



THE BEARING OF SOCIAL CAPITAL ON VIOLENT CRIMES IN NIGERIA

Usman Isah Ndashiru A¹

¹*Department of Communication Education/ General Studies, Federal University of Technology, Minna- Nigeria,*

Usman Ahmad Karofi²

²*Department of Sociology, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto- Nigeria*

Abstract

Human beings are social animals who cannot live independent of each other. The constant interaction of humans defines their nature and weaves the network upon which order is created and maintained. Social order endures on the basis of trust established among men and the benefit derived there from. This established trust which underlines social relationship is prized by men as safety net against trepidations and adversities. Referred to as social capital, it is also seen an informal social control mechanism. The object of this paper is to examine the relationship between social capital and individuals' involvement in murder as an example of violent crime. A total of 718 convicted prisoners were sampled randomly from four prisons of medium security standard in Niger state, Data obtained from the completed questionnaires were analyzed. The result indicates a significant relationship between social capital and involvement in murder. Formation of neighbourhood unions is suggested.

Keywords: Social capital, crime, violent crime, murder, Nigeria.

Introduction

Human beings are social animals who cannot live independent of each other. The constant interaction of humans defines their nature and weaves the network upon which order is created and maintained. Social order endures on the basis of trust established among men and the benefit derived there from. This established trust which underlines social relationship is prized by men as safety net against trepidations and adversities. Safety nets used against difficult situations confronted by men in society is also referred to as social capital (Putnam, 2000). On this basis, where social capital is not in existence or in short supply, individuals attempt to compliment them elsewhere, an effort which sometimes makes them slid into the circle of peers that engages in delinquency and crime. Social capital measured as trust on community members has the effect of reducing the incidence of violent crimes (Lederman, Loayza, and Menéndez, 1999).

When crime pervasive in society it brings along social and an economic cost which tends to hamper standard of living and the overall quality of life. Also, there is a potential vicious cycle between crime, unemployment and poverty. Prevalent criminal activities erode employment opportunities and are exacerbated by high

unemployment rates (Bharadwaj, 2014). When people and organizations are densely related, it creates high levels of bonding and bridging social capital. In terms of crime, social capital builds the trust necessary to sustain a healthy community (Choi and Sloane, 2012).

However, the literature shows that perpetrators of crime and delinquency are mostly from the disadvantaged, especially products of single parent households (Heimer, 1997; Rosenfeld, Messner and Baumer, 2001), the unemployed (Adebayo, 2013a) and those with low level of education (Hajmarson and Lonchner, 2012). All these categories of people suffers from low social capital particularly products of single parents because of the fact that they lack a second parent and because they change residence frequently. It has been shown that single-parent hood has a negative impact on various outcomes, such as educational attainment, juvenile crime and teenage pregnancy, affecting children's social development (Akcomak and Weel, 2008).

Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between social capital and involvement in violent crime in Nigeria. A sample of 615 convicted prisoners of murder, armed robbery, rape and assault were selected



from four prisons in Niger State to serve as research subjects. The paper is divided into three major sections, the first being the introductory section, which is followed by method as the second. The third section contains the results and conclusion and recommendations.

Definition of concepts

Social capital

Putnam (2000: 19) introduces the idea of social capital in following way. Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called “civic virtue.” The difference is that “social capital” calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a sense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital. Putnam,(2000) version of version of social capital became appealing to many different disciplines and academic areas because it could explain numerous facets of society, such as crime, community well-being, economy, and health.

Violent crime

Violent crimes or violent offenses involve the use of force or injury to the body of another person. The seriousness of a violent crime is usually determined by the degree of physical harm caused to the victim. The use of a weapon could raise the seriousness of the crime. Some crimes are classified as violent crimes even if the victim was not injured. For example, crimes that involve the threat of injury to a person would be qualified as a violent crime (Izzi, 2017).

According to Defintions.net (2017), violent crime or crime of violence is a crime in which the offender uses or threatens to use violent force upon the victim. This entails both crimes in which the violent act is the objective, such as murder, as well as crimes in which violence is the means to an end, such as robbery. Violent crimes include crimes committed with weapons. The offence that

threatens or actually inflicts harm on another is termed violence.

Murder: Defined as the willful killing of another.
Assault: The unlawful attack by one person upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe bodily injury, usually accompanied by the use of a weapon or other means likely to produce death or serious bodily harm. **Theoretical Framework.** The social organizational approach arising out of Shaw and McKay's work views local communities and neighborhoods in terms of systems of friendship, kinship and acquaintanceship networks, as well as formal and informal associational ties rooted in family life and ongoing socialization processes (Kawachia, Kennedy and Wilkinson,1999).

