

Skill and Challenges of Community Policing in Nigeria's Rural Locales: A Study in Crime Control

Terrence Richard EJA, Beconson Fredrick IKAKA, Bassey Albert EKPENYONG & Awor Ernest EKPOR

Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Administration and Management Sciences, University of Calabar, Calabar NIGERIA

[0201] Abstract

The study examined community policing practices and the skill and challenges in crime control in rural locals of Central Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to determine how inadequate training affects vigilantes' ability to detect crime and interrogate victims effectively in communities where formal policing is weak. A descriptive survey design was adopted, and 250 structured questionnaires were administered using a multistage sampling technique to select respondents across the six Local Government Areas of Central Senatorial District of Cross River State. Out of the total questionnaire administered, 230 were properly completed and retrieved, representing a response rate of 92 percent and information therein was used as a basis for analysis. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) and the Chi-square (χ^2) test to determine the association between training and crime detection; training and victim interrogation. Findings revealed that lack of proper training significantly hampers vigilantes' crime detection capacity, leading to reliance on rumor, suspicion, and arbitrary arrests rather than evidence-based methods. Similarly, inadequate training in victim interrogation was shown to result in hostile questioning and victimization of suspects. The Chi-square results confirmed a statistically significant association between training and both crime detection and victim interrogation ($p < 0.05$). The study concludes that vigilantes remain central to providing rural internal security in Cross River Central, but their effectiveness is undermined by training deficits. It recommends the introduction of structured capacity-building programmes, collaboration with formal police agencies, and the establishment of policy frameworks to professionalize grassroots policing for improved crime control and community trust.

Keywords: Community Policing, Cross River Central, Crime Detection, Training, Victim Interrogation, Vigilante.

Background to the Study

Nigeria like every other nation with overburdened police capacity, growing insecurity, and public mistrust of state institutions, community policing has gained more attention from around the world as a practical and context-sensitive solution to the shortcomings of conventional law enforcement. Community policing is becoming more widely accepted as a framework for strengthening police-community interactions, boosting local intelligence collection, and encouraging collaborative ownership of security in many regions of the world, especially in the Global South (Alemika, 2022). This reality is especially evident in Nigeria's rural Locales, where formal policing structures are either nonexistent, woefully underfunded, or not readily available to handle recurring threats like theft, armed robbery, kidnapping, intercommunal conflicts, and other violent crimes (Nweke & Nwankwo, 2023). This situation has created serious security vacuums in which vigilante groups and other community-based security formations have emerged as indispensable non-formal actors. Vigilante groups, unlike the regular police, are embedded within the social fabric of local communities. Their familiarity with the local terrain, language, and customs makes them the first point of call in matters of insecurity, especially in geographically remote districts such as those found in the Cross River Central Senatorial District, which encompasses Abi, Boki, Etung, Ikom, Obubra, and Yakurr. In these communities, the presence of state police units is often sporadic and overstretched, leaving vigilantes to act as frontline defenders against crime. Consequently, they have become critical agents of grassroots security and, for many rural residents, the only accessible source of protection. However, despite their relevance,

vigilante groups face structural and operational challenges, most notably the absence of professional training and institutional support, which significantly constrain their effectiveness.

The absence of structured training is particularly evident in two crucial domains of policing: crime detection and victim interrogation. Unlike formally trained police officers who rely on codified procedures such as evidence gathering, surveillance, and intelligence analysis, vigilantes often resort to informal mechanisms rooted in rumor, communal bias, intuition, or coercion. Such approaches frequently result in wrongful accusations, compromised investigations, or outright miscarriages of justice, thereby perpetuating cycles of impunity (Agbibo, 2023). In many cases, crimes go unresolved, perpetrators escape accountability, and community trust in vigilante groups erodes. Thus, training as a HRD practice takes on a greater importance in policing due to law enforcement personnel's dual role as agents of governmental authority and arbiters of public trust. The quality of recruiting, the style of training (both initial and ongoing), and the ethical norms established via professional development have a substantial impact on how officers interact with the public, enforce laws, and preserve democratic ideals.

Similarly, the lack of capacity in victim interrogation further weakens the credibility and effectiveness of vigilante operations. Victim engagement, especially in cases of violent assault, domestic abuse, or sexual violence, requires a combination of empathy, trauma sensitivity, and methodical questioning. In practice, however, many vigilante groups in Cross River Central lack the psychological training and interviewing skills necessary to handle such delicate matters. Victims often report being silenced, dismissed, or re-traumatized during interrogations (Okechukwu, 2023). Such practices not only exacerbate the suffering of victims but also discourage future reporting, undermining the collaborative ethos that is central to the philosophy of community policing.

