

Combating Youth Violence and Insecurity in Jalingo Metropolis: A Pragmatic Approach

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Abstract

Youth gangs and youth violence have been on the increase in recent times within Jalingo Metropolis. This has resulted in insecurity and loss of lives and properties of the inhabitants. The emergence and activities of the “*Base Boys*” creates an atmosphere of disproportionate gang violence by the restive youths in Jalingo. This study examines the approaches and strategies adopted in curtailing the spread and negative transformation of the new phenomenon of the *Sara-Suka* (youth gang groups) by the Jalingo Local Government Council, Muri Emirate Council and Security Agencies in Taraba State. The sources of data are both primary and secondary. The methods of data collection are primary through unstructured interviews and direct observations. The theoretical framework adopted in this study is the Social Learning Theory, which defines social behavior through the social learning process. The theory posits that people learn from one another through observation, imitation and modeling. The differential association theory which is a micro level theory is also explored. The study findings revealed that push and pull factors from rural-urban migration and crisis in the northeast as a result of Boko Haram insurgency brought in thousands of refugees to Jalingo metropolis. This is further reinforced by ethno-religious conflicts within Taraba State which forced internally displaced persons (IDPs) to relocate and settle in Jalingo town, thereby aggravating the development of youth violence gang groups. The study recommends that to combat youth violence, community policing should be encouraged, government at all levels should initiate pro-poor youth empowerment programs, provision of modern security gazettes and constant patrol of flash points and criminal hideouts areas in the metropolis.

Keywords: Community Policing, Gang Violence, Jalingo, Pragmatic Approach, Youth Gang.

Introduction

Youth gangs and youth violence have been on the increase in recent times within Jalingo Metropolis, which has resulted in insecurity and loss of lives and properties of its inhabitants. The emergence and activities of the “*Base Boys*” create an atmosphere of disproportionate gang violence by the restive youths in Jalingo, Taraba state’s capital. Urban youth violence is multifaceted in nature and carried out by criminal groups, youth gangs, militias and political thugs at different times for different reasons. This violence may be either expressive or instrumental depending on the context. Since the return to civil

rule in 1999, the phenomena of political thugs and youth gangs have increased across the Nigerian federation gradually and systematically.

As a result of the growing insecurity in recent times, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) has approved the adoption of new strategies such as community policing for combating various crimes perpetrated all over the country (Odegbonam, 2019). The FGN has already inaugurated a 14-Man Committee in May, 2019, mandated to come up with a clear road map for addressing the new security challenges. A meeting was also held between the FGN and Nigerian Governors' Forum on the possibility of using the N-Power Volunteers as local security operatives that would assist the Police on internal security. The meeting recommended the need to engage over 500,000 volunteers to be used across the 36 states and 774 LGAs in the country (Sahara Reporters 2019; Mudassir, 2019).

Just as at the federal level, various strategies have been adopted in combating youth gang violence and general insecurity in Jalingo Metropolis since the escalation of youth violence in early 2017. According to police reports, since the escalation of violence, eleven people have been officially reported killed, while over 300 persons have been arrested in the last two years (Taraba Police Command, 2018 cited in Mohammed, 2018). In addition to gang violence and general insecurity, kidnapping is also on the increase within and around Jalingo metropolis. This rather unfortunate phenomenon which was not known previously in Jalingo town has become rampant in recent times. Most of the targets of the kidnappers are wealthy individuals, politicians and senior civil servants. In April 2019 alone, over 20 persons were kidnapped in Jalingo Metropolis, excluding other parts of the States (Hunkuyi, 2019). It is against this background that this paper examined the community policing strategy adopted by Jalingo Local Government and Muri Emirate Council in combating youth restiveness and general insecurity in Jalingo Metropolis.

Conceptual Clarifications

Community Policing

Community policing is a universal way of tackling crime and general insecurity in a community through partnership between the community, State Police and other security agencies. There is no one way of implementing community policing as a problem-solving technique in a society. According to United States Department of Justice (1992), community policing is a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies in the community to combat potential situations that might create public safety issues such as social unrest, fear, and crime and gang violence.

The history of community policing as a strategy of fighting crime could be traced to the 19th century in Europe and United State of America. However, in the 1960s it became popular in the United State of America. Recent studies have shown that over 80% of crimes and other related offenses have been solved through community policing in the United State of America. It is a reaction against the fire brigade approach and a total

departure from reactive policing to proactive policing in crime control (US Department of Justice, 2009).

