

OSPAC Vigilante Outfit and Crime Control in Emohua and Etche Local Government Areas of Rivers State

Adiele, Ikemefule Blessing; Emeodu, Elijah Nwabueze PhD

Department of Sociology, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This study examined OSPAC vigilante and crime control in Emohua and Etche Local Government Areas. The study adopted three (3) research questions and objectives and they guided the study. The study adopted community implant theory propounded by Rosenbaum (1987) to support the use of OSPAC vigilante on crime control. The descriptive survey research design was used. The study population is about 633,700 people, with a sample size of 400. The purposive sampling technique was used. The method of data collection utilized both primary and secondary sources. However, simple percentages, mean and standard deviation were used for data analysis. The study found out that the failure of the Nigerian security in curbing crime, high level of poverty, lack of quality leadership, cult clashes for supremacy, high level of unemployment and desire to get rich quick are factors responsible for insecurity. Further findings showed that since the inception of OSPAC vigilante security in Emohua and Etche local government areas, there have been crime reductions in the areas as people go about their daily activities. The study recommended that despite reductions in crime in Emohua and Etche by OSPAC vigilante; there is a need for its sustainability, and one way to achieve this would be to provide employment, entrepreneurship education and training.

KEYWORDS: OSPAC, Crime, Vigilante, Crime Control, Insecurity

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria state is bequeathed with the problem of criminality. This may be so due to an increase in crime rates which pose a challenge to the ideal security of lives and properties. The increase in crime rates have assumed terrifying dimensions and are affecting the country's political and economic divide, indeed the entire nation, to regret the absence of safety in most parts of the country, as seen in the activities of Boko-Haram, Fulani-Herdsmen and Farmers clashes, kidnapping and militancy (Onifade, Imhonopi & Urim, 2013). Thus, crime has reached an alarming level in Nigeria and has manifested in numerous facets of our national life. Lives are being lost daily, the population is being depleted, businesses are winding-up, investments are decreasing, multinational corporations are closing their operations and leaving the country, unemployment is skyrocketing, and the populace is fearful.

Since the transition to democratic rule in 1999, Nigerian governments at all levels have experimented

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with a variety of methods aimed at mitigating the devastation caused by crime and insecurity with little success. When it appears that the government is succeeding in one area, another area of insecurity emerges. The reason for the government's failure to adequately address the crime problem may not be unrelated to the government's failure to meet the developmental needs of the people, which has compelled them to form various alliances that have succeeded in breeding increasing ethnic hatred, religious bigotry, political rivalry, and a growing population of dissatisfied citizens in the country who feel they have been short-changed and given very limited or no access to basic services (Onifade, Imhonopi & Urim, 2013).

Due to this dissatisfaction and lack of trust in security agencies, some communities, LGAs, including Emohua and Etche LGAs in Rivers State and other parts of Nigeria, have opted for self-defence through the formation of vigilante groups. According to

Adikwe (2013), increased violent crime in Nigeria has prompted citizens to seek alternative security or self-help measures to reduce crime or checkmate the activities of certain unscrupulous elements and hoodlums, and to prosecute them appropriately. The study will examine OSPAC vigilante outfits and crime control in selected communities in Rivers State's Emohua and Etche Local Government Areas.

There have been high levels of kidnapping with little or high ransom demanded by the kidnappers in Rivers State. Communities are also experiencing a series of other crimes ranging from cult activities, kidnapping, illegal oil theft, and many others (Lawan, 2006). Many businesses have collapsed, investors relocating to other areas that are secured. Hence, for the LGAs and States in Nigeria to develop, peace and security must be stabilized since peace is the panacea to development, and insecurity and conflict breed underdevelopment. Studies and observations have revealed various occurrences of crime in Rivers State, specifically in Etche and Emohua local government areas. It was revealed that crime correlates to poverty and a high unemployment rate. As this occurs, it implies that crisis/insecurity contribute to development problems. There existed a situation where a pregnant woman was thrown inside a well filled with water and how over 26 people were killed within 2008-2019 in Ibaa Community. With this, there was a shortage of manpower and a bad image to such a community. What led to this insecurity can be attributed to leadership failure, poverty, and tussle for chieftaincy stool and cult activities (Njoku, 2019; Chukwu, 2018; Fund for Peace, 2015; Uriah & Inweregbu, 2019).

