

Review Article

The Activities of Organized Criminal Groups and Their Effects on Peace and Security in Nairobi County, Kenya

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Abstract: This paper is derived from a study that was funded by Kenyatta university Vice-Chancellor's Research Grant. It discusses the activities of organized criminal groups as well as the effects of those activities on security and peace in Nairobi. Nairobi County was chosen for the study because it has the highest number of organized criminal groups in the country. Such groups pose a serious challenge to Kenya Government for it negates the main objective of vision 2030 which is to achieve a secure environment for sustainable social, economic, and political development. The study used oral interviews, participant observation, and document analysis as methods of data collection. Findings of the study revealed that criminal groups were involved in several activities which made the streets, places of work or residence, public transport, and open-air markets unsafe. It was concluded that the Kenya Government must invest more in security so that Nairobi residents can live peacefully and carry out their businesses without fear of being attacked by criminals. From the findings and conclusions of the study, recommendations were made on how the problem of organized criminal groups in Nairobi can be minimized to ensure residents can live in a peaceful and secure county.

Keywords: Crime, Organized, Peace, Security.

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INTRODUCTION

Security and peace are primary components of development. Indeed, security and peace were ranked by Kenya Government as critical factors in the attainment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The country registered significant progress in most of the MDGs by 2015. However, progress towards realizing peace and security was slow. The focus shifted to vision 2030 on building a sustainable world where environmental sustainability, social inclusion, and economic development are equally valued. Security and peace were the main motivation for creating the United Nations. By implications, development cannot be achieved without ensuring a country is secure and peaceful. In the past security and peace were centered on nuclear threat especially during the cold war. However, in the last few decades, violence is linked to organized criminal groups that have become widespread throughout the world.

Jurists, criminologists, and sociologists view crime from different perspectives. This study adopted Thotakura's (2011) definition of crime as an act or offense which violates the law of the state and is strongly disapproved by society. In Kenya, cases of crime continue to escalate despite stringent measures

taken by the government to prevent and manage the same. The increasing crime rate poses a major challenge to peace and security in the process frustrating both domestic and foreign investments.

According to the National Crime Research Centre (NCRC) report (2012), Kenya has forty-six criminal groups spread all over the country out of which sixteen are in Nairobi. It must however be noted that criminal groups keep on mutating and that some of those groups may have gone underground while others have been formed. The proliferation of criminal groups is worrying because several studies and reports show that most criminal activities in Kenya take place in urban areas. This is a major concern considering that the country is working hard to be as urbanized as the developed countries of the world. It is for this reason that the study interviewed different categories of people on the activities of organized criminal groups in Nairobi County and established their effects on peace and security.

Activities of Organized Criminal Groups in Nairobi County

The study investigated the activities of organized criminal groups in the sampled areas in Nairobi County. The data is tabulated in Table 1 below.

Table-1: showing the activities of criminal groups in Nairobi County

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Pick-pocketing	35	30.4%
Mugging	28	24.3%
Robbery with/without violence	16	13.9%
Burglary	13	11.3%
Car Theft	11	9.6%
Rape	7	6.1%
Murder	5	4.4%
Total	115	100%

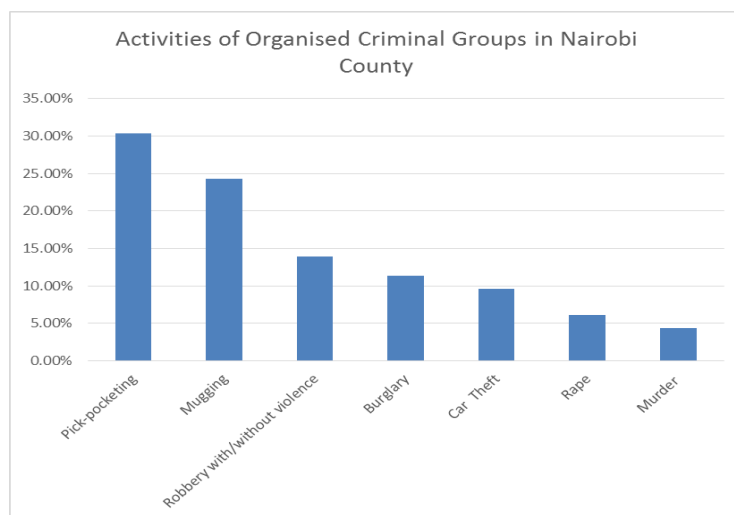


Fig-1: Activities of Criminal Groups in Nairobi County

Table 1 and Figure 1 above show that the highest number of criminal activities as petty crimes like pickpocketing and mugging accounting for 30.4% and 24.3% respectively. These percentages are in agreement with the criminal justice system report (nd) which found out that most prison inmates in Kenya were poor people held for petty offenses and state-regulated crimes. Pickpocketing involves stealing money or other valuables from a person's pocket or bags without them noticing the theft.

