

ARMED ROBBERY AMONG YOUTHS: IMPLICATION ON SECURITY IN NIGERIA

***¹Danjuma B. Lawi, ²David B. Ugal, ¹Nyanu G. Luka and ¹Danjuma Rimamtsise**

¹Department of Crime Management, College of Agriculture, Science and Technology,
Jalingo, Taraba State.

²Department of Sociology, Federal University of Lafia, Nassarawa State.

*Corresponding Author: Email: pstbomke@gmail.com

Abstract

The provision of adequate security is a social necessity for the smooth running of every society either developed or developing. The foremost social problem inhibiting security and developmental progress in Nigeria over the decades is the considerable increased rate of criminal activities among youths especially armed robbery. The country in recent times has witnessed an unprecedented level of insecurity through the criminal activities of youths resulting in national security threat. This study examined the armed robbery among youths and its implication on security in Nigeria through review of relevant literature, and concludes that security in Nigeria is greatly hampered by criminal activities of youths of which armed robbery is one. The study argued that a multi-pronged approach is needed to curb the menace of armed robbery in Nigeria. The study recommends that socio-economic and political factors such as unemployment, ethnicity, poverty, must be addressed in order to help curb the engagement of youths in armed robbery.

Keywords: *Armed Robbery, Youths, Security Implication*

Introduction

The provision of adequate security is a social necessity for the smooth running of every society either developed or developing. For every society to achieve its developmental goals, security of lives and property must be ensured. Adeleye and Jamal (2020) pointed out that the foremost social problem inhibiting security and developmental progress in the African region over the decades is the considerable increased rate of criminal activities among youths. Hardly would a day pass by without the news of armed robbery attack or incidences of crime in any given society and the rate of crime is increasing daily especially among youths. In recent times, Nigeria has witnessed an unprecedented level of insecurity through the criminal activities of youths resulting in national security threat (Nasiru, 2020). He opined further that Nigeria is currently bloated in security crisis which has turned into an unending challenge. Taraba State has had its share of the ugly trend of security challenges as a result of criminal activities of youths which are portrayed in high rate of kidnappings, armed robbery, and so on. These crimes are on the increase daily.

In Southern Senatorial District of Taraba State, Nigeria, security challenges borders on kidnapping, armed robbery and other sundry crimes. Armed robbery has constituted a major security threat to any given society. There is never a day that cases of robbery attacks are not reported either in the print or electronic media. The very worrisome aspect includes the age bracket of the perpetrators which are mostly youths, the level of brutality during each attack, the varying targets, and the brazen manner in which the attacks are carried. According to Umar (2015), armed robbery is one of the most popular crimes in contemporary Nigerian society. It

has to do with the unlawful utilization of any form of arms to forcefully deprive innocent people of their legitimate possessions; it is therefore a crime against the Nigerian criminal laws.

Armed robbers use advanced equipment particularly firearms like pistols, AK 47, short guns and violent force to coerce suspecting victims into submitting their valuables such as cash, phones, trinkets, electronics and others is the characteristic of armed robbery. Gabriel (2017) asserted that unlike their previous modes of operation which used to be at night and often hooded, armed robbers now operate bare-faced in broad day-light. They attack homes, offices, shops, restaurants and churches to rob, rape, maim and kill. They operate on the streets and strike at filling stations and banks while dispossessing their victims of cash and valuables. The incidence of robbery in Nigeria today is so appalling that armed robbers operate on a daily basis, leaving sorrow, tears, and blood in their trail. Gabriel lamented that in Nigeria, security measures taken so far by both the Government and public security operatives have failed to control or even reduce rate of armed robbery. On the contrary, the crime rate continues to soar to such extent that it beats the imagination of relevant authorities at all levels.