In Africa, Nigeria and Taraba State in particular, community policing is a very old phenomenon. The method of controlling crime has been the traditional method of native authority (Local Police) which was old-fashioned but effective in crime control and general security. The idea of community policing started after the attainment of independence in 1960. Community policing is democratic and collaborative in nature. It requires the active participation of local government, civic, business leaders, public and private agencies, residents, Churches, Mosques, schools, hospitals, NGOs, the Police, etc. All the security agencies have to come together to design and implement measures or policies that would prevent crime and promote peaceful co-existence in the society. The essence of community policing is built on trust and prevention and elimination of crime and violence.

Community policing through community participation prevents crime in society (Adisa, 1994 cited in IFRA-Nigeria). It embodies the use of vigilantes, Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and multi-layer security apparatuses to control and fight crime holistically. The Muri Emirate which was established in 1817, over 200 years ago after the Jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio of 1804, has a robust community policing structure based on the traditional political system inherited from the Islamic and the colonial administration of indirect rule system.

Youth Gang

Youth gang refers to neighborhood or street-based youth groups that meet gang criteria. It may be group of associates, friends or members of a family with a defined leadership and internal organization that identifies with or claims control over a territory in a community and engages, either individually or collectively, in illegal and possibly violent behavior. Miller (1992) defines a street gang as a self-formed association of peers, united by mutual interests, with identifiable leadership and internal organization, who act collectively or as individuals to achieve specific purposes, including the conduct of illegal activity and control of a particular territory, facility, or enterprise. In this context, the *Sara-Suka* also known as *Base Boys* unleashing terror in Jalingo Metropolis are qualified as youth gang that also claim territory in their various streets and neighborhoods. Gangsterism is a form of self-help which victimizes others. It may appear in societies which lack strong forces of law and order. Gangsterism has become a society of itself.

Youth Violence

According to World Health Organization (2016), youth violence refers to the intentional use of physical force or power to threaten or the actual use of physical force, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation. Youth violence is violence by young people between the ages of 10-24

years. It may be intra or inter group violence perpetrated by youths. Youth violence is an extreme form of aggression which include; physical assault, bullying, rape, gun shooting, kidnapping, drug trafficking, street brawling, slapping, violence dating and emotional abuse among others. It may cause injury or death of the victims. What is happening in Jalingo by the *Sara-Suka* is a peer violence among groups within the metropolis that is linked to territoriality and social life. It is a social disorder that has become rampant and dangerous in the past three years.

According to Mohammed (2018) youth violence within Jalingo Metropolis could be classified into three types; violent youth gangs, political thugs and criminal youth gangs. He maintains that youth violence in Jalingo Metropolis is caused by inter-group rivalry between neighborhood groups and age groups known as the *Base boys*. There are various reasons why violence is perpetrated in societies; some are as a result of relative deprivation and political mobilization (Gurr, 1970; Tilly, 1978).

There are two major types of street gang violence. These are the expressive violence and the instrumental violence. The main goal of the expressive violence is injury or violence to an individual or group, while the main goal of the instrumental violence is not to injure or kill, but to acquire property or money (National Gang Assessment Report, FBI, ND).

Pragmatic Approach

According Online Cambridge Dictionary (2019), a Pragmatic Approach means solving problems in a sensible way that suits the conditions that really exist now, rather than obeying fixed theories, ideas, or rules. It is a mixed method of studying, understanding, analyzing and explaining a situation. A pragmatic approach is more practical than a theoretical approach in dealing with problems in reality. Therefore, in this context, the combination of traditional approaches and community policing in prevention, control and fighting youth gang violence in Jalingo Metropolis is through a pragmatic philosophy of problem-solving in society. This is the new paradigm of combating crime in Nigeria. The Federal Government of Nigeria is working towards implementing community policing in tackling the new emerging challenges of farmer/herder conflicts, kidnappings, rape, Boko Haram insurgency and political thuggery among others.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Social Learning Theory (SLT). There are different sub-types of social learning theory from Skinner to Bandura that emphasize learning process and outcomes (Skinner, 1933; Bandura, 1966; 1972). However, our focus is on *Differential Association Theory* (DAT) propounded by Sutherland's (1986; 1999) and Akers' *Social Learning Theory* (1966; 2000). The differential association is a micro level theory which consists of nine (9) propositions or assumptions as follows:

i. Criminal behavior is learned.

