

CRIMINOLOGY

Reducing Crime and Violence through Community Policing: A Case Study of Lokoja Local Government Area, Kogi State, Nigeria

Jacob Erinola Arokoyo, Ohize Abdulmumin Ahmed, Lare Agnes Abalaka, Favour Yetunde Mejiyan

Department of Sociology, Federal University Lokoja, Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigates the efficacy of Community Policing (CP) as a strategy for reducing crime and violence in Lokoja Local Government Area (LGA), Kogi State, Nigeria. Employing a descriptive survey design with a sample of 400 residents, the research focused on three core objectives: assessing the level of community awareness of CP initiatives, evaluating the perceived influence of CP on crime reduction, and identifying effective CP strategies. Findings indicate a moderate level of awareness (Mean=2.73) and a similarly moderate perceived influence of CP (Mean=2.74). Key strategies endorsed by respondents include enhanced visible police presence, the use of advanced technology, and robust community engagement programs (Cluster Mean=2.93). The study concludes that while CP holds significant promise, its full potential in Lokoja is hampered by deficits in public trust, inconsistent implementation, and inadequate resource allocation. Recommendations are proffered for intensifying community education, institutionalizing participatory frameworks, and fostering stronger police-community partnerships to engender sustainable security.

Keywords: community policing; crime reduction; violence; security strategies; public awareness

1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

The pervasive challenge of crime and violence constitutes a critical impediment to socio-economic development and human security in Nigeria. From armed banditry in the northwest to kidnapping and communal clashes across the nation, traditional, reactive, and often militarized law enforcement models have demonstrated profound limitations (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2019). In response, Community Policing (CP) has emerged globally and within Nigerian policy discourse as a paradigm shift towards a more collaborative, proactive, and problem-solving approach to security (UNODC, cited in Ajayi, 2018). This philosophy re-conceptualizes the police-community relationship as a partnership, aiming to build trust, empower citizens, and address the localised root causes of disorder (Trojanowicz & Bucqueroux, 2018).

In Nigeria, the formal adoption of CP frameworks, such as the Nigeria Police Force's Community Policing Scheme, acknowledges the necessity of localized strategies (Nigeria Police Force, 2019). However, the transition from policy to effective practice is fraught with challenges, including institutional resistance, resource constraints, political interference, and deep-seated public scepticism stemming from historical experiences of police brutality and corruption (Akinlupe, 2019;

Okafor, 2019). The effectiveness of CP is inherently context-dependent, requiring adaptation to unique local socio-cultural, economic, and political dynamics.

Lokoja LGA, the capital territory of Kogi State and a historical confluence point, presents a pertinent microcosm for this study. It embodies the complexities of urban-rural integration, diverse demographics, and the security pressures typical of a sub-national capital. Understanding how CP principles are perceived, implemented, and experienced in this specific locale is crucial for generating actionable insights. This research, therefore, seeks to contribute empirical data from Lokoja LGA by examining three pivotal aspects of the CP continuum: community awareness, perceived impact, and preferred implementation strategies.

2 Statement of the problem and research objectives

Despite constitutional and policy commitments to CP, crime and violence remain endemic in many Nigerian communities, including Lokoja LGA. The persistence of these issues suggests a disconnect between the theoretical promise of CP and its on-ground realities. Factors such as low public trust in law enforcement, inadequate community participation, and a lack of tailored strategies undermine potential gains (Ayodele, 2015; ECOWAS, 2019). While extant literature discusses CP broadly in Nigeria, there is a paucity of nuanced, empirical studies focusing on specific LGAs like Lokoja, which is essential for moving beyond generic prescriptions to context-specific solutions.

This study is guided by the following **objectives**, derived from the broader research aim:

1. To assess the level of awareness of reducing crime and violence through community policing among residents of Lokoja LGA.
2. To evaluate the influence of community policing in reducing crime and violence as perceived by the community.
3. To identify and assess strategies considered effective for reducing crime and violence through community policing in the study area.

3 Literature review - conceptual foundations

Community Policing Defined: CP is not merely a tactic but a philosophy that redefines policing from a state-centric, crime-fighting model to a community-based, service-oriented one. It is characterized by "a partnership between the police and the community in identifying and solving community problems" (Kelling & Moore, 2018). This involves organizational transformation, proactive problem-solving, and decentralised accountability (Rosenbaum, 2019; Skogan & Hartnett, 2019).