Theoretical Frameworks

This work is hinged on Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977). The theory is based on the idea that we learn from our interactions with others in a social context. Separately, by observing the behaviours of others, people develop similar behaviour. The theory postulates that people tend to model behaviour of significant others encode such behaviour and integrate it through motor reproduction. Social learning theory states that we can acquire new behaviours and knowledge by watching others, a process known as vicarious learning. By implication, one of the assumptions of the theory is that any violent or anti-social behaviour is accounted for by the continuous reciprocal interaction of personal and environmental determinants. Some of the behaviours are transferred from other countries to Nigeria through the process of globalization, facilitated by advancements in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), while some are transferred as people migrate from one community to another to settle or even within a community itself. This study therefore adopted this theory because it helps in understanding that most of the behaviours exhibited by our youths which are in conflict with societal norms are borrowed behaviours.

Literature Review

Causes of Armed Robbery Among Youths

Several scholars have given different reasons why youths engage in different criminal activities, armed robbery inclusive. These may range from individual to societal factors. Looking at the views of these scholars, it implies that a number of closely related factors are responsible for crime among youths in Nigeria. These factors, if carefully handled can mitigate armed robbery in any given society. These factors among others include:

Lack of Supervision of Youths and Materialistic Family Values

Thomas (2021) opined that the lack of supervision, coupled with exposure to social media or music related to crime and killing, was seen to be putting young people at risk. At present, without employment coupled with poverty, moral decadence, relevant skills, many youths become ready tools used for various crimes and violent criminal activities. Therefore, the life of the youth can be described as dangerous, where only the fittest survive. Similarly, recently

research in criminology has begun to refocus its attention on the role of family in explaining crime. The family is undoubtedly the most critical agent of socialisation for humankind and has the initial and long lasting influence on family members. Philip and Tungu (2021) asserted that the family environment goes a long way in determining to a large extent what a child becomes in the later part of his life. They opined further that affectionate, supportive, and understanding homes are likely to promote conformist and constructive social behaviour, because a positive family environment leads to healthy personality development. Conversely, a lack of parental affection and support, or in more severe cases parental indifference, hostility or rejection, causes children to feel emotionally insecure and leads to poor personality development, thus encouraging antisocial or criminal behaviour. Thomas (2021) averred that the lack of supervision, coupled with exposure to social media or music related to crime and killing, was seen to be putting young people at risk. Parents' behaviour relating to violence and drugs becomes normalised in the family and children do not have the best role models. Philip and Tungu also pointed out that some parents give poor directions to their children. In addition, parents fail to control children's behaviour and fail to appropriately reward or punish their children. It is disheartening, that all criminals or offenders were born into one family or the other.

In another dimension, Ulo and Jike (2022) opined that materialistic family values and get-rich-quick syndrome appear to be the major factors fuelling crime among youths. Oyinlola (2022) allured that many families have failed in performing their major role of protection, provision for their members, socializing their members and ensuring they conform to the socially acceptable patterns of behaviour in society, thereby increasing the rate of adolescent crime in society.

Religious Intolerance

Furthermore, religious intolerance has also been considered as one of the causes of crime among youths. The relationship between religion and crime is not however as straightforward. Religion could serve, and has indeed served as an instrument of social harmony in many civilisations. Paradoxically, however, it has also served as a motivation for violence, hence its indication in some literature as a 'double-edged sword. Srijan (2022) stated that religion and crime are linked both positively and negatively. Instead of imparting fear of hellfire or guilt, religion gains power over the individual as a community component and influences its adherents. Even though millions of people are utterly unaware of this, hundreds of crimes are perpetrated every day tied to religion. He said criminals have been engaged in religious activities from time to time. In addition, recent incidents of religious-based violence have occurred across the globe. Hiteshi (2022) averred that in the name of religion many great and fine deeds have been performed. In the name of religion also, thousands and millions have been killed, and every possible crime has been committed. He said conflicts between adherents of different religions that arise for a variety of reasons frequently result in individuals committing acts of hatred which result in crime. Religious crimes are prevalent worldwide, from Islamic countries to communist countries, even to the so-called secular countries. In the Northern part of Nigeria, for instance, the current place of 'Almajiri' (Islamic students) tradition is a prime example of religious-motivated youth crime. This age-long and acceptable Islamic religious practice has been abused in recent times. Macpherson (2023) attested that the concept of almajiri has since outlived its purpose and the original aim of introducing the practice has long

