



Article

The Socio-economic Impact of the Activities of “Unknown Gunmen” on Market Women in Imo State.

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Abstract

Efforts have been put in place to tackle the menace of “unknown gunmen” as well as other security issues in the country, but little has been done to address poverty and unemployment as root causes of security threats in Nigeria. Thus, in view of the continued existence of the “unknown gunmen”, this study sought to investigate the socioeconomic impact of the activities of the “unknown gunmen” on market women in Imo State. The study anchored on the Routine Activity theory. Orlu Local Government Area of Imo State, was purposively selected for this study because, it has experienced more activities by the “unknown gunmen” than other LGAs in Imo state. Three towns however, were randomly picked and a sample size of 352 used for the study. Findings revealed that the activities of the unknown gunmen have affected the socioeconomic life of market women by restricting their movement and reducing patronage. It was further revealed that some of the challenges facing the fight against “unknown gunmen” are; the lack of information, public support and prompt response from security personnel. It was also revealed that the increased rate of poverty and unemployment is one of the problems facing the fight against unknown gunmen. Therefore, the study recommended that, government and non-governmental organizations to work together to eradicate unemployment and poverty in the country.

Keywords: Crime, Nigerian Police Force, Security, Unknown Gunmen, Vigilante.

Introduction

The entity Nigeria, has in more recent times been synonymous with insecurity; with security threats like Boko-Haram, herdsmen crisis, kidnapping, assassination and banditry etc. hovering the entire nation. These security threats have metamorphosized into “unknown gunmen”; who have perpetuated various

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heinous crimes in the country and thus, increased the crime rate in the country. Michael (2023) stated that Nigeria ranks 6th in the African crime index and global ranking with a crime rate of 7.35 after Democratic Republic of Congo. In view of this, the Global Peace Index of 2023 ranked Nigeria 144th out of 163 independent states in the world (Arogbonlo, 2023).

Therefore, the emergence of the “unknown gunmen” has constituted a threat to the peace, security and stability of the country by heightening the security issues in Nigeria. These “unknown gunmen” are people who perpetrate crimes but whose identity remain unknown. Though, it has been argued that these persons are known but are yet to be discovered by the authorities or are being protected by the public or authorities, the idea behind the name “unknown gunmen”, came from the fact that these gunmen are believed to be unknown.

Hanatu (2021) however argued that these criminals are known but their crimes are most times dismissed and simply labelled as “Unknown Gunmen”, perhaps due to “political correctness” or ineptitude on the part of the security personnel’s or reasons that are not known. Onifade et al., (2013) stated that the security issues in Nigeria may be connected to the increased ethnic hate, religious bigotry, political rivalry, a growing population of disgruntled citizens who feel that they have been marginalized and government’s failure to deliver public goods to citizens (Igbuzor, 2011).

Ighomereho and Akpor-Robaro, (2013), opined that unemployment and poverty, terrorism, porous borders, fraud of all kinds and internet swindling, official corruption among others, have contributed to the state of insecurity and has increased the crime rate and terrorists’/bandits’ attacks in the country; leaving unpalatable challenges for the nation’s economy and its growth. This manifests in the fear instilled in people as they go through their daily activities due to security issues. McGrew (1988) asserts that the security of a nation is characterized by the protection and maintenance of the socio-economic order in the event of internal and external threat and the promotion of a preferred international order, which reduces the threat to basic values and interests, as well as to the domestic order.

In the absence of these, it becomes difficult for citizens to confidently invest and do their business without the fear of being killed or maimed. In some other cases, there have been several incidents of loss of property which do not augur well for human development. This is worse for market women who rely on their daily earning for their daily livelihood as they may lose confidence and sense of security when they lose their property/business. Also, when these women lose their lives in the course of doing business, their families tend to suffer greatly as regards the absence of a mother and wife especially, when they are the breadwinner.