Mugging is also a petty crime that entails the use of certain force/violence in taking one's personal effect and may lead to injuries. Most of the properties stolen include personal effects like handbags, purses jewelry, watches, and mobile phones among others. The criminals steal such kinds of items to earn a living since they cheaply sell them to an unsuspecting public. This led to the deduction that poverty precipitates people to engage in criminal activities.

Interviewees pointed out that members of organized criminal groups find it easier to pounce upon passers-by and physically harass them and rob them of their property. Small trade business people, in particular, complained of being robbed by youths carrying crude weapons such as knives and axes. These organized criminals strategize on how to carry out their

operations. Data collected revealed that they often steal in the morning or the evening when there is high traffic into and out of the city. In slum and mid slum areas, criminals hide their weapons and attack people along roads and streets at night. The study revealed that in some sub-counties like Dagoretti, Makadara and Kamukunji there are streets and roads that citizens are afraid to use even during daytime due to the presence of marauding criminal groups. Besides pickpocketing and mugging, other closely related criminal activities are robbery with/without violence and burglary accounting for 13.9% and 11.3% respectively. Data gathered from the research revealed that sometimes organized criminals may rob people without harming them but at times they use violence in gaining entry into a premise or home and ruthlessly beat or even kill the occupants. This affirmed that the security situation in Nairobi is wanting the same way Stavrou (2002) observed in his report on crime survey in the Nairobi. He found that home burglary was a common crime in Nairobi County. The report described home burglary as the unlawful or forcible entry of a residential property, which usually, but not always, involved a theft. The illegal entry may have been by force, such as forcing a door open, breaking a window, or slashing a screen, or may have been without force by entering through an unlocked door or an open window. As long as the person entering had no legal right to be present in the structure, a

burglary is deemed to have occurred. These views were further corroborated by BM security weekly crime report in June 2019. The report shows that robbery with violence and burglary are common crimes in Nairobi County.

Respondents informed the researcher that sometimes a person may get back home from work only to find his or her house broken into and electronics and gas cylinder stolen. However, the criminals may break into the house when the owners are still inside and demand to be given money besides electronic goods which they sell cheaply to corrupt electronic technicians and also to unsuspecting citizens. One of the respondents said, "These boys usually know which house the owner has traveled and while he/she is away they will break into the house and carry the valuables. They sometimes have a master key which can open the house without the neighbors suspecting". It was also revealed that sometimes the criminals work in cahoots with the caretakers of the houses who update them on who has traveled. Other times the criminals pretend to be plumbers or electronic technicians and they can tell the valuables in a particular house in various residential apartments. This shows how organized the criminal groups are in carrying out their activities and thus disturbing the peace and security in the county.

Car theft was reported as another activity of organized criminal groups accounting for 9.6%. Criminals target cars in parking lots in the Central Business District (CBD) and or at residential parking lots. From the respondents, car theft is of two categories, one where the cars are stolen and two where some of the parts are stolen. The respondents also reported that car theft is not carried out by any ordinary street gang but by the well-experienced criminal group(s). The criminals target certain types of cars because they are easy to dismantle and sell their parts. It was learned that some of the criminals are well connected to corrupt garage owners or business owners dealing with spare parts. The second category of car theft entails criminals who specialize in stealing parts like side mirrors, headlights, screen wipers, and wheel caps. All these items are sold at a cheap price to mechanics and or vehicle spare part dealers. The respondents said that a side mirror worth Kenya shilling

22,000 could be sold at a price of Kenya shillings 2000. This affirmed that youth have a quick money syndrome that has a direct relationship with joblessness and poverty.

The data gathered from the study expressed the existence of other activities of organized criminal groups like Rape and Murder with percentages of 6.1 and 4.4 respectively. The lower percentages in comparison to the other criminal activities do not make them any lesser crimes. According to the respondents, the activities though very traumatizing do not happen as frequently as the other crimes. The study found out that rape occurs anytime but mostly in the early morning hours as women are going to work or in the evening especially from 6 pm. The study found out that rape was not necessarily due to poverty for in most cases the rapist(s) would only do so to inflict pain on the victim. This was especially in situations where the criminal would rape a child or rape a victim for having been reported by her to the police for previous criminal activity. This finding went against the study hypothesis by revealing that not all criminal activities are connected to poverty. The criminals are sadists who derive joy from inflicting pain on innocent people.