Theoretical Underpinnings: This study is anchored primarily on **Social Disorganization Theory**. **Originating** from the Chicago School, this theory posits that crime flourishes in communities where social institutions (family, school, local organisations) are weak, and collective efficacy is low due to factors like poverty, residential mobility, and ethnic heterogeneity (Shaw & McKay, 1942). CP interventions aim to strengthen these very social bonds and institutional capacity, thereby reducing the "disorganization" that fosters crime. As Siegel & Worrall (2020) note, crime is a violation of societal norms, and CP seeks to reinforce those norms through collective action.

Awareness as a Precursor: Awareness is the critical first step in the CP value chain. As Ayodele (2015) argues, communities affected by crime are often receptive to CP, but awareness levels are uneven, especially in rural or underserved areas where information channels are limited. Effective CP

requires that citizens understand their role as co-producers of security, not passive recipients (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2019).

4 Literature review - strategies and empirical context

Influence and Strategies: The influence of CP on crime reduction is mediated by the strategies employed. Evidence-based strategies include:

Problem-Oriented Policing (SARA Model): Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment of specific crime problems (Eck & Spelman, 1987).

Increased Police Legitimacy and Procedural Justice: Building public trust through respectful, transparent, and fair interactions (Tyler, 1990).

Technology Integration: Using crime mapping, data analytics, and surveillance to deploy resources intelligently (Weisburd & Eck, 2017).

Partnership Building: Collaborating with local government, NGOs, schools, and traditional institutions to address root causes like unemployment (Adeyemi & Oyebamiji, 2018).

Empirical Context in Nigeria: Studies in various Nigerian contexts yield mixed but insightful results. Omeje (2021) found that CP contributed to crime reduction in Enugu State but highlighted unemployment as a deeper challenge. Conversely, Usman (2023), studying Kaduna, reported minimal impact due to poor implementation, lack of training, and unrealistic expectations. Daniel (2022) observed that vigilante groups, as informal CP actors, aided crime control in Niger State but raised concerns about coordination and accountability. These studies underscore that success is not automatic but contingent on implementation fidelity, resource adequacy, and community buy-in—gaps this study explores in Lokoja.

5 Methodology

Research Design: This study employed a cross-sectional descriptive survey design, suitable for capturing the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of the population at a specific point in time (Nworgu, 2006).

Study Setting: Lokoja LGA, Kogi State, Nigeria, with an estimated population of 351,700 (projected from 2006 census data).

Population and Sampling: The target population was adult residents and household heads. A sample size of 400 was determined using Taro Yamane's formula. A multi-stage sampling technique was used:

1. **Purposive Selection:** Five districts (Felele, Adankolo, Ganaja Village, Lokongoma, Zango) were selected to ensure geographical spread.
2. **Quota Sampling:** 80 questionnaires were allocated to each district.
3. **Convenience Sampling:** Within each district, respondents were selected based on availability and willingness to participate.

Instrumentation and Data Collection: Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire. The instrument was divided into sections capturing socio-demographics and items measured on a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) corresponding to the research objectives.

Data Analysis: Data were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 25). Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were used to summarise the socio-demographic data and analyse responses to the Likert-scale items. Cluster means were calculated for groups of items related to each objective to provide an aggregate measure.

Ethical Considerations: Informed consent was sought from participants. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, and the research was conducted under the guidance of an institutional supervisor.

6 Data presentation and analysis - socio-demographic profile

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents.

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	228	57.0
	Female	172	43.0
Age (Years)	Less than 19	44	11.0
	20-24	68	17.0
	25-29	132	33.0
	30-34	76	19.0
	35-39	40	10.0
	40-above	40	10.0
Marital Status	Married	180	45.0
	Single	160	40.0
	Others	60	15.0
Education	FSLC	60	15.0
	SSCE	120	30.0
	B.Sc./HND	100	25.0
	NCE/ND	80	20.0
	M.Sc/PhD	20	5.0
	None	20	5.0

Table Summary: The sample was predominantly male (57%), with a mean age of approximately 27 years, indicating a relatively young population. A high proportion (85%) had at least a secondary school education (SSCE and above), which is significant for comprehending CP concepts. The income distribution showed an average annual income of about N77,000, highlighting the economic constraints within the community.

