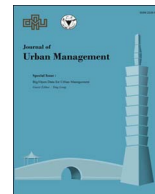




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Case Essay

A comparative study of urban crime between Malaysia and Nigeria[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Urbanization has created numerous social problems, among which is crime that became a common phenomenon to all urban areas in both developed and developing nations. Recent unimaginable levels of the world urbanization coincides with rise in urban crimes in many parts of the world, as the rate of unemployment had been on the increase and coupled with increased poverty among the urban poor. Nature of crime is not uniform but varies from one geographical region to another. In some areas, property crime is more common while in others, crime on person (violent) is prevalent. Crime is not being plagued by a singular factor anywhere it occurred, there are variant factors that influence criminal activities. However, key factors that persuade criminal behaviours of potential offenders includes: unemployment, poverty, bad governance and weaknesses in law enforcement or crime-control agencies. These four key factors were discussed in this paper with hope of bringing out nature of urban crimes that bedevilled properties and people safety for taking management and prevention measures.

1. Introduction

Urbanization is a process whereby towns grow naturally or through migration and their societies become urban. Urbanization happens as the result of people migrating into urban areas seeking economic opportunities and improving their living conditions, especially in the developing countries. This is because urban areas have most of the facilities and employment corridors provided to make life more comfortable. This phenomenon developed rapidly, particularly in Africa and Asian sub-regions where people from neglected rural areas migrate to the urban areas expecting employment and better living conditions. Heyer (1981), Knight and Gunatilaka (2007) stated that a migrant takes into account the probability of obtaining a desired urban employment at any time. In another study, Soh (2012) supported the idea that it is in urban areas where all the facilities are well built to make human life more comfortable, and the main attraction of urban is easy access to wealth. Harris and Todaro (1970) described it as “proceeds in response to urban-rural differences in expected earning”. Although, in certain cases, many urban immigrants assumed they will secure employment, when usually it is not the case. Instead, they meet a cost of living that is much higher or rather difficult than that of their experience back in rural areas.

Impulsive crime also takes place in areas where there are high population densities, swift changes in social environments and poor living conditions. For instance, many immigrants in urban areas experience new urban life where relationship is based on momentary, superficial and impersonal interactions. This then produce anonymity among urban dwellers, diabolical socio-economic, high cost of living and socially disorganized, thereby turning some to steal, rob, become drunkards, drug pushers and

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prostitutes to make ends meet. This idea is supported by [Soh \(2012\)](#), who states that “secondary relations eventually lead to family breakup, alcoholism, crime, and other negative aspects of urban life”. Although he further clarified that, ‘urban life does not automatically lead to social disorganization, but it does increase the opportunities to be exposed to deviance and negative effects on one’s behaviour as there are many promoters of such acts, or else when the condition warrants it. Therefore some other factors cause urban crimes in all its ramifications other than urbanization.

Urban areas are regarded as centres of opportunities that have become engines for economic growth, centres of diversity and changes. In urban areas the residents live, work and interact within their confined physical environment, matching up with criminal prospects rendered themselves within these same confined environments which instilled fear into the minds of many. Criminal activities have no respect and barrier to people’s socio-economic status and at all stages of civilization. In recent decades crime has become a universal phenomenon in its varying forms in all cultures. Prevalent of crime in urban areas make it seen as a space of geographical fear for many and the fear is not restricted to one’s age, class, gender or race. Urban stability and sustainability has been connected to safety of securing and policing of urban areas. Issues of personal safety and security became linked with urban ‘liveability’ and ‘quality of life’ and addressing crime has become a significant benchmark for a city’s quality of life ([England & Simon, 2010](#); [Tretter, 2013](#); [Ahmed & Salihu, 2013](#)).