been defeated, as these children roam the streets, constituting public nuisance and consequently are predisposed to antisocial conducts thereby inadvertently making themselves ever readily available 'sophisticated weapons' of terror. Because they are exposed to criminogenic needs and factors and are routinely found or reside in deviant/criminal neighbourhoods where there is an absence of capable guardianship, these particular children become suitable targets of being recruited into terrorism and other criminal activities as kidnapping, armed robbery, religious wars, and so on. This calls for serious concern among political leaders since ethno-religious crimes have affected Nigeria's economy, which has drifted into depression. There has been wanton loss of lives and properties, and general human degradation, hopelessness, famine, arson, food insecurities, poor qualities of live and general social economic imbalance in the nation.

Ethnicity

One of the causes of crime is ethnic conflict which leads to ethnic violence. Ethnicity itself is not the primary cause of crime. While ethnic differences can be a factor, it is the underlying political, economic and social dynamics that create the conditions for crime. Ethnicity had provided the pattern and potential for the protracted violent ethnic conflicts Nigeria has experienced in the past three decades (Azeez, 2018). Anthony and, Abioye (2019) argued that the ethnic conflicts that have befallen Nigeria since the return to civil rule in 1999 are inbuilt in socio-economic and political management of postcolonial Nigeria. However, with the renewed attempt at entrenching democracy, struggle for political and economic spaces has intensified between and among the various ethnic and political groups, thus making these conflicts inevitable. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung report of 2020 stated further that just like in many developing countries that are highly fractionalized, ethnic crisis ranks amongst many security challenges bedevilling Nigeria, making Nigeria loosely a country at war with itself. This situation magnifies Nigeria's political instability and the efforts of security agencies to address the range of insecurity issues which beyond fractionalization crisis encircle terrorism, banditry, ritual killings, armed robbery and kidnapping. With over 400 ethnic and linguistic groups, Nigeria is arguably one of the world's most ethnically fractionalized countries in the world. Ethnicity accounted for the civil war that ravaged most countries leading to the death and displacement of large number of people. Jones (2022) stated further that the outcome of ethnic violence is private armies, militant leaders and violent political groups that may cause additional harm which can result in separation, fragmentation and destabilization of a country in the long run. These militants and violent political groups rob, maim and rape innocent citizens in order to survive when their pay masters are not able to sufficiently sponsor their activities and cater for their needs.

Ineffectiveness of Security Agencies

Thus, insecurity is rife, Kingsley et. al. (2023) emphasized this by claiming Nigerian security agencies have largely been ineffective, which has led to a colossal amount of insecurity and violence in the country. Ezemenaka (2018) opined that there is a need for alertness, call to order and an overhaul of security institutions in a country where crime precedes security. This, Ezemenaka said is especially true of Nigeria where there are frequent incidences of particular crimes, such as sectarian violence, ethno-religious conflict, political assassination, ransom kidnapping, campus cultism and electoral thuggery to human rights violations. Though The

Nigerian police avow that as an institution, it has arrested over a thousand kidnapping and armed robbery suspects in 2017, but the menace is increasing daily. Armed robbery as a security discourse is not new in Nigeria and its prevalence alongside the strain on security it brings needs to be investigated thoroughly. To an extent, these assertions hold weight, however, it must be noted that the effectiveness of security in the state is a causal effect of the political order. Politicians are not exempt from the ills they have created through armed robbery. The ineffectiveness of Nigerian security leading to the prevalence of crimes such as kidnapping has multi-causal connotations; among these causal variables, corruption is salient in the reasons and explanation of ineffective security.

Unemployment

On the other hand, the alarming increase in youth unemployment is one of the causes of youth crime especially armed robbery. Okafor (2022) observed that unemployment is a global trend, but occurs mostly in developing countries of the world, with attendant social, economic, political, and psychological consequences. Emeh (2012) asserted that unemployment in Nigeria looms large and its concomitant consequences are alarmingly daring, especially as youths are the worst hit. Okafor (2022) in his research endeavors, have brought to the fore that because youths face lack of employment potential and also lack necessary productive skills to keep body and soul together, resultantly, this situation makes crime a more attractive option for so many Nigerian youths. This is because in Nigeria it is common to find some graduates still roaming the streets, five years after graduating in search of jobs that are not there; thereby lending force to crimes such as ethnic conflicts, armed robbery, kidnapping, car snatching, pipeline vandalism, oil bunkering, and prostitution among the youths. This situation poses great challenges to the very existence of individuals in Nigeria thereby calling for the training of men and women who can function effectively in the society in which they live in.

