Barriers to Effective Community Policing For Public Security in Imo State Nigeria

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Abstract
This work examined the 'Barriers to effective community policing for public security in Imo State, Nigeria, because the level of insecurity of lives and property is increasing in recent times. This raging scourge threatens the nation's socioeconomic progress and therefore undermines the very fabric of Nigerian society. Community policing is one of the strategies adopted by the Nigerian government to address this ugly menace. It is regarded as an effective strategy for controlling crime. However, in recent times achieving this goal seems to be difficult as Nigeria, particularly Imo State, experiences rising cases of insecurity. Given the increasing level of insecurity in different parts of Nigeria, one wonders what could be the barriers to effective community policing toward achieving its goal, particularly in Imo State. Understanding barriers to effective community policing would be germane, given that such information would be very resourceful for effective community policing intervention policies and actions. Yet not many empirical studies have been conducted to address the problem in the study area, leading to the paucity of evidence-based information in current literature. It is to fill this research gap that this study investigated barriers to effective community policing toward achieving public security in rural communities of Imo State. The study was a cross-sectional survey that employed a mixed-method approach to collect the data. The sample size was derived through Cochran's sample size formula for an infinite population. To expound the data gathered through the questionnaire, a qualitative approach was used and the analysis was presented in a narrative form. The analysis of quantitative data was done using percentages and charts while the hypothesis was tested using the spearman correlation test. The study found, among others, that there is a significant and positive relationship between the level of funding, and level of effectiveness of community policing, and factors such as the inadequate provision of work materials, poor remuneration, and undue government interference are the main factors limiting the effectiveness of community policing in the study area. The researchers, therefore, recommend, among others, that improved funding, provision of work materials, and peaceful collaboration between the government and communities, among others will improve the level of effectiveness of community policing in Imo State, Nigeria.
Key words: Community policing, Barriers, Public Security, Rural Community, Imo State

I.   Introduction

Nigeria is currently witnessing incidences of insecurity ranging from armed robbery attacks, kidnapping, human trafficking, Boko Haram, political assassinations, religious crisis, militancy, and vandalization of oil facilities to the activities of Fulani herdsmen and unknown gunmen, among other security vices. This is a worrisome situation in that it not only constitutes a threat to lives and property but is also inimical to the nation's socio-economic development. As the rate of social insecurity is scaling up, both the government and communities search for more efficient and effective ways to combat the scourge to promote public safety. Among the mechanisms instituted within the country to deal with this growing incidence of insecurity is community policing. Currently, community policing in Imo state appears in different forms, namely Vigilante Group, Eastern Security Network, and *Ebubeagu*. However, the Vigilante Group is the first instituted form of security outfit established by the government and the most widely accepted by the indigenes before the introduction of other groups.

The Vigilante Group of Nigeria is the foremost Community Policing Organization in Nigeria which practically involves community members in security decisions and efforts. The word 'Vigilante' is a universal word that refers to people who respond to growing crime rates and insecurity in their communities and decide to keep watch and vigilance to protect lives and property (Ayisire, 2017). In his words, the objective of VGN is to promote community policing, crime control, prevention, and protection of lives and property in Nigeria.

Community policing according to Ayisire, (2017) is the collaboration between the Police and community members that identify security challenges in their neighborhood/communities and proffers workable solutions. It is a policy and a strategy aimed at achieving more effective and efficient crime control, reduced fear of crime, improved quality of life, improved police services, and police legitimacy, through a proactive reliance on community resources that seeks to change crime-causing conditions (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1994). It differs from traditional policing in that members of the community are involved in security decisions and are at the centre point of all efforts at policing (Ikuteyijo, 2009). This strategy assumes a need for greater accountability of police, greater public share in decision-making, and greater concern for civil rights and liberties (Friedmann, 1992). Because community members are more likely to understand where and when a crime is taking place as well as who the criminals are, their partnership with the police in addressing crime and security issues is considered to be effective (Friedmann, 1992; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2008; Law Teacher, 2013; and Ayisere, 2017). Its importance therefore cannot be undermined.