While most studies like Chukwuma et al., (2022) and Achumba (2013) have focused on insecurity, few studies have investigated “unknown gunmen”, in different dimensions. Moreso, there seems to be very limited literature that focus on the effect of the activities of these unknown gunmen on market women. Therefore, it is pertinent to find out how the activities of “unknown gunmen” affect market women.

Problem of the Study

The activities of armed men (unknown gunmen) have affected the socioeconomic life of citizens adversely. Nkwopara, (2021) stated that, since the emergence of unknown gunmen, the country’s socioeconomic life has been on the verge of collapse. Though several efforts have been made to tackle this and many more security threats, Omenga, (2013) stated that one of the lapses in security comes from the lack of response by the Nigerian Police Force during crime and emergencies. According to Omenga, some analysts have opined that perhaps government or some group of unscrupulous government officials have been using the unknown gunmen saga as a gambit for political gain.

Even as this may have been the case, these unknown gunmen may not actually be unknown to members of the public. But, the inability of the Nigerian Police Force to establish good relationship with the public may have affected the gathering of intelligence/information on these “unknown gunmen”. Possibly, members of the public seem to have built a negative perception of the Nigeria Police Force over the years and may have resolved to avoid anything that has to do with them to avoid blackmail, extortion and the likes.

Though the efforts of the Nigeria Police Force in protecting lives and properties cannot be overemphasized, the efforts of the local vigilante groups in the fight against security threat may have been given proper cognition. Evidently, members of these vigilante groups usually are members of the community and thus, have access to a wider range of information than the Police Force.

Also, while efforts to nip security issues in the bud seem to have focused on the recruitment of security personnel and the procurement of ammunition, focus may not have been on root causes of security threats like poverty, unemployment etc. This may have given rise to a situation where security threats continue to emerge in different forms and methods. Most worrisome is the loss of businesses and lives which tends to weaken entrepreneurship zeal in males and females. However, while men tend to recover from their losses easily, women may take longer time in recovering from their losses as they may as well struggle to regain their self-confidence, self-esteem and morale in addition to their lost business venture. This therefore, may increase the rate of poverty among women and hinder the battle to empower women.

In view of this, this study has attempted to examine how the activities of “unknown gunmen” have affected market women so as to make recommendations that will help women achieve their full potential in the society. The study therefore aimed at investigating the impact of “unknown gunmen” on the socio-economic life of market women.

This study was guided by the following questions. They are;

1. How has the activities of the “unknown gunmen” affected the social life of market women in Imo State?
2. How has the activities of the “unknown gunmen” affected the economic life of market women in Imo State?
3. What are the challenges facing the fight of unknown gunmen in Imo State?
4. How can security threats like “unknown gunmen” be eradicated to ensure socio-economic development in Imo State?

Empirical review

Ugwuoke, (2023) investigated “Nigeria’s Reign of Unknown Gunmen: A New Sector of Criminality and Security Challenges. The study covered the entire country with at least two states captured in each of the six geo-political zones of the country. Data was derived through newspaper reportages and analysed using content analysis. The research found out that victims of the unknown gunmen cut across civilians and armed security men. It was also revealed that soldiers and policemen were usually targeted and their weapons taken away by the unknown gunmen when killed. Also, it was revealed that the activities of “unknown gunmen” include; killings, raping, robbing, and kidnappings for ransom.

Akinyetun and Ebonine, (2023) examined “Unknown gunmen and insecurity in Nigeria: Dancing on the brink of state fragility”. The paper aimed at investigating the menace of unknown gunmen in Nigeria: as a pervasive threat to the people of Nigeria. It offered a conceptual and theoretical supposition of a fragile state and adopted a documentary method of data collection technique. Qualitative descriptive method of data analysis was used to analyse the research data. Findings revealed that the term “unknown gunmen”, used to describe the spate of insecurity in the country reflects the threat to insecurity and the peaceful coexistence of members of society. It was also revealed that this is a threat to a fragile state. Therefore, the study recommended state-building and peace-building in the country.