- ii. Criminal behavior is learned in interaction with other persons in a process of communication.
- i. The principal part of the learning of criminal behavior occurs within intimate personal groups.
- ii. When criminal behavior is learned, the learning includes (a) techniques of committing the crime, which are sometimes very complicated, sometimes very simple, and (b) the specific direction of motives, drives, rationalization, and attitudes.
- iii. The specific direction of motives and drives is learned from definitions of the legal codes as favorable and unfavorable.
- iv. A person becomes delinquent because of an excess of definitions favorable to violation of law over definitions unfavorable to violation of law.
- v. Differential association may vary in frequencies, duration, priority, and intensity.
- vi. The process of learning criminal behavior by association with criminal and anti-criminal patterns involve all the mechanisms that are involved in any other learning.
- vii. Although criminal behavior is an expression of general needs and values, because non-criminal behavior is an expression of the same needs and value.

Moreover, the Akers' social learning support Sutherland's differential association with the very slight expansion and integration. The theory states further that criminal behavior is not just only learned, but can be imitated. There are four basic concepts in the theory; differential association, definitions, reinforcement and imitation. Differential association has both behavioral interaction and normative dimensions. Definitions are individuals' own attitudes or meanings that are attached to given behavior based on rationalization. It is the process of justifying the right or wrong, good or bad, doable or undoable. The individual defines the behavior as good (positive definition) or bad (negative definition). The third concept of differential reinforcement means the balance of the anticipated or actual rewards or punishments which comes after a behavior. Meaning, the chances or possibility of committing a crime depends on the past, present, or future rewards or punishments for the action or behavior.

Reinforcement refers to those groups that control persons' sources of reinforcement and punishment and expose them to behavioral models and normative definitions. These include family, peers, schools and religious bodies such as churches and mosques and other groups. Imitation, therefore, is exhibiting the same type of behaviors by others that one associates with either peers or family.

It could be stressed here that trajectories and transitions in individuals' life affect their sense of belonging and worldview. The Base boys are boys in the process of transition in life and their transformation is complicated by the social context they found themselves.

Jalingo Metropolis has had experience of the adolescent bonding occurring very fast due to the urbanization and globalization in the social media and other media.

Methodology

This study uses both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data were generated through unstructured interviews with the critical stakeholders, notably the Taraba State Commander of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), the Secretary of the Muri Emirate Council and some legal practitioners in Jalingo as key informants. The interviews were conducted between May and September, 2019. The choice of these individuals and agencies is purposive, judging by their involvement and knowledge of the developments and dynamics of the activities of the *Base boys'* transformation in Jalingo town. A field survey was undertaken within Jalingo metropolis through direct observations on the activities of the youth gang groups, particularly on the flash points. The method of data analysis used in the paper is the qualitative descriptive method. This is in order to identify the dynamics, attributes, challenges and solutions. Therefore, the study adopts a triangular approach in the collection and analysis of data.

Result of the Findings

New Strategies for Combating Youth Violence and Insecurity in Jalingo Metropolis

These strategies centered mostly on community policing approach that was developed with the support of the Taraba State Government, Jalingo Local Government Authority and security agencies in the State.

Table1. Muri Emirate's community policing strategy in combating youth gang violence in Jalingo metropolis

S/N	Name of Committee	Composition	Responsibilities
1	Committee of Elders	Elders in the Ward/Area	To look into the general security problems and challenges and resolve them in the Ward/Area
2	Committee of Youths	Youths in the Ward/Area	To identify all the youths within their Ward/Area for security reasons
3	Security Committee	Civilian Joint Task Force in the Ward/Area	To provide security and maintain law and order in the Ward/Area

Source: Author's Compilation

Table 1 above shows the efforts of the Muri Emirate Council in collaboration with the Jalingo Local Government Council, Security Agencies and community leaders towards

combating youth restiveness within the Jalingo Metropolis. Each Ward/Area was tasked to have the three committees and manage their operations in order to mitigate the urban violence and general insecurity. The strategy has been yielding positive results in managing and controlling the gang violence. Consequently, the gang violence and general insecurity in the Jalingo metropolis has reduced significantly.