Security refers to the protection of lives and property against threats, harm, or any form of attack. Public security is defined as the degree of resistance to, or protection from harm that applies to any vulnerable and or valuable asset, such as a person, dwelling, community, item, nation, or organization (Wikipedia, n.d). It is a process that promotes public peace and order. Scholars (Friedmann, 1992; Kasali and Odetola, 2016) have generally acknowledged that public security can be achieved by the effectiveness of the police and other law enforcement agencies. This is also determined by the level of collaboration between these agencies and the citizens.

In Imo State, various types of crime which threaten the safety of the citizens exist, irrespective of the existence of various security agencies, including the Vigilante group. For instance, crime statistics released by the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2016) indicates that between 2013 and 2015, stealing, with a figure of 110,303 (male and female) topped the list of offenses in Imo State, followed, in descending order, by armed robbery with a figure of 26,974 (male and female) and robbery with 24,601 (male and female).

In recent times, cases of armed robbery, kidnapping, ritual killing, violent attacks, and raping, among others are increasingly reported in Imo State. Considering this growing rate of security challenges in the State, even with the presence of community policing, it becomes expedient to investigate the barriers to the effectiveness of community policing.

Despite the increasing rate of these ugly incidents, so far few empirical studies (e.g Ofole and Odetola, n.d.; Obasi, Kanu, and Ugwu 2022) have been conducted to unveil the barriers to the effectiveness of community policing in the State. Most existing literature (Okeshola and Mudiare, 2013; Gbeneme and Adishi, 2017; Ngwu and Ahuruonye 2017) are theoretically-based and are therefore inconclusive as to provide the required information. Moreover, in Imo State, apart from the study by Obasi et al, (2022), no other study has empirically examined barriers to the effectiveness of community policing in Imo State in recent times.

The study by Obasi et al, (2022) found that the level of funding was associated with the level of effectiveness of community policing, in the 3 major cities studied, namely Orlu, Okigwe, and Owerri. Arguably, much is yet to be uncovered, because the study focused only on a few communities with functional community policing (Vigilante group), thus excluding those communities where this approach was previously functional but presently inactive. There is therefore a need to adopt a more comprehensive approach that will create more insights into factors that limit the effectiveness or that cause the inactivity of community policing in Imo State. This study is an attempt to fill this research gap, and by extension provide evidence-based information that can strengthen community policing as well as guide effective security intervention policies in the area and even beyond.

The main objective of this study was to empirically examine community policing and identify barriers to its effectiveness in achieving public security in Imo State.
Specifically, the study investigated: the
1.   socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents
2.   level of effectiveness of community policing in maintaining public security in rural communities of Imo State in recent times.
3.   barriers to the effectiveness of community policing in rural communities of Imo State in recent times.
4.   level of funding of community policing in Imo State in recent times.

The study hypothesized that:
There is a significant relationship between the level of funding and the level of effectiveness of Community policing in rural communities of Imo State

II.   Literature Review

The Concept of Community Policing

Community policing, which originated in the United States in the '80s involves the synergy or collaborative efforts of local communities and police to safeguard lives and property (Wong, 2009 cited in Kasali and Odetola, 2016). It ideally involves indigenous members of the community concerned participating in security matters of their community. Udoma (2017) defines community policing as a social contract between members of the public and the police. Wrobleski and Hess (2003) cited in Gbeneme and Adishe, (2017), define community policing as "an organization-wide philosophy and management approach that promotes community government, and police partnership; proactive problem solving and community engagement to address the causes of crime and other community issues.