7 Data analysis - objective 1: Level of awareness

Table 2. Awareness of Community Policing Initiatives.

Item (abridged)	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean
Access to info on CP activities	80	120	60	80	60	2.70
Aware of specific CP programs	90	100	70	80	60	2.72
Trust police to address crime via CP	70	110	50	90	80	2.48
Knowledgeable about CP strategies	100	130	50	70	50	3.10
Adequate info on local crime	80	100	60	90	70	2.63
Cluster Mean 2.73						

Key: SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, U=Undecided, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree.

Table Analysis: The overall cluster mean of 2.73 indicates a moderate level of awareness. The highest mean (3.10) was for knowledge of prevention strategies, suggesting some successful public education. However, critically, the lowest score (2.48) was for trust in law enforcement to deliver through CP. This aligns with Alemika & Chukwuma's (2019) observation that police legitimacy is a fundamental barrier. The score for access to information (2.70) also points to communication gaps, supporting Ayodele's (2015) contention that awareness is uneven.

8 Data analysis - objective 2: Influence of community policing

Table 3. Perceived Influence of Community Policing.

Item (abridged)	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean
CP is being implemented	90	120	70	70	50	2.85
Community participates in CP	100	110	60	80	50	2.95
Trust in Law Enforcement	80	100	70	80	70	2.60
CP affects crime rates	90	110	60	80	60	2.80
CP improves safety perceptions	70	110	60	80	60	2.48
Cluster Mean 2.74						

Table Analysis: The cluster mean of 2.74 reflects a moderately positive perception of CP's influence. Respondents acknowledged community participation (Mean=2.95) and some level of implementation (2.85), suggesting that CP structures exist. However, the perceived impact on actual crime rates is tepid (2.80), and most concerning is the low score for improved safety perceptions (2.48). This dichotomy indicates that while activities labelled "CP" may be occurring, they have not yet translated into a strong, widely-felt sense of security—a core goal of CP (Skogan & Hartnett, 2019). The persistent low trust score (2.60) remains a key limiting factor.

9 Data analysis - objective 3: Effective strategies

Table 4. Assessment of Crime Reduction Strategies.

Item (abridged)	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean
Visible Police Presence	110	120	50	70	50	3.05
Regular Evaluation	90	130	50	70	60	2.93
Use of Advanced Tech	100	120	60	70	50	3.00
Training for Officers	80	120	60	80	60	2.875
Community Engagement Prog	90	130	50	70	60	2.93
Problem-Solving (SARA)	100	110	70	70	50	2.90
Building Positive Relations	90	130	50	70	60	2.93
Cluster Mean 2.93						

Table Analysis: With a cluster mean of 2.93, respondents strongly affirmed the importance of specific CP strategies. Visible police presence (3.05) and use of technology (3.00) were rated highest, reflecting a community desire for both a tangible deterrent and modern, efficient policing methods. Community engagement programs, relationship-building, and regular evaluation all scored equally high (2.93), underscoring the community's understanding of CP as a participatory and accountable process. Interestingly, training for officers scored relatively lower (2.75), which may indicate either less visibility of such training to the public or a prioritisation of other, more immediate strategies.

10 Discussion of findings

The findings present a nuanced picture of CP in Lokoja LGA. The moderate awareness levels (Objective 1) suggest that foundational sensitization efforts have begun but require intensification and innovation, particularly to address the profound deficit in trust—the single greatest obstacle identified. This echoes the work of Ayodele (2015) and the diagnostic of Alemika & Chukwuma (2019) on the Nigerian police's credibility crisis.

Regarding Objective 2, the moderate perceived influence reveals a critical implementation gap. The existence of participation and activities does not automatically yield (a sense of safety) or significant crime reduction. This finding resonates with Usman's (2023) study in Kaduna, where CP activities were present but ineffective due to poor execution. It suggests that in Lokoja, CP may be partially implemented in form but not yet in the impactful spirit envisioned by Trojanowicz & Bucqueroux (2018).