Furthermore, it was noted in some communities in Emohua LGA that businesses and individuals forcefully migrated to other safer areas for protection and as they moved, capitals also left with them which would have been used to develop the insecurity prone areas or communities. The incidence of insecurity in Etche LGA increased substantially from 2012 to 2014. According to Rivers State Conflict Bulletin 2021, in February 2014, an APC chairman in one of the wards was assassinated, while in May 2014, a cult clash resulted in the death of over ten persons in Etche. Also, it was reported that a fight between two armed youths led to the death of three persons in Etche. In January 2015, there was a rivalry clash between the Deebam and Deywell cult groups, as a result, three cultists were killed. This led to increased communal tensions where most people relocated to other peaceful communities and LGAs. Given a more critical situation in Etche, many youths in Etche LGA resorted to evil activities such as kidnapping, stealing,

armed robbery and online scamming known as yahoo-yahoo. As a consequence of these restive activities, most infrastructures and facilities including the Social Development Institute located in Okehi which is Etche LGA Headquarter were vandalized by hoodlums. As these insecurity and crimes persist, many blamed the police and other security agencies of government, for being ineffective in their duties. The problems associated with security agencies failure to curb crime are a high level of corruption by security agents, poor salary, poor working gadgets and an un-hygienic environment that disturb the security agencies in the country. Because this exists, there have been increases in crime which affect social, political and economic development in Emohua and Etche local government areas. As the pressure of crime intensifies, Emohua and Etche people opted for self-vigilante as security and absorbed the functions of OSPAC Vigilante security and other security apparatus (Kasali, 2012; Uriah, Ololube & Egbezor, 2015; Emeodu & Elem, 2020; Chukwu, 2018, Adiele, 2021).

However, since many studies highlighted various crimes in Rivers State and also suggested community self-approach to security, none of the studies was able to focus on OSPAC Vigilante outfit and crime control in Emohua and Etche Local Government Areas. This, therefore, constituted the gap this study sought to fill. The study was guided with the following research questions:

1. What are the factors that promote the increase in crime and the need for OSPAC vigilante security outfit in selected communities in Emohua and Etche Local Government Areas?
2. Are there crime reductions since the establishment of OSPAC vigilante in selected communities in Emohua and Etche Local Government Areas?
3. Are there measures that can improve the performance of OSPAC vigilante outfits to control/reduce crime in selected communities in Emohua and Etche Local Government Areas?

The objectives of the paper are:

1. To identify the factors that promote an increase in crime and the need for OSPAC vigilante security outfit in selected communities in Emohua and Etche Local Government Areas.
2. To establish if there is crime reduction since the establishment of OSPAC vigilante in selected communities in Emohua and Etche Local Government Areas.
3. To identify measures that can improve the performance of OSPAC vigilante out and

control/reduce crime level in selected communities in Emohua and Etche Local Government Areas.

Theoretical Framework

The study's theoretical framework was community implant theory. Rosenbaum (1987) advanced this theory in his essay titled "*Theory and Research Behind Neighborhood Watch*." The Community Implant Theory has predicated on the premise that the primary reason for high crime rates is a lack of informal social control in neighbourhood areas. Sociologists argue that informal social control can be introduced into a community through collective citizen action in areas where social control is naturally weak or nonexistent (Rosenbaum, 1987). Social control, in its broadest sense, refers to a group's or community's capacity to regulate its members. It entails the administration of rewards and sanctions. Thus, while formal social control is always based on written rules and laws and is enforced by courts and police, informal social control is based on customs and norms and is enforced by citizens themselves through surveillance, reprimand, warning, rejection, and other emotional pressures to ensure conformity. In general, the community implant hypothesis argues that crime and social disorder can be better controlled if both formal and informal systems, such as the police, and informal arrangements, such as community participation, work together towards that end. It is believed that this integration will help ensure crime control to a certain extent.

The theory is pertinent to the study because it explains the community's role in establishing a vigilante organisation to combat crime in Emohua and Etche Local Government Areas. The theory becomes critical in explaining the crime situation in two local government areas by utilising community members to maintain social control. The term "social control" refers to a group's or community's capacity to regulate its members. It entails the administration of rewards and sanctions. Thus, the use of OSPAC security has ensured crime control, and those who violate the laws of the land face charges, fines, and the death penalty, depending on the severity of the crime. Through these measures, social control is restored and crime is reduced in the local governments of Emohua and Etche.

Literature Review

The purpose of forming vigilante groups is to maintain crime control. Dambazau (2007) defined crime control as a set of attitudes and behaviours aimed at both reducing the threat of crime and increasing one's sense of safety and security to

improve one's quality of life and create an environment conducive to crime. It entails steps, strategies, activities, measures, and efforts aimed at ensuring crime prevention and reduction. Vigilante is a term that refers to alternative security measures that have been established by residents to ensure the protection of lives and property (Adiele, 2021). It is an informal group formed by a community to supplement conventional security efforts in providing security within their established community. Thus, vigilantism is defined as something that exists alongside and beyond the law, as something that is not necessarily bound by the formal justice system but rather operates independently of it. The term "vigilante" has been applied to organisations such as the OSPAC, Amotekum, and Bakassi Boys that were founded with the express purpose of combating crime.