Community policing in Nigeria came into existence in Nigeria in 2004 (Ibrahim, Saleh, and Murkhatar, 2016). The introduction of community policing in Nigeria was justified, given that Nigeria was grossly under-policed (Ayisere, 2017). Ibrahim et al (2016) posited that the adoption of community policing was due to the belief that the traditional policing approach has failed in crime control and that the police institution lacks legitimacy within the public they serve. The community policing approach is therefore believed to be more effective in curbing crime and promoting public safety in communities and thereby making

the police more

responsive and connected to the communities they serve (the Law Teacher 2013; Onuoha , Ekpechu, and Arua, 2021). This approach is also expected to improve police-community relations, which the traditional method failed to achieve.

However, with the persistent security challenges in Imo State despite the presence of community policing, the question that remains unanswered today is, why has this security outfit failed to achieve its goal, given the rising wave of crime in the area?

Cross Cultural evaluation of Community Policing

Community policing exists across cultures in different forms but with a similar philosophy. Dominique and Ihekwoaba, (2008) stated that community policing is ubiquitous in Africa, Latin America, and China. The general philosophy of community policing is the protection of lives and property. Nevertheless, it has been evaluated differently across societies. In Kenya, for example, Ruteere and Pommerolle (2003) noted that community policing is characterized by ambiguities in its conceptualization and may in practice operate to reinforce undemocratic and oppressive structures. Morgenthau (1990) condemned community policing based on its high cost, frustrating effect on the police and community dramatic change in the way the officers are to be trained. In Nigeria, Ofole and Odetola (n.d.) focused on perceptions of the impact of community policing on crime control in Ibeju-Lekki Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria**,** and found that it had a positive impact on crime control in the area. Ikuteyijo (2009) studied the challenges of community policing in Nigeria and observed that factors such as interference by some powerful members of the society, inertia by corrupt police officials, financial constraints, and the unpleasant image of the police were among the factors inhibiting its effectiveness.

Despite the enormous criticisms against community policing, many other writers, particularly in developed societies, still, extol this approach.

For instance, the success of community policing was documented in several works, such as in Mastrofski and Warden (1995), the United States National Institute of Justice (1992) in Seattle, Washington; Bayley (1989) in Singapore; and The United States National Institute of Justice (1995) in Chicago" all cited in Ferreira, (1996). In addition, many writers justified the need to have and promote community policing based on several factors, such as the advantage of local inputs in terms of ideas, personnel, and other resources (Ren, Cao, Lovrich, and Gaffney 2005), police-community synergy (Sykes, 1978), incapability of the conventional police to handle all security problems alone in a given community (Aboh, 2021), as well as its emphasis on problem-solving and proactive approach in dealing with security challenges of communities (Tylor and Fritsch, 1998). Based on the foregoing, one would argue that community policing has the potential to combat crime in Imo State but with evidence-based intervention needs.

Barriers to the Implementation of Community Policing

Barriers to effective community policing may vary as much as the approaches or the application strategies. In Nigeria, Ikuteyijo (2009) states that the problem of effectiveness and efficiency of community policing can be attributed to the "interference of some 'powerful' members of society, inertia on the part of some corrupt police officials who want the status quo to be maintained, financial constraints, and the unpleasant image of the police." Ordu and Nnam (2017) are of the view that barriers to community policing are many and include bribery and corruption, selective enforcement of the law, negative public perception of the police, lack

of trust and confidence, poor and inadequate manpower, and 'godfatherism'. Other barriers, highlighted by Otu and Aro (2013), are partisanship, constitutional loopholes, and lack of transparency and accountability. Ibrahim, Saleh, and Murkhtar (2016); Aboh and Ogunkayode (2021) posited that corruption, the police working conditions, poor remunerations, the level of public trust and disenchantment with the operations of the police, lack of public cooperation, the unpleasant relationship between informal or non-state policing (vigilantes) and the police are among the challenges limiting the effectiveness of community policing. Obasi et al (2022) found that inadequate funding, lack of improved security gadgets, and poor communication between the community and police are among the greatest barriers to its effectiveness. Ordu and Nnam (2017), posited that "Maintaining a good relationship between the police and the community remains the primary means of overcoming the barrier in information gathering and dissemination, which gives rise to effective community policing."

