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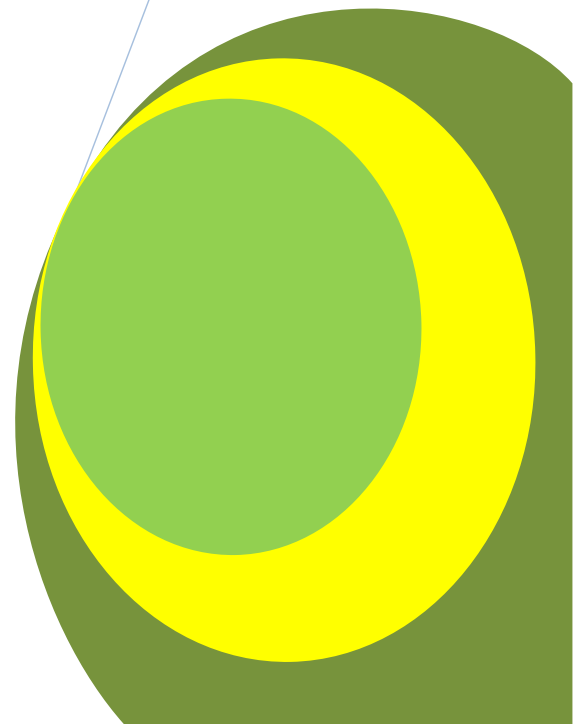
The Role of Vigilante Service Groups in Crime Control for Sustainable Development in Anambra State, South-East Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study accessed the place of informal policing structures in crime control for sustainable development in Anambra State. The cross sectional survey design was adopted in the study. A total of 600 respondents, aged 18 and above were selected for the study. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used in data collection. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages and bar charts were used to analyze data. Findings of the study indicate that socio-cultural factors like the inability of the formal police to adequately and effectively control crime necessitated the formation of informal policing structures. Also, results show that the informal policing structures are significantly accepted as agents of crime control in the communities wherein they exist. The study recommends that for sustainable development to be achieved, crime and criminality will have to be effectively tackled through a synergistic relationship between the vigilante service groups and the formal police. It is also recommended that the vigilante service groups are provided with adequate funds and equipments so they can discharge their responsibilities adequately.

Keywords: Crime, Crime Control, Informal Policing Structures (IPS), Policing, Vigilante Service Groups, Sustainable Development.

INTRODUCTION

Peace, safety and security are both necessary and indispensable requirements for development and the attainment of good quality of life for any human society. They provide the requisite enabling environment for citizens to live and work towards social, economic and political development of the society (Groenewald and Peake, 2004). By the same token, their absence stifles the human capacity to develop and heavily compromises the dignity and quality of life of both individuals and society. Furthermore, insecurity impacts negatively on all citizens through losses of property, life and limb, or through loss of confidence from fear of violence. It is against this backdrop that the delivery of safety and security is considered a justifiable public good and the very essence of the state (Lubuva, 2004). Human safety and security are indeed human rights having a value of their own and serving an instrumental function in the construction of human contentment and prosperity (Odinkalu 2005). Unfortunately, social life in Nigeria has remained largely characterized by fear and insecurity (Odekunle, 2005; Odinkalu, 2005; Bach, 2004; Alemika and Chukuma, 2005) in a manner that suggests that the country lacks the capacity to discharge its security functions especially that of policing.

Reiner (2000) observes that formal policing structures, a body of men recruited and paid by the state to enforce law and maintain order is a recent development in human history. Traditionally and historically, policing was the responsibility of every adult in the community. In medieval society, all adults were obliged to contribute towards the prevention and control of crime and disorder. This was achieved through the system of "hue cry and pursuit" and the "watch and ward" that preceded the emergence of the state (Martin, 1990:6). Achebe (1974) identified institutions like council of elders and masquerade cult as very indispensable in ensuring the prevalence of community peace, safety and security, prior to colonial rule in Nigeria. The emergence of the state as an entity with the claim to the monopoly over the means of legitimate violence in society (Weber, 1968 cited in Ritzer, 2012) resulted to the creation of specialized agencies such as the police and the armed forces for controlling the use of violence by other groups.