The formation of the OSPAC vigilante groups in Emohua and Etche local government areas is to provide security and fight against crime. OSPAC as an acronym simply means Onelga security planning and advisory committee. Emeodu (2021) in his study on indigenous security outfit and socio-economic development in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoniand Emohua LGAs, Rivers State, conceptualized OSPAC vigilante as a form of indigenous security outfit that aid the conventional securities to protect their territories. However, various LGAs and communities adopt its name than using ONELGA. For instance, in Etche and Emohua LGAs, instead of calling it OSPAC, it is called ESPAC. Generally, the security outfit is known as OSPAC in Rivers State because the people of Onelga (Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGA) pioneered the formation of this indigenous vigilante outfit before spreading to other LGAs and communities in Rivers State. Given the above scenario, it is imperative to posit that OSPAC or ESPAC security network aims to provide security for her people.

Nwaeze (2010) conducted a study on the effect vigilante groups have on crime control in contemporary Nigeria. It indicated that the Nigerian Police is ineffective at crime control and that vigilante groups sprang up in their current form to compensate for this ineffectiveness. Additionally, it demonstrated that vigilante groups are gaining prominence as crime-fighting agents in contemporary Nigeria. As a result, vigilante groups have proven to be the most effective method of resolving Nigeria's crime problem. As a result, vigilante groups' activities in Nigeria must be increased. However, lack of firearms, insufficient funding, and a lack of patrol vehicles are the major challenges confronting vigilante groups, given the threat of crime to a nation's economic,

political, and social security, as well as a major factor contributing to underdevelopment; because it discourages both domestic and foreign investment, reduces the quality of life, destroys human and social capital, and erodes citizens' relationships with their governments, undermining democracy and the rule of law. Thus, the study established that the Nigerian Police Force's inability to contain the growing tide of crime has resulted in the proliferation of vigilante groups in contemporary Nigeria. The study concluded that the best way to address Nigeria's crime problem is to increase vigilante group activity through training and support from local communities and government and that security committees should be established at the local government level to discuss security issues in their areas and to report any issues of insecurity to the appropriate security agencies for proper management and resolution.

Methodology

The study is a survey research design. The study adopted the use of primary and secondary sources of

Data Analysis and Discussion

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

N = 400

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	298	74.5%
Female	102	25.5%
AGE		
20-29 years	85	21.25%
30-39 years	95	23.75%
40-49 years	100	25%
50-59 years	70	17.5%
60 years and above	50	12.5%
Religion of Respondents		
Christian	280	70%
Muslim	8	2%
Traditional Religion	80	20%
Others	32	8%
Categories of Respondents		
Chiefs	50	12.5%
Police	50	12.5%
Politicians	100	25%
Repented Cult members	100	25%
Youths	100	25%

Fieldwork (2021)

The above table shows various demographic characteristics of respondents, ranging from age, gender, religion and categories of respondents.

Research Question One: What are the factors that promote the increase in crime and the need for vigilante security outfits in selected communities in Emohua and Etche Local Government Area?

Table 2: showing mean and standard deviation score on factors that promote the increase in crime and the need for vigilante security outfits in selected communities in Etche Local Government Area.

S/N	Questionnaire Items	NO	MEAN	SDT	REMARK
6	Cult clash for supremacy	400	3.76	0.65	Accepted
7	Lack of quality leadership	400	3.40	0.63	Accepted
8	Youth unemployment	400	3.97	0.89	Accepted
9	Corruption in the Nigeria security system	400	3.34	0.64	Accepted
10	Failure of the Nigerian security in curbing crime	400	3.23	0.71	Accepted
11	Increase in poverty level	400	3.21	0.68	Accepted
12	Greed and get rich quick syndrome	400	3.40	0.62	Accepted
	Grand Mean		3.47	0.69	Accepted

Source: Fieldwork (2021).

