

Examining the Effects of COVID-19 Curtailment Measures on Criminal Activities in Southern Nigeria

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Abstract: COVID-19 ushered in a new pattern of social living as governments across the globe sought out ways to contain the spread of the viral pandemic. Notable among the measures adopted by the government of Nigeria is the lockdown policy. Following the Routine Activities theory, this study examined criminal victimization in Nigeria during the period of COVID-19 pandemic using a qualitative approach. Findings indicate that criminal victimization lessened at the onset of the lockdown measure; however, trends in criminal victimization kept oscillating as the lockdown persisted. The pattern of crime found to be prevalent are human right abuses by law enforcement agents, domestic crimes, white collar crime and pen robbery such as mismanagement of funds donated by well spirited individuals and corporate bodies by some government agents, profiteering and advanced fee fraud amongst others. We also found that following the changes in social living, corruption became rife in Nigeria. The study concludes that there is need for implementation of community policing in Nigeria as the bulk of policing returned to the people during the pandemic period.

Keywords: Social living, Lockdown, Personal crime, White collar crime, Policing.

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Introduction

Globally, public health is challenged as never before. Schools were closed, worship centers like churches and mosques shut, offices and businesses locked down and global oil price and stock market tumbled following the sit-at-home order in various countries. Restrictions were placed on local and international movements and borders were closed by the majority of the countries as a result of a virus that originated from Wuhan in China which exploded into a global pandemic. Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by infection with severe acute respiratory syndrome known as Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) was initially reported in December 2019, in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, a central city in the People's

Republic of China, where transportation is enormously convenient to connect all other places in China and overseas (Qian *et al*, 2020; Wu *et al*, 2020; Wu, Chen & Chan, 2020). Evidence is highly suggestive that the outbreak is associated with exposures in a seafood market in Wuhan which was on January 1, 2020 closed down (WHO, 2020b). World Health Organization also noted that on January 11-12, 2020, it received further detailed information on the outbreak (WHO, 2020a). Wuhan, being a city open to the world, the virus was carried by travelers of different countries who visit Europe. On March 11th, 2020, WHO declared 2019-nCoV, which was identified and classified as belonging to the Coronavirus family, a global pandemic, as the virus spread widely across continents, leading to a dramatic increase in the number of positive cases and deaths (Campedelli, Aziani & Favarin, 2020). Unlike any other known pandemic in history, Coronavirus tends to spread faster, defying all technological advancements of the 21st century. To this effect, governments round the world brokered several strategies to arrest the situation, in what Wilder-Smith and Freedman (2020) noted as, containment or mitigation strategies. In comparison to the Spanish Flu, African Center for Strategic Studies noted that while both the pandemic of 1918 and COVID-19 are respiratory diseases largely spread through the air by coughing or sneezing, the two pandemics are different in important ways. The H1N1 influenza strain of 1918 had a very short incubation period, just 1 to 2 days, whereas the coronavirus incubation can stretch up to 2 weeks, and its spread is facilitated by asymptomatic carriers. Moreover, the flu pandemic of a century ago would penetrate deep into a victim's lungs straightaway, and its virulence could trigger an overreaction by the immune system, filling the lungs with antibodies that caused acute respiratory distress. As a result, victims were overwhelmingly the young and healthy. This is the inverse of COVID-19's age profile, which targets those with weakened immune systems (African Center for Strategic Studies, 2020:2).

In Nigeria, the government ordered civil servants to work from home in an apparent lockdown as a measure to limit sporadic spread of COVID-19. Other forms of the curtailment strategies applied by the Nigerian government as given by Nigerian Center for Disease Control (NCDC) include; maintaining social distancing, hand washing and use of hand sanitizers, avoiding group of more than fifty (50) individuals (this entails closing down churches/mosques, market places, ban on marriage and burial functions, and other public gatherings) (NCDC, 2020). Considering the aftermath of state lock down on social living, Campedelli, Aziani and Favarin (2020) observed that, now and as before, the attention of scientists has been drawn in assessing social and psychological consequences of quarantine in periods of public health emergencies as epidemics and pandemics. Regrettably, there are dearth of research outputs that investigate the effects of COVID-19 curtailment measures on criminal activities (Campedelli, Aziani & Favarin, 2020), and we add, particularly in Nigeria. Containment and mitigation strategies towards containing Coronavirus earlier mentioned limited commercial activities and booming vehicular traffic which created hotspot that necessitated criminal victimization. Following the lockdown by the government, vehicular movements on highways were reduced drastically, limiting

highway robbery and kidnapping activities. In another light, social distancing policy reduced pick pocket activities which normally occur in a crowded commercial vehicle or crowded open markets and its environs. Violent crimes like assault have also been checkmated with restrictions in movement which affected night life in clubs, public bars and hotels. Therefore, both the intended criminal and victims are in a restricted movement, freeing up criminal hotspots and target suitability in an environment which Eze (2016) reports as one marked by high spate of criminal victimization.