Ikezue, (2023) in the study, “Unmasking the Identity and Characteristics of the Unknown Gunmen in Anambra State, Nigeria: A Survey Approach”, attempted to unmask the defining socio demographic characteristics of persons responsible for these destructive feats. The study also investigated the factors

responsible for the emergence and spread of the unknown gunmen insurrection. The relative deprivation theory formed the theoretical thrust of this study and it adopted the mixed methods research design and used a sample size of 400 hundred participants; drawn from the Awka Metropolis in Anambra state. 12 persons were also interviewed for this study. The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and percentages. The study found, among others, that unknown gunmen were mainly poor and aggrieved persons who have taken to criminality to make ends meet. Poverty, feeling of injustice and weak institutional framework were found to be responsible for the emergence and sustenance of the unknown gunmen in Awka metropolis. The paper recommended among others the necessity of empowering the youth through serious concerted efforts in job creation and acquisition of entrepreneurial skills. It was also recommended that efforts be Intensify towards educating the populace to help in dispelling them toward separatist propagandist claims of the unknown gunmen.

The above studies explained the activities of unknown gunmen and to an extent, the causes of its emergence. However, little studies have focused on the impact of these activities especially, on women. Thus, this study sought to bridge this gap by investigating the impact of the activities of unknown gunmen on market women.

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on the Routine activities theory that was originally developed by Cohen and Felson (1979). Cohen and Felson assumes that crime requires three basic elements; the combination of a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of capable guardians. This is based on the assumption that crime can be committed by anyone who has the opportunity and it focuses on specific crime events and offender behaviour/decisions. This theory has however been criticised for not properly explaining how offenders can be motivated.

Thus, the mystery of “unknown gunmen”, is based on the availability of individuals who for any reason may have been motivated to commit crime. These individuals may have been motivated by their inability to access socioeconomic resources, other structural grievances or the need to punish the government and perhaps, take what they think should be accrued to them. However, these “unknown gunmen” understand that the masses are too weak to defend themselves thereby, making them suitable targets. The targets are more often than not, socioeconomically disadvantaged members of the society, who are unable to mobilise security personnel towards ensuring the safety of their lives and property. Moreso, the penetrability of the Nigerian security system, makes it possible for crime to survive. In spite of the huge resources allocated to fighting security annually, the numerical strength of these security personnel, has

remained relatively small when compared to the large population of the country, and are largely ill-equipped to withstand the contemporary security challenges in the country.

Research methods

The study focused on the activities of the “unknown gunmen” in places where these activities are rampant in Imo state. The descriptive research design was adopted to enable the researcher effectively describe the pattern of operation and the behaviour of the unknown gunmen. The researcher selected Orlu LGA to represent the 27 LGAs in Imo State using a purposive sampling technique. This is because, the unknown gunmen have carried out lots of operations in the LGA. Furthermore, a probability sampling technique was used to select three towns; Umutanze, Amike and Umuzike from the 17 towns; Umuna, Eziachi, Obor, Umuzike, Umutanze, Obinugwu, Umudioka, Owerre-Ebeiri, Amike, Mgbee, Amaifeke, Ihioma, Okporo, Ogberuru, Obibi-Ochaso, Umutanze and Ihette-Owerre, in the LGA. In this method, all the towns were written on different sheet of paper, put in a can and shuffled. After which, three out of the 17 towns were picked.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, (2022), the population of Orlu LGA in the year 2022, was placed at 198,500 people. Thus, using a sample calculator of 95% confidence level, a margin of error of 5, a population proportion of 40 and a population size of 198,500, a same population of 369 was derived. This population was divided into three; 123 in each of the sampled towns. Respondents comprised of female adults of various age range, religion, academic qualification and occupational status.

Table I: Distribution of questionnaire

Towns	Distributed Questionnaire	Returned Questionnaire	Percentage (%)
Umutanze	123	119	33.8
Amike	123	116	33
Umuzike	123	117	33.2
Total	369	352	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2024.