The strong endorsement of practical strategies (Objective 3) provides a clear roadmap. The community's prioritization of visibility, technology, and engagement aligns perfectly with evidence-based CP literature (Weisburd & Eck, 2017; Greene & Mastrofski, 2019). The high value placed on evaluation and relationship-building indicates a community ready for a transparent, accountable, and lasting partnership, consistent with the principles of procedural justice (Tyler, 1990).

The disparity between the acknowledged strategies (high mean) and the perceived impact (lower mean) can be explained through the lens of Social Disorganization Theory. Lokoja, as a growing urban centre, likely experiences strains such as population flux, economic pressure, and weakened traditional structures. CP strategies, if well-implemented, are designed to bolster "collective

efficacy"—the community's ability to regulate behaviour and achieve common goals (Sampson et al., 1997). The findings suggest that while the community identifies the necessary tools (strategies), the application of these tools has not yet been sufficiently robust or sustained to significantly reverse underlying social disorganization and build the level of collective efficacy required for dramatic crime reduction. CP initiatives may be operating at a superficial level without deeply engaging and strengthening the core social institutions and networks.

11 Conclusion

This study set out to examine the nexus between community policing and the reduction of crime and violence in Lokoja LGA. Based on the analysis of three core objectives, it concludes that:

1. There is a foundational but insufficient level of public awareness about CP, severely undercut by a persistent crisis of trust in law enforcement agencies.
2. The perceived influence of CP on crime and safety is moderate, indicating a significant gap between the operational presence of CP activities and their tangible, felt impact on community security.
3. The community possesses a clear and pragmatic understanding of effective CP strategies, prioritizing visible policing, technological aid, and sustained engagement, which offers a strong participatory foundation for future interventions.

In essence, Community Policing in Lokoja LGA exists in a state of potential rather than optimal performance. The philosophy is recognised, and the desired methods are known, but the transformative power of CP is constrained by implementation weaknesses and the paramount challenge of building police legitimacy.

12 Recommendations

Derived directly from the findings, the following recommendations are proposed for law enforcement agencies, local government authorities, and community leaders in Lokoja LGA:

1. **To Bridge the Awareness-Trust Gap:** Launch a sustained, multi-platform "CP Sensitization and Legitimacy Campaign." This should move beyond information dissemination to focus on procedural justice: demonstrating police fairness, respect, and transparency in all interactions. Regular "Police-Community Accountability Forums" should be institutionalized where commanders explain actions and address grievances publicly.

2. **To Enhance Influence and Impact:** Move from ad-hoc CP activities to a formalized Problem-Oriented Policing model. The police, jointly with community representatives, should use the SARA model to identify and tackle 2-3 priority crime problems annually (e.g., bike-snatching, burglary in specific districts). Success on these focused issues will build credibility and demonstrate influence more than diffuse activities.

3. **To Operationalize Community-Preferred Strategies:**

Visibility & Tech: Redeploy patrol patterns to ensure consistent, predictable visibility in crime hotspots identified via community input and basic crime mapping. Explore cost-effective tech like dedicated social media groups for alerts and a simplified SMS-based tip line.

Structured Engagement: Formalize and resource Ward-Based CP Committees with clear mandates, inclusive membership (youth, women, elders), and a direct liaison officer from the police. These committees should co-design and monitor the strategies mentioned above.

13 Contributions to knowledge

This study makes several contributions to the academic and practical discourse on policing in Nigeria:

1. **Context-Specific Empirical Evidence:** It provides granular, data-driven insights into the state of CP in Lokoja LGA, filling a gap in the literature which often focuses on state or national levels. This localised analysis is critical for developing tailored interventions.
2. **Diagnostic Clarity:** It clearly delineates the difference between awareness of CP, the perception of its influence, and the knowledge of its strategies, demonstrating that progress in one area (e.g., knowing strategies) does not automatically translate to another (e.g., feeling safer).
3. **Community Voice in Strategy Formulation:** The study empirically captures and prioritizes the strategies deemed most effective by the community itself, reinforcing the core CP principle that the public are not just beneficiaries but essential partners in designing security solutions.

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