GANG VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF THE ILORIN SPECIES

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ABSTRACT

There is an epidemic of youth gang violence in many part of world today especially in post colonial states. Gang members kill each other and committing atrocities sporadically at rates that negate the notion of tranquillity formally enjoyed in these areas. This paper provides an overview of the current situation in Ilorin the capital of Kwara State Nigeria. It describes the major pathways to violent gang involvement for Ilorin youth and goes on to validate deprivation theory. It advocate for a shift to a public good approach that addresses the pathways to gang violence, and describes or formulate some evidence-based models that have great value in solving gang violence. The conclusion premised on is that a failure to act now will result in things getting much worse very shortly since the indigenous Ilorin population growth rate is exploding and the population "at risk" in many areas will double within the next decade.

KEYWORDS: Gangs, Urban Violence, Deprivation, Poverty, Politics and Urbanization.

INTRODUCTION

The colonial structure in most developing countries has left an organised abandonment of internal fissures which till today most of the internal fissures had become external image of backward repute to the homeland. The focus of this paper is on Ilorin youth gang members aged 12-40 years. In Nigeria, it is estimated that twenty-two percent of known gang members are youth, and that there are between 800-1000 active gang members in the North Central Zone where Ilorin (Kwara state) is nationally zoned (Rotimi 2005; NPF 2012).

Ilorin youth gangs are visible groups that come together for political profit-driven criminal activity and in some cases severe violence. Gangs including the Ilorin species identify themselves through the adoption of a name which claims to appeal to neutrality, community affiliation or political party aligned groups. Other identities include common brands or colours of clothing, tattoos and political alliance to demonstrate gang membership to rival gangs. Gang-related communication rituals and public display of gang-ways attributes are common notice among members (Gordon 2000; Totten 2000; 2008; Coomber et al 2015).

Membership is semi- solid as family background, tribe, location and political alliance are most justifying factors. But there is still lack of compact organization and structure, and many of these gangs operate independently in small units. Status is gained through the ability to make large amounts of cash and engage in serious violence (Totten 2009a). The organization of these gangs varies in terms of: the structure and hierarchical nature of the gang; which is best determined by the political affiliation of the gang and the gang's connection to larger, more serious organized crime groups; the sophistication and permanence of the gang and the level of integration, cohesion, and solidarity between the gang's members (Mellor et al 2005; Totten 2008).Membership commitment can be measured in a hierarchical ranking system within the gang. Often, there is not one person who directs other members, although older members have more influence compared to young members (Rotimi 2005; The Runnymede Trust 2008).

Leaders (also called Chairman, Bosses, Presidents or Captains) actively promote and participate in serious violent activity. These males are generally in their late thirties and early forties. Other members of the gang as veterans decide which criminal activities the gang will participate in and are considered to be faithful in their loyalty to the gang. Together with the leaders, the veterans are responsible for settling internal conflicts within the gang which is usually caused by unequal political largess sharing formula. Core members who are also the regular members or Associates usually have been with the gang since it started, and they are experienced and proven members. (Totten 2009a)

This work answers the question of why has gang membership persisted in Ilorin? What effect will it have on the vulnerable younger generations? This work adopts deprivation theory to address the issue of persistency of the members and involvements in criminal activities. The pathway to gang violence is analysed and the superior violence prevention, intervention and suppression approaches are suggested considering the failed approach to curbing urban violence and the approach that works. Recommendations are directed to the government, the community leaders and the general populace. Conclusion is premised on the fact that government should play her role in providing the basic amenities for the community so as to reduce the heavy dependence on the political largesse from politicians.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Deprivation theory

The theory of deprivation as applied in this work implies deprivation due to unequal distribution of political social and economical largess. The theory does not claim that in all social groups one will find consensus in values—rather it considers some of the consequences of situations where there is consensus. Where people do not agree on values, relative deprivation can also occur. The theory came out of a need to understand the motivations behind the social activist movements of the 1960's. It seeks to give answers to questions like; what is the impetus that motivates an individual to agitate for a change in his life?

The theory posits that (collective) action stems from individuals' psychological reactions to the gap between expected circumstances and actual ones. The gap becomes apparent when they perceive themselves to be in a relatively unjust position vis-à-vis another person or group to which they might reasonably compare themselves. For instance, an individual might expect to have access to higher education for a variety of reasons: he is of the right age, he is obviously very bright, and he has prepared himself by studying at home. Other obvious anti fact may be he does not have the access that she might expect, he might perceive himself to be relatively deprived compared to people of his age.