Victimization generally is a widespread phenomenon encompassing every facet of the life of individuals and organizations (Gyong, 2010). The generic meaning of victimization is a situation in which persons or groups suffer physical, mental or psychological harm or injuries, material loss or damage or other social disadvantages resulting from either natural, socioeconomic, political, physical or mechanical disaster or misfortune (Gyong, 2010; Yusuf & Yahaya, 2014). Crime victims are individuals or groups who have directly or indirectly suffered the brunt of criminal activities. Thus, Gyong (2010) noted that, those who suffer from outright violations of fundamental human rights perpetrated by individuals or the State, discriminatory socio-economic policies, white collar elite and conventional (common) crimes, among others, can be said to be victims of crime. Governments charged with the responsibility of securing lives and properties, churn out policies to ameliorate criminal victimization. Ban on commercial motorcycle in urban areas and partial curfew, regulating business hours from 7am to 6pm, and target hardening are some of the measures adopted to curb criminal victimization (Ugwuoke *et al*, 2020).

Although criminal victimization was on the decline at the onset of lockdown following the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, there is fear that as the lockdown policies drag from weeks to months, the populace are certainly going to run out of food stock and cash, and may be forced by economic realities to source a means of livelihood amidst the lockdown. Resurgence of criminal victimization amidst the measures put in place to curtail COVID-19 calls for empirical enquiry, as the measures put in place continue to lash harsh economic penury to all and sundry. The impact wields not only on the civilian populace in Nigeria but also on law enforcement agents whomay receive bribes from citizens to violate the COVID-19 inter-boundary restrictions. The activities of teenagers who line up the streets because of school closure are also important indices towards understanding criminal victimization in a pandemic era, as it could swing the pendulum of trends in domestic violence, rape, sexual abuse, teen pregnancy and other personal crimes. Therefore, the dynamics surrounding criminal victimization in a peculiar period as in a period of pandemic outbreak prompted this research. We set out on this study to investigate criminal victimization in a period of Coronavirus outbreak in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinnings of this study anchor on the Routine Activities theory of Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson (1979). The theory was targeted to explain escalating

official crime rate during the 1970s in the United States of America. From the routine activities theory perspective, crime is a consequence of the presence of a likely offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian or social control agent (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Daily activities of people such as going to work, pursuing recreation, and running errands can bring offenders in contact with suitable victims and targets, and in such contact where there is no hindrance, crime becomes inevitable. Cohen and Felson suggest that the first ingredient for crime; a motivated offender, was a given. Rather than understanding crime as a function of variation in offender motivation, Cohen and Felson indicate that we could better understand crime in terms of variation in the other two ingredients for crime (a suitable target and absence of capable guardianship). They show in a study that victimization increased in the United States of America following major shifts in the labor force participation of women occurring between 1960 and 1970, thereby leading to diminished guardianship at homes. Thus, they suggest that it was the changing routine, daily activities of U.S. residents that created increased opportunity in the form of increased target suitability and diminished guardianship. The lockdown in Nigeria like in other parts of the world resulted in change of routines to stay-at-home in which the COVID-19 pandemic forced both the offenders and potential victims indoors. Outdoor activities and victimizations were blocked by the lockdown while the stay-at-home order protected households from burglaries type of victimization. It is on this strength that Routine Activity theory captured this study.