Social disorganization has been defined as the “inability of a community structure to realize the common values of its residents and maintain effective social controls” (Kawachia, Kennedy and Wilkinson,1999:720). After a study to test concentric zone theory through the use of courts records over several decades, Shaw and McKay were able to show that crime levels were highest in slum neighbourhoods regardless of which racial or ethnic group resided there and, moreover, as these groups moved to other zones, their offending rates correspondingly decreased. On this basis, they concluded “that it was the nature of the neighbourhoods – not the nature of the individuals who lived within them – that regulated involvement in crime” (Burke, 2009:130).

A fundamental community-level theory, social disorganization theory posits that crime and delinquency are more pronounced in areas characterized by persistent poverty, population heterogeneity, and residential mobility, which combine to disturb the capacity of neighborhoods to maintain informal social control. These ideas on neighbourhood and crime have been thoroughly investigated and empirically supported, leading social disorganization theory to become the most well-known theory of neighborhood crime in the field of Criminology today (Parker and Stransfield, 2014). Since social



capital is fundamentally an issue that is rooted in the community or neighbourhoods, social disorganization theory has great potency for the explanation of social capital violent crime nexus. This connection informed the choice of social disorganization theory as the guiding theory for this paper.

Methods

This research plan proceeded in two phases. The first being the gathering of relevant materials from government agencies and ministries which are saddled with the responsibility of taking care of improving the living conditions of people within the state. In doing so, secondary data were obtained from Niger State Ministry of Youth Development; Human Resources Unit of the Office of Head of Service (HOS); the Police and the Prisons in the state.

The second phase involves the collection of primary data from the field and subsequent analysis of same. This second phase of the research centered on one method- quantitative. The quantitative section employed the use of survey method, which involves the use of questionnaire for the convicts in prisons. The prison inmates were chosen for this research, partly because, they are readily available and chiefly because, they constituted a group which had been processed through the criminal justice system and have been convicted for various violent crimes. Out of these 9 prisons in the state, four (4) prisons were selected. The selection of prisons was based on capacity, convict enrolment, and the security capabilities of the institutions. For instance, convicted violent criminals are kept only in prisons that are of 'medium security' standard.

The selected prisons include those situated in Minna (old and new), Kontagora and Suleja. The selected prisons for example, housed 818 or 85 percent of the 962 convicted persons in all the prisons in the state. The sampling method places emphasis on the areas where information regarding violent criminal convicts could be obtained. These were the urban centers and the identified volatile areas in the state. For this

reason, 718 individuals convicted of violence crime were randomly selected and questionnaire administered on them. The data was also analyzed with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) on simple percentage and regression model for the comparison of variables.

The general regression model is given as follows:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_n X_n + E \dots \dots \dots 1$$

- Where Y = dependent variable
- X₁, X₂ ... X_n are the independent variables (predictor variables)
- β₀ = is the intercept of the model
- β₁, β₂ ... β_n are the slopes or parameters of the predictor variables in the model
- E = is the random error term
- N = signifies the end term of the predictor variables

Results

The instrument of data collection used in the collection of the data was questionnaire administered among prison inmates. The data from questionnaires were presented with tables, frequency charts and other regression analysis charts. From a total of 718 questionnaires were administered among prison inmates, however, only 615 were found to be completed properly after data cleaning, which represents 85.6 percent of response rate. One vital feature of the respondents of the research was that they were predominantly 84.6% males, while females were 15.4 percent. Similarly, respondents who fall within the age brackets between 25 and 29 years were the majority. The prisoners who fall within this age brackets, represent 38.0 percent. A substantial percentage precisely 42.2 percent of the respondents were married, whereas, 35.1 percent had at least a child, with 40.1 percent of them without children at all.

On the educational level of the respondents, the data shows that majority of them had low level of education as only 3.1 percent cumulatively went beyond secondary level of education such as Diploma, National Certificate of Education (NCE) and Degree. This explains why 69.1 percent were unemployed.

A close look at table 4.1 above shows that majority of convicted prisoners for violent types of crimes within the four prisons studied, are young. This is so because 83.5 percent of respondents fall with the age bracket 20 through 34 years. It could be clearly stated that majority of those who engaged in violent crimes are youths. Furthermore, the study also indicated that 80.9 percent of these convicted prisoners were unemployed when they committed offences for which they were incarcerated.

