

Perception of Safety and Fear of Crime in Core Residential Neighbourhoods of Akure, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines residents' perceptions of safety and crime in Akure's core residential neighbourhoods. The study looked at fear of crime in the house and in the neighbourhood level, as well as the types of crime and the characteristics that predicted fear of crime. Data was acquired via questionnaires distributed to 532 family heads in four disadvantaged core residential neighbourhoods in Akure, Nigeria. These have been analyzed using frequencies and categorical regression models. According to the survey, the majority of respondents (57.3%) feel unsafe walking in their neighbourhoods during the day, whereas the majority of respondents (81.2%) feel unsafe walking in their neighbourhoods at night. Fear of crime was higher in the neighbourhood (78.9%) than in the house (27.1%). However, only a small percentage of respondents (11.9%) experienced frequent fear of crime, and the most prevalent criminal acts that cause fear include drug abuse/alcoholism (49.6%), theft/burglary (28.2%), gambling (16.9%), prostitution (11.7%), fraud (6.9%), and rape (4.3%). Age, education, duration of residency, income, and tenure status were identified as socio-demographic determinants of fear of crime in this study. The study concluded that core residential neighbourhoods because of their high density have high fear of crime and this fear of crime can be influenced by geographical variations as well as socio-demographic factors.

Keywords: fear of crime, safety, neighbourhoods, anti-social behaviours,

Introduction

The perception of safety in neighbourhoods refers to individuals' subjective judgements, beliefs, and feelings regarding the level of safety and security within their residential neighbourhoods (Allik & Kearns, 2017; Austin & Furr, 2002). It is a subjective assessment based on personal experiences, observations, and information received from various sources. While perception of safety and fear of crime are distinct, they are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Individuals' perception of safety can shape their level of fear of crime, as feeling unsafe or perceiving high crime risks can heighten fear. Conversely, fear of crime can influence individuals' perception of safety, as heightened fear can lead to a more negative evaluation of safety in a given environment (Ladenburg et al., 2016). Fear of crime is an

emotional response or apprehension individuals experience regarding the possibility of being a victim of crime. It is a specific and immediate emotional reaction to perceived threats or risks of criminal victimization. Various studies on fear of crime have proven that everyone is afraid of crime at some time in their lives. Within any liveable environment, the purpose or amount of fear may vary according to wealth, income or social standing (Ogundiran, 2019)

Several researchers have argued that decreased perceived safety in urban settings causes increased fear of crime and of being a victim (Najafpour et al., 2014; Machielse, 2015; Allik & Kearns 2017). Internationally, one of the factors used to explain fear of crime is the recorded crime

rate within a neighbourhood. However, In Akure and Nigeria context, obtaining crime data information was challenging, and the available data were insufficient for the purpose of the study. Therefore, this study was limited to investigating perceived safety and fear of crime from a spatial perspective.

There have been several studies on the spatial pattern of crime, Bottom and Wiles (2004), explained that crime is intrinsically a geographical phenomenon since both criminal offenses and criminal offenders have a spatial distribution. According to Harries (2006), the theoretical grounding for the spatial component of criminology is that crime and criminals cluster together, and geographical unpredictability is an exception rather than the norm in this setting. The core idea is that there are distinct patterns of crime, with concentrations in various locations and times (Cozens, 2007). Indeed, events do not occur at random; rather, particular locations in cities are very small, yet crime occurs more frequently than elsewhere, leaving them very susceptible (Goldsmith and Mc Guire, 2000). This fact has heightened interest in the study of places and urban planning.

Despite the geographical and spatial pattern of crime, most studies on the fear of crime or crime incidence have been studied in the western countries and most of the Nigerian case studies only looked at crime at the neighbourhood or city-wide level, without looking at the fear of crime within individual house level (Aguda (1994), Afon (2001), and Abodunrin (2004). Also, considerable attention has been given to the drivers of fear of crime internationally, relatively little is known about what factors drive the fear of crime in Nigeria in general and Akure specifically. This study thus investigates people's experiences and fears of crime occurrences in Akure's core residential neighbourhoods and at the house level.

Literature Review

Perceived safety refers to the sense of security and an absence of anxiety about becoming victimized while moving through spaces (Van Schaik et al. 2012). Perceived safety is a complex issue that may vary from one person to another (Ladenburg et al. 2016). Although research to date has verified that the degree of perceived safety varies with different environmental variables (Baum, et.al., 2009). In addition, numerous studies have shown that the positive perception of safety positively contributes to health outcomes, especially in the neighbourhood (Macintyre, & Ellaway, 2000; Risova & Sladekoya, 2020)]. Similarly, perceiving the neighbourhood as unsafe appears to have a negative effect on residents, including increased anxiety and decreased life satisfaction (Moller., 2005). Previous studies emphasize the multidimensional nature of perceived safety, along with fear of crime, and its association with different variables: such as various demographic factors, previous victimization experiences, and the presence of physical and social incivility signs in the urban context (Allik & Kearns 2017; Austin & Furr 2002; Dastgheib 2018; Ladenburg et al. 2016).