Theoretical Framework
The Functionalist theory

The functionalist theory forms the framework of the study. For the functionalists, the social system is maintained through value consensus and this is what links individuals in society. On this pedestal, there is a consensus on the need for the protection of lives and property to improve the quality of life of the general public. A society without security will suffer extinction.

Functional indispensability implies that societies or groups will cease to exist if some vital functions are not performed. This supports the idea behind the establishment of community policing for the maintenance of functionality and social stability. Functional prerequisites which are aspects of functional indispensability can help us to understand the need for the establishment and use of community policing to protect lives and property to achieve social stability. For instance, the essence of integration of community policing is to ensure the achievement and maintenance of social and emotional stability of individuals and groups in society. Incidentally, this is within the ambit of security outfits such as the vigilante groups formed in Nigeria.

Adaptation as a postulate of functionalist theory entails the process of securing sufficient facilities such as funds, material and technical resources to solve the security of a given social group. The mobilization of these resources by a group to provide its needed security for the preservation of lives and property of members is therefore accounted for by this postulate.

III. Methodology

The study was a cross-sectional survey that lasted for 9 months in 18 communities of Imo State in 2021. The 3 geo-political zones in Imo State were covered. A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted to select the study communities. In the first stage, a proportionate but random sampling technique was employed to select 4 local government areas from Orlu, 3 from Owerri, and 2 from Okigwe. This gave a total of 9 LGAs covered. In the second stage, a random sampling technique was used to select 2 communities from each of the selected LGAs, giving a total of 18 communities involved in the study. The technique used to derive the sample size was Cochran's formula for determining sample size for an infinite population, which is given as n= Z2 (pq)/ e2 where n = sample size, Z = standard error (1.64), p= standard deviation (0.6), confidence level = (90%), q = 1-p, and e = +/-4%. This gave a total of 605 copies of the questionnaire administered. The participants were selected through an accidental sampling technique. However, informed consent was obtained before involvement in the study. In the end, a total of 597 copies of the questionnaire were found valid for the analysis. The variables that were examined include the demographic characteristics of the participants, the levels of effectiveness and funding of community policing, barriers to the effectiveness of community policing, and community-preferred intervention needs for the effective functioning of community policing. Furthermore, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with community leaders and members of Vigilante Groups, as well as Focus Group Discussions with community members, taking into consideration such characteristics as age, gender, and socioeconomic status, for more detailed information. In all, a total of 6 sessions of in-depth interviews and a session of FGD, comprising 8 persons per group, were held in each of the communities sampled. These gave a total of 108 participants for the in-depth interviews and 144 participants for the FGDs. Each in-depth interview lasted for 50-55 minutes while each session of the FGD lasted for 2 hours. The quantitative data were analysed using Bar charts and Spearman rank order correlation, while the qualitative data were analyzed through a thematic approach.

IV.   Results and Discussions

Figure 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the Respondents
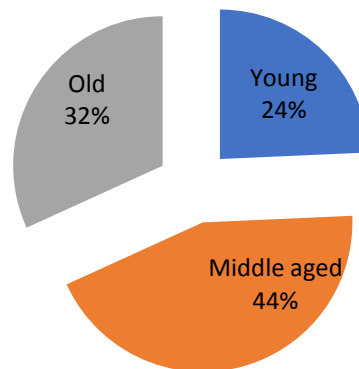
Gender
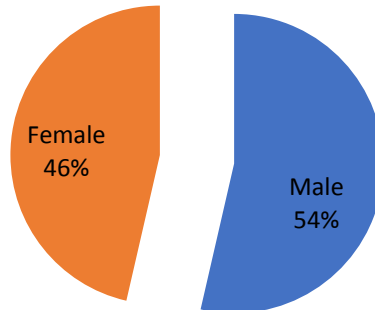
The result of the study in figure 1 shows that more males, 54%, than females 46% were involved in the study.