Some state governments in Nigeria are also known to have tacitly or openly endorsed armed vigilante groups as part of their campaign against crime (Amnesty International, 2002; Akinyele, 2008). In Anambra state, Vigilante service groups were established by the Anambra State Vigilante Services Law, 2000. The law was amended in 2004 and is now currently referred to as the Anambra State Vigilante Group Law, 2004. The group is empowered to assist the Nigerian police to perform its constitutional duties of protecting lives and properties. They are however expected to hand over arrested criminals to the police because they are not empowered to detain. Vigilante groups in the State have been in existence since they were established, working hand in hand with the formal police. They operate from the communities as their presence is visibly present in every community in the State.

A number of factors may have occasioned the emergence of vigilante groups in Anambra state. Chukwuma (2001) asserts that the inability of the police to protect the lives and properties of members of the society has given rise to community effort at ensuring their own security. Okoro (2007) identified corruption, brutality, oppressive and repressive postures, high level of extortion, high cost of assessment to police services, poverty, non-personal relationships, as some of the factors that made the people lose faith in the police and their consequent preference for informal policing structures.

The Anambra vigilante service group may not have a cordial and mutual relationship with the formal policing structure. The reasons for this may include the feeling by the police that the informal policing structures are not legally recognised and that they are arrogating their constitutional powers to themselves. Another reason may be the fact that the police are benefiting from the high and unabated crime rate in the country (Amuka, 2008).

Shaw (2002) is of the view that there is a rise in crime because of the perceived inadequacies of the police in the society to provide safety and security to citizens. To him, crime is on the rise and the police are not coping very well with the demand for protection by the citizens who are active in countries undergoing dramatic transformation in the economic and political spheres.

Adegbusi (2009) in a study conducted in Ondo state of Nigeria on 'Vigilante groups and the task of policing' with 500 respondents found that vigilante service groups are important in crime prevention and control as majority of the respondents indicated that vigilante service groups can partner with the police to control and prevent crime in the state.

In view of the aforementioned problems, this study examined the place of informal policing structures in crime control in Anambra, South East Nigeria. The study sought information from urban and rural residents in Anambra State on how they think vigilante service groups can contribute to crime control effectively.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide this study:

1. What socio-cultural factors are responsible for the emergence of vigilante service groups in Anambra, South-East Nigeria?

2. What are the roles of Vigilante Service Groups in crime prevention and control in Anambra South-East Nigeria?

3. What kind of relationship exists between the Vigilante Service Groups and the formal police in Anambra, South-East Nigeria?

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives of the study were derived from the research questions and they include:

1. To ascertain the socio-cultural factors responsible for the emergence of vigilante service groups in Anambra, South-East Nigeria
2. To identify the roles of vigilante service groups in crime prevention and control in Anambra, South-East Nigeria
3. To examine the kind of relationship that exists between vigilante service groups and the formal police in Anambra, South-East Nigeria

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

This study is anchored on broken window theory and structural strain theory. While broken window theory was used to explain the place of informal policing structures in crime control, structural strain theory was used to explain the incidence of crime in the society. The proponent of broken window theory is Philip Zimbardo (1969). The theory focuses on the control and prevention of crime from within the community as against from outside the community. It explains how effective and efficient informal policing structures are in controlling crimes compared to the formal policing structure that is made up of 'strangers'. The theory holds that only the community members can safeguard themselves from crimes. This is because they live in the community and can work and watch at all times. They also know who those potential criminals are and how best they can be contained. The core principle of informal policing structures is the constant maintenance of law and order in the various communities by members of that community. This is in line with the core notion of broken window theory, which asserts that the constant presence of police structures makes a community less conducive for crime and criminals. Increased police presence and enforcements of informal rules of conduct and laws can make a community seem less chaotic and safer, thereby, increasing the presence and involvement of residents in their community and lowering crime rates (Palmiotto,2000).The BWT can be incorporated into the concept of informal policing in the sense that collective efforts by both the police and community dwellers can help alleviate the rate of crime in the community as the police see residents as partners in development and vice versa. The broken window theory asserts that if there is a crack anywhere in the community and no one is available or observant enough to take care of it, overtime it becomes a deep ditch that would pose a serious security risk to members of the society. The BWT assumes that most neighborhood crimes are more often than not perpetrated by offenders who reside near the victims; this makes crime primarily a local problem which can best be solved locally.