Several researchers have also linked perception of safety to fear of crime, and argued that decreased perceived safety in urban neighbourhoods can cause increased fear of crime and of being a victim (Najafpour et al., 2014; Machielse, 2015; Allik & Kearns 2017).

Crime is a global phenomena that poses a significant danger to public order. According to Shopeju, (2007), crime is a complex and multifaceted phenomena with behavioural, physiological, criminological, geographical (geographic), managerial, correctional, and eternal elements. According to Gabriel and Greve, (2003), fear of crime refers to an individual's fear of being a victim. Fear of crime is characterized as a combination of empirically separate but linked constructs that integrate emotion, risk perception, and vulnerability and can only be quantified via

confirmatory factor analysis of environmental perception (Jackson, 2014).

Fear of crime is defined by Ferraro and LaGrange (1994) as an emotional response to crime or a symbol associated with crime. According to Boers (1993; 2002), one of the most common causes of fear of crime is the fear of being a victim. It was mentioned that fear of crime is connected to personal aspects such as gender, age, and social standing, all of which might impact vulnerability to crime. Furthermore, the current condition of residential areas has an influence on the dread of crime.

According to Skogan, (1990), fear of crime is a pervasive societal problem that may affect people's health and well-being as well as the quality of life in local communities by reducing contact and trust among inhabitants. According to Sampson, (1999), the fear of crime is the result of the social and economic conditions of a neighbourhood, which are directly related to people's behaviours and perceptions, regardless of people's personal characteristics or their perception of the level of crime and social disorder in the neighbourhood.

Several studies have discovered a number of individual and neighbourhood level characteristics that raise people's fear of crime (Skogan & Maxfield, 1981; LaGrange et al., 1992; Gilchrist et al., 1998; Evans & Fletcher 2000; Smolej & Kivivuori, 2006; Cossman & Rader, 2011). Individual-level characteristics associated with feelings of vulnerability include age, gender, racial and ethnic origin, exposure to crime media, and physical well-being state. The elderly (Evans & Fletcher, 2000), women (Gilchrist et al., 1998), and racial and ethnic minorities (Skogan & Maxfield, 1981) are most frequently observed to be fearful in these investigations. Residents in communities with high ethnic diversity (Kershaw &

Tseloni, 2005), low income (Fitzgerald, 2008), large youth populations (Hale et al., 1994), residential instability (Taylor & Covington, 1993), and the presence of social and physical disorder (LaGrange et al., 1992) have a higher fear of crime.

The literature on crime also suggests a number of substantial links between poverty and crime. Wilson, (1987). According to Pridemore, (2011), the link between social structure and violence has a long history in Europe and the United States. This long history, combined with extensive research on crime and poverty, has led to the logical conclusion that neighbourhoods with higher levels of poverty will likely experience higher levels of crime than middle- and upper-class neighbourhoods (Wilson, 1987; Peterson et al., 2006).

Methodology

Study Area

Akure is a traditional town in Nigeria, similar to the country's several other traditional Yoruba cities. The city is located in the country's south-western part. It is located approximately at 7 ° 15'N latitude and 5 ° 15'E longitude, approximately 1.214 ft. (370 m) above sea level. The rapid development of the city stemmed from the city's political status, initially a provincial headquarters but now a state capital.

According to the 2006 census, the population of Akure was 360,268. With an annual increase of 2%, it was expected to be 486,300 by 2016 (National Population Commission of Nigeria (web)). The constant growth of the population has been tied to the administrative role of the city and its long-standing status as a centre of economic activity and also been classified as an oil-producing state, two features that have attracted a large array of immigrants.



Figure 1: Akure division into 12 residential zones (Source: Owoeye, 2012)

Data Collection

This paper is part of a larger analysis that examined urban poverty in central residential communities in Akure, Nigeria. This paper is however focused on measuring the perception of safety and fear of crime in poverty concentrated neighbourhoods. The study uses primary data to achieve a reasonable measure of fear of crime, frequency of crime and the types of crime common in the core neighbourhoods through a standardized questionnaire survey. Fear of crime was measured at two distinct levels (house and neighbourhood) due to the fact that crime has spatial distribution.