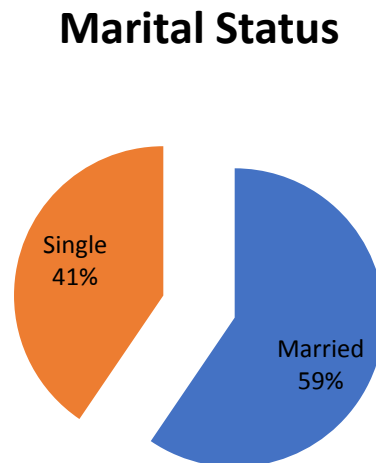**Figure 2 The age category of the respondents**

Age category

The result of the study in figure 2 shows that in terms of age category, a greater proportion, 44%, of the respondents were the middle-aged, 32 % were elderly persons, while the least, 24%, belonged to the youth category.

Figure 3 Marital Status of the Respondents

Marital Status

The result of the study in figure 3 above suggests that more married, 59%, than single, 41%, were involved in the study.

Figure 4 Shows Result of Level of Effectiveness of CP in Rural Communities of Imo State

Level of effectiveness of Community Policing Strategy
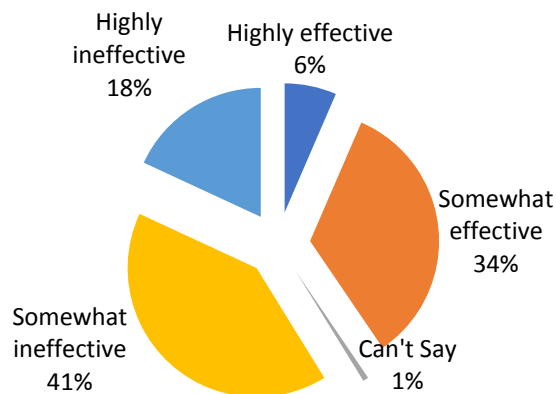
The result of the study shows that a greater proportion, (41%), of the respondents, affirmed the ineffectiveness of community policing in maintaining security in the area, followed by 34 % who perceived community policing as being effective. Furthermore, 18% of the respondents rated community policing as highly ineffective while only 6% of the respondents believed it is highly effective in maintaining security. In Other words, communities that experienced effective community policing are far fewer than those that experienced its ineffectiveness.

The result of the finding is consistent with Obasi et al (2022) who observed that the level of effectiveness of community policing in Imo State is low.

This was also confirmed by the result of the field note from the IDIs and FGDs. When asked to assess the effectiveness of community policing in reducing crime in the community, even though there were divergent views across communities, most of the participants in the interviews affirmed that it was ineffective. This was captured in one of the excerpts from a female participant, who stated that;

This community is not safe. We witness criminal activities from time to time. Last week there was a case of kidnapping in the nearby community and there were gunshots even in our community. People are living in fear these days because they don't know when and where it will happen next.

Another male participant revealed that:

The level of crime in our community is getting worse, we hear about kidnapping, unknown gunmen, ritual killing, and other criminal activities from time to time. Even though our community police are trying, they have not been able to reduce these problems. Something needs to be done about this, people are living in fear.

However, there were few communities in which many participants reported the effectiveness of community policing. This was captured in a comment made by a female participant thus:

This community has no security problems. There are rare cases of robbery, kidnapping, shooting, and killing. I would say that community policing is effective in controlling crime. Our vigilante people (Community police) are trying in terms of crime control in our community. People move freely and everywhere is calm because they are active and bad people fear them.