Literature

Criminal victimization in a pandemic era

Criminal victimization follows a trend of events in the society, while in certain occasions, criminal victimization might be on the increase, during some other occasions, criminal victimization might decline. A pandemic situation provides one of such occasions which swings the pendulum pressurizing criminal victimization to oscillate. COVID-19 poses a war-like situation to the world. In the same manner new patterns of criminal victimization emerged as an aftermath of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war (Igbo, 2007; Ugwuoke, 2010; Ajayi, 2011; Eze, 2016), it is in the authors' argument that, fear of the aftermath of COVID-19 in relation to surge in crime wave are not farfetched. McCoy (2020) notes that, fears about the Coronavirus have raised anxieties about other threats, such as crime, and indicates that violent crime has been on the decrease in New York, USA. He went further to state that:

The idea that desperate people will storm food stores or break into homes of the wealthy...finds no precedence in American history. Riots occur during times of rising social and economic expectations, not depressions. Looting occurs opportunistically after a riot or immediately after an unexpected major event such as an electrical

blackout or a hurricane, not as the result of months-long slide into economic turmoil (Mccoy, 2020: 1).

There is a global drop in crime since measures were put in place to slow the spread of the coronavirus (South China Morning Post, 2020). Hoodlums are also conscious to contain the spread of the virus and limit the chances of contracting it themselves. Therefore, burglars are like the rest of every other person in a period of pandemic outbreak (Mccoy, 2020). In Chicago, one of America's most violent cities, drug arrests have plummeted 42 per cent in the weeks since the city shut down, compared with the same period last year. Part of that decrease, some criminal lawyers say, is that drug dealers have no choice but to wait out the economic slump (South China Morning Post, 2020:1). In line with the foregoing, several researchers (Shayegh & Malpede, 2020; Pietrawska, Aurand & Palmer, 2020a; Pietrawska, Aurand & Palmer, 2020b; Pietrawska, Aurand & Palmer, 2020c; Ashby, 2020a; Ashby, 2020b; Felson, Jiang & Xu, 2020; Campedelli, Aziani & Favarin, 2020; Lum, Maupin & Stoltz, 2020; Mohler *et al.*, 2020; Gerell, Kardell & Kindgren, 2020; Payne & Morgan, 2020) have made initial examinations into how crime rates have fluctuated in the advent of COVID-19, producing mixed results when comparing broad categories of crime across different cities and with different methods and periods of study. While some researchers identified an overall drop in crime, others found increase in certain patterns of crime (Stickle & Felson, 2020). The variations from empirical studies aforementioned indicate that at the beginning of the lockdown measure to contain COVID-19, property crimes declined in cities, while personal crimes increased. For instance, Pietrawska, Aurand, and Palmer (2020c) compare crimes against persons and crimes against property in four cities for a period of ten weeks, their findings indicate sharp variations in both pattern of crimes from week to week and within different crime types.

Swinging pattern of crime

Enforcing defaulters of COVID-19 law opens a new swing to complex criminal victimization where by the prospective law breaker (i.e., citizens who break the lock down orders) may become victims of physical abuse, brutality or death in the hands of law enforcement officers. Specifically, non-compliance with stay-at-home orders was associated with delinquent behavior (Nivette *et al.*, 2020), and as Stickle and Felson (2020) note, there are some relationships between non-compliance to COVID-19 laws and crime. In another light, where harsh economic realities push people to leave their home before the official expiration of the lock down rules, there could be swinging changes to criminal victimization, too. Therefore, with the aid of advanced technology aided by most renowned websites for anonymized cell phone location history, combined with the ability to measure compliance with movement restrictions, criminologists have the data to examine the routine activities of whole populations at a level never before possible while overlaying crime rates for both a temporal a place-based evaluation (Stickle & Felson, 2020).

It has been argued that as violent crime wane during a pandemic as it is with COVID-19, other patterns of crime seem to resurrect in a rather increasing manner (South China Morning Post, 2020; Mccoy, 2020). The unpreparedness of the stay-at-home policy holds an aftermath for several households who hardly have time to spend together. While it is believed that the elongated time family members spend together can help towards intimate bonding, it also holds certain consequences for domestic violence. South China Morning Post (2020) notes that, in the US, Houston Police recorded that aggravated assaults were up by 10 per cent three weeks into the lockdown, and half of those were domestic violence, a significantly higher proportion than normal. Crime victimization experience wave from one pattern to another under COVID-19 pandemic. Mccoy (2020) observes a surge in online fraud, white collar crime, and domestic violence against spouses, partners, roommates, and even children.