Going by the details on Table1 above, the sample size of this study is 352; with Umatanze having the largest sample size. Therefore, the systematic random sampling technique was adopted in selecting the respondents of the study. In this method, the researcher selected every third house in the town. In view

of this, data was collected through primary; use of questionnaire and secondary sources. These data were afterwards, presented in tables and analysed using simple percentages.

Research findings

Table II: How has the activities of the “unknown gunmen” affected the social life of market women?

S/N	Questions	True	False	Total
1.	It has restricted movement on several occasions	215 61.1%	137 38.9%	352 100%
2.	It has affected social interaction adversely	189 53.7%	163 46.3%	352 100%
3.	It has prevented visitors from visiting the town even on festive periods	205 58.2%	147 41.8%	352 100%
4.	It has prevented social gatherings in the community	191 54.3%	161 45.7%	352 100%
5.	The activities of unknown gunmen has increased the rate of poverty among women and hinder the battle to empower women.	201 57.1%	151 42.9%	352 100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2024.

The above table showed that the activities of the unknown gunmen have affected social life by restricting movement, social interaction and social gatherings. Also, it has limited the rate at which visitors visit the town even during festive periods and has increased the rate of poverty among women.

Table III: How has the activities of the “unknown gunmen” affected the economic life of market women?

S/N	Questions	True	False	Total
6.	It has led to the loss of businesses	229 65%	123 35%	352 100%
7.	It has reduced patronage	211 60%	141 40%	352 100%

8.	It has reduced profit and increased losses	255 72.4%	97 27.6%	352 100%
9.	It has killed the zeal of doing business	201 57.1%	151 42.9%	352 100%
10.	It has hindered visitors from coming to the town to do business for the fear of losing their life.	217 61.6%	135 38.4%	352 100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2024.

The table showed that the activities of the unknown gunmen have affected the economic life of market women as it has led to the loss of businesses, reduced patronage, reduced profit and increased losses in doing business. It also showed that it has killed the zeal of doing business and hindered visitors from coming to the town to do business.

Table IV: What are the challenges facing the fight of unknown gunmen?

S/N	Questions	True	False	Total
11.	The lack of information	211 60%	141 40.1%	352 100%
12.	Increased rate of poverty and unemployment	219 62.2%	133 37.8%	352 100%
13.	Lack of vigilante	205 58.2%	147 41.8%	352 100%
14.	Lack of public support	222 63.1%	130 36.9%	352 100%
15.	Lack of prompt response from security personnel	231 65.6%	121 34.4%	352 100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2024.

The table above showed that the challenges facing the fight against unknown gunmen are; the lack of vigilante, public support and information. It also showed that the increased rate of poverty and unemployment as well as prompt response from security personnel are part of the challenge facing the fight against unknown gunmen.

Table V: How can security threats like “unknown gunmen” be eradicated to ensure socio-economic development?

S/N	Questions	True	False	Total
16.	Reorient the public to change the negative perception of the Nigerian Police force.	199 56.5%	153 43.5%	352 100%
17.	Tackling poverty and unemployment	251 71.3%	101 28.7%	352 100%
18.	Incorporating the vigilantee group into the fight against unknown gunmen	243 69%	109 31%	352 100%
19.	Providing relevant information to security personnel	201 57.1%	151 42.9%	352 100%
20.	Quick and timely response by security personnel	214 60.8%	138 39.2%	352 100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2024.

The table above showed that the provision of relevant information to security personnel, incorporation of vigilante group into the fight against unknown gunmen and the quick and timely response will curb unknown gunmen. It also showed that the reorientation of the public to change their negative perception of the Nigerian Police force and the reduction of poverty and unemployment will curb the menace of unknown gunmen.

Discussion of findings

The activities of the unknown gunmen are grievous including the destruction of lives and properties. These activities have affected movement, social interaction and social gatherings in Orlu LGA as a community. This is because, individuals are unable to move freely especially at night for the fear of being attacked or accidentally meeting an attack. Members of the community have also, reduced the rate of social interactions in order to avoid talking about the unknown gunmen since the identity of these men are not known. Visitors also rarely visit the community due to the fear of losing their lives and properties.

