: Community Policing, Collectivism, Cohesion, Crime, Security Strategies

Introduction

The pervasive insecurity in Nigeria has had a profoundly detrimental impact, with staggering loss of civilian and security personnel lives, extensive destruction, and a debilitating erosion of public confidence and trust (Husaini & Muhammad, 2023). The insidious spread of crime across the nation has reached a critical juncture where immediate and decisive action by the government and security forces is indispensable to curtail these nefarious elements, lest the already dire consequences escalate into societal chaos (Maidawa, 2023). The North-Central region of the country, in particular, has witnessed an upsurge in crime, altering the perspectives and behaviour of some unemployed youth (Ojo-Ebenezer & Fakunle, 2023a). As the youth increasingly view crime, including kidnapping and banditry, as a lucrative alternative for economic power, social status, and financial gain, the nation's security challenges are amplified, while the capabilities of the country's law enforcement agencies are almost overstressed (Ajani & Fakunle, 2021; Fakunle & Ajani, 2021, Maidawa, 2023; Muoghalu & Fakunle, 2021; Oluwaniyi, 2021).

In addition to other communities in the North-Central region of Nigeria, the Karu community in Karu local government area of Nasarawa State has also been afflicted by rampant security challenges. The pervasive and destructive nature of crime in Karu community has caused widespread fear as criminal activities are becoming more prevalent. This prevailing state of insecurity and disquietude highlights the pressing need for robust crime control strategies and communal reconciliation efforts to restore peace and stability in these vulnerable areas. In response to the dire security situation across Nigerian communities, scholars have advocated for community participation with various strategies as a deterrent to criminal activities through the formation and strengthening of community-based organisations.

Existing studies have demonstrated a number of benefits of community participation in security activities; these include enabling early detection and intervention in criminal activities, as they are often the first to notice signs of suspicious behaviour, thereby boosting the efficacy of crime control efforts (Ojo-Ebenezer & Fakunle, 2023b; Oyibokure, Okereka & Mukoro, 2023). While extant scholarly work has investigated crime in various regions, including the North-Central region of Nigeria, the strategies to enhance

community participation in curbing crime remain under-examined. The study sought to fill this gap by investigating the strategies for promoting community participation towards crime reduction and the inherent challenges in Karu community of Nasarawa State.

Literature review

Studies have indicated that the security situation in Nigeria has become increasingly complex and dire (Ndakotsu, 2023; Salami, Believe & Jerry, 2019). In response, collective efficacy has risen in urban areas, as demonstrated by the emergence of landlord associations, residents' associations, and other community-based organisations (Mthombothi, 2023; Okunola & Fakunle, 2021). This increased community engagement can be attributed to the inability of the government to effectively provide for its citizens in the face of a growing population, resulting in intense competition for limited resources and opportunities (Fakunle & Ajani, 2021). Furthermore, the perceived inadequacy of the security forces has prompted community members to adopt a more proactive stance in protecting themselves and their property, leading to the formation of neighbourhood watch groups, vigilante units, and other self-defence initiatives. This shift towards community-driven security measures reflects a growing mistrust in the government's ability to address the security issues plaguing the Nigerian community effectively. Community participation is a concerted effort by community members to join forces in crime prevention and management (Mthombothi, 2023; Fakunle & Opadere, 2023; Fakunle, Okunola & Ajani, 2023). This collective effort involves non-state actors, such as local leaders, non-governmental security agencies, religious organisations, other community groups, and youth organisations, which primarily operate at the local level (Falusi, Omoyemi& Olabamiji, 2024; Fakunle, 2024). Community participation takes diverse forms and models, including neighbourhood watches, vigilantes, religious and ethnic militias, and neighbourhood guards. To achieve their objectives, these community participants must pool their tangible and intangible resources, opportunities, and platforms

for ongoing idea exchange. Community participation has become an indispensable tool for addressing the inadequate manpower of the Nigeria Police Force as insecurity has continued to affect people's lives (Ojo-Ebenezer & Fakunle, 2023a).