In Nigeria, the rate of crime reports in national dailies has dropped, but the rate of domestic violence is already a cause for concern (Oditia, 2020). Another wave of crime peculiar to Nigeria during the period of COVID-19 is extra-judicial killing. Eighteen (18) people in Nigeria have been killed by security forces during the enforcement of measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 (Ojo, 2020; Aljazeera news, 2020; Tim, 2020; National Human Rights Commission, 2020). In another light, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) presents that, out of 105 complaints/incidents of human rights violation received and documented within the initial lock down period, Lagos State has the highest recorded cases with 28 incidents. This is followed by the FCT, Abuja, which has 10 recorded cases. Enugu State recorded 9 incidents followed by Abia, Delta and Nasarawa States which recorded 7, 6 and 5 incidents, respectively. Rivers State also recorded 5 incidents of human rights violation while Imo recorded 4 incidents (NHRC, 2020:1). NHRC classified human right abuses it received at the initial period of the lock down, and stated them as follows: Complaints of human rights violations were received and documented in the following thematic areas: extra-judicial killings, violation of right to freedom of movement, unlawful arrest and detention, seizure/confiscation of properties, sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), discrimination, torture, inhumane and degrading treatment, and extortion.

Changes in Policing

In the United States for instance, COVID-19 pandemic has brought “business as usual” to a crashing halt for all, and created unprecedented challenges for law enforcement agencies and America’s criminal justice system (Brook & Lopez, 2020). Criminal justice procedure which has to do with booking process, imprisonment, and constitutionally required court hearings present additional risks both to arrestees and to police, jail, and court personnel (Brook & Lopez, 2020). The authors add that, this creates an apparent paradox for law enforcement traditional approaches to crime prevention and response. Guidelines for containing COVID-19 pandemic seem to pose technical difficulties to traditional policing.

Thus Jones (2020) avers that as the government relies on the justice system (especially the police) to ensure community safety and to protect the community not only from common threats to public or individual safety such as domestic violence, gangs, guns, or drugs but also from COVID-19, the government also affords them with additional powers. The pattern of which the police carry out those powers and policies during the COVID-19 pandemic is of utmost importance as these drastic measures can impact police legitimacy (Jones, 2020). Legal police activities such as routine stop and search or other apprehension methods towards abating crime are likely to be impacted. Thus, we have an apparent paradox: The very practices upon which police typically rely to enhance public safety are those that are now most likely to endanger public safety. This is because stops, searches, and arrests all involve, at a minimum, close physical proximity, and searches and arrests require close and sustained physical contact between police officers and suspects. It goes without saying that searches require officers to physically touch suspects, running their hands over suspects' clothing, reaching into pockets, and the like. Custodial arrests require officers to handcuff suspects and transport them to police stations for booking, often in the back of patrol cars; during the booking process, arrestees are searched again and fingerprinted by station personnel, then placed in small cells where they are often crowded together with other arrestees. Even those who are released immediately after arraignment typically spend several hours in custody; those who are detained pending trial may spend weeks or months in overcrowded jails (Brook & Lopez, 2020:9).

Also, police officers are humans like any other person in the society, they also experience fears, anxiety and stress which goes with the dreaded COVID-19 pandemic. Police officers have families who they retire to at the end of the day hence these officers apart from their statutory duties need to maintain healthy living to avoid endangering their family members through contracting and spreading of the virus. All these may hold serious implications for criminal victimization as police officers reserve the use of discretion in executing their duties.

Under 'normal' circumstance, not all crimes are reported to the police. Many crimes go unreported either because the victims' fears of further victimization by the offender, or feelings that the incident was insignificant to report and thereby save him/her self time and the rigor of the criminal justice system. Crime victims may also choose not to report crime because of lack of trust on the criminal justice agency. In any case, all unreported crimes constitute dark figures, with implications for crime combat strategy. Sawyer (2020) therefore observes that, people are avoiding in-person contact for fear of contracting or spreading the Coronavirus, and even avoiding hospitals when they need them, the implication being that even fewer crimes are being reported to police. In Lagos, Nigeria, residents have resorted to self help *abintio* to wade off hoodlums who attacked their communities as the COVID-19 lockdown was extended. Afeez (2020) thus reports that residents of Lagos resorted to keeping vigils and making bonfires to secure their communities from the hoodlums whom they said numbered about 200. Therefore, as people stayed in their homes, their presence

became the policing tool of their neighborhood, which provides capable guardianship of the environment capable of deterring crime and criminals, this is with obvious implication to pattern of policing and crime statistics. Thus, as COVID-19 lock down persists, changes in policing will mean fewer arrests and lower crime rates (Sawyer, 2020).

