An Assessment Of The Relationship Between Crime And Social Exclusion In Nigeria

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Abstract

This research paper examined the symbiotic relationships between crime and social exclusion in Nigeria. In this paper, which is basically a literature review with its data solely extracted from secondary sources (journals, textbooks and internet materials), the researchers formulated Two (2) specific objectives to guide the study. Relative deprivation, social discontent and strain theories were combined to form the framework to this study. Majority of Nigerians are found at the base of the social ladder and deviant neighbourhoods where the pervasive influence of social exclusion with its concomitant effects on crime is uncontrolled. The underclass lacks access to qualitative education, equal employment opportunities, adequate healthcare and good housing. There is no doubt that a prolonged deprivation of empowerment resources and undue exclusion from mainstream culture will result in poverty and social discontentment, thereby luring many affected individuals into crime as a backlash to such an ugly development and/or as a means of survival. Socially excluded people feel both deprived and cheated–especially when they compare their conditions to that of the affluent–who they believed is the cause of their predicaments. Thus, any society where there is a yawning gap between the poor and the rich as regards human and material resources is doomed to witness a dramatic increase in property, economic and violent crimes as well as juvenile delinquency. Therefore, the paper called for urgent implementation of the welfare state in Nigeria.

Keywords: Assessment, Crime, Nigeria, Relationship, Social Exclusion

Introduction

Poverty has over the years dominated crime literature as one of the major causes of crime and delinquency in human society. Nonetheless, the quest for the causes of crime and delinquency in the real world has in recent times led to a paradigm shift in crime perspective. Indeed, there is a renaissance in crime aetiology and epidemiology which had, at least, led to the introduction, operationalisation and adoption of a relatively new but broader concept technically known as 'social exclusion' in Sociology and Criminology alike. Giddens (2006) contended that the idea of social exclusion has been taken up by politicians, but was first introduced by sociological writers to refer to a new source of inequality that has strong link with crime rather than poverty. Some social observers like Haralambos and Holborn (2008) in recent years have tried to broaden the issues involved in thinking about the relationships between the most deprived groups (socially excluded people) and crime in society by using the term 'social exclusion' rather than poverty.

Social exclusion originated in the Continental Europe to replace poverty, which hitherto was implicated by some commentators as a leading cause of crime. Unlike poverty, the concept of social exclusion is a multidimensional and all-encompassing social variable which may predispose some people to crime and criminality. Some of the factors that constitute social exclusion which have direct bearing on crime causality include limited or unequal employment and educational opportunities, lack of proper medical care, lack of empowerment resources, poor housing, and other forms of deprivations and exposure to deviant neighbourhoods where the propensity to commit crime is high (see Haralambos & Holborn, 2008). Given its wide scope and powerful influence on crime causation, social exclusion has been duly considered and accorded both national and international recognition across cultures. This development is to encourage the contrary–social inclusion–which its primary concern is to alleviate the plight of the populace. Social inclusion counters social exclusion; the latter phenomenon or concept creates the underclass and accordingly precipitates majority of them into crime to eke out a living.

Specifically, the term 'social exclusion' has gained currency in the British political circle. Little wonder therefore that the British Labour Government in 1997 established a viable Interdepartmental Social Exclusion Unit (ISEU) to carter for the socially excluded individuals in its country. The European Union's (EU's) European Social Charter mentions the term and the promotion of social inclusion is now a strategic goal of the EU (Alcock, 1997; Burchardt, Grand & Piachaud 2002 cited in Haralambos & Holborn, 2008). Similar social exclusion programmes, though not well-defined or formally structured as obtains in the Western world, have been set up in virtually all the States and Local Government Areas in Nigeria. Prime example of social exclusion intervention programmes in Nigeria are: Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P), access to free HIV/AIDS medical care; National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), free National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) programme for willing and qualified inmates in the Kirikiri, Port Harcourt and Enugu prisons; National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP); the recent inclusion of the youth in the national development plans and their proactive involvement in mainstream politics, etc.