The table shows the mean and standard deviation scores on factors that promote the increase in crime and the need for vigilante security outfits in selected communities in Emohua and Etche Local Government Area. Hence, item 6 on Cult had mean and standard deviation scores of (M=3.40 & SD=0.63). Furthermore, item 7 on lack of quality leadership had a mean and standard deviation scores of (M=3.40 & SD=0.63). Item 8 had mean and standard deviation scores of (M=3.97 & SD=0.89). Also, item 9 had mean and standard deviation scores of (M=3.34 & SD=0.64). Item 10 had mean and standard deviation scores of (M=3.23 & SD=0.71). Item 11 had mean and standard deviation scores of (M=3.21 & SD=0.68). Item 12 had mean and standard deviation scores of (M=3.40 & SD=0.62). In conclusion, the homogeneity in response among the responses of the items implies that all the items support that they are factors that promote the increase in crime that led to the need for vigilante security outfits in selected communities in Emohua and Etche Local Government Areas. The findings show that since cult clashes for supremacy, lack of quality leadership, youth unemployment, increase in poverty, corruption in the Nigerian security system, greed and get rich quick syndrome are all responsible factors that promoted an increase in crime, and that led to the urgency for vigilante security outfit. This finding is in reflection of the study of Iro (2016) and Ladapo (2012), who posited that since the formal security system is prone to corruption, there is a need for the alternative policing system. This led to why communities in Emohua and Etche considering the persistent nature of the crime, deemed it fit to adopt OSPAC vigilante to ensure crime reduction.

Research Question Two: Are there crime reductions since the establishment of OSPAC vigilante in selected communities in Emohua and Etche Local Government Areas?

Table 3: Showing mean and standard deviation scores on if there are crime reductions since the establishment of OSPAC vigilante in selected communities in Emohua and Etche Local Government Areas.

S/N	Questionnaire Items	NO	MEAN	SD	REMARK
13	Do you think that since the inception of OSPAC, Schools are now functioning	400	3.40	0.56	Accept
14	Because there is an OSPAC vigilante, Shops have reopened	400	3.31	0.54	Accept
15	Because there is an OSPAC vigilante, Various businesses are ongoing	400	3.26	0.58	Accept
16	Do you think that since the inception of OSPAC, Farmers are now active in agricultural activities	400	3.21	0.63	Accept
17	Do you think that since the inception of OSPAC, People are not living with fear	400	3.02	0.58	Accept
18	Do you think that since the inception of OSPAC, Reduction in Cult activities	400	3.15	0.60	Accept
19	Because there is OSPAC vigilante, kidnapping has been reduced	400	3.34	0.56	Accept
20	Because there is an OSPAC vigilante, there is an increase in food production	400	3.18	0.59	Accept
	Grand Mean		3.23	0.58	Accept

Source: Fieldwork (2021).

The table, it shows the mean and standard deviations score on if there are crime reductions since the establishment of the OSPAC vigilante in selected communities in the Emohua and Etche Local Government Area. Furthermore, Item 13 had mean and standard deviation scores of (M=3.40 & SD=0.56). Item 14 had mean and standard deviation scores of (M=3.31 & SD=0.54). Item 15 had mean and standard deviation scores of (M=3.26 & SD=0.58). Also, item 16 had mean and standard deviation scores of (M=3.21 & SD=0.63). Item 17 had mean and standard deviation scores of (M=3.02 & SD=0.58). Item 18 had mean and standard deviation scores of (M=3.15 & SD=0.60). Again, item 19 had mean and standard deviation scores of (M=3.34 & SD=0.56). Finally, item 20 had mean and standard deviation scores of (M=3.18 & SD=0.59). By implication, through the responses of the respondents, it implies that there are crime reductions since the establishment of the OSPAC vigilante in Emohua and Etche Local Government Area. The findings of the study showed that since the emergence of OSPAC vigilante in Emohua and Etche LGAs, there has indeed been crime reduction. This is evident as schools are now functioning, shops are now re-opened, businesses are ongoing, people no longer live with fear, kidnapping has reduced, and farmers are busy on the farms, hence ensuring an increase in food production. Reacting on farming activities, this was the situation in ONELGA that led Adekola and Enyiche (2017) to posit that during the crisis period, the place was in total dissolution as most of the community residents fled the community for fear, shops were closed and farmers could not access their farms. This was also the situation in Emohua and Etche LGAs before the arrival of OSPAC vigilante security. The effort of the vigilante helped to control crime and brought normalcy. The findings established that since the inception of the OSPAC vigilante in the study area, there have been crime reductions.

Research Question Three: Are there measures that can improve the performance of OSPAC vigilante group to reduce crime in selected communities in Emohua and Etche Local Government Areas?