Methodology

We employed a qualitative method using purposive sampling (chain referral method) to select and interview respondents for this study. In-depth interview method was the major instrument for this study. The study was carried out among the non-academic staff of universities across four (4) federal universities in the south east and south west geo-political zones of Nigeria. Hence, University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (NAU), University of Lagos (UNILAG) and University of Ibadan (UI) were purposively selected. The essence of selecting non-academic staff of universities is to sample opinion of mid-level to low-level class populace. Again, the academic staff of universities embarked on strike shortly before the COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria. The choice of the geo-political zones was informed by the reputation of these zones as the foremost pilot centers for university education in Nigeria. To this end, their staff strength cuts across diverse cultural divides of Nigeria. The eligibility criteria for selecting the participants were based on availability and willingness to share views on the topic. Non-academic staff aged 40 years and above were selected. The entire strength of participants was thirty-two (32), eight (8) from each university. Transcripts from the interview were independently read and re-read by the researchers to familiarize, identify and generate some common and recurrent themes. The recurrent themes included; issues of criminal victimization during the lockdown, criminal opportunities during COVID-19, pattern of criminal activities during COVID-19, and policing crime in a pandemic situation. Following these emergent themes, the final reports were produced.

Results

Table 1: Socio-Demographics of Respondents

<i>Age (in Years)</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
40-45	27	84
46 and Above	5	16
Total	32	100
Sex		
Male	21	65.6
Female	11	34.4
Total	32	100
Education		
Primary	---	---

<i>Age (in Years)</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Secondary	---	---
Tertiary	32	32
Total	32	100
Marital Status		
Married	32	100
Single	Nil	---
Widowed	Nil	---
Divorced	Nil	---
Separated	Nil	---
Total	32	100

Source: Authors' Field Survey 2021

The findings of the study show that more males [N = 21, 65.6%] participated in the study than females [N = 11, 34.4%]. Though the initial target was to include equal number of men and women, men were more disposed and more accessible during the period of this study than women resulting to higher number of men in the study. Majority of the participants [N = 27, 84.3%] were between the ages of 40-55 years. The findings show that all the participants had a Bachelor's degree as their minimum academic qualification. All the participants are married.

Issues of Criminal Victimization during the Lockdown

More than half of the respondents [N = 19, 59.4%] hold the view that criminal victimization lessened during the lockdown measure to contain COVID-19. Decrease in criminal ventures was attributed to lockdown measures put in place by the government to curtail movement of people through inter-state boundaries and the dusk to dawn curfew; these limited movement of people at odd hours of the day or night. On the other hand, respondents whose responses differed [N = 13, 40.6%] pointed out that the hardship ushered in by the lockdown policy swings a wave of criminal victimization.

Their responses were captured as follows:

Criminals are human beings too, they are afraid to die just like you and I perhaps. Everyone wants to maintain social distance at least until they could understand the trend of the novel virus. In a situation where people are even afraid of unconsciously inserting their fingers into their own eyes or nose, coming in contact with another person to rob, maim or intimidate for the purpose of criminal venture becomes almost a luxury [a 41-year old male, NAU].

The first few periods of the lockdown saw a decrease in crime, but as the lockdown persisted and palliatives were not forth coming to cushion hunger effects, some neighborhoods of Lagos witnessed attacks by hoodlums. Although everyone felt the frustration of staying at home, especially those who earn daily income for their upkeep. The fact that self control is a function

of personal choice made some unscrupulous elements to throw caution to the wind to return to criminality. I had heard people say. It is better die of Corona virus than of hunger virus [a 48-year old male, UNILAG].

This period everybody is experiencing bad market. Nobody hears of kidnapping along Abuja-Kaduna express way, excessive Boko-haram activities in the north east and armed robbery which was fast becoming a way of life. The media too seem to be so much engulfed on updating the public on COVID-19 situation, every channel or radio station is preoccupied with discussions on matters of COVID-19. Even though there might be pockets of criminal activities here and there, it is so insignificant that people hardly notice or talk about them [a 40-year old male, UNN].