Awogbenle and Iwuamadi (2012) observed that unemployment has become major problem bedeviling the lives of Nigerian youths causing frustration, dejection and dependency on family members and friends. The high rate of unemployment among youths in Nigeria has contributed to the high rate of poverty and insecurity in the country. Onwachukwu (2015) asserted that in recent times, there have been notable adverse social, economic and political developments in Nigeria, a consequence of youth unemployment and underemployment, particularly exemplified by increasing militancy, ethnic conflicts, violent crimes, kidnapping, armed robbery restiveness and political instability. Njoke and Olanipekun (2011) contended that unemployment has been identified as one of the major causes of social vices, including armed robbery, destitution, prostitution, political thuggery, kidnapping and many more. Nwankwo (2014) opined that a depressed labour market makes crime relatively more attractive than work. These social vices may constitute serious security threat to a state and the country in general. Unemployment is one of the most serious problems facing Nigeria like many other countries of the world. In view of this, the country is going through security challenges which call for serious concern.

Poverty

Lastly, poverty is seen as one of the reasons for crime among youths. Orobosa and Odoni (2023) asserted that Nigeria has a high level of poverty among youths hence the increasing crime rate among the youths in their quest for survival as a result of the level misery index of the country.

They stressed further that Nigeria has low Per Capital Income, high rate of poverty and crime; hence there are several socioeconomic challenges alongside crime of various dimensions, such as kidnapping, banditry/armed robbery, burglary, social vices, rituals and Internet fraud etc. Puzzanchera, Hockenberry, and Sickmund, (2022) alluded that exposure to poverty at an early age is linked to crime. They stressed further that research has often supported a connection between poverty and involvement in crime. Youth who grow up in families or communities with limited resources are at a higher risk of offending than those who are raised under more privileged circumstances. Those who are very poor or chronically poor seem to be at an increased risk of serious crime. Ulo and Jike (2022) remarkably stated that some parents have nothing to offer regarding good morals and sometime encourage their children to make wealth not minding the method of it acquisition because of poverty. A child from such home learns whatever he/she likes outside the home from peer groups and such learning can be dangerous. Adejoh, Alabi, Adisa and Emezie (2019) reported that 71% of Nigerian households are poor with the halving of this classified as core poor or very poor. About 77% of the urban and 68% of the rural family is considered poor pointing to the fact that a greater majority of youth criminals are poor.

Crime particularly among youths has continued to gain popularity as many young people are becoming attracted to the act. In fact, many youths in cities and rural areas have embraced crime as a way of life and a means of improving their economic condition, especially as poverty rate continues to soar. Kostadis (2017) examined the relationship between poverty and crime and posited that individuals are more likely to become involved in criminal activity when they experienced a negative income shock. He revealed that deteriorating economic conditions may favour criminal activity and more people are likely to engage in crime as an alternative source of income. Orobosa and Odoni (2023) concluded that poverty is an enemy of man and a multi-dimensional incident that affects many aspects of human conditions, ranging from physical, moral, to the psychological, and has the ability to humiliate and dehumanize its victims.

Njoke and Olanipekun (2011) contended that unemployment has been identified as one of the major causes of social vices, including armed robbery, destitution, prostitution, political thuggery, kidnapping and many more.