The survey included questions on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, perception of safety and fear of crime, the frequency of crime within the house and neighbourhood and the types of criminal behaviours that increased fear of crime. In order to analyse the perception of safety among residents of the core of Akure, the following two questions from the New Zealand General Social Survey, (2010) and the British Crime Survey, (2015) were adapted in the survey to measure perceived level of safety;

1. How safe do you feel walking alone during the day in your neighbourhood?
2. How safe do you feel walking alone at night in your neighbourhood?

Respondents were asked to indicate a response to the above questions on a 4-point Likert-type scale, where 1 was 'very safe' to 4 being 'very unsafe'. Responses were aggregated and analyzed to understand the overall safety perception within a neighbourhood.

Four core residential neighbourhoods with the highest concentration of poverty and with high incident of crime were selected for this study, and the study is also limited to households living within the four poor residential neighbourhoods in the core of Akure's. The four neighbourhoods selected are Zone 1 covering the Erekefa / Erekesan market, the Town Hall, the General Post Office and the King Palace, Zone 2 covering Idiagba, Ijemikin, Irowo, Odopetu, Ajagunle, Zone 3 covering (Araromi, Oja Oshodi, Odo-Ikoyi, Isolo and Ijomu via Oke-Ijebu streets), and zone 4 covering the other side of Araromi, Odo-Ijoka and Old stadium areas.

The sample size was determined by the number of existing buildings in the area since the administration of the questionnaire will be done on one person per household and one household per household. The analytical unit was the head of the household in the housing units. The sample size for the analysis is five hundred and fifty-seven (557) of a total population of

approximately 2228 residential buildings, which was developed using the 95 percent confidence power analysis and sample size calculator (PASS Software). Based on their relation to population size, the questionnaire number for each area was determined. A systematic random technique was then used to select the houses being studied; every fourth residential building was selected for interview, starting from the first dwelling unit in each of the streets involved. The basic focus of questionnaire administration was the heads of households in each house. For the questionnaires (the percentage return was 95% (532 copies), which was considered sufficient for the study. The study was analysed using descriptive analysis and categorical regression analysis.

Results and findings

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Out of the 532 respondents, (50%) are male, and (49.6%) are female, while 2 of the respondents didn't indicate their gender. There was also a good representation of each participating age bracket. More than a third (31.8%) of respondents belonged to the 26-40 very active age bracket; this group also represented the most economically active group, while respondents between 56 and above represented the most economically active group while the 20.5% remaining respondents represents the elderly. Most respondents fall within the low-income brackets; about one-third of household heads earned less than NGN10,000 per month (below the national

minimum wage of NGN30,000 per month approved by the Federal Government of Nigeria for the lowest-paid civil servants at the time of the survey), and nearly 38% earned just NGN10,001-20,000 per month. However, the neighbourhood was home to a few households living far above the minimum wage. The neighbourhoods are dominated by those living in rented apartment (51.5%) and those living free in family homes (25.8 %) dominated the communities.

Perception of safety

Residents' perceptions of safety walking alone at night and during the day have been used to establish a baseline level of fear of crime in the British crime survey (CSEW, 2022). The feeling of being safe walking alone at night and day indicates a high level of safety within the neighbourhood. The result of respondents perceptions of safety in the neighbourhood at night (Table 2) shows that only (39%) of the respondents feel safe walking alone during the day, while (18.8%) of the respondents rate the neighbourhood safe at night. The majority (57.3%) of the respondents experienced a degree of fear about their safety walking in the neighbourhood during the day, and (81.2%) of the respondents experienced a degree of fear walking alone at night. The implication of the results on the perception of safety when walking alone in the neighbourhoods suggests that the surrounding area has a high tendency for crime and antisocial behaviours especially within the outdoor spaces.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (n = 532).

Variable	Characteristics	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	266	50.0
	Female	264	49.6
	Missing values	2	0.4
Age	< 25	101	19.0
	26-40	169	31.8
	41-55	153	28.8
	56-70	91	17.1
	71+	18	3.4
Marital Status	Single	122	22.9
	Married	283	53.2
	Divorced	20	3.8
	Widowed	82	15.4
	Single parent	15	2.8
Income (NGN per month)	< 10,000	171	32.1
	10,001-20,000	200	37.6
	20,001-30,000	67	12.6
	30,001-40,000	44	8.3
	40,001-50,000	26	4.9
	50,000+	17	3.2
Homeownership Status	Owner	115	21.6
	Renter	274	51.5
	Rent free	4	.8
	Living in family house	137	25.8
House Type	Rooming apartment (face me I face you)	400	75.2
	Flat	85	16.0
	Others (single dwelling unit, semi-detached)	47	7.3
Length of residency	0-10 years	118	22.2
	11-20 years	140	26.3
	21-30 years	125	23.5
	31-40 years	79	14.8
	41-50 years	38	7.1