The key to understanding the feeling of deprivation is a matter of which these characters are comparing themselves with. Why do they think they deserve better than what they have? Who is their point of comparison? What choices do they think they should have open to them? Relative deprivation theorists among others have suggested that perhaps it is not Ego Relative Deprivation (ERD) that motivates individuals, but rather perceptions of group, or collective relative deprivation (CRD). CRD occurs when the individual feels that his or her group has been deprived.

UNDERSTANDING FORMS OF ILORIN GANG VIOLENCE

Ilorin youth gang violence is different to that exhibited by other youth gangs in Nigeria because of their peculiar of geographical location – between the Northern and Western Nigeria. Although similar in outlook to a few others in the western Nigeria but they differ in fundamental functions and ideology. They do not always riot or commit public atrocities to the extent of public coverage and city acrimony (Oruwari and Owei 2006; Inokoba and Maliki 2011). Rates of internalized violence, including drug overdose and self-injurious behaviours are far higher than externalized criminal forms of violence. Other points of extremely high rates of self-injurious behaviours include; slashing and burning, particularly among the indigenous rural areas. Most acts of physical violence in the Ilorin indigenous rural youth gangs are motivated by revenge, retaliation, and reputation which has political undertone resulting into casualties of lives and properties (Rotimi 2005; Saka 2010).

In general, there is a strong fit between traditional deprivation theories which is seen as an instrument and the express of violence exhibited by Ilorin indigenous youth gangs. The process behind Ilorin indigenous youth gangs and the Ilorin city youth gang violence involves a number of identifiable steps this step is also seen as similar to the aboriginal youth gangs in Canada (Totten 2009a):
1. Members feel not so loose bonds to the gang and there is a semi solid membership. Most have a fatalistic outlook on life, believing that they will die in the near future.
2. Members perceive a threat from a rival gang: this increases gang cohesion and solidifies temporary membership. The threat is often political and irrational, given the high degree of trauma most members have suffered. In most cases, intergenerational family ties are important, and often one family is at war with another family.
3. An incident takes place in the community within or between different groups which sparks an escalation of gang violence.
4. The gang responds in a chaotic and violent manner, similar to the process of sporadic combustion. The fact that most gang members have cognitive impairments on the reasons why they have to endanger their lives on socio-political or economical issues which could be solved amicably contributes to the impulsive and unplanned nature of the violence.
5. The other gang retaliates. In their parochial view, they have been cheated—escalating violence which affects the identities of those involved. This spread gangs across neighbourhoods also reserves and increases supporters and membership.

However, the collective and individual forms of violence by Ilorin indigenous gang members, whether directed internally, against certain political actors or at other gangs—produces more collective violence through the processes of threat and unpredictable heat up of the polity. It is also meant to increases solidarity of gang members for a brief time, serving to unite them against a common enemy by increasing their dependence on each other and or disciplining members. Totten (2009a) and Chakraborti and Garland (2015) posited that the forms of violence are also aim to uphold and perpetuate gang values, norms, and the conditions of membership. Also to strengthen familial ties in marginalized and transient communities and provides members with a

structure and sense of purpose, combating hopelessness and a sense of powerlessness over their lives.

Members talk about feeling a sense of honour, self-respect, and self-esteem when they engage in violence (Morales 2006; Totten, 2009b). It can also motivate some members to exit the gang when the violence reaches levels that are unacceptable to them. Researchers have identified some of these factors as well in European, African, American and Latino gangs (Amado 2008; Bannister and Fraser 2008; International Crisis Group 2007; Decker 1996; Klein 1995; Sanders 1993).

PATHWAYS INTO VIOLENT GANG INVOLVEMENT FOR ILORIN YOUTHS

There are five main pathways to violent gang involvement, each is briefly described below; the first pathway into gang violence is Family background violentizism, the process through which survivors of extreme physical child maltreatment and neglect of proper parental up bringing become predators and prey gangsterism in adolescence. Totten (2009a) noted that; when children suffer these forms of harm, they are at high risk for reduced academic attainment, neurological impairment, and restricted language development. They are more likely to have personality disorders, impaired psycho-social development, and internalizing and externalizing symptoms.

The family background of nonchalant attitude to child care due to ignorance or poverty also leads to suffering from chronic and repeated sexual trauma throughout childhood which is also a key driver into gang life. Typical victims' experience multiple types of exploitation within a single year, including sexual abuse. These children are most often abused by male family members or men who know them. Totten (2009b) noted that more girls are victims, although many male youth who participate in violent gang activities report having been sexually abused. This betrayal of trust and abuse of relationship by family member and further aggravated by community members has been a potent pathway into violent gang life.