The concept of community policing has elicited numerous empirical studies, shedding light on various facets of this policing approach. Akinlotan and Akazue (2021) evaluated the efficacy of community policing in Ikeja in terms of its forms, roles, effectiveness, and challenges in crime management. The study found that people preferred the roles of community policing in crime prevention and viewed it more favourably than the NPF. However, community policing was found to be plagued by institutional constraints, police perception issues, god-fatherism, and inadequate funding, all of which hindered its effectiveness. Ndakotsu (2023) investigated community policing and crime prevention in Nigeria, focusing on the Jenkwe Development Area. The study revealed that community policing and crime prevention had strengthened the relationship between the community and the police. While the study sheds light on the challenges and benefits of community policing and crime prevention in Jenkwe Development Area, its findings may not directly reflect the specific situation in Karu community. Falusi et al. (2024) examined the effectiveness of community policing as a strategic response to the emerging security challenges in Nigeria, along with the ongoing debate on establishing a state police force. Traditional policing in Nigeria has often been reactive, leading to strained relations between the police and the public. The study found a positive relationship between community participation and law enforcement efficacy, highlighting the potential benefits of community policing. While state police could be beneficial, its implementation could be detrimental if abused by power-hungry executives.

In spite of several challenges, all these existing studies emphasised the importance of community participation in effective law enforcement, highlighting the potential benefits of community

policing over state police, which, if abused, could be counterproductive to crime prevention efforts. A limitation of these studies was their lack of direct relevance to the Karu community. Thus, while the findings may inform the general understanding of community policing in the Nigerian community, it is important to consider evidence specific to the context of Karu community to ensure that the review accurately reflects the local situation; hence, the current study.

Methodology

This study adopted an exploratory research approach intended to gain a comprehensive understanding of the influence of community participation on crime prevention among residents of Karu community. There are 11 electoral wards in Karu Local government, namely Aso/Kodape, Bagaji/Agada, Kash1, Karshi 2, Keffin Shanu/Betti, Tattara/Kondoro, Gitata, Guraku/Kabusu, Uke, Panda/Kare, and Karu. The study purposively selected Karu as the location of the study, where a sample size of 22 participants was selected based on Creswell's (1998) recommendations for phenomenological studies. This study targeted key community stakeholders for data collection, including community leaders, market women leaders, youth representatives, household heads, motorcycle riders, market women, and vigilante group leaders. The diverse nature of these groups enabled the study to capture a wide range of perspectives and experiences related to crime and community participation in crime prevention and management, providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. In-depth interviews, conducted in the local language, lasted approximately fifty minutes each. The interviews were transcribed verbatim in English and coded thematically using Atlas.ti8.0 software based on the study's objectives.

Findings of the study

Socio-demographic characteristics of the study participants

The sample comprised a total of 25 participants, of which 15 were male and seven were female.

The most prevalent age groups were 18-37 years (n = 10) and 38-57 years (n = 7), followed by 58 years and above (n = 5). With regard to employment status, the sample included six students, four apprentices, five self-employed individuals, four private sector workers, and three public sector workers. Regarding religion, 15 participants were Muslim, 5 were Christian, and 2 practiced African traditional religion.

Strategies Adopted for Dealing with Crime in Karu Community

One of the key strategies adopted for crime prevention by residents of Karu community in Karu Local Government area of Nasarawa State is constant security meetings and maintenance of cordial relationships with formal law enforcement agencies. As the findings show, regular security meetings with community members serve as an effective strategy for combating crime in Karu communities. These meetings provide a platform for identifying crime-related issues specific to each community, discussing strategies for prevention and intervention, and raising awareness about criminal activities and appropriate steps for reporting suspicious activities. These findings indicate that the community members' involvement and participation in these security meetings not only empower them with knowledge and skills for identifying and responding to criminal activities in their communities but also foster a sense of shared responsibility and collective ownership in maintaining community safety and security. Moreover, the study data revealed that fostering strong relationships between law enforcement agencies, such as the police and civil defence, and community members serves as a vital strategy for crime prevention in Karu communities. Community-based security outfits were observed working closely with formal security officers, with volunteers engaging in night watch patrols and proactively informing the police of added support and backup. One of the participants in the qualitative study revealed as follows:

> Through our landlord association, we usually hold meetings to discuss community security

issues, particularly prevalent crimes and their prevention. We strive to maintain cordial relationships with the police and civil defence, informing them of our activities and seeking their approval and support as our backup (Male, 39-year-old, Landlord Association Member, Karshi2, August 2024).