No matter how much a criminal will want to commit crime, the opportunity may not present itself. The neighborhood is filled with people who are now sitting at home, making COVID-19 topic part of routine of spending their day. There are security patrols in business premises which are now deserted as a result of the lockdown, at night there is curfew, so no matter how the criminals will want to further their interest, opportunities may not present. The lockdown measure made criminal opportunities scarce, too [a 40-year old female, UI].

We may be looking at hoodlums but the human right abuses committed by the police and other law enforcement agencies during the lockdown is enough criminality. There were reports of killings in Onitsha, Anambra state, like that of a security officer who stabbed a young man to death over issues surrounding non-wearing of face mask, this is also an index of criminality [a 46-year old female, UNN].

Even the bad eggs in the police that extort N50 from motorists are now in bad market. People no longer go out unless it is necessary when they want to buy food items or go to hospitals or for other essential services. The hoodlums on the highway do not see motorists, especially merchants who travel for businesses to intercept. Crime is on the decrease. I had the opportunity to ply the high way to a neighboring state, and I can tell you that for the journey of two hours, I could count the whole vehicles I came across to and fro. Notice that nowadays there is no longer rush by commuters to struggle for bus which normally happens during work close hours whereby pick pockets target their victims [a 49-year old female, UNILAG].

For the very first time in my life, I could listen to the radio, watch news and read news papers without being bogged by flashes of criminal ventures. I think the lockdown did not only achieve curtailment of COVID-19 but had a double function of curtailing criminal activities, too. At least for the first few weeks of the lockdown I can say that criminal victimization was almost zero [a 45-year old male, UNN].

Criminal opportunities during COVID-19

On the issue of criminal opportunities, respondents' views were captured:

If there are criminal opportunities during the COVID-19 lockdown, it will be seen in the form of domestic crimes which could include all forms of sexual exploitation. Many of these types of crimes go unreported to the law enforcement agents. So I will say that most crime will be seen where people are now concentrated which are the crowded homes and streets [a 55-year old female, NAU]

I am not a criminologist or a lawyer, but I do know that crime has to do with anything against the law. Why I am saying this is because mismanagement of funds donated by well spirited individuals and corporate bodies by some individuals in government is also a criminal opportunity. COVID-19 presented an opportunity for white collar crime and pen robbery. Remember that the office of the accountant general was engulfed by fire during this period. It might be a mere coincidence anyway but it also smells foul. Also, the way and manner money is being spent by government in the guise of COVID-19 palliative, shrouded in secrecy only leaves doubts in the minds of people. Lack of accountability in governance is enough pointers to pen robbery [a 44-year old male, UNN].

Many security agents, especially the police became overzealous in the enforcement of guidelines put in place by government. In so doing, fundamental rights of citizens were undermined. There were occasions where health professionals who are supposed to move freely were harassed by the police while moving to duty posts. Meanwhile, the same police officers on boundary duties are those who would receive handshake (bribery) from unauthorized travelers and allow them a pass. I see human right abuse as the chief criminal opportunity which presented itself during COVID-19 caused lockdown in Nigeria, and this was orchestrated by the police. Criminality is not exclusive to hoodlums or certain groups of persons, law enforcement agents who engage in illegality are also criminals whether the law caught up with them or not [a 49-year old female, UNILAG].

COVID-19 presented an opportunity for people who deal on essential commodities to hike prices of their products. I wonder how our people do think. This is supposed to be a period when people show empathy to each other, but they rather see it as a golden opportunity to make excess profit. Our government is not helping matters when it comes to price regulation either. Profiteering is one of the criminal opportunities that presented itself during COVID-19 especially following the lockdown order. Nose mask which before sold for N20 is N200 today, what an outrageous hike in price! Also food commodities became unnecessarily scarce as marketers hoard products and create artificial scarcity. I think there are a few business outlets in Abuja that were found culpable and sued for price hiking, but they are not the only business outlet who may be guilty, because price hiking was too obvious as COVID-19 persisted [a 42-year old male, UI].