The second key pathway into violent gang life is experiencing of a poor and non-correlation basic facilities and amenities to the needs of the youths (Pérouse 2007, Totten 2008 and Tilley 2014). These basic amenities include the provision of adequate schooling facilities and motivation to complete a higher degree education which has the tendencies to recuperate nation building. The inadequacy of the availability of this basic amenity breeds a haven of gangs who are ready to translate their actions into violence at anytime. Poor recruitment opportunities also cumulate to a recruitment zone for gangs to build up a formidable violence readable force.

These class of unemployed or semi skilled employed Ilorin youths clusters to form a ready troop of violent gangs mostly employed by political actors against some perceived target enemies. Other neglect which forms a tributary to this path way including severe poverty and poor housing facilities. Youths growing up with all these non correlating amenities to a good living and future often results in behaviour disorders, which manifest from the impact of childhood neglect and maltreatment by parents and therefore becoming adulthood violent gang involvements.

The third pathway reflects the permanent impact of brain and mental development to learning. These means the level of education and enlightenment of the youths which predisposes them to the option of being violent or to retrace their step back to community development prowess. The level of education of Ilorin youths varies from the skilled, semi-skilled and the unskilled levels. It is observed that the bulk of the gang violence cut across the education levels but the majority and the key pings in the violent adventures are on the semi-skilled level. They believe they have nothing or little to loss in the violent gang breeding and violent endeavours.

The fourth pathway revolves around the level of political accessibility, social exclusion and devaluation relating to social class, family background, sexual orientation, and gender. Any organized youth group with little political access will tend to emasculate other competing group's opportunity so as to secure their political largess. A way to weaken other group chance to political recognition is through gang violence. The higher the gang's political accessibility the higher the gang violence exhibited. The loss of cultural identity, combined with social and economic marginalization also fuels gang violence. Totten (2009a) noted that gang-related activities offer employment and income for many members. Some Aboriginal girls are vulnerable to gang involvement, and can become sexually exploited and trafficked in urban settings because they cannot meet their basic needs. A relatively deprived person will be driven by the wind of largess given group therefore becoming an easy prey for gangism.

The final pathway reflects the lifelong impact of brain and mental health disorders that result from prolonged or easy access to (hard) drugs. These range from weeds to alcohols. This leads to mental trauma and Fatal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), also developmental impairments and emotional vulnerability. Due to the psychological drive of strength derived from the drugs to enhance daily performance many youths easily drift into gang making. The impact of these on Ilorin youth is suffering from severe abuse related to experiencing mental health problems such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Borderline Personality Disorder, Depression, and Bipolar Disorder. Majority of the Ilorin gang members who engage in violence have a state of extreme thinking that leads them to focus on survival only. Many young Ilorin gang members hide behind the pretence of violence and emotional detachment; their sense of security, safety and trust is never developed. These pathways can intersect to form compounding challenges for some Ilorin youth. The fourth Pathway for example, can be associated with all other pathways.

SUPERIOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION, INTERVENTION AND SUPPRESSION APPROACHES

Although there are many Nigerian gang prevention, intervention and suppression initiatives, few have proved futile and most have not been adequately evaluated. It is hoped that this situation will change in the near future, provided that the National security services improve currently there funding of in the research into youth violent causes and preventions and come up with a robust evaluation designs. There are some designs which had been adopted by the Nigerian Police and other related security forces which had proven inadequate to gang violence prevention. Nevertheless there are some suggested programs which have the prowess to succeed in mitigating gang violence in Ilorin, Nigeria at large and other countries with such menace. A set of failed approaches which had been invoked will be examined with the intention of seeing a better one.

Failed Approaches?

In Nigeria, force approach has won out over evidence based treatment and prevention, and scarce resources are usually spent in this angle. The approaches described below are proven to be ineffective and should be stopped.

Imprisoning gang members: This does not reduce future criminal behaviour. Studies across the world demonstrate that locking up gang members increases the chances of re-offending and staying in the gang (Nafekh and Steys 2004; Olson, Dooley, Kane, 2004 and Chambers 2014). Enclosing high-risk youth together increases the negative attraction among members and leads to even more entrenched anti-social and criminal behaviour. Individualized approaches in facilities work best with long-term transition into the community following release.

Gang suppression initiative: Most evaluations have found relatively low results. These programs seek to prosecute and convict gang members, especially gang leaders. It fails to prosecute and convict the sponsors who are mostly political actors in the respective communities. Although it decreases gang-related crime in the short term, they fail to address psychosocial issues such as child maltreatment, mental health, substance abuse, education and employment. This should be a last resort or a coupled initiative utilized to complement a range of interventions.