2. Literature review

The perception of the term crime varied greatly across geographical areas, socio-cultural and economic differences of societies as well as time lag. This kind of variations makes it difficult to universally define crime across regions of the world. What may be regarded as a crime in one region may not be a crime in another and changes over time. For instance, prostitution and homosexuality are crimes in many regions especially where religion dictates, while in many others, they are acts of promotion. A few decades ago, dumping toxic waste has not been classified as a crime but presently it is a serious crime and violation of laws in country like Nigeria ([Dambazau, 2007](#); [Usman, Yakubu, & Bello 2012](#); [Tenibiaje, 2010](#)). Therefore, the perception of an act to be a crime varies with time and location. Similarly, criminal behaviour is a common phenomenon anywhere and in every society, but certain societies have higher criminal activities than others and variation can be found in the same society (urban areas), where criminal activities are prevalent in some locations over others. Within the same city, criminal activities tend to be higher in the city centres than in the suburbs ([Soh, 2012](#)). This may be connected with the intensities of activities and potentialities for offenders to commit crime in the city centre. This goes in line with what [Ajibola \(1990\)](#) reported, where crime and criminal activities are constantly performing and growing in a sporadic facet (cited by [Tenibiaje, 2010](#)).

However, in trying to understand crime, it is good to bring ideas presented by many scholars in their respective perspectives on the subject matter. This is because many scholars have defined crime in different views. For instance, [Habibullah, Baharom, and Tan \(2013\)](#) defined crime as violation of ‘property rights’ where the focus was prioritized on crime against property. This will not give a comprehensive understanding on crime; hence there are many other areas where crimes are committed. For instance, crimes can be established in corruption, rape, terrorist criminal activities, kidnapping, human trafficking, assault, vagrancy and failure to pay public tax, utility bills or transport, drugs and narcotics abuse, wanton environmental destruction and unauthorised dumping of toxic substances ([Tenibiaje, 2010](#); [Tretter, 2013](#)). On socio-cultural ethical perspectives, crime is viewed as violation of societal norms and values. [Tenibiaje \(2010\)](#) explained that crime is a ‘deviant behaviour that violates prevailing norms, which may be cultural, social, political, psychological and economic conditions’. [Louis and others in 1981 \(cited by Usman et al., \(2012\)\)](#), described crime as a deviant act that is threatening moral behaviours and injurious to society. Moral decadence afflicts the personality of individual, his property and lessens trust among members of the society which may result to threat and fear.

In ideological perspective particularly in criminal law, crime is regarded as an act or omission forbidden by law on pain of punishment or else is a violation of law ([Usman et al., 2012](#)). Similarly, [Tenibiaje \(2010\)](#) expresses crime as an act that violates the law of the society or serious offence against the law of the society for which there is a severe punishment by law. In other words, crime is any culpable action or omission prohibited by law and punishable by the state. In these views, crime is a violation of any law of a given society and offenders are punishable in accordance to the set of that law. These laws can either be criminal laws or societal unwritten laws, norms and values, any offender or violator of such laws is culpable to punishment.

In the literature there are variant views of crime but all converged at common understanding word ‘violation’ of societal norms and values or laws. In this context, crime refers to violation of state laws or deviant act prohibited by state laws that is subjected to punishment in accordance to the set of the laws. These include all types of deviant acts or offences against lawful authority, against local act, against person and against property. This definition is more appropriate in this paper as it takes nation states studies which have their respective apparatus for managing or converting crimes that are guided by state laws as the case may be to any nation. Accordingly, urban crime is considered as ‘violations of laws or deviant acts’ performed in ‘urban areas’ that are prohibited by state laws and are punishable in accordance to the set of the state laws. Therefore, urban crime should not be viewed as violating urban development laws only, but crimes committed in urban areas.

In any circumstances, crime is a convergence of criminal, element for crime act (property/ victim) and place to perform crime activity. This is what [Tabangin, Flores, and Emperador \(2008\)](#) opined, where crime is not only about offenders and attractor may also be about ‘places’. Urban areas as places offer opportunities for various socio-economic activities, as well as potentialities for criminal behaviours and multiple crime spots (points) for those with criminal tendencies to hit a target. Frequent occurrences of crimes in urban areas can instil fear into the public of being victims of crime instead of seeing urban area as a place of economic opportunities, safe living and offered quality of life to the residents ([Soh, 2012](#); [Sewuese, 2014](#)).

In trying to classify what crime is, some scholars classified it into violent and property crimes ([Habibullah, et al., 2013](#); [Kien,](#)

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