Table 2: Records of arrests and seizures of hard drugs by NDLEA Taraba State 2016-2018

S/ N	YEAR	ARRES TS	SEX		SEIZURES		PROSECUTIO NS
			MAL E	FEMAL E	CANNABI S SATIVA	PSYCHOTROP IC	
1	2016	249	242	7	2,536.728k g	1,013.276grams	48
2	2017	117	116	1	755.761kg	598.899grams	30
3	2018	113	111	2	309.994kg	3,507.777grams	14
	TOTAL	479	469	10	3,602.483k g	5,119.952grams	92

Source: Adapted from NDLEA, Taraba State Command, 2019

The Table 2 shows the records of arrests, seizures and sexes of drugs dealers and addicts in Taraba State. Drawing from the periods 2016 to 2018 under review above, the percentage of those arrested in 2016 were 97% male and 3% female. In 2017 male were 99 % while female 1 %, in 2018, male arrests were 98 % with female 2 %.

In Jalingo, according to NDLEA, what is common is the use and dealings in illicit drugs. However, in Jalingo cultivation of Cannabis Sativa is very rare. This, therefore, shows that more males than females are involved in illicit drug dealings and substance abuse. Another interesting fact is that Psychotropic drugs are consumed or used more than the Cannabis Sativa in the State. Prosecutions of arrested persons were successfully achieved, which were 48, 30 and 14 persons for the years 2016, 2017 and 2018 respectively.

Table 3: Taraba Police Command strategic positioning of Police in Jalingo Metropolis

S/N	FLASH POINT (S)	LOCATION (S)	POLICE PRESENCE
1	PDP Round About	Turaki "A"	Permanent
2	Mayo Gwoi Bus Stop/Market	Barade Ward	Permanent
3	Jalingo Main Motor Park	Kona Ward	Permanent
4	Road Block Round About	Kona Ward	Permanent
5	Mobile Police Base Sabon Gari	Kachalla Ward	Permanent

Source: Author's compilation

The above table shows the various tipping points identified by the Taraba Police Command where Police officers have been stationed permanently since the rampant clashes of the *Sara-Suka* started. The main function of the security officers at these flash points is to respond immediately to any violence within Jalingo Metropolis, particularly youth gang violence since 2018.

Discussion of findings

The phenomenon of youth gang violence has been rampant in Jalingo Metropolis since early 2017 and throughout 2018. The Jalingo Local Government Council under the leadership Hon. Abdul-Nasir Bobboji set-up a Committee led by Mallam Aminu Jika, a former Chief of Staff to Taraba State Government in 2018, which investigated the remote and immediate causes of youth restiveness and drug abuse. Most of the recommendations of the Committee were not fully implemented.

In mid-2018, the Emir of Muri, Alhaji Abbas Njidda Tafida (*OFR*), initiated a community policing agenda to deal with the rising youth restiveness. The Emir summoned the over hundred (100) Ward Heads from the ten (10) Political Wards of Jalingo Local Government Area to adopt a holistic approach towards curbing the root causes of youth gang violence and social unrest in Jalingo Metropolis (Saidu, personal communication, 17 June, 2019). This approach led to the formation of various committees which are the Elders, Youth and Security Committees respectively. The Committees were formed and inaugurated in mid-2018 to tackle the youth gang violence and general insecurity in their respective Wards/Areas in Jalingo and environs.

Nevertheless, the challenges of the Committees have been funding, equipment and logistics. However, wealthy individuals have been providing assistance when needed. In the area of carrying out their duties in arresting and persecution of suspects, the issues of political interference in the process and criminal justice in regards to violation of human right by the security committee have been the obstacles observed.

According to Alhaji Usman Sai'du Gassol, the Secretary, Muri Emirate Council, one of the major problem has been lack of youth inclusion in the traditional institution administration and democratic governance in the State. This is why the Muri Emirate Council introduced conferment of titles on youths, for example titles like *Sarkin Matasa* (youth leader), *Jakadun Matasa* (youth ambassadors), among others. There were also allegations of excessive use of force and human rights abuses in handling suspects accused of gang violence and interference by powerful politicians in the work of the committees. The best way to handle the conflicts should be Alternative Dispute Settlement Mechanism (ADSM) which is very flexible and cheap in resolving conflicts among the people in the society.

Mr Patrick O. Odaudu, the State Commander NDLEA, stated that the strategies to control drug abuse, according to the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC),

include: supply, demand and harm reduction in any given society. This is the strategy that has been adopted in Jalingo Metropolis and Taraba State at large. Moreover, he identified the followings as the physical consequences of drug abuse, pre-mature death, physical fatigue, and psychological loss of memory, hallucination, while social consequences include the loss of job, prostitution and rejection (Odaudu, personal communication 12 July, 2019).