Community development (CD) approaches: The CDs founded on the premise of political support to a territorial group and the sustenance of family background hegemony as a singular cohesion does not work. In reality, there are many competing interests in most reserves and urban neighbourhoods. There are divisions reflecting religious and spiritual lines, access to income and wealth, gender, clans and ethnicities, family and gang allegiances. Programs therefore must effectively engage these subgroups and address the concerns and priorities of groups.

Better Approaches?
Evidence-based approaches are presented below with collaboration and problem-solving partnerships, sustaining community capacity, concentrating on investments on highest needs. These programs are:

Community Collaboration and Problem-Solving Partnerships

The Creation of age target Projects, such as Community Anti Gangs Service (CAGS). The programs targets 12-20 year-old Ilorin gang members and youth at high-risk of gang membership. Target 16-28 year-old gang leaders and their partners and family members are another group. The program should be meant to educate and to recycle the youth for community development. Community-wide, cross-sectoral strategies are required to address the multiple factors related to gang violence.

The Rejuvenating of Youth Criminal Justice Act, has a special set of criteria and measures for curbing youth violence, but communities are not always implementing the Act as intended. If well

implemented, there will be a dramatic reduction in the number of youths who are imprisoned and gang violence will drastically decrease. The new collaboration and problem-solving partnerships must be culturally and gender sensitive.

Concentrating Investments on Highest Needs

The priority of needs should be on education of the youths. Schooling might be expensive for most family to afford, the government and the organized private sectors should salvage the future of the society by making school look attractive to youths and lowering major cost of entrance and furtherance of quality education. Little encouragement however might go a long way to persuading primary and secondary school leavers to further into higher schools. The cultural competencies of schools can be enhanced by increasing the number of indigenous teachers and administrators, teaching in traditional language, reducing the suspension and expulsion of Ilorin students, teaching and implementing quality violent and suicide prevention programs and reshaping the curriculum to reflect indigenous approaches to knowledge and teachings. Crenshaw & Garbarino (2007) noted that primary schools are excellent places where children can safely work on grief and trauma; creative arts techniques and play therapy are proven interventions.

Sustaining Community Capacity Development

We must acknowledge that Gang-related activities offer employment and a good income to the gang perpetuators; we therefore cannot reduce gang violence without replacing the lost income and jobs which gangs provide to compatriots. Quality and compact programs include those that confront low educational attainment, unstable and crowded housing conditions, poverty, unemployment, untraceable residential address and substance abuse. Totten (2009a) noted that programs must respond to the many competing interests on many Reserves and urban neighbourhoods. Efficient settlement of land and (political) jurisdiction claims is directly related to improving the overall standard of living for Ilorin peoples.

Poverty Reduction Strategy

Money should be reinvested in proven school-based programs involving specially trained security personnel such as the intensive mentoring, supervision and support of very high-risk students and their families, beginning from the elementary school (Totten, 2004 and xxxx 2015). Although the most effective method of preventing youth gang involvement is reducing child maltreatment (Totten 2009a and xxxx 2015). The welfare funds strategies of unnecessary placements in residential facilities have failed. Money can be saved by closing some facilities and investing the savings in intensive, home-based programs.

Finally, Public engagement against crime should be further supported and propagated through schools. National Crime Prevention Centre (NCPC) and Institutes should be founded and funding for gang prevention projects far beyond 2025, and assure that other prevention initiatives have long-term funding and robust evaluations.

CONCLUSION

Youth gang violence has reached epidemic levels in many communities in Nigeria. If administrators fail to act now, the state will pay dearly within the next decade. Many remote and

urban communities in both eastern and Northern Nigeria will have double the number of young men within the next ten years. The male youth are most at risk of gang involvement. Prevention and rejuvenation of good moral strategies must be employed to curtail the main pathways into gang violence.

In general, the deprivation theories of violence incorporate factors related to loss, trauma and developmental impairments, it also focus on historic, social and economic conditions. Most of the current strategies to address youth gang violence have been adapted to by the virus genome of gang violence thereby making it inadequate in sound evidence output. Such include ineffective outputs are; Repression strategies coupled with law and order approaches which actually increase gang activities and at the same times they are not cost effective and do not offer long-term solutions. In fact, a substantial body of evidence suggests that there should be a shift of focus and supports to more proven and promising ways of addressing youth gang violence such as poverty reduction strategies, community capacity sustenance, investment concentration on highest need and community collaboration and problem-solving partnerships.

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