Implications of Armed Robbery on Security

Armed robbery has constituted a major security threat to any given society. Gabriel (2017) asserted that unlike their previous modes of operation which used to be at night and often hooded, armed robbers now operate bare-faced in broad day-light. They attack homes, offices, shops, restaurants and churches to rob, rape, maim and kill. They operate on the streets and strike at filling stations and banks while dispossessing their victims of cash and valuables. The incidence of robbery in Nigeria today is so appalling that armed robbers operate on a daily basis, leaving sorrow, tears, and blood in their trail. Armed robbery has continued to permeate the society despite every concerted effort made by both the people and the state to combat it. Thus, this social milieu poses serious security and development challenges to the state and the society at large. According to Umar (2015), armed robbery is one of the most popular crimes in contemporary Nigerian society. It has to do with the unlawful utilization of any form of arms to forcefully deprive innocent people of their legitimate possessions; it is therefore a crime against the Nigerian criminal laws.

There is never a day that cases of robbery attacks are not reported either in the print or electronic media. The very worrisome aspect includes the age bracket of the perpetrators which are mostly youths, the level of brutality during each attack, the varying targets, and the brazen manner in which the attacks are carried. Victims of armed robbery usually suffer certain tremendous negative social and economic consequences. Umar furthered that the problem has successfully imposed a culture and atmosphere of fear, mistrust, and violence in the country. Like many other crimes in Nigeria, armed robbery he said has not been given the desired attention by successive governments. This has resulted in persistent occurrences, and the malicious impact of these persistent occurrences of armed robbery on national security and development constitute serious challenges. Gabriel (2017) lamented that in Nigeria, security measures taken so far by both the Government and public security operatives have failed to control or even reduce crime rate. On the contrary, the crime rate continues to soar to such extent that it beats the imagination of relevant authorities at all levels. Igbin (2022) is of the opinion that Nigeria has remained a violent-ridden nation in the psycho-political map of the world for a number of decades. Armed robbery/banditry is one of the major forms of insecurity that has affected every part of Nigeria for the past decade. Armed robbery has become a harsh reality in today's Nigerian society.

The Nigerian state is grappling with continuous rising incidences of insecurity and repeated pattern of attacks on individuals. The indicators of the prevailing insecurity cases in Nigeria include armed robbery, kidnapping of innocent citizens, human trafficking, religious motivated killings, inter-tribal or communal wars. Igbin opined further that armed robbery is a crime that has been precipitated and sustained by the prevailing socio-existential environment in the rural sector characterized by a high proclivity to criminal indulgence. Madubuegwu and Abah (2023) posited that Nigeria is today ravaged by unabated menace of armed bandits and criminal gangs. The security situation in Nigeria is rapidly deteriorating in alarming scale and intensity. They revealed that in Nigeria, hardly anywhere is safe. Stories of blood attacks appear regularly in the news, so, few people get shocked by them. The northeast, northwest and southeast, play host to messengers of death. But the other three geopolitical zones are not any better. Sadly, it appears that the government and state security machineries were overwhelmed or perhaps oblivious of the bloodletting, agony and misery of Nigerians. The pervasive armed banditry and its associated threats to human security in Nigeria have become a subject of national security and public concern. The multifaceted layers of criminality involved, and recurrent nature of the armed banditry call for effective mechanisms to mitigate the threat it poses to peace and security in the affected states. Armed robbery is a criminal act that constitutes serious threat to national security. It is one of the organized crimes through which many people have lost their lives; for instance, the armed robbery incidents in Offa in Kwara State, Oye-Ekiti in Ekiti State and Ikire in Osun State. Also, Aja in Lagos State and Akure in Ondo State have had their own records of armed robbery. Many innocent souls have fallen victim of armed robbers and properties worth millions of Naira were lost. Some financial institutions have resorted to sketchy services to avert menace of armed robbers (Haruna, Ochigbo & Agbor, 2022). Haruna et. al. (2022) carried out a research on reported cases of armed robbery between 2015 and 2021. The research revealed that there has been an increase in the number of armed robbery cases reported to the police with 21.30% in 2021 from 10.61% in 2015. This reveals a decline on national security. Abdulrasheed (2020) averred that Nigeria has been facing multiple crises since independence. He said a review of the Nigerian Fourth Republic quickly portrays the