Note. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding and because some respondents did not answer every question

Table 2: Perception of Safety

Perception of Safety	Day		Night	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Very Safe	37	7.0	31	5.8
Fairly Safe	170	32.0	69	13.0
A Bit Unsafe	225	42.3	200	37.6
Very Unsafe	100	18.8	232	43.6
Total	532	100	532	100

Fear of Crime

The result of findings on respondents' fear of crime within their neighbourhoods (Table 3) indicates that (78.9%) of the respondents have experienced fear of crime while (16.4%) of the respondents indicated they have not felt fearful about the possibility of becoming a victim of crime in the last year. A few of the respondents (4.7%) can't

remember ever being fearful about the possibility of becoming a victim of crime. The fear of crime is a strong indication that the crime rate is high in the neighbourhood and crime is likely to occur.

Similarly, the findings on the fear of crime within the house indicated a decline in the perceived fear of crime earlier reported

within the neighbourhood. Only (27.1%) of the respondents harbour any kind of fear within their house compared to (78.9%) of respondents that experienced fear in their neighbourhood within the last year. The majority of the respondents (66.2%) of the respondents indicated they experienced no fear of becoming a victim of crime within their houses in the last one year.

The results confirm the literature that fears of crime can be influenced by geographical variations in the patterning of crime locations and these variations differ in regards to type of crime. The houses within the neighbourhoods are therefore considered safer than the surrounding neighbourhoods. The result on fear of crime confirmed previous researches (Aguda, 1994, Afon, 2001, Abodunrin, 2004) which earlier linked high-density neighbourhoods with a high incidence of crime. Fear of crime is conceived to arise from concern about crime, the consequences of victimization, the probability of being victimized feelings of vulnerability, and wider social and situational influences (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform 2009).

Nonetheless, some criminal activities are peculiar to certain densities with different

degrees of incidence. The study further evaluated the frequency of the occurrence of fear among the respondents in the neighbourhood and house level in the last year, as it allows for the measurement of the frequency of fear of crime and its intensity within the neighbourhoods. The result of findings to evaluate the occurrence of fear of crime in the neighbourhoods (Table 4) indicates that out of all the respondents that express fear of crime, only a few of the residents (11.9%) experienced fear of crime often while (38.3%) sometimes experienced fear of crime. However, (47.9%) confirmed that they rarely have a fear of crime while (.7%) never had any fear of becoming a victim of crime in the neighbourhood. Also, only (21%) of residents experienced fear of crime often in their neighbourhood while (41.3%) sometimes experienced fear of crime, and about (28%) of the respondents rarely experienced fear of crime.

This study conclusively demonstrates that there are notable geographical variations in the patterning of crime locations and these variations may differ in regards to type of crime. The implication of this is that fear of crime does not only in the neighbourhood level but also within the house level.

Table 3: Fear of Crime

Fear of Crime	Neighbourhoods	House
Afraid	78.9%	27.1%
Not Afraid	16.4%	62.0%
I Dont Know	4.7%	8.6%

Table 4: Frequency of Fear of Crime

	Neighbourhood		House	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Often	50	11.9	30	21.0
Sometimes	163	38.8	59	41.3
Rarely	196	46.7	40	28.0
Never	3	.7	11	7.7
Don't Know	7	1.7	3	2.1
No Response	1	.2	-	-
Total	420	100.0	143	100.0

Predictors of Fear of Crime

To test whether the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics influence fear of crime, categorical regression analysis was performed using the optimal scaling method with convergence criteria set at 0.00001. The analysis consisted of perception of fear of crime as dependent variables while the independent variables were the socio-demographic characteristics namely (sex, age, marital status, income, education, tenure status, house types and length of residency). The result of the regression analysis (Table 5) to determine the individual level factors that lead to fear of crime produced a significant model ($p=0.0005$, $F_{6,772}$) that explained 14% of the fear of crime (Adjusted R square = .140) emerged

The significant predictor variables for fear of crime as shown in the table above were age group ($r=0.0005$), education ($r=0.0005$), tenure status ($r=0.0005$), length of residency ($r=0.0005$) and income ($r=0.0005$). Interpreting the beta values, income, length of residency, and education have the highest influence on fear of crime followed by age and tenure status. Other socio-demographic characteristics such as sex, marital status, and house types have no significant influence on fear of crime in the study area. The result of findings on predictors of fear of crime therefore validated previous researches (Evans & Fletcher 2000, Fitzgerald 2008) that some individual-level

factors can lead to an increased fear of crime among individuals.