The study found out that sometimes organized criminals kill the victims. Interviewees said that mostly, murders are carried out on business people and this happens especially when the business people threaten to expose known criminals to the chief or the police and or in cases of the victims failing to surrender what the criminals are demanding. Further, the study learned that at times, some organized criminal groups are out for hire to carry out assassinations. In this case, they are paid to kill known people in cases of a business deal gone sour or in a love triangle. Thus, organized crime becomes a way of earning a living.

Effects of the Activities of organized Crime on security and Peace in Nairobi County

The study inquired about the effects of the activities of organized crime on peace and security in Nairobi County. The information gathered from the respondents revealed four dominant effects as presented in Table 2 and Figure 2 below.

Table-2: Effects of the activities of organized Criminal Groups on security and Peace in Nairobi County

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Fear/terror and tension	58	50.4
Loss of trust in security agents	21	18.2
Increased costs in maintaining security	20	17.4
Limitation of business hours	16	14
Total	115	100

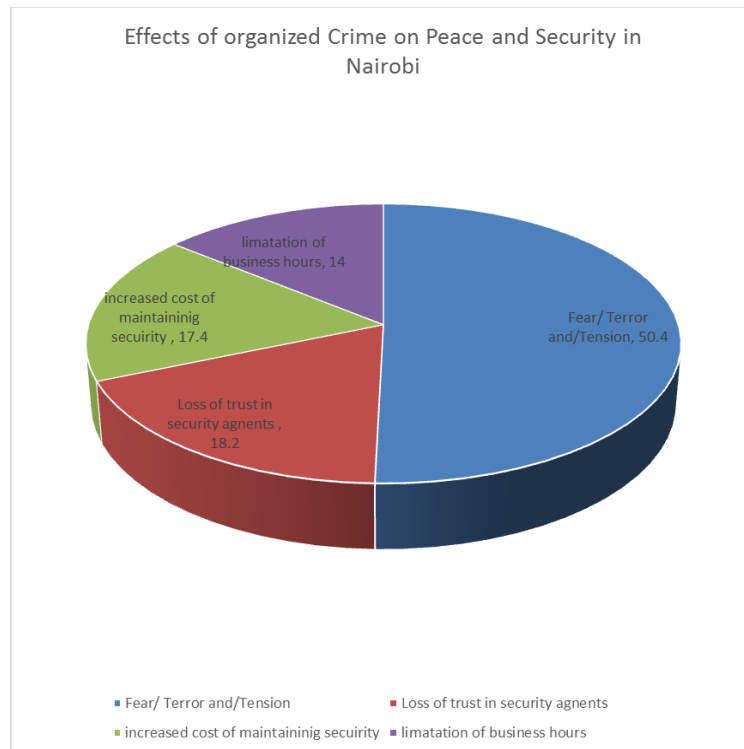


Fig-2: Effects of Organized Crime on Peace and Security in Nairobi

The findings of the study as shown in Table 2 and Figure 2 reveal that organized crime has significant effects on peace and security in Nairobi County. It was found that the greatest effect was fear/ terror and tension with a frequency of 58 translating to 50.4%, loss of trust in security agents especially the police with a frequency of 21 translating to 18.2%, Increased costs of businesses was also another significant effect having a frequency of 20 translating to 17.4 % followed by limitation of business hours with a frequency of 16 making 14%.

From the oral interviews and group discussions, interviewees kept on mentioning that terror/fear caused by organized criminal groups disturb the peace and security of the people in Nairobi. They said criminals carry weapons such as guns and pocket knives which they use either to scare their victims into submission or to kill/injure/ maim those who resist or try to raise alarm. The criminals are usually well organized. They attack individuals either during the day when their businesses are open or in the evening when they are closing. Sometimes the criminals may happen to be known by the victims who later report them to the chief or the police authorities. In case the perpetrators are not prosecuted due to lack of evidence some of the victims migrate to other areas deemed safer. This is because the organized criminals issue threats and at times they attack or kill those residents suspected to have reported them to state authorities. One respondent said, "organized crime has led people to migrate to other places because of life threats received. This

happens in case one reports them to the police or confronts some of the known criminals." This finding complemented that of Mutuku (2017) in his study on the effects of organized criminal gangs on the livelihoods of the urban residents; A case study of Gaza Gang in Kayole Estate, Nairobi. He observed that the majority of his respondents expressed fear as one of the consequences of organized criminal groups. Respondents said that organized criminal groups make residents to either avoid some places or to relocate to other estates within the city. The present study was wider in scope than that of Mutuku because it was carried out in five sub-counties of Nairobi and established that relocating from one area to another within the city was not a solution to the problem of insecurity because no single sub county in Nairobi among the ones studied was free from the fear caused by criminal groups