Structural strain theory was developed by Robert Merton (1957). According to him, in every society, people experience strain whenever there is a disjuncture between the culturally accepted goals and the institutionalized (conventional) means of achieving these goals. According to Merton, the social and cultural structures of society contain two major elements. The first is the culturally defined goals (culture goals) which members of a society are encouraged to recognize and value as worth striving for. Examples of such goals are wealth, material possessions, etc. The second major element of the social and cultural structure of society is the means or modes which society has institutionalized or put in place for the pursuit of culture goals.

Robert Merton asserts that in pursuit of culturally accepted goals and the means to achieving these goals, five categories of people emerge in the society. They include: the conformists, ritualists, innovators, retreatists and the rebels. For the purpose of this study, the innovators are explained as it is the strand of the theory that suitably explains the issue of crime in the society. Innovators are those individuals that accept the cultural goals of society but reject the conventional methods of attaining those goals. Examples are armed robbers, drug dealers and prostitutes. The innovators are constantly interested in achieving success in the society but they fail to follow the acceptable laid down procedures for this. They rather devise their own means of attaining success which is oftentimes contrary to what is acceptable by members of the society. This results to all sorts of criminal activities. Innovators literarily invent crime to achieve success. Crime for them is the short cut to success as they consider the laid down procedures by the society so long and out of reach. It is pertinent to also note that the frustrations associated being unable to achieve success through laid down societal procedures oftentimes leads people into becoming innovators. An example is a youth who has diligently gone to school and study so hard and comes out with a good grade expecting to get a job. When the job doesn't come the youth begins to think of other means of survival. In a situation like this he could invent kidnapping as a way of surviving the pains of having no job.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

(a) Study Area and Population

The cross sectional survey design was adopted in this study. The study was conducted in Anambra state. Anambra is one of the 36 states of Nigeria. Anambra was created from the Old Anambra State on the 27th August, 1991. The name of the state is the anglicized version of the original "O ma Mbala", the native name of the Anambra River. The capital of the state and the seat of government is Awka. Onitsha and Nnewi are the commercial and industrial cities respectively, in the state. The slogan of the state is "Light of the Nation". The state is bounded by Delta State in the West, Imo State in the South, Enugu State in the East and Kogi State in the North. The indigenous ethnic group in the state are Igbos. The predominant religion in Anambra state is Christianity.

The 2006 population figure for Anambra state is four million, one hundred and seventy seven thousand, eight-hundred and twenty eight (4,177,828). The male population is two million, one hundred and seventeen thousand, nine hundred and eighty-four(2,117,984) while the female population is two million, fifty nine thousand eight hundred and forty-four (2,059844) (NPC). The target population for this study comprises males and females aged 18 years and above. This group of people was used because they are adults and mature enough to answer question on informal policing structures and crime control.

(b) Sample size and sampling procedure

A sample size of 600 was used for the study. This number was considered enough and adequate in view of the statistical requirements, time frame and available resources. The multistage sampling method that involves successive random sampling was employed in selecting local government areas (LGAs), communities, villages streets households and respondents in the study. The multi-stage design was very relevant because the study population was very large and made up of several clusters like towns, villages and households. All the local government areas in the state were first categorized into urban and rural. From each category one LGA was selected using purposive sampling technique. Consequently, Awka south and Oyi LGA were selected as the urban and rural LGAs respectively using purposive sampling. In selecting the households, the researcher used simple random sampling technique (balloting0 to select households. The researcher also used simple random sampling method (balloting) in selecting the desired number of respondents. One respondent 18 years and above was chosen from each selected household. The researcher alternatively chose one sex from a selected house and another sex from the next. This was to ensure gender balance.