A point of convergence from those interviewed is that Jalingo has witnessed remarkable changes due to urbanization, rural and urban migration and refugees from conflicts prone areas from within and outside the State. The negative aspect of these developments is the influx of criminals and light weapons into the city, especially among the youths. In the last one decade of Boko Haram insurgency in the North-east, Jalingo has been the “safe haven” of escapees from the theatre of the various conflicts.

By and large, there were extensive campaigns launched against gang violence in Jalingo Metropolis by religious groups and civil society organizations in the Churches, Mosques, media and various fora as community efforts towards mitigation of the menace. Consequently, the use of social media, especially Facebook to report incidences of violence, rape, fighting, maiming and even deaths, has added to the escalation of youth gang violence within the metropolis. The reason is that it is easy to inform, mobilize, and revenge attacks by one group against the other. It is very easy to post or share information on the social media platforms, especially Facebook and WhatsApp, to group members for speed, secrecy, solidarity and action.

Conclusion

This study attempts to examine the strategies used in combating youth gang violence in Jalingo Metropolis by the Jalingo Local Government and Muri Emirate Council. The gang violence in Jalingo is perpetrated by the youths within the ages of 15 to 35 from families of lower economic status. The natures of the gang violence have been intra and inter group (s). The violence usually results from delinquent behaviors such as brawling, rape, drug abuse and alcoholism.

There are risk factors that determine the violence in the context of the trajectory and transition. The transition and transformation of the violence are influenced by age grades, neighborhoods, and streets solidarity within the Jalingo Metropolis. The violent groups have names, leaders, core members, peripheral members, symbols and colors as identified by Jalingo Local Government Council Committee report headed by Mallam Aminu Jika in 2018.

The gang violence members are mostly male with few female members. Since the formation of the Community Policing Approach Committees by the Muri Emirate Council to curtail the twin issues of gang violence and general insecurity in Jalingo Metropolis, there have been reductions in gang violence and improvement on the security situation. It

is therefore correct to say that the Community Policing introduced in combating the rising youth violence is working, and should be sustained for more positive results.

The deployment of security agencies at tipping points in the Metropolis to respond to clashes among the violent groups have been helpful. The strategic efforts of the Taraba Police Command in carrying out constant patrols, raids, arrests and prosecution of youth gangs have reduced the crime rate within Jalingo.

Consequently, the activities of NDLEA in Jalingo and the State at large in fighting drug abuse, trafficking and cultivation have shown evidence of reduction rather than increase in dealing with illicit drugs in the State. The various arrests, seizures and convictions by the Agency as presented above have been very useful in understanding the challenges associated with drug abuse and crime nexus.

Therefore, the strategies used in curbing youth gang violence in Jalingo Metropolis are yielding positive outcomes and need to include issues like rehabilitation, disarmament and re-integration of the *Sara-Suka* base boys into the society in order to become productive agents of societal development.

Finally, the increasing negative use of social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp to spread sometimes fake news on the activities of the base boys, political thugs and criminals exacerbates the volatile security situation in Jalingo Metropolis.

Recommendations

- i. Government at Local Government and State levels should implement the recommendations of Mal. Aminu Jika Committee.
- ii. The government should build rehabilitation centers.
- iii. The government should initiate youth empowerment programs.
- iv. The government should make a law banning all violent/illegal youth groups.
- v. Compulsory drug test, for political appointment, employment and admissions.
- vi. There should be youth inclusion in governance.
- vii. Installation of modern security gazettes (security control room for Jalingo Metropolis).

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Oral Interviews

S/N	NAME	AGE	SEX	OCCUPATION	PLACE OF INTERVIEW	DATE OF INTERVIEW
1	Alh. Sa'idu Usman Gassol	57	M	Civil Servant	Muri Emirate Palace	17/06/19
2	Mr. Patrick O. Odaudu	58	M	Civil Servant	NDLEA Taraba State Office	12/07/19
3	Barr. Bilyaminu Bakoji	36	M	Legal Practitioner	Baba Ya'u CBN	26/07/19
4	Mr. Dankishiya Mustapha Saleh	26	M	Politician	Millennium Suites	30/07/19