Common Antisocial Behaviour and Criminal Activities that Creates Fear

Within various residential densities, antisocial behaviour and crime categories have been observed to display varying patterns. In the core area of Akure, the category of antisocial behaviour and common crime that creates fear of crime are smoking/drug and alcoholism (49.6%) followed by theft and burglary (28.2%), gambling and betting (16.9%), prostitution (11.7%). Other antisocial behaviour common within the neighbourhoods are smuggling and fraud/ 419 (6.9%), assault/ physical abuse (6.0%), and rape (4.3%). The result however validated the outcome of a similar study of housing and deviant behaviours in the core of Akure (Olotuah, 2005) where property crimes, theft in the form of home and business burglary among others are considered high in the neighbourhoods. The study through physical observation confirms that there are several brothels, where prostitution thrives and alcoholic joints within the neighbourhoods. The various categories of criminal behaviours exhibited within the neighbourhood are indeed a pointer that the residential core of Akure is indeed a breeding space for crime and deviant behaviours.

Table 5: Socio-demographic predictors of fear of crime

	Standardized Coefficients		Df	F	Sig.
	Beta	Std. Error			
Respondent's Sex	.022	.041	3	.292	.831
Respondent's Age Group	-.131	.042	2	9.840	***.000
Respondent's Marital Status	.071	.041	1	3.050	.081
Highest Level Of Education Attained	.187	.041	2	21.169	***.000
Tenure Status	-.101	.041	1	6.075	***.014
Length of Residency	.198	.041	2	23.453	***.000
Monthly Income	.279	.042	3	45.105	***.000
House Type	-.039	.041	1	.929	.335

Dependent Variable: Have you ever felt fearful about the possibility of becoming a victim of crime in the neighbourhood?

Table 6: Common Criminal Behaviours Associated with the Neighbourhoods

Criminal Behaviours	Frequency	Percent
Drug Abuse & Alcoholism	264	49.6
Stealing & Burglary	150	28.2
Fighting & Physical Assault	109	20.5
Betting & Gambling	90	16.9
Prostitution	62	11.7
Smuggling & Fraud	26	6.9
Thuggery	32	6.0
Rape	23	4.3

Due to the various crime and anti-social behaviours normally associated with poor neighbourhoods, the study further investigated the presence of law enforcement agents or community policing in combating crime. Findings reveal that half of the respondents (49.1%) confirm the presence of law enforcement agents in their neighbourhood while (35%) have no form of security personnel attached to their neighbourhoods. The remaining (15.9%) are not aware of the presence of any neighbourhood watch. The result implies that the neighbourhoods are not well policed despite the high fear of crime witnessed across the neighbourhoods. The presence of community policing will further enhance respondents' perception of safety within the neighbourhoods.

Conclusion

This paper looked at fear of crime and perception of safety across four core residential neighbourhoods in Akure, Nigeria. First, it was interested in examining the perception of safety, the nature and occurrence of criminal and anti-social behaviour activities in core neighbourhoods characterised by concentrated poverty. Second, it investigated the factor which influenced fear of crime in this context, most importantly the socio-demographic characteristics of the residents.

The result of the perception of safety in the neighbourhoods revealed that the majority of the respondents (57.3%) feel unsafe during the day in the neighbourhood while the majority of the respondents (89.2%) feel unsafe at night. The study investigated fear of crime at two distinct levels (house and neighbourhood) to understand the most

common geographical location of criminal activities in the study area. Fear of crime was considered higher in the neighbourhoods (78.9%) than the house (27.1%) level. The houses are considered safer than the neighbourhoods. The result of the study indicates that despite the high level of fear of crime in the neighbourhoods, only (11.9%) of the respondents experienced fear of crime often.

The literature revealed that the factors responsible for fear of crime differ from one neighbourhood to the other and therefore the result of findings cannot simply be universal to all residential neighbourhoods. In this study, certain socio-demographic characteristics such as age, education, length of residency, income, and tenure status were strong predictors of fear of crime. It is however interesting to note that sex and house type has no significant relationship with fear of crime in this context.

This paper to some extent has explained the nature of fear of crime and the perception of safety in the core of Akure and the individual level predictors of fear of crime. The paper concluded that more research work is needed to investigate the relationship between neighbourhood physical characteristics and fear of crime in a poor neighbourhood.

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