(c) Instruments

Both quantitative and qualitative tools were employed for the study. This enabled the researcher achieve a maximum result. Instrument for quantitative data was the questionnaire while for qualitative data, focused group discussion guide (FGD) and in-depth interview guide were used. The major instrument however was the questionnaire. the researcher trained two research assistants. These trainees comprised of one male and one female. This ensured gender balance. The research assistants were trained for two to three days. The questionnaires were self administered on a face to face contact with the respondents.

In the focused group discussion, two research assistants were made use of. One helped in writing down verbal and non-verbal responses while the other was in charge of operating the tape recorder. Similarly, the in-depth interview (IDI) was done with the help of two research assistants. The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted with participants purposely drawn from the LGAs the study covered. A total of 4 FGD sessions were conducted; two sessions for the rural areas and two sessions for the urban areas. To ensure gender homogeneity, FGDs were conducted for males and females separately. This means the 4 FGD sessions comprised of two male and two female sessions.

The in-depth interview (IDI) comprised of four interviewees. This comprised of two police officers and two officers of the Anambra Vigilante Group. The IDI is more flexible and has a higher completion rate. Also, it offers greater opportunity of extracting more information than the other methods.

(d) Data analysis techniques

The IDIs and FGDs were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Adequate interpretation of the respondents' statements was ensured, and statements were found to have contextual importance or connotations were extracted and used as excerpts to support statistical data. Responses from the questionnaire were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). This was expressed in frequency distribution tables and percentages.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

Table 1: Socio-demographic data of respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	216	36.9
Female	369	63.1
Total	585	100
Age	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
18-27	129	22.1
28-37	298	50.9
38-47	114	19.5
48-57	37	6.7
58 and above	5	.9
Total	585	100
Marital status	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Never married	297	50.8
Married	272	46.5
Divorced	5	.9
Separated	6	1.0
widowed	5	.9
Total	585	100
Educational qualification	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
No formal education	0	0
Primary/FSLC	1	.2
GCE/SSCE/WAECqnmn	225	38.5
OND/diploma	41	7.0
HND/first degree	245	41.9
Higher degree/MSc/PhD	73	12.5
Others	0	0
Total	585	100
Religious affliction	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Christianity	534	91.3
Moslem	28	4.8
Traditional religion	23	3.9
Others	0	0
Total	585	100
Occupation	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Civil servant	78	13.3
Student	94	46.2
Farmer	59	10.1
Unemployed	81	13.8
Artisan	38	6.5
Others	0	0
Total	585	100
Place of residence	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Urban	296	50.6
Rural	289	49.4
Total	585	100

Table 1 indicates that there are 216 (36.9%) male respondents while the number of female respondents is 369 (63.1%). This implies that there are more female respondents than male respondents in the study. The table indicates that respondents who are within the ages of 18-37 years are 129 (22.1%), those who fall within the ages of 28-37 years are 298 (50.9%), and those between the ages of 38-47 are 114 (19.7%), while those between the ages of 58 and above are 5 (.9%). This shows that majority of the respondents are between the ages of 28 - 3 7 . Table 1

reveals that 297 (50.8%) of the respondents indicated "never married" as their marital status, 272 (46.5%) indicated that they are married, 5(.9%) of the respondents indicated divorced as their marital status, 6(1.0%) of the respondents indicated separated as their marital status while 5(.9%) indicated widowed as their marital status. This implies that majority of the respondents are not married.