Similarly, restrictions rules were placed against unauthorised movements while self-surveillance is also regularly conducted by community members. As the study uncovered, implementing specific rules and regulations within the community designed to address the unique crime patterns in each community proved to be a successful strategy for crime prevention. These regulations included curfews, limiting the movement of motorcyclists at night, and closing shop fronts by 11 pm, among others. The study's findings revealed that community-based security groups, particularly vigilante groups, played a significant role in the safety and security of Karu community. These groups engaged in day and night patrols while also collaborating with mobile police units deployed by the government, with the community providing housing support for these officers. The youth of Karu also contributed to the security effort by conducting surveillance activities at night, while hunters and their leaders also played an active role in maintaining public safety. According to one of the female participants in the qualitative data,

> Our community has local hunters and vigilante groups who assist in preventing criminal activities. Additionally, every member of the community, especially the youth, plays a vital role in maintaining surveillance throughout the day and night to promptly report any suspicious activities to the appropriate authorities. Moreover, the community has established rules and regulations, such as a 11pm curfew for all non-security personnel, to deter potential crime (Female, 51-year-old, Trader, Gitata, August 2024).

In addition, suspicious activities are regularly reported, while caution is maintained in the accommodation of strangers. As the study found out, effective crime prevention strategies adopted by Karu community members included reporting any suspicious activity or unfamiliar occurrence to the authorities for further investigation and action. Besides, community members maintained a level of vigilance by ensuring that they knew the background and purpose of visitors or new residents before accommodating them, either through shared housing or tenancy agreements. This level of scrutiny helped to prevent potential criminal activity within the community. These findings suggest that a community-wide ethos of awareness and caution served as a preventive measure against potential crime within the community. By establishing and maintaining a sense of mutual trust and concern, Karu community members were able to reduce the likelihood of criminal activities within their area. That these preventive measures formed part of the security measures in Karu community is reflected in the responses of one of the participants in this study. According to him,

> We have been instructed to report any unusual movements or suspicious activities to the head of the vigilante group or law enforcement personnel in our community. With our community being home to people from various tribes, our community leaders have advised us to make sure that we obtain detailed information about any unknown person we intend to accommodate (Male, 46-year-old, Motorcycle rider, Guraku/Kabusu, August 2024).

As the study's findings also indicate, members of Karu community adopted and maintained the principle of "never walking alone". To them, strength in numbers can deter potential criminal activity. Women and children, who were particularly vulnerable to threats of crime, adopted the practice of moving in groups when travelling to their farms or other remote areas, which provided added security and reduced their

risk of being targeted by criminals. This finding suggested that this practice of moving in groups not only provided physical protection for the women and children but also served as a means of fostering a sense of social cohesion and support within the community. This approach to crime prevention highlights the value of collective action and community solidarity in maintaining public safety. As one of the participants submitted:

> To ensure our collective safety and well-being, we have adopted a practice of travelling in groups, both for the sake of mutual support and to address any potential threats that may arise (Female, 37-year-old, Farmer, Uke, August 2024).

Challenges of Community Participation in the Study Area

Among the challenges of community policing in the study area are role conflict, absence of authorisation to carry weapons and lack of motivation for the supporting members in community policing initiatives. As the study found out, one of the major challenges faced by Karu community members in their efforts to prevent crime was a lack of formal security personnel. This obstacle created an additional burden on household heads who were left to assume responsibility for maintaining community safety, often requiring them to sacrifice valuable rest time after their daily work. Furthermore, the community's reliance on youth volunteers to conduct night watch patrols resulted in some youth members experiencing negative perceptions from other residents, who may have assumed the youths were engaging in these activities for personal gain. Moreover, the study's findings revealed that the lack of weapons and authorisation to carry weapons for community members was a significant barrier to their efforts in combating crime. This scarcity of means to defend themselves against criminal elements resulted in fear of potential injury or capture among the community members. This fear not only limited their capacity to carry out effective crime prevention measures but also highlighted the need for supportive structures and legal frameworks that would enable community members to safely engage in crime prevention activities without facing undue risks to their safety and well-being. As one of the male participants reported:

> During the day, we perform our economic roles to earn a living, which leaves us in need of rest at night. However, we prioritize community safety over our own needs, engaging in night watch patrols to deter crime. This constant lack of sleep negatively affects our daily work activities. Another challenge we face is that we are not authorized to carry sophisticated weapons to combat crime, which further inhibits our ability to respond effectively to criminal activities (Male, 32-year-old, Farmer, Tattara/Kondoro, August 2024).

Findings also indicate a lack of incentives and motivation for community members who volunteered in crime prevention efforts presented a significant challenge. Without any tangible or symbolic recognition from the government or private sector for their efforts, these volunteers were left feeling underappreciated and potentially de-motivated, hindering their capacity for sustained engagement in community safety activities. The study data revealed that some community members failed to fully cooperate with those who volunteered in crime prevention activities, creating additional challenges for these volunteers. The lack of cooperation manifested in various ways, such as the non-payment of night watch fees, the concealment of suspicious criminal activities, and the shielding of family members who had committed crimes. These findings highlight the importance of promoting a strong sense of community responsibility and trust, in order to effectively engage all members in efforts to combat crime and maintain public safety. As captured in the responses of one of the participants,

Our efforts to protect the community are self-funded, with no support from either the

---

government or private organizations. In addition, we experience a lack of cooperation from some community members, particularly when one of their relatives is caught engaging in criminal activity. In such cases, the offender's family may intervene to prevent the individual from facing punishment or being reported to the authorities backup (Male, 54-year-old, Landlord Association Member, Keffin Shanu/Betti, August 2024).

Apart from the above, the findings of the study also revealed that bribery and corruption had posed significant obstacles to community policing efforts, as several key informants reported. Individuals suspected of crimes, particularly fraud, were handed over to formal law enforcement agencies but were later found moving freely within the community. This lack of accountability and enforcement of law within the legal system underscores the need for a stronger emphasis on transparency and accountability within law enforcement agencies, as well as a greater involvement of the community in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of criminal justice processes. This finding suggests that bribery and corruption, if not adequately addressed, can undermine community trust in law enforcement, potentially leading to a deterioration of the relationship between law enforcement agencies and the community. This, in turn, could negatively impact the community's willingness and ability to participate in crime prevention efforts, thereby hampering the effectiveness of community policing initiatives. The extract below reflects these findings.

> A notable incident occurred when some internet fraudsters, known locally as "yahoo boys," were identified and apprehended by our community's vigilante group and handed over to the police. However, to our dismay, these fraudsters were later spotted roaming freely in our community, suggesting that they may have evaded punishment through corrupt means (Male, 38-year-old, Vigilante Member, Karu, August 2024).

Financial constraints and lack of security apparatuses constitute another major challenge to community policing in Karu. As the finding suggests, financial constraints in procuring security equipment and a lack of essential security apparatuses, such as communication systems and vehicles, presented significant challenges to the community in their crime prevention efforts. The study data revealed that the financial burden associated with obtaining security logistics and facilities hindered the community's capacity to respond quickly and efficiently to security threats. Moreover, the findings suggested that the lack of security facilities and equipment exacerbates the existing challenges faced by the community in maintaining public safety, increasing the risk of crime and insecurity. The extract below reflects these findings.