The socio demographic of respondents indicate a predominant male (67.3) percent with an average age that falls within the age bracket of 25 to 29 years. This finding is in accord with the study of Murray,(2011) in Los Angeles street youths who were found to be predominantly males. Also, the study of Emeh, Nwaguma and Aboroh (2012) in Lagos, Nigeria found out male dominated. On the age of respondents, this research found out youths whose age range mostly from 20 years to 34 years with an average bracket of 25 to 29 years as dominance perpetrators of violent crimes. This is also consistent with past studies. This outcome of youths being the leading perpetrators of violent crimes is in consonant with finding of Murray,(2011), Moffit *et al* (2000), Ucha, (2010) Baskin and Sommers, (1993), Emeh, Nwanguma and Aboroh, (2012), Efiom, Archibong and Ojua (2014) and Wikstrom and Treiber, (2016).

With regard to religious affiliation, 47.8 percent of the respondents were Muslims, while 44.9 percent Christians. This finding is however at variance with the finding of Emeh, Nwaguma and Aboroh (2012) who found their respondents to be predominantly Christians. The result reflects that Niger State has predominant Muslim population (NGSG. 2010).

Majority (42.4%) of the respondents were married. But only 35.1 percent said to have had at least a child. This finding is surprisingly at variance with findings of many studies Baskin and Sommers, 1993; Emeh, Nwanguma and Aboroh, (2012) Efiom, Archibong and Ojua (2014) and Wikstrom and Treiber (2016) which all in effect found their respondents to be

predominantly single. Here again culture plays a role, as the study area are not only Muslims, but also falls within north central axis of Nigeria who most often marry early in life (Oloede, 2014)

Also, descriptive statistics of questions on respondents' neighbourhood, nature and characteristics were presented. The wisdom behind the presentation is to establish a link with involvement of respondents in violent crimes and the socio-economic conditions presented by their status.

When asked on what kind of job do respondents engage in before incarceration? Some 29.3% of them acknowledged that they were motor vehicle drivers. Next to driving among list of jobs that occupied their time was carpentry, (27.7%), Okada operator (16.4%) and business (8.2%), among others. On the time spent on the jobs per week, majority (55.4%) of respondents said they spend less than 20 hours on their respective jobs. On the respondent's individual assessment of earning from their jobs Table 1 indicates only 20.5 percent of them scored their income high with 33.7 percent believed they earned low income.

Table 1: Respondents' rate of their earnings per week

Description of earnings	High	127	20.5
	Moderate	212	34.1
	Low	209	33.7
	Very low	66	10.6

Source: Field work(2017).

While 10.6 percent of them acknowledged to have earned very low income, 20.5 percent of these respondents confirmed they earned high income. For instance, Table 2 indicates that only 8.7 percent of respondents earn six thousand naira (N 6000) and above per week. For the fact that 43.5 percent of respondents earn less than 2000 naira a week which they acknowledged to be low, it then follow that low income could have played significant role in the respondents' involvement in violent crimes. This is because earning low income within a community where others earn higher makes respondents has feeling of social



exclusion and deprivation which by extension begets involvement in violent crimes as supplement.

Table 2: Respondents' earnings per week

Earning per week	less than N2000	231	37.2
	N2000-3999	239	38.5
	N4000-5999	104	16.7
	N6000 and above	41	6.6

Source: Field work(2017).

Furthermore, the data showed that 37.2 percent of respondents earned less than N2000 per week. Given this low level of income earned by respondents, it become obvious that such income could not sustain them properly when other sources are not available. One major source of income to augment a parlous income is the family. A financial source from the family who would be biological parent or caregiver was therefore needed greatly as safety net for socio-economic needs. The respondents confirmed that 46.6 percent of them 'very much' depended on the caregivers. Absence of care giver warrants involvement in crimes.

Table 3: Respondents' level of dependence on parents/caregivers

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Much	273	46.6
Much	254	41.5
Undecided	45	7.4
Little	34	5.6
Very Little	6	1.0
Total	612	100.0

Source: Field Work(2017).

Among the respondents who answered the question which sought to know their level of dependence on parent or care giver, only 6.6 percent which cumulatively felt their level of

dependent on caregivers were either little or very little as seen in the Table 3 above. It should be noted that parents play key role in the life of individuals when they navigate the uncertainty of growing up as children, without which the children get the leverage to commit crime.