Table 4: Showing mean and standard deviation scores on measures that can improve the performance of OSPAC vigilante group to reduce crime in selected communities in Emohua and Etche Local Government Areas

S/N	Questionnaire Items	NO	MEAN	SD	REMARK
21	Proper orientations, training and supervision should be carried out to OSPAC.	400	3.54	0.65	Accept
22	OSPAC vigilante should handover any victim of crime to the formal security.	400	3.11	0.70	Accept
23	Recruitment of OSPAC vigilantes should include those with zero records of cultism and violent behaviour	400	2.90	0.96	Accept
24	The OSPAC vigilantes should be given the necessary incentives/motivations.	400	3.43	0.68	Accept
25	Punishment to any member of OSPAC, as a deterrent to others.	400	3.47	0.74	Accept
26	OSPAC vigilante should avoid killing victims being captured without government investigation.	400	3.54	0.65	Accept
27	Government should support the effort of OSPAC vigilante in your area through incentives.	400	3.52	0.72	Accept
	Grand Mean		3.35	0.73	Accept

Source: Fieldwork (2021).

The table shows mean and standard deviations score on measures that can improve the performance of OSPAC vigilante group to reduce crime in selected communities in Emohua and Etche Local Government Areas. Hence, item 21 had mean and standard deviation scores of (M=3.54 & SD=0.65). Item 22 had mean and standard deviation scores of (M=3.11 & SD=0.70). Again, item 23 had a mean and standard deviation scores of (M=2.90 & SD=0.96). Also, item 24 had mean and standard deviation scores of (M=3.43 & SD=0.68). Item 25 had mean and standard deviation scores of (M=3.47 & SD=0.74). Again, item 26 had mean and standard deviation

scores of (M=3.54 & SD=0.65). Also, item 27 had mean and standard deviation scores of (M=3.52 & SD=0.72). Therefore, this implies that as all the items are accepted, they support the existence of measures that can improve the performance of the OSPAC vigilante group to reduce crime in selected communities in Emohua and Etche Local Government Areas. The findings of this study identified measures that can help in crime control. One of the solutions is that there should be proper orientation, training and supervision of vigilante security outfits. Such exercises will always energize them to understand the need for their emergence.

Supervision will serve as a watch or check on them. Hence, such awareness will fix them up to discharge their duties with good morals knowing that they can be called upon anytime to give an account of their operations. Equally, punishment should be given to any member of the vigilante outfit who defaults or violates prescribed rules and regulations. Thus, they should be supervised and/or monitored by the Nigerian security system. Therefore, proper training, as well as supervision, will help solve the problem of vigilante outfit killing victims arrested by them leading to why many people may be criticizing them despite their efforts in crime control. Total adherence to the stated measures, if well internalized, it is expected, will reduce crime and as Stewart (2004) and Elem & Emeodu (2020) posited, it will usher in more growth and development.

Conclusion

Crime prevention is imperative to development. Crime breeds insecurity, and with its attendant consequences becomes unhealthy to national growth. Because the formal security system has failed in providing security, local vigilantes have stepped out to prevent crime and cover the weakness of the Nigerian security system. The OSPAC vigilante outfit emerged from ONELGA and spread to other troubled local governments. Through the efforts of vigilante security, some remarkable improvements have been recorded in our security architecture, in Emohua and Etche L.G.As. The study concludes that it is only fit and proper for Emohua and Etche people and government to see the need to support the efforts of the OSPAC vigilante outfit to ensure that socio-economic and political activities thrive to boost more development since development cannot be achieved in a crime-prone area.

Recommendations

The study has identified some salient issues that require immediate attention. Accordingly, we posit the following recommendations:

1. Because insecurity exists with the devastating outcome of crisis that affects the people, the study recommended the need for communities in Rivers State to adopt the aid of OSPAC vigilante security watch. Through this, more opportunities for security improvement will be guaranteed. This effort will be instrumental in preventing further crimes such as the cult struggle for supremacy, kidnapping armed robbery, electoral violence and political assassination.
2. **There should be quality leadership.** Such leadership should generate more employment opportunities. When this is actualized, it will reduce kidnapping, youth unemployment,

poverty, involvement in electoral violence. Also, it will reduce the influx of youth's involvement in cult activities. It is said that an idle mind is a devil's workshop, therefore, let's keep the youth busy and focused on major achievements.

3. **Motivation to vigilante outfit in Emohua and Etche LGAs:** Truly, increased support and motivation through placing them on salary, provision of modern gadgets and facilities will help in providing the needs of OSPAC vigilante security. When this is done, it will boost their performance; ensure effective security and crime prevention.
4. **Constitutional Amendment:** there is from the outcome of this study an urgent need to amend the Nigerian Constitution 1999 to include alternative/vigilante/community security outfits to compliment the work of the state security apparatus. There may as well be consequential amendments to the Police Act. The purport of this recommendation is for the federal government to decentralize the activities of the security operations to allow for community/vigilante /alternative security.

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