Data collected revealed that robberies carried out by criminal groups are well organized such that they have vehicles or motorbikes (boda-boda) waiting for them to escape. Other gangs operate in crowded streets and in open-air markets. These latter groups are also well organized because they try to rescue any one of them who happens to be caught by the public. They also attack those victims who make distress call asking for help. One of the study respondents explained the reasons why he thought fear caused by organized criminal groups was the utmost effect on security and peace in Nairobi. He said, "They (gangsters) make open markets as well as the CBD unsafe because members of

the public fear walking along some streets and alleys for they may fall victim to these criminals irrespective of the time of the day or night". It was gathered from the interviews that criminals pretending to be customers attack and steal from members of the public. They have strategies of getting away if caught because they give someone else the stolen goods to run away with. The respondents indicated that many people are attacked early in the morning when they leave for work or in the evening on their way back home. Besides mugging and stealing from the victims some of the criminal's rape ladies. They usually threaten to kill those victims who do not cooperate. Criminal gangs who were reported to be fond of hijacking transport vehicles popularly known as matatus terrorize the passengers by stealing their personal effects and instill a lot of fear in them. Such activities cause fear among residents of Nairobi and thus negatively affect their peace and security.

Loss of trust in government security agents was found to be an effect of organized criminal groups. The emergence of new criminal groups every time was reported to be a testimony that either the police are unable to combat crime or they are part of the crime syndicate. Gastrow (2011) noted how easy it is easy for criminals to infiltrate the security and judicial agents and thus compromising local, regional, and national security. He argued that organized crime (especially transnational organized crime) has got a way of penetrating the political class and the consequent capability of funding elections and thus influencing parliament and procurement processes. The penetration of organized crime to government and politics to institutions breeds further crime but mostly corruption. In such a state of affairs, the scholar observed that it becomes easy to "persuade" and "buy" a police officer or judge. This argument implies that criminals can bribe their way out once they are caught by security agencies. Respondents affirmed Gastrow's sentiments in the sense that they said that there could be cooperation between the police and the criminals in some of the robberies. One respondent said, "I believe that some policemen even hire out guns to criminals, this explains why in case of an attack by gangs the police respond long after the criminals have left. If they can go round collecting money from illicit liquor brewers, what else can't they do"? These sentiments express the loss of trust in the security agents and thus some residents fail to report criminal activities when they take place and opt to engage the services of guards for securing themselves and their property. Respondents, however, said that while those who are rich could easily organize for their security the poor cannot afford such services and so they hardly get comfortable sleep fearing that they could be attacked by criminals.

Respondents were candid that lack of security in Nairobi was draining their hard-earned finances.

Most of those running business irrespective of the size had installed CCTV cameras besides hiring guards. One respondent said that "I may close my shop because my business cannot sustain me due to the increased cost of maintaining security. I have installed cameras in my shop and I have also acquired a guard whom I have to pay".

The study also found that organized crime negatively affects the security and peace needed for running a business.' Some of the sampled business persons said "the gangs attack us at night (around 8-9 pm) when most businesses are being closed and steal the day's earnings. They threatened to kill and usually have weapons so we choose to surrender to them. The gangs have also affected businesses because we have to close early and so we do not make as much profit as we would if we closed our businesses at late hours like 11 pm". This finding corroborated that of Pokhariyal and Muthuri (2003)) that criminals affect the length of doing business because the gates are closed earlier than before thus shortening the length of doing business. Although this study did not focus on the exact age of the criminals, respondents were generally calling them young people. It was also evident that the criminals were not in formal employment where they were earning salaries. The findings, therefore, gave credence to Prior and Paris (2005) that poverty constrains people from realizing their goals hence resulting in criminal activities to earn a living.

CONCLUSION

The study investigated the activities of organized criminal groups in Nairobi County. It was found that criminals were involved in several activities which made the streets, houses, public transport and open-air markets very unsafe. Pick-pocketing, mugging, robbery with/ without violence, burglary car theft rape, and murder were found to be common in all parts of the study area. These activities of organized criminal groups in Nairobi County affect peace and security not only to the Kenyans but also to the local and international investors. Fear and tension caused by the criminals alarm entrepreneurs making them lose trust in security agents. Robbery, pickpocketing, violence, and mugging among other criminal activities limit business hours as well as increase the cost of maintaining security personnel. It can thus be concluded that the Kenya government must invest more resources in security in Nairobi so that people can live peacefully and carry out their businesses without fear of being attacked by criminals. Many youths do not know their talents, abilities, skills, and aptitudes. The study recommends to the county government of Nairobi to organize youth empowerment programs and seminars to keep young people engaged. It is imperative that they be given ways to legitimately develop their talents like music and drama among others. The study further

recommends that parents should know the friends of their children. Knowledge of close associates of children will help parents to identify bad characters in advance thus saving them from negative influences that can lead them to join criminal groups.

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