By and large, it is necessary to operationalise the concept of social exclusion in order to keep the thrust of this paper in perspective, as it will assist in grappling with the topical issue of crime and social exclusion in Nigeria. The idea of social exclusion suggests that some people are deliberately not included in the mainstream culture of good living or allowed to share in available legitimate opportunities for success and empowerment resources that make life worthwhile, because of their social backgrounds and socio-demographic characteristics. According to Giddens (2006), social exclusion refers to ways in which individuals may become cut off from full involvement in the wider society; for instance, people who live in a dilapidated housing estate, with poor schools and few employment opportunities in the area, may effectively be denied opportunities for self-betterment that most people in society have. The basis of Giddens' argument, though implicit, remains that success can equally be achieved through illegitimate means; some individuals under pulls (social exclusions) tend to improve their standard of living by fair means or foul; and there is clear cut interplay between crime and social exclusion, that is, crime and delinquency are inevitable outgrowth of social exclusion. Thus, the central problem confronting this paper is to establish relationships between crime and social exclusion in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to assess the relationship between crime and social exclusion in Nigeria. Other specific objectives of the study are:

1. To explain the trajectories of crime-social exclusion nexus in Nigeria using relative deprivation, social discontent and strain theories; and
2. To unravel the interplay between crime and social exclusion in Nigeria.

Trajectories of Crime-Social Exclusion Nexus: Theoretical Considerations

The relative deprivation theory of Judith Blau and Peter Blau (1982), which is a systematic integration of anomie theory and social disorganisation models, graphically explains the relationship between crime and social exclusion in Nigeria. Like any other contemporary capitalist-oriented society, a considerable number of Nigerians are mainly found among the lower class where the pervasive influence of social exclusion is unbounded. Clearly, someone under exclusion of any kind will certainly feel both deprived and cheated when they compare their socioeconomic disadvantages to those of the affluent. Based on this, Blau and Blau (1982) as recorded in Siegel (2008) argued that people who feel deprived because of their race or economic class eventually develop a sense of injustice and discontent. The less fortunate among this class of people will begin to distrust the society that has nurtured social inequality and obstructed their chances of progressing by legitimate means.

The concept of relative deprivation underscored the relevance of Robert Gurr's social discontent theory, as both theories are intermittently used in this study to explain the trajectory/course of crime cum social exclusion in Nigeria. Social discontent theory, to a large extent, shares similar views with relative deprivation theory of Robert Gurr. Gurr (1970) defined the term 'social discontent' within the ambit of psychology to mean a perceived discrepancy between men's value expectations and their value capabilities. Here, value expectations are the 'goods' and 'conditions' (empowerment and motivation resources) which people believe they are rightfully entitled to while value capabilities are the 'goods' and 'conditions' they think they are capable of achieving if given the right opportunity. This Gurr's ideology re-echoed the second subtype of Agnew's (1992) strain theory called 'denial or removal of previously attained achievement,' which according to him, is produced by stressful events (such as social exclusion). Examples of Agnew's standpoint include breaking up with a political patron and being fired or laid off from a job.

In Nigeria, various forms of crime: political thuggery, robbery, arson, murder, kidnapping and militancy can be explained and understood within the purview of 'deprivation-discontent' philosophy, social exclusion. For instance, Majekodumi (2009), Odoh (2010) and Ikoh (2011) lamented that jobless youths recruited by politicians as political thugs are abandoned after elections without retrieving the arms and ammunition that they were provided with for the purposes of electioneering campaigns and elections. The guns and ammunition now become operational tools for armed robbery, kidnapping and hired assassinations. Such transition from political thuggery to organised gang criminality and street hoodlums represent a realignment of interest and readjustment of economic strategies rather than a clear break from the original motive behind engaging in violence. Nnam, Agboti and Otu (2013: 80) rather suggested that "the meteoric rise in unemployment, poverty, social exclusion and weak or dysfunctional social structures (both formal and informal) have exacerbated the crime problem in Nigeria."