Based on the belief that unknown gunmen tend to target social gatherings in perpetrating evil, individuals have also reduced the rate of social gatherings in the community. This has therefore weakened the social ties that existed in the community and allowed the infiltration of individualism.

All these have affected the rate of patronage in business activities; leading to a reduced profit and increased expenses or loss. This is as a result of due to the loss of goods/stock in businesses and the

inability of visitor to visit the community with the aim of doing business. Also, the increased losses and reduced profit experience by business people, may have adversely affected the zeal of doing business within the community which has further impoverished the market women.

Moreso, the study found that the fight against the continued activities of the unknown gunmen is faced with numerous challenges like; poverty and unemployment, lack of public support, lack of information and the absence of prompt and timely response mechanisms from the security operatives. It has also been argued that unemployment and poverty are the root of various vices; unknown gunmen inclusive. This is because it is believed that individuals who are unemployed and poor may see crime as a means of livelihood in which to cater for their need. But, as regards to the lack of information, this is drawn from the lack of cooperation and support by the public which may be traced to the reputation built over the years by the security personnel in Nigeria; especially, the Nigerian Police Force.

This reputation discourages the public from freely giving the Nigerian Police Force and perhaps, other security personnel information where it is needed. This may have as well affected the timely intervention of these security personnel in times of security threats. But, while the vigilante group is encouraged in some communities, in other communities this group may not have been given adequate support and recognition in the fight against the unknown gunmen. It is no gainsay that in most places, these vigilante groups are made up of indigenes who know the nook and cranny of the village thereby making them an essential tool in fishing out these unknown gunmen

Conclusion

Nigeria has transcended from minor security problems to the now unknown gunmen. While it can be argued that this is symbolic of a state with a structural problem; the security operatives in the country have no doubt exhausted their might in tracking down these unknown gunmen. Though these operatives have been successful to some extent, the havoc left behind by these unknown gunmen does not speak well of the efforts of the security operatives.

The governments on their part have also done their best to tackle the problem of unknown gunmen as well as other security issues by recruiting security personnel and increasing the budget on security. But one begins to wonder why the identity of these unknown gunmen has remained unknown despite these efforts.

Basically, one primary challenge that seems to have surfaced in the battle against insecurity is the growing rate of unemployment and poverty in the country. These seem to have given rise to a sense of

deprivation and the need to rebel against the government. In some instances, this has also made individuals to take up crime as a means of survival.

However, while the vigilante security groups may be essential to the numerous security issues in Nigeria including the unknown gunmen saga, they may not have been properly funded and given proper recognition. It is thus, agreeable that some communities experiencing security problems do not have vigilante groups to defend and protect them thereby, making them vulnerable to frequent attacks by the unknown gunmen.

Generally, these attacks disrupt the socio-economic life of all citizens. But for market women, the consequences are more severe. This is because these women may lose morale and self-confidence in doing business and thus, may not venture into business again. This may adversely impact on the efforts to empower women and liberate them from poverty.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations were made.

1. There is a need for government and non-governmental organizations to work together to eradicate unemployment and poverty through the creation of job opportunities, provision of skill acquisition centres at little or no cost and the provision of interest free loans for prospective businessmen/women.
2. The public should endeavour to cooperate with the security agencies and offer them useful information when need be. The security operatives on the other hand should work on building trust with the masses and curbing every form of corrupt and exploitative practice in the system. Also, the government should increase the remuneration of the security personnel and provide them with equipment needed to do their job diligently and honestly.
3. Furthermore, the local vigilante groups should be incorporated into the security force and made to collaborate with the formal security forces; sharing information and possibly equipment to ensure the security of lives and properties.

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Corrections made

- The items in yellow were deleted
- Attention was given to the research methodology and it was found out that, a descriptive research design was adopted for the study.
- Wrong tenses were corrected.
- Corrections were made to the references to suit the APA referencing style.

Short biography

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