From the foregoing, therefore, one could safely conclude that the level of effectiveness of community policing varies from community to community

Figure 5: Result showing barriers to effective CP in rural communities of Imo State
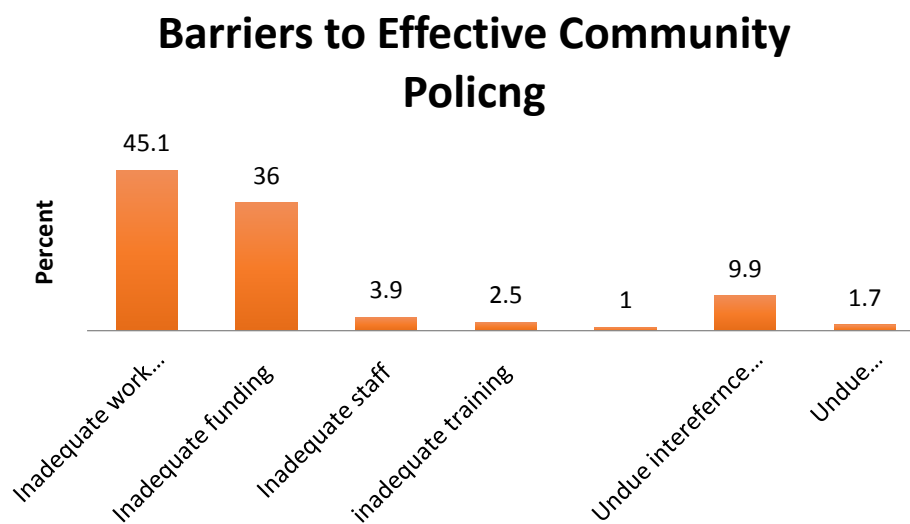
The result of the study in figure 5 above reveals that inadequacy of work materials was the highest (45.1%), among the factors that limit the effectiveness of Community Policing. The next common factors mentioned by a considerable number of the respondents include inadequate remuneration (36%), and undue interference by the government/politicians (9.9%). However, other factors mentioned by an insignificant proportion of the respondents which cannot be ignored include; inadequate workforce (3.9%), inadequate CP training (2.5%), undue interference of the Nigerian Police force (1.7%) as well as lack of cooperation among Community police members (1.0%).

This finding is in agreement with the findings of Ibrahim, Saleh, and Mukhtar (2016) and Aboh and Ogunkayode (2021) who observed that corruption, police working conditions, poor remunerations, level of public trust and disenchantment with the operations of the police, lack of public cooperation, the unpleasant relationship between informal or non-state policing (vigilantes) and the police are among the challenges limiting the effectiveness of community policing.

From the reports of the IDIs and FGDs, the common view about barriers to effective community policing were inadequate work materials and poor funding.

This was highlighted by a community police member in one of the communities studied:

Most of us are family members, you can't bring us out of our homes to protect the community and leave us without giving us something good enough to take care of our families. I have family responsibilities so you don't expect me to go out working for the community when I'm not paid and my family suffers. If I have enough money to drop for my family, I am ready to answer whenever and wherever I am called.

Another Community police member complained thus:

How do you expect us to work without enough money and security devices? We don't have any vehicle to move around, no better tools to challenge criminals who strike with sophisticated machines, and no means of proper communication among members and between members and the community. What we have are just a torch and handcuff. We can't perform a miracle to control high-level criminal activities.

However, some participants also reported that how the community police members were selected caused the ineffectiveness of community policing. This was captured in the report from one of the participants thus:

The problem we have currently regarding community policing is that members of CP were selected without the knowledge and consent of community leaders, such attitude breeds mistrust and a lack of collaboration between us and those who should protect us. How can we collaborate with people who are imposed on us? The boys behave as they like and the communities have nothing to do about that.

A similar view was captured in the comment by another participant in another community who said:

The community police don't do what they are expected to do. They behave as they like because they believe the *community did not employ them. We do not know whether they are working or not. Some of them are not even well known to us because they are non-indigenes of our community. In the past when the community leaders use to select members of the community police, they were very active and the security in the community was tight. Then everywhere use to be calm, because these guys are members of the community and they know the criminals, and even how and where they operate better than the Mopols. They care about protecting their families and relations, unlike other security agents who sometimes show nonchalant attitudes because they are outsiders.*

According to one of the community leaders:

One of the problems we have here is imposing people on us to protect our community. It is not going to work. It will be very difficult for the community police to perform well when they are selected from above. It will also be difficult for the leaders to support them in terms of resources if they are imposed on us.