Many Nigerians suffer exclusions in their day-to-day activities; they are frequently abused and neglected, politically battered and abandoned, and their constitutional rights denied with impunity. When people are relatively deprived of essential goods and services (social exclusion), frustration and depression will invariably ensue and consequently lead to the acting out of their discontentment and aggression through all means, including crime and violence. Specifically, the somewhat doused ugly incidence of militancy in the Niger Delta and kidnapping in the South East regions of Nigeria is an indirect explanation and/or a backlash to the widespread social exclusion in these regions. Ikoh (2011) supported this

assertion when he retorted that the long years of neglect by successive government to develop the Niger Delta region and the failure of the multinational oil companies to integrate the oil-producing communities into the oil economy led to the feeling of deprivation and subsequent crises that made militancy and kidnapping pervasive crimes in Nigeria today.

Furthermore, people who are socially excluded may take to crime and delinquency as an expression of displeasure and dissatisfaction with a hostile political regime in their country. Obviously, the homeless or even residents of poor and dilapidated housing estate, physically challenged persons, individuals of no or low educational attainment, and generally people faced with disadvantaged conditions in Nigeria are bound to suffer exclusions. It is important to note that this class of people has been oppressed and suppressed by the advantaged group in society. These socially excluded people suffer what Anthony Giddens calls the 'anomie of injustice', a situation whereby realistic aspirations are faced with inequitable opportunities and or a distinction between high aspirations and limited opportunities. Since social origins usually facilitate or hamper access to the form of success represented by wealth or recognition or power, children from disadvantaged backgrounds tend more to commit crime in order to obtain forcefully what they were denied at birth (Igodo, 2002 citing Giddens, 1971/1972). Yet this viewpoint does not mean that the people of the upper echelon and their children or relatives do not commit crime; they do, even to a large extent.

The nature, complexity and rate of crime witnessed today in Nigeria speak volumes about the ubiquity of social exclusion in the country. Seen from the relative deprivation and social discontent central tenets, any society where an unjustified yawning chasm exists between the poor and the rich regarding human and material resources is likely to witness crime and delinquency of an unprecedented magnitude. This suggests that certain conditions, namely, broken home, unequal or lack of employment and educational opportunities, and socially disorganised and deviant nieghbourhood may subject some socially excluded people to seek criminal routes of adjustment and survival. People under this state of affairs are said to be left in the lurch with a forlorn hope of improving their means of livelihood, hence they take to crime in order to survive.

The Interplay between Crime and Social Exclusion

There are strong symbiotic relationships between crime and social exclusion in Nigeria, occasioned by the apparently relative deprivation which is commonplace in the country. Currie (1998) studied the links between crime and social exclusion in America and unravelled that American society is a 'natural laboratory' that is already demonstrating the 'ominous outside' of market-driven social policy: rising poverty and homelessness, drug abuse and sharp increase in violent crime. Here, young people are increasingly growing up on their own without the guidance and support they need from the adult population. While faced by the seductive lure of the market and consumer goods, young people are also confronted by diminishing opportunities in the labour market to sustain a livelihood. This can result in a profound sense of relative deprivation, and a willingness to turn to illegitimate means of sustaining a desired lifestyle (Giddens, 2006). Admittedly, the views of Currie and Giddens vividly described the situation in contemporary Nigeria, where there are obtrusive socio-political and economic deprivations in the nation's social structure and political economy.