> One of the main obstacles we face is insufficient funding to provide appropriate compensation for the community members who voluntarily safeguard our community. Additionally, these volunteers rely on their personal communication devices to coordinate security efforts, and there is a lack of dedicated vehicles to facilitate rapid response to security incidents (Male, 67-year-old, Landlord Association Member, Bagaji/Agada, August 2024)

Conclusion of the study
Community policing strategies as adopted by the residents of Karu community included regular security meetings, fostering of cordial relationships with formal law enforcement agencies, the implementation of movement restriction rules, self-surveillance by community groups and members, the reporting of suspicious activities, the exercise of caution in accommodating strangers, and the implementation of the 'never walk alone' principle. However, the study identified several challenges that hindered effective community participation in curbing crime, which hindered the ability of Karu community members to effectively combat crime, highlighting the need for a coordinated, multi-faceted approach that addresses these obstacles and fosters a stronger

relationship between community members and law enforcement agencies. Based on the major findings from this study, the study recommends that the government should provide financial support to existing members of these community security groups to serve as motivation so that prospective members can also be encouraged. The representatives of the government should oversee the affairs of the community so as to understand the needs of different communities.

References

Ajani, O.A. and Fakunle, S.O. (2021). Globalisation and trends of changes in family institution in Nigerian society. *American International Journal of Supply Chain Management, 2*(1), 46-54.

Akinlotan, R.A. and Akazue, G.D. (2021). Insecurity: Rethinking community policing and crime management in Ikeja Area of Lagos State. *International Journal of Management, Social Sciences, Peace and Conflict Studies, 4*(4), 191 - 213

Creswell, J.W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions.* Sage Publications, Inc

Fakunle, S.O. (2024). Peculiarities in household solid waste management in Nigeria: A quick review. *Front. Sustain.* 5:1440758, 1-8.

Fakunle, S.O. and Ajani, O.A. (2021). An empirical study of community involvement in household solid waste management: A case study. *Insights into Regional Development, 3*(4), 114-127. http://doi.org/10.9770/IRD.2021.3.3(7)

Fakunle, S.O., and Opadere, A.A. (2023). Cultural determinants and parent-child communication as an effective tool to prevent child sexual abuse: A quick qualitative study. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 32*:4, 475-493

Falusi, F.S., Omoyeni, T.J., and Olabamiji, A.A. (2024). Community policing and crime prevention in Ekiti State: Interrogating the State Police option. *International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation, 6*(7), 630-642.

Husaini, U. and Muhammad, A. (2023). Impact of community policing on crime reduction in Kaduna Central Senatorial District, Nigeria. *International Journal of Economics, Business and Management Studies (EBMS), 10*(2), 39-35.

Maidawa, B.A. (2023). The role of the community participating in crime prevention and control: Evidence from Bauchi metropolis. *Journal of Policy and Development Studies, 14(1),* 127-142

Mthombothi, S.I. (2023). The roles that the community can play in fighting crime in their areas of residence. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI), 12*(3), 63-74

Ndakotsu, R.N. (2023). The role of community police in crime prevention and control for effective management. *Wukari International Studies Journal, 7*(1), 387-409

Ojo-Ebenezer, O., and Fakunle, S.O. (2023a). Influence of insecurity on social activities and the coping strategies in Bayshincommunity of Abuja. *Ijagun Journal of Social and Management Sciences (JOSMAS), 7*(1), 1-18

Ojo-Ebenezer, O., and Fakunle, S.O. (2023b). Youth, peer pressure and strategies for recruitment. In *National Drug Law Enforcement Agency and National Security: Perspectives on drugs, crime andHuman Security, (Vol. ii)* 863-886. Adejoh, et al. (eds.). Abuja, Nigeria. Nigerian Defence Academy Press

Okunola, J.L., and Fakunle, S.O. (2021). Community participation: a pragmatic solution to negative impacts of COVID-19

on household's socioeconomic lives. *Insights into Regional Development*, 3(4), 21-33.

Oluwaniyi, O.O. (2021). Comparative analysis of community policing in Lagos and Ekiti States, Nigeria. *African Security Review*, 30(1), 57-70.

Oyibokure, G.I., Okereka, O.P., and Mukoro, A. (2023). Community Policing and Internal Security in Delta and Edo States of Nigeria. *Logika: JurnalPenelitian Universitas Kuningan*, *14*(02), 164-196

Salami, H., Believe, I.I. and Jerry, H. (2019). Effectiveness of community policing and crime rate in Suleja, Nigeria. *Discovery*, *55*(288), 635-643