In terms of educational qualification, table 1 shows that 0 (0%) of the respondents have no formal education, 1(.2%) of them have obtained primary school certificate/FSLC, 225 (48.5%) of them have the GCE/SSCE/WAEC as their highest educational qualification, 41 (7.0%) of them have obtained OND/Diploma as their highest educational qualification, those that have obtained HND/First degree as their highest educational qualification are 245 (41.9%) while those that have obtained Higher Degree/MSc/PhD are 73 (12.5%). No respondent (0%) indicated other as his/her highest educational qualification. This shows that majority of the respondents have obtained HND/First degree. On religious affiliation, table 1 shows that 534 (91.3%) of the respondents are Christians, 28 (4.8%) of them are Muslims while 23 (3.9%) of them are practicing traditional religion. No respondent (0%) indicated 'others' as his/her religious affiliation. This implies that majority of the respondents are Christians.

A further look at table 1 reveals the occupation of the respondents. The table indicates that 78(13.3%) of the respondents are civil servants, 235 (40.2) are business men/women, 94 (16.1%) are students, 59(10.1) are farmers, 81 913.8%) are unemployed, 38(6.5) are artisans while no respondent (0%) indicated others as his/her occupation. This shows that majority of the respondents are business men/women. Table 1 also shows that 296 (50.6%) of the respondents are students, 59(10.1) are farmers, 81 (13.8) are unemployed, 38(6.5%) are artisans while no respondent (0%) indicated others as his/her occupation. This shows that majority of the respondents are business men/women. Table 1 also shows that 296 (50.6%) of the respondents are from urban areas while 289 (49.4%) of them are from rural. This implies that we have more urban respondents than rural respondents.

ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research Question One: What socio-cultural factors are responsible for the emergence of vigilante service groups in Anambra, South East Nigeria?

Figure 1 shows the socio-cultural factors responsible for the emergence of informal policing structures in Anambra State
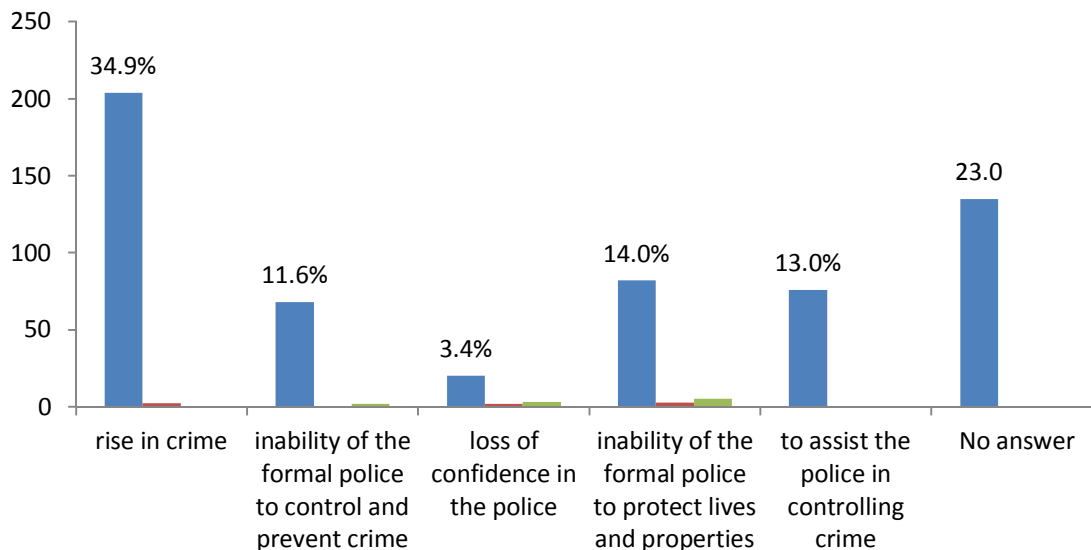
Figure 1: *Respondents' views on socio-cultural factors responsible for the emergence of vigilante service groups in Anambra State.*

The findings revealed that 34.9%of the respondents consider rise in crime as the socio-cultural factor that resulted to the emergence of vigilante service groups in Anambra State. 11.6% identified inability of the formal police to control and prevent crime, 3.4% identified loss of confidence in the police, 14.0% identified inability of the formal police to protect lives and properties, 13.0% identified the need to assist the police in controlling crime while 23.0% of the respondents did not answer the question.