Any society where social exclusion pervades is bound to fail: attenuates social conscience, discourages gentrification, and witnesses a sharp increase in crime and delinquency. Such a society will certainly create its own brand of different crimes and criminals by creating the underclass, social divisions, economic disparities, asymmetrical legitimate opportunities and access to empowerment resources among its members. In Nigeria, there is an emphasis on success, but without a corresponding legal opportunities and

level playing field for achieving the height. This situation, wittingly or unwittingly, creates the dregs of society among lower class people, who are always on the peril of social exclusion: oppression, suppression, strains, alienation, deprivations and marginalisation. Thus, when people are excluded from available socioeconomic resources they are entitled to, such individuals may refuse to accept a bleak future and then resort to criminal activities for sustenance and livelihood. Supporting this argument, Akinyemi (2002) noted that when people are asked to pursue economic success and at the same time denied means of achieving it, there is a goal blockage. The aspiration is frustrated and may lead the individuals to choose illegitimate means like crime to achieve their goals. For instance, Akinyemi further argued, many college graduates who are caught in crime in Nigeria have tended to give excuses that include frustration because of lack of jobs (social exclusion) to eke out a living since after graduation.

The ongoing debate about the relationship between crime and social exclusion culminates in the resultant effects of capitalism. Capitalist economy breeds social exclusion by creating both absolute and marginal poverty and the underclass in any society where it is deep-rooted. Categorically, there is a direct connection between social exclusion and crime in Nigeria. Crime wave in Nigeria is linked to the inverse socioeconomic margin between the 'haves' and 'have nots', thereby compelling the latter who are excluded by the former from mainstream culture of success to indulge in criminal activities with a view to improving their poor conditions in the society. Uwakwe (2012) reiterated that the Nigerian scenario where people who occupy governmental offices loot public treasuries for their personal gain, thus leaving the rest of Nigerians impoverished and without any of the basic necessities of life (socially excluded) are major factors that lead many Nigerians to crime.

Anayaba (2012) illustrated that the living standard and welfare of Nigerians have since independence continued on a downwards progressive slide in the face of though abundant material and human resources. Poverty (social exclusion) is especially exemplified in the area of water supply with statistics indicating that less than 40% of Nigerians have access to pipe borne water while 60% of them obtain their water from rivers, streams and ponds that are sometimes located many kilometres away from their residence. Ironically, this water in most cases is not in a drinkable condition. Anayaba further lamented that less than half of the national population cannot afford Three (3) square meals per day. Comfortable living standard and affordable housing have continued to elude the highest number of Nigeria's population both in urban and rural communities. Health facilities in Nigeria are largely insufficient, not strategically located, overstretched, underfunded, poorly managed and maintained, ill-equipped and understaffed with poorly motivated members of staff that lack modern medical capacity to deliver. Also, Nigerian roads have driven from bad to worst and from manageable condition to inaccessible. It is estimated that Nigeria ranks next to such densely populated countries as China and India in accident rates, resulting from poor or bad road network, Anayaba (2012) lamented!

Quite naturally, economic and social disparities adversely affect the socioeconomic disadvantaged group. Socially excluded people have an albatross around their neck: they are prone to unemployment, underemployment, poor educational attainment and other desperate circumstances which directly or indirectly hinder the development of their innate requisite skills or talents which could pave way for a better living condition and consequently dissuade them from contemplating crime or delinquency. In this regard, both the root and immediate causes of substance abuse, kidnapping, youth restiveness, political thuggery, campus cultism and terrorism in Nigeria are strongly linked to social exclusion endemic in the country. For instance, a cursory look into the historical antecedent of cultism in Nigeria is traceable to social exclusion (Nnam, 2014). Many Nigerians were dishearteningly excluded from their societal resources by the British colonial masters. In reaction to this egregious situation in

Nigeria, a group of Seven (7) students at the University College, Ibadan in 1952 formed the Pyrate cult/confraternity in order to correct the anomalies in the system and stem the widespread social injustice meted out not only to Black students but also the entire Black population in the country. Warner (2003) stressed that some lower class (socially excluded) people are driven to desperate measures such as crime and drug abuse because they lack ties to the mainstream culture; this they do to cope with their economic plight. Giddens (2006), citing Currie (1998), reiterated that the connection between social exclusion and crime is that legitimate channels for change are bypassed in favour of illegal ones. Crime is favoured over alternative means, such as the political system or community organisation.