Patterns of criminal activities during COVID-19

We sought to ascertain the pattern of criminal activities during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in Nigeria. Majority of the respondents [N = 27, 84.4%] opine that criminal

activities during this period in Nigeria took a pattern of personal crime (rape, sexual abuse and domestic violence) and white collar crime (embezzlement and financial fraud). The only pattern of crime which related to property crime, which a few of the respondents highlight was cyber crime which is attributed to the amount of time people tend to spend online as a result of the lockdown, thereby being exposed to the antics of hackers and scammers whose criminal ventures also do not require face to face contact with their victims but the ability to con them into compromising information which will be capitalized upon to access their bank accounts, credit cards and confidential documents. One of the respondents, a 44-year old male from UNILAG claims thus: “although hackers, scammers and cyber criminals never really had physical contact with their victims’ pre-COVID-19, it will not be out of order to state that cyber criminality is a pattern of crime in this period because cyber crime escalated. There are a lot of spam messages flying here and there”. Another respondent, a 46-year old male from UI says “most people fall victim by clicking certain links to access government registration online portal for palliative which are all false. These scam links are usually sent through social media and people ignorantly share it to their family and friends”.

Other responses were captured as follows:

Most of the palliative promised by government to the people never really get to them, and in some quarters where it does, it is usually too meager that the palliative given cannot take the family on a three square meal. I do not think that this was the real budgetary allocation marked out for such. Those funds allotted for palliatives must have been embezzled but corruption in the system could not allow those involved to be brought to book, at least on the immediate [a 40-year old female, NAU].

An idle mind they said is the devil’s workshop. The situation has kept able bodied youth in their homes doing absolutely nothing than accessing all forms of contents online. With time what they consume will begin to take better part of them and tend to be the upsurge in sexual abuse which I believe will become chronic if the lockdown persists. In another way, these are able bodied men who have been forced to stay back home due to school closure may start engaging in sexual exploits. So if we start seeing upsurge in teen pregnancies, rape and sexual assaults it will be easy know they are the aftermath of the idle mind [a 41-year old male, NAU].

When people fall prey of scammers, it was because some people in government have decided to embezzle money made for the well being of the people in the form of palliative. What I am trying to say is that scammers only leveraged on the lack of transparency on the part of government officials to feed vulnerable populace with fraudulent information on how to access fund. The root cause of all these is embezzlement. I recall about three of my friends whose social media accounts were hacked because they clicked on a link which they believed to be a link provided by the government to access COVID-19 palliative [a 48-year old male, UNILAG].

People now spend time with their spouses and children, with time, excess of availability will translate into unsettled relationship as each comes to learn each other’s weaknesses which were

before now not obviously visible. Domestic violence did not just occur; this is just one of the precursors. So I will say wife/husband battery, vulgar words which could lead to provocations and perhaps homicide is inevitable at these moments [a 45-year old male, UNN].

Policing crime in a pandemic situation

Responses were captured thus:

A pandemic situation presents a peculiar situation which is traumatizing as well as destabilizing for citizens. Law enforcement agents should apply intelligent discretionary measures to understand what to let go and what not to let go. As I said before, most health workers, even media personnel were harassed this period of COVID-19 leading to human right abuses. This could be classified as police brutality in the real sense [a 49-year old female, UNILAG].

The bulk of policing returned to the people. It is a practical demonstration of the saying that, "security is everybody's business". Like in Lagos when security officers were not forth coming, the people took it upon themselves to defend themselves and give the hoodlums harassing their neighborhood a hot chase. Although official police agents do their work, the people never let down their guards[a 48-year old male, UNILAG].

The official police had little to do in pandemic situation as we have in COVID-19. The police we have now are the health workers who are at the front line fighting the pandemic. I see police vehicles patrol my neighborhood and most times park their vehicle, hang around and drive off. I guess there isn't much work to do for them except to intercept people who broke the lockdown rules or curfew ordered by the government. But funny enough some of these officers do receive bribes to allow defaulters go scot-free. I say so because there are recurring decimals of across border movements across the country apart from those on essential services. Police officers on the border posts collect money and allow people to pass freely [a 45-year old male, UNN].

There is nothing to police when everyone is at home. Police officers are on break too. I have neighbors who are police officers; I usually see some of them around their houses. Everybody is busy policing their health in a pandemic situation. Only those who defy the lockdown orders are policed in an obvious manner so to say [a 40-year old female, NAU].

Policing in a pandemic period require much technical expertise on law enforcement officers different from the conventional policing. One of the constitutional duties of the police is social service. Therefore, bulk of what is expected of the police in a period of pandemic is to offer social services to the people. Our police have not really done well in this regard even before the outbreak of COVID-19. I would not blame them in this period because they are humans too and have families to protect. So I will say the police are fearful too of contracting the virus[a 42-year old male, UI].