Driving this point home, an IDI respondent noted,

> To the best of my knowledge there are two factors that led to the formation of vigilante services in the state. First is high rate of   criminality, second is the inability of the police force to curb crime in the state over the years. Corruption in the police is also one of it. (Male, 27 years, Vigilante officer).

An FGD participant supported this finding when he stated,

> The community members saw the need for establishing a security outfit that will be close to the people and also willing to respond that was how the idea of vigilante came about in the community. (Male, 60 years, Artisan).

Research Question Two: What are the roles of vigilante service groups in crime prevention and control?
Responses of respondents on the roles of vigilante service groups is shown in figure 2
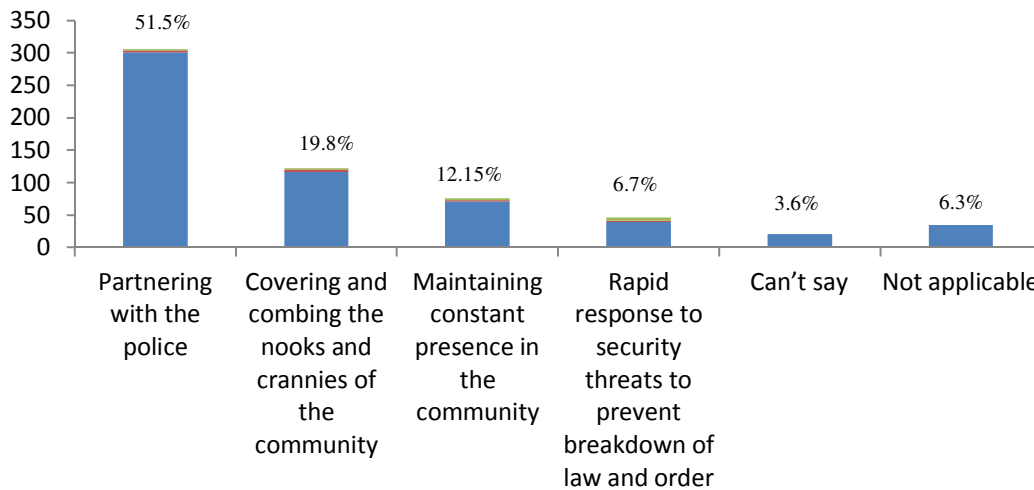
Figure 2: *Respondents' views on the roles of vigilante service groups in crime control*

Figure 2 shows the roles vigilante service groups play in crime control and they include partnering with the police 301 (51.5%), covering and combing the nooks and crannies of the community/streets which the formal police have been unable to do effectively (19.8%), maintaining constant presence in the community/streets to prevent criminals from operating (12.1%), rapid response to security threats to prevent breakdown of law and order (6.7). The question did not apply to (6.3%) of the respondents while 3.6% of the respondents can't say what the roles of vigilante groups are in relation to crime control.

Research Question Three: What kind of relationship exists between the formal and informal policing structures in Anambra, South-East Nigeria?

Respondents were asked to identify the kind of relationship that exists between the formal and informal policing structures. Their responses are presented in figure 3.
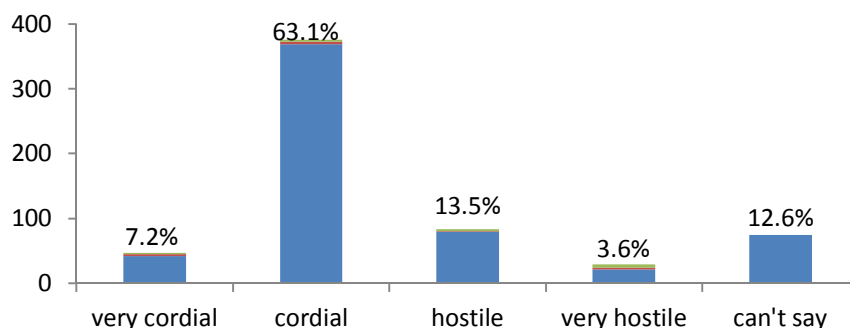
Figure 3: *Respondents' views on the kind of relationship that exists between the formal and informal policing structures.*