Conclusion

This research paper carefully traced the relationships between crime and social exclusion in Nigeria. The researchers draw their conclusion from the relevant literature and theories (secondary data) reviewed herein. From the secondary data on crime and social exclusion as progressively discussed, the paper provided a clear and convincing explanation to the poly-causal (not mono-causal) relationships between various forms of crime and social exclusion in Nigeria. Obviously, therefore, any society where an unfounded wide gap exists between the downtrodden and the wealthy with regard to human and material resources is said to be at a low ebb, and such a society certainly is doomed to witness a disturbingly high rate of variegated criminal activities, such as robbery, political thuggery, kidnapping, militancy, arson, cultism/confraternity, and the like. People who are not properly included in a prosocial, receptive and life-improving empowerment programmes or resources as well as equal opportunities for a better living condition they are entitled to, may take to crime and delinquency as an expression of discontentment and/or means of survival. It stands to argue here that crime is seen as a medium through which socially excluded people in society tend to include themselves or recover their perceived denied collectively-own 'goods' and 'services/conditions'.

The paradox of this ugly development is that contemporary Nigeria is in the throes of crime and social exclusion. There is, in fact, a direct link between social exclusion occasioned by the 'evil spirit of capitalism' and crime problem in Nigeria. The accent is, without doubt, on capitalism because this politico-economic-social system breeds social exclusion and crime by creating abject poverty, unemployment, alienation, exploitation, dehumanisation and relative deprivations in any society where it is deep-rooted, with the lower class on the receiving end. A preponderance of Nigerians is found at the base of the social ladder where social exclusion is unbridled. Hence, this underclass lacks access to meaningful employment and qualitative educational opportunities, proper healthcare, good housing, proactive and responsive political culture and socialisation. More importantly, the socially excluded group in Nigeria is continually exposed to both physically and socially disorganised neighbourhoods that induce crime and criminal victimisation over time. There is no doubt, however, that people under such social and economic plight or circumstances are inveigled into criminal activities in order to survive.

Policy Implication

In keeping with the trajectories of crime and social exclusion as progressively dissected in this paper, the researcher recommended an urgent implementation of the welfare state in Nigeria. By welfare state, we simply meant those essential goods and services which are mainly provided or subsidised by the government for the betterment of socially excluded people in society. It is a socio-economic system or intervention programme championed by the government. This programme is geared towards reducing relative deprivations, social divisions and economic disparities as well as both absolute and relative poverty levels and other forms of unaccented exclusion in a given country. The government provides free or

subsidised medical care, education, housing, social security, among others to the unemployed, aged/old, ill, orphans, derelicts and the less privileged or disadvantaged in society. In a similar submission, Giddens (2006) posited that State (Government) plays a central role in the provision of welfare, which it does through a system that offers services and benefits that meet people's basic needs for things such as healthcare, education, housing and income. The same source added that an important role of the welfare state is managing the risks faced by people over the course of their lives: sickness, disability, job loss and old age.

The welfare state exists and thrives in societies where there is a market for goods, services and labour, typically capitalist societies (such as contemporary Nigeria). The welfare state develops where the government decides that the population's essential needs and well-being will not be adequately provided for without government intervention (Haralambos & Holborn, 2008). The welfare state is urgently needed in Nigeria, given the tidal wave of class struggle, social divisions and economic disparities with their resultant effects on criminal activities in the country. In order to fight crime and social exclusion to the barest minimum, the Federal Government of Nigeria through its National Assembly should expedite action to pass the lingering 'Social Security Bill' which placed prime emphasis on curtailing social exclusion into law. Also, efforts should be made to harmonise the age-long traditional Africa social conscience, egalitarianism and social democracy with the ongoing social engineering and political reconstruction in the country.

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