nation with uncertainty, as many Nigerians are apprehensive of what the future of the country might be. This is as a result of series of threats and attacks that have been ravaging the nation in recent time. Abdulrasheed stated further that with the proliferation of arms and ammunitions gaining entrants into the country on daily basis, it becomes glaringly clear that insurgents are emerging in different parts of the country. This also has resulted in armed robberies, kidnapping and rising trend in ethno-religious conflicts across the countries among others. Over the years, emerging forms of human, social and political organizations have stimulated necessity for the protection and safety of the individual, family, community and the nation. As threats become incessant and recurrence on daily basis, insecurity emerged as the dominant fear of human beings. Insecurity in the present circumstance arose out of social and political contradictions such as the crisis of legitimacy, autonomy and sovereignty. From the foregoing, armed robbery can be said to be a very serious threat to security not only in Nigeria but the world over.

Curbing the Menace of Armed Robbery

The use of advanced equipment particularly firearms like pistols, AK 47, short guns and violent force to coerce suspecting victims into submitting their valuables such as cash, phones, trinkets, electronics and others is the characteristic of armed robbery. It is indeed a fact that armed robbery has constituted a major security threat to any given society. From the reasons advanced in this work as causes of armed robbery, curbing the menace requires a multi-pronged approach. It requires combining proactive law enforcement, technology, and community involvement. Some of these effective strategies include:

- i.Reducing the means – Tackling proliferation of illegal firearms and restricting access to weapons can go a long way in curbing armed robbery in any given society. It has to do with the unlawful utilization of any form of arms to forcefully deprive innocent people of their legitimate possessions. These illegal firearms are major weapons used by robbers to coerce victims into handing over their cash and other belongings. These weapons, though meant for security, gets into wrong hands that use them for criminal activities. Ordinarily, if any individual forcefully enters a house to rob without a lethal weapon, the occupants will put in a fight to over-power him.
- ii. Community-based intelligence – In the case of ineffectiveness of security agencies, local community leaders and residents should be engaged to identify, monitor, and report suspected criminals within their communities without their identities revealed. These community leaders and members know those that have questionable characters in their communities and can easily monitor and track them.
- iii. Intelligence-led policing and surveillance – As a result of corruption, security agencies are poorly equipped to fight crime. Utilizing drones, CCTV, and other gadgets with the help of intelligence gathering will enable security agencies to be proactive rather than reactive. This will also help security agents to aggressively patrol high-risk areas.
- iv. Addressing the root causes of armed robbery – Addressing socio-economic and political factors such as unemployment, ethnicity, poverty, can help deter youths from engaging in armed robbery. Unemployment has become major problem bedeviling the lives of Nigerian youths causing frustration, dejection and dependency on family members and friends. The high rate of unemployment among youths in Nigeria has contributed to the high rate of poverty and insecurity in the country. In recent times, there have been notable adverse social, economic and political developments in Nigeria, a consequence of youth unemployment and

underemployment, particularly exemplified by increasing militancy, ethnic conflicts, violent crimes, kidnapping, armed robbery restiveness and political instability. Unemployment has been identified as one of the major causes of social vices, including armed robbery. A depressed labour market makes crime relatively more attractive than work.

Poverty is also seen as one of the root causes of criminal activities among youths. Nigeria has a high level of poverty among youths hence the increasing crime rate among the youths in their quest for survival. The Nigerian government should therefore be proactive in tackling the high unemployment rate especially among youths by equipping them with necessary productive skills to keep body and soul together.

v. Government policies - Government at all levels must be proactive in policy making and implementation to tackle the problem of ethnic conflict, religious intolerance, marginalization and so on which to a large extent are triggers of disenchantment and subsequently crime, especially among youths.

Conclusion

This study examined the effect of armed robbery on security in Nigeria through the review of relevant materials. The study concludes that security in Nigeria is greatly hampered by criminal activities of youths of which armed robbery is one. The study revealed that the root causes of armed robbery among youths include unemployment, poverty, and ethnic conflict which must be tackled at all levels of government through proactive policies making and implementation. Local community leaders and residents should be engaged to identify, monitor, and report suspected criminals within their communities. The use of drones, CCTV, and other gadgets should be introduced to help in intelligence gathering so as to enable security agencies to be proactive rather than reactive.

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