On the part of the Community Police, in addition to mentioning resource constraints and poor remuneration, they also complained of intimidation by NPF and incompetence of some of the CP members which shows the need for occasional training.

Figure 6: Result showing the level of funding of CP in rural communities of Imo State
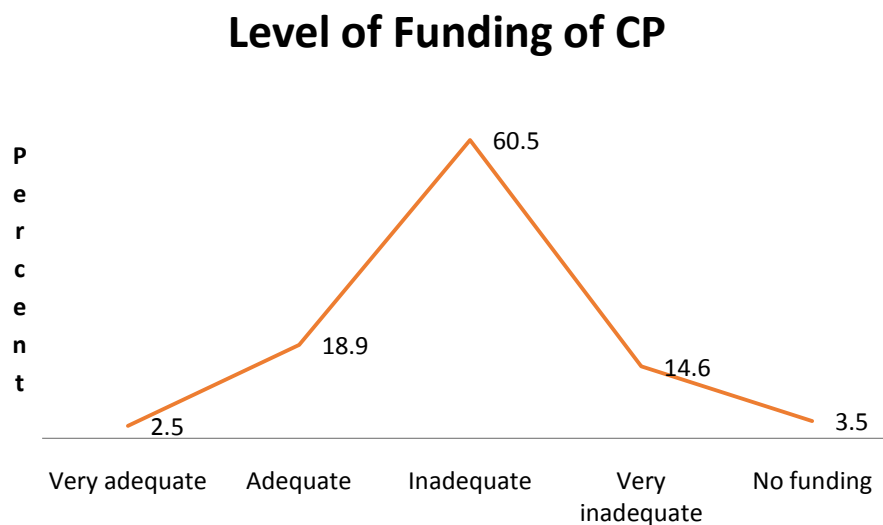
Level of Funding of CP

Figure 6 above, shows that overall, a greater proportion, 75.1%, of the respondents reported their community policing was inadequately funded while only 21.4% believed the level of funding of CP was adequate. However, an insignificant proportion, 3.5%, of the respondents indicated that their CP was not funded at all.
This finding is consistent with the findings of Obasi et al (2022) that the level of funding for community policing in Imo State is low.

From the expressions of many participants in IDI and FGD, many believed that community police were not well paid.

This was encapsulated by one of the CP participants thus:
The security men are ready to work but the problem is that they are not well paid. Sometimes we are not paid at all and we are not even sure of where we will go and ask for our salary. Sometimes the community members are asked to contribute what they can to pay us, and sometimes nobody contributes because things are hard.

One could therefore conclude that the level of funding of CP is inadequate in Imo State. This suggests the need to improve financial investment in Community Policing and increase the salary of members.

Figure 4: Result showing preferred intervention for effective community policing in rural communities of Imo State

Community Prefered Intervention Needs
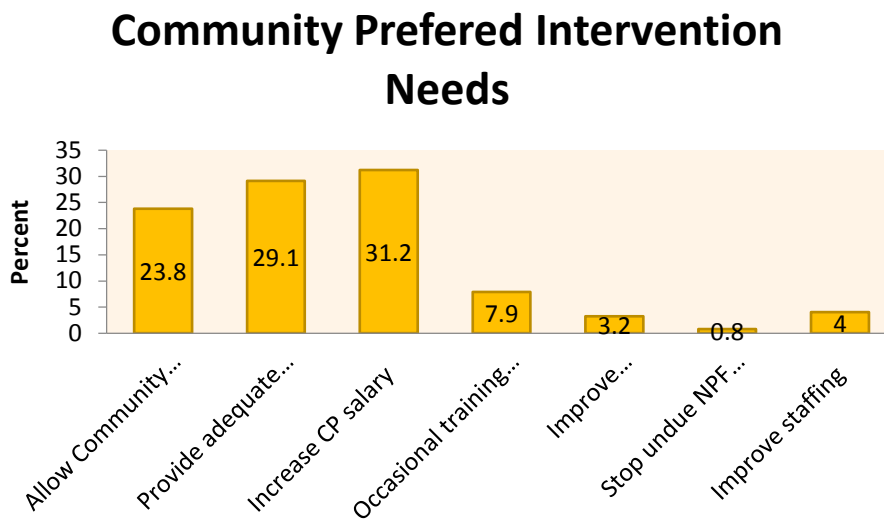
From the result in figure 7 above, the majority, 31.2%, of the participants mentioned the need for improved remuneration of Community Police, 29.1%, indicated the need to provide adequate work materials, 23.8%, suggested that communities should be allowed to choose their members of community police. Other needs mentioned, though by a small proportion of the respondents include the need to provide occasional training (7.9%), the need to increase the workforce (4%), promote CP-Community relationship (3.2%), and the need to stop NPF interference (0.8%). This result is in line with the reports from the FGDs held in different communities.