Figure 3 show that majority 7.2% of the respondents consider the relationship between vigilante groups and the formal police in Anambra state to be very cordial. 63.1% consider the relationship cordial, 13.5% consider the relationship hostile, 3.6% consider the relationship very hostile while12.6% of the respondents couldn't say the kind of relationship that exists between the vigilante service groups and the formal police in Anambra, South-East Nigeria. This finding was disputed by one of the IDI interviewees, who contended that,

> The relationship is hostile in the sense that the police see the vigilante as taking over what they should be getting based on that, they are not happy with us. They feel we are taking the glory they should be getting (Male, 27 years, Vigilante Officer).

DISCUSSION

It was found in the study that factors like rise in crime, inability of the formal police to control and prevent crime, loss of confidence in the police, inability of the formal police to protect lives and properties led to the formation of vigilante service groups in Anambra State. This finding is corroborated with that of Chukwuma and Alemika (2004) who found that rise in crime is one of the reasons for patronage of vigilante service group in Anambra State.

Also, findings further revealed that vigilante service groups have a role to play in crime control in. Among the roles vigilante service groups can play in crime control as identified in the study are: partnering with the police, covering and combing the nocks and crannies of the community/streets which the formal police have been unable to do effectively, maintaining constant presence in the community/street to prevent criminals from operating and repaid response to security threats to prevent breakdown of law and order.

This finding is line with that of Adegbusi (2009) who posited that vigilante service groups partner with the police in every community they operate in and this partnership have gone ahead to see to reduction in crime rate. This is also in line with the finding of Chukwuma and Alemika (2004) who found that vigilante service groups are always available whenever they are needed since they maintain constant presence in the community/streets to prevent criminals from operating.

Further findings reveal that there is a cordial relationship between the police and vigilante service groups in Anambra State. This finding contrasts that of Adebisi (2009) who posited that there is an unfriendly relationship between the police and vigilante groups because vigilante groups are perceived by the police as unwanted competitors.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the role of informal policing structures in crime control with particular reference to vigilante service groups in Anambra state, south east Nigeria. Despite the efforts made by the formal policing towards controlling crime in the state, it is evident that they cannot effectively and efficiently discharge the role of crime control independently. It was established in the study that the role of informal policing structures in crime control is indispensable is sustained success and progress must be recorded in that sector. There is need to also create a synergistic relationship between the formal and informal policing structures so they can begin to see themselves as complementing each other and not as competitors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the paper recommends the following:

1. It was established in this study that the police alone cannot effectively and efficiently police the society. It is therefore recommended that informal policing structures be adequately equipped through provision of funds, equipments and strong enabling laws that would guarantee their independent and unbiased discharge of their security functions. The old order of compelling the vigilante groups to report their operations to the police should be done away with. This is because it constitutes a clog in the wheel of proper discharge of their duty.
2. A concerted effort towards having a synergistic relationship between the formal and informal policing outfits in the state is recommended. This is particularly important due to the fact that the presence of this would ensure a complementary working relationship that would further improve on the efforts and progress made so far in terms of policing.
3. Constant training and retraining of vigilante service group members would enhance their efficiency on the job. There should be room for regular training to equip them with knowledge on modern ways of fighting crime especially at the community level.
4. Motivation of vigilante members is crucial and as such should be taken seriously as it will enable them get dedicated to service. Outstanding members should therefore be recognized to boost the morale of other officers. An excellence award unit should therefore be set up in the office of the governor of the state to kick start this all important project
5. Motivation of vigilante members is crucial and as such should be taken seriously as it will enable them get dedicated to service. Outstanding members should therefore be recognized to boost the morale of other officers. An excellence award unit should therefore be set up in the office of the governor of the state to kick start this all important project

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