Discussion

We found that criminal victimization was on the decline during the lockdown measure to contain COVID-19. The declines in crime experienced in criminal ventures were attributed to limitations on movement of the people including inter-state boundaries and dusk to dawn curfew whereby people stay in their homes day and night, while the hardship ushered in by the lockdown policy swings a wave of criminal victimization. The swing of criminal victimization during COVID-19 tilts its pendulum towards personal crime, this agrees with the findings of (Ashby, 2020a; Campedelli, Aziani & Favarin, 2020; Pietrawska, Aurand & Palmer, 2020c; Felson, Jiang & Xu, 2020; Odita, 2020). Other patterns of criminal victimization during the COVID-19 pandemic period in Nigeria include white collar and cyber crimes.

Our findings show that criminal opportunities during COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria have little to do with hoodlums. In the same vein with Ojo (2020) and Tim (2020), this study also found that human right abuses, extortion, and embezzlement which were pointed out by the respondents are not patterns of crime perpetrated by hoodlums instead they are elite crimes and are committed by law enforcement agents or people entrusted with state powers to protect citizens, and government officials or privileged individuals in corridors of power. Our findings also show that frustration, anxiety, pains and total confusion which surround issues of disbursement of relief materials during the COVID-19 period had the tendency to lure unsuspecting citizens into accessing unapproved official links designed by scammers. Thus, cyber crime tends to be the bane of the pandemic period.

Findings in this study also suggest that police roles and policing during pandemic period are not the same with policing during ordinary times. This agrees with Brook & Lopez (2020), Jones (2020) and Sawyer (2020). In ordinary times, full commercial activities are in place, criminals have unlimited opportunities to take advantage of hot spots of activities to pursue their criminal ventures. However, in a pandemic situation as presented by COVID-19, commercial activities are shut down and social life is restricted. To this end, law enforcement officers are challenged not only with staying safe for themselves and for their families in such situation but also have the ability to offer adequate social services which are also constitutional duties expected of police officers.

Our findings on this study also revalidate the Routine Activities theory of Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson. Cohen and Felson (1979) in their routine activities theory state that when a suitable target and a motivated offender meet without let or hindrance, crime becomes imminent. The three elements put forward by Cohen and Felson as important indices to criminal victimization (that is a motivated offender, a suitable target and absence of a capable guardian) are embedded in the daily activities of people. Thus, going to work, pursuing recreation, running errands or service rendering can bring offenders in contact with suitable victims and targets; a contact which makes crime inevitable. A pandemic situation as COVID-19 puts away those activities that lead to the convergence of a

motivated offender and a suitable target. Therefore, criminal activities, especially property crime, declined as lockdown measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 became effective. Drastic reduction in certain kinds of crime (even though crimes, like domestic crime, sexual harassment, rape, advanced fee fraud and cyber crime which had also been in place pre-COVID-19) was observed.

Conclusion

COVID-19 presents a unique moment to countries around the world. The unique moment includes overstretching of health facilities, jettisoning of social life, ban on cross boundary and cross border movements, suspension of commercial activities, all with implications on criminal activities and criminal victimization. The swing in criminal activities during COVI-19 period presents a picture of future pattern of criminality in a pandemic period. A deep focus on the swinging wave of criminality during COVID-19 period will afford governments an indispensable tool in domesticating measures to contain future pandemics while adopting necessary health tips. Safety tips and measures to be adopted by governments should be domesticated and adapted to the environment upon which it is to be applied, by so doing the government will be able to contain other rippling effects which can trigger innovativeness in criminal victimization. Based on this study, we hereby suggest that government in developing nations should adopt pandemic safety measures which will not expose their citizens to excessive hardships necessitated by hike in prices of essential goods and services. We therefore conclude that in a pandemic situation as COVID-19, policing should go beyond traditional and routine processes of law enforcement by police officers. Citizens should be enlightened on the importance of policing and security as everybody's business. Thus, government should provide a dedicated call center unit system in the Nigeria police system with a toll free line through which individuals can report crime as they occur, this will provide leverage to policing and limit excessive person to person contact characterized with the current Nigeria policing system.

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