However, from the reports of the IDIs, the most frequently mentioned intervention need as identified by many of the KPIs was the need to let community members choose their security members.

On the other hand, many of the members of community police who participated in the In-depth interview believed that increase in wages, and provision of adequate security gadgets were the more intervention needs for improving performance.

Table 8: Result of Spearman correlations showing relationship between level of funding, Nature of community-community police relationship and level of effectiveness of community policing

Correlations			Level of Funding of Community Policing	Effectiveness of Community Policing
Spearman's rho	Level of Funding of Community Policing	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.497**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	597	597
	Effectiveness of Community	Correlation Coefficient	.497**	1.000

| | Policing | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | . |
| | | N | 597 | 597 |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From the correlation table above, the hypothesis which states that there is a significant relationship between the level of funding and the level of community policing effectiveness was accepted. [r (1) = .497, P < 0.01]. This means that the level of effectiveness is significantly related to the level of funding for community policing. In other words, the higher the funding, the more effective the community policing will be in maintaining public security in Imo State.

V. Conclusion

The level of effectiveness of Community policing towards reducing crime in most parts of Imo State has proved to be unsatisfactory. This is attributed to several factors, the most important being resource constraints, which include inadequate operation materials and poor remuneration. Other barriers mentioned by the respondents include undue interference by the government, inadequate workforce, and lack of training. It is evident from the result of the correlation analyses that the more adequate the funding, the more effective community policing would be in achieving public security in Imo State.

VI. Recommendations

Community police should be provided with adequate, and necessary security materials (such as vehicles, smartphones, walkie-talkies, batons, whistles, and hand-cuff among others) necessary for effective performance.

Community police should be adequately compensated with sustainable wages to motivate them to improve their performance.

The government and political elites should desist from undue interferences such as imposing members of community policing on community members. The communities should rather be allowed to select reliable and trusted indigenes as their community police.

Communities that lack community police should be adequately staffed and there is a need to provide occasional training to improve Community Police performance.

The limitation of the study

It is worthy of note that the fieldwork coincided with the time Imo State was having serious security challenges. Consequently, the researchers had to postpone the fieldwork several times, and data collection was done intermittently, targeting whenever the tense situation would calm down.

The frequent attack of unknown gunmen at the time of the study created fear and security tension throughout the state. Based on the situation on the ground, there was public skepticism about the existence and functionality of any form of policing in the state which would have rendered the study void. Given this scenario, the researchers had to reframe the data collection instruments to cover not only the current knowledge but also previous knowledge of community policing in the area.

Many community members were also skeptical about participating in the study for fear of indictment or sanction by the authorities, thinking that the researchers were spies sent by the government to obtain secret information that would affect them negatively. It, therefore, took much effort to convince the subjects that the study was purely academic rather than political.

Another limitation worthy of note is the nature of the data collection instrument, the use of a non-standardized instrument that captured perceptions only rather than objective measurement of the variables could be misleading. Moreover, no cause-and-effect relationship can be established with the type of data generated, the study provides only correlational information. Therefore there is a need for further study to consider these limitations.

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