Parental support decreases involvement in crime and other antisocial behaviours, but where parental support wanes or out rightly absent, data indicated that when parental support was not available, people often times resort to crime, particularly of violent types. In response to a question which sought to know whether absence of support from parents or caregivers was responsible for their imprisonment, the following Table 3 indicates that 44.0 percent of the respondents said that absence of care givers was 'very much' responsible for their imprisonment. The implication of being in a neighbourhood where moral and financial assistance was absent, (social capital) sand the support from parents or caregiver for individuals who lack required educational and employment/ income capabilities to cushion the pangs created by the socio economic status, makes respondents vulnerable to joining gangs which serve as staircase to involvement in murder, rape or assault cases.

Table 4: Whether absence of parent/caregiver was linked to imprisonment

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Much	270	44.0
Much	263	42.8
Undecided	45	7.2
Little	26	4.2
Very Little	9	1.5
Total	614	100.0

Source: Field Work(2017).

Only 7.2 percent of respondents could not conclude on whether absence of their parents or care givers was responsible to their imprisonment whereas 4.2 percent of respondents felt their incarceration has little to do with absence of caregivers. From the data, respondents are not only from a socially disadvantaged background as indicated by their poor working and earning conditions and low social capital, most of the



respondents come from neighbourhoods that they described as below average (28.3%) in its community sense. This closely knitted relationship within a neighbourhood is critical factor in the issue of social capital.

Test of hypothesis

Since the focus of the paper is on social capital and violent crime. The paper then hypothesized that there is a significant relationship between social capital and involvement in murder as an example of violent crimes. The result is hereby presented as follows:

Table 5: Testing of hypothesis between social capital and murder

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	20.387	1	20.387	9.254	.002 ^a
	Residual	1193.993	542	2.203		
	Total	1214.380	543			

- a. Dependent Variable: Murder
- b. Predictors: (Constant), Social Capital

When social capital is placed against murder in the regression analysis table, the result as indicated in table 4.34 above shows that a P-value of .002 was obtained which is less than the P-value of 0.05 set as level of significance. It therefore infers that there is a significant relationship between social capital and involvement in murder predicted by the research hypothesis. Consequently, the research hypothesis is therefore accepted against the rejection of the null hypothesis which predicted no significant relationship between social capital and involvement in murder.

Furthermore, finding of the study which relates social capital with murder shows a significant relationship. An outcome of regression analysis from Table 5 shows a P-value of .002 which is less than the P-value of 0.05 set earlier which equally indicates a strong relationship between social capital and involvement of individual in murder. The finding is in accord with a study conducted in

Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria by (Abebayo, 2015) which reported to the effect that unemployed youths with no safety valve like social capital are disproportionately represented as perpetrators of murder and robbery, in the Oyo State crime scene. In furtherance of this, Galea, Karpati and Kennedy (2002) in study in the United States based on the inverse relation between social capital and homicide, hypothesized that variations in social capital in US states over time could predict variations in regional homicide mortality both across and within time periods. The analyzed serial cross-sectional data for measures of social capital and age-adjusted homicide rates was for between 1974 and 1993. The result shows that the used perception of social trust and per capita membership in voluntary associations, obtained from responses to the General Social Surveys, as the principal measures of social capital, were strongly inversely correlated with homicide rates in an aggregate cross-sectional analysis ($r^2=0.51$; $p<0.001$) and also within each time period. Homicide rates also predicted levels of social capital in adjusted models ($p<0.001$): (Galea, et al, 2002 p.1373). Just as these scholar found relationship between social capital and crime, other scholars found that social capital has differing level of effect on crime in rural areas when compared with urban ones, or social capital reduces property crime without effect on violent crime (Deller&Deller, 2010.)

Conclusion and recommendations

On the whole, the empirical result of this paper supports the proposition that social capital has a significant relation with involvement in murder as a form of violent crime. The relationship is however inverse implying that a higher social capital within human community ensure or bring about reduced involvement in murder. It can be stated categorically here that social capital serves as safety net that assist in reducing the tension of wants among individuals within society. It also serves as a form of informal social control mechanism which in turn retard criminal tendency thereby ensuring a peaceful society.

The paper therefore recommends that individuals should be encouraged to form self-help voluntary



organizations to enable them feel the impulse of each other, provide social capital for everyone and extension serves as social control mechanism.

Members of every community should endeavour to join religious groups and attend religious gatherings as this has been identified as an aspect of social capital.

Governments at all levels should devise means of engaging youths in productive ventures. The formation of cooperative societies for the purpose loans and other social benefits should be encouraged and sustained.

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