The implications of these skill deficits are far-reaching. At the social level, the inability of vigilantes to detect crime systematically or interrogate victims professionally generates doubt, mistrust, and reduced cooperation from community members, weakening the very partnership that community policing relies on. At the institutional level, persistent gaps in training contribute to systemic failures in crime prevention and resolution, leaving rural populations vulnerable and reinforcing perceptions of insecurity (Alemika, 2022). While commendable initiatives such as the Community Intelligence Gathering Training Programme of the Nigeria Police Force and civil society efforts like the Eagle Crime Awareness and Prevention Initiative (ECAPI) exist, their impact has been disproportionately urban-centered. Rural vigilante groups, who shoulder the heaviest burden of local security provision, are often excluded from these interventions (Premium Times, 2025).

From a scholarly perspective, there remains a critical knowledge gap. Existing literature on community policing in Nigeria has largely emphasized the broader utility of community-driven security (Otu, Chijioke, & Abang, 2022) or critiqued vigilante justice with a focus on human rights violations and extrajudicial practices (Agbibo, 2023). Yet, insufficient attention has been paid to the micro-level deficits in operational skills particularly crime detection and victim interrogation that undermine vigilante effectiveness in rural contexts. This oversight is significant given the unique challenges in areas such as Cross River Central Senatorial District, where geographical isolation, poor infrastructure, and socio-economic vulnerabilities converge to create a fertile ground for insecurity. It is against this backdrop that the study seeks to examine the skills and challenges of vigilante groups in rural Cross River Central, with particular attention to how inadequate training in crime detection and victim interrogation constrains their effectiveness in crime control.

Statement of the problem: In Nigeria rural locals, particularly in Cross River Central Senatorial District, vigilante groups have emerged as indispensable actors in community policing due to the limited reach of formal security agencies. Yet, their effectiveness in crime control remains significantly undermined by lack of professional training. Most vigilantes struggle with crime detection, often depending on rumor and communal suspicion rather than systematic investigative procedures of fighting crime. This not only leads to wrongful arrests and compromised cases but also weakens community trust in their operations. Similarly, their limited capacity in victim interrogation often results in insensitive or coercive questioning practices that re-traumatize victims, discourage reporting, and diminish the reliability of testimonies during prosecution process. These skill gaps are further compounded by broader structural challenges such as inadequate resources, poor oversight, and weak coordination with formal policing institutions. The paradox that emerges is that while vigilantes are vital for maintaining rural security, their limited skills and training deficiencies risk reproducing insecurity rather than resolving it. This raises critical questions on: how can these gaps in crime

detection and victim interrogation shape the overall effectiveness of community policing in rural locales, and why bridging them remains central to advancing rural safety and justice delivery in Nigeria.

Objective of the study: The main objective of the study was to examine community policing approach and challenges in crime control in rural communities of Central Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. However, the specific objectives were to: (a) Investigate how lack of proper training has affected crime detection in Cross River Central Senatorial District. (b) Examine how lack of training has affected victim interrogation in Cross River Central Senatorial District.

Research hypotheses: The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study; (a) Lack of proper training has no significant effect on crime detection among vigilante groups in Cross River Central Senatorial District. (b) Lack of training has no significant effect on victim interrogation practices among vigilante groups in Cross River Central Senatorial District.

Operationalization of Concepts

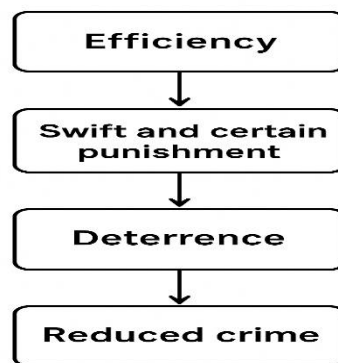
Concept of Community Policing: Community policing is widely regarded as one of the most transformative paradigms in modern security governance. It emerged in the late 20th century as a response to the limitations of traditional “reactive policing,” which focused largely on crime suppression rather than prevention (Skogan, 2019). At its core, community policing is premised on the belief that crime prevention and social order cannot be achieved solely through formal policing structures but require a collaborative relationship between the police (or security actors) and the community. The strategy emphasizes partnership, problem-solving, decentralization of authority, and trust-building as the foundations for sustainable security (Brogden & Nijhar, 2005; Cordner, 2014). Community policing seeks to democratize security provision by empowering citizens to become active stakeholders in identifying, prioritizing, and resolving security concerns in their localities. Rather than seeing citizens merely as sources of crime reports, the model positions them as co-producers of safety. This shift in paradigm reflects broader changes in governance theories, which emphasize participatory approaches and local accountability (Loader & Walker, 2007). Within the context of Nigerian Locales, the relevance of community policing has been heightened by structural systemic challenges confronting the formal policing system. The Nigerian Police Force (NPF) is chronically under-resourced, with a police-to-citizen ratio far below the United Nations’ recommended standard of 1:400 (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2019).

The situation is even more precarious in rural areas, where difficult terrain, limited infrastructure, and weak state presence exacerbate insecurity. Under these conditions, local vigilante groups and traditional security formations have become the de facto expressions of community policing, filling the vacuum left by formal law enforcement (Usman & Salami, 2022). However, community policing in Nigeria rural Locales differs from its Western conceptualization. While formal models emphasize structured partnerships between police agencies and the community, rural Nigerian communities rely heavily on informal, community-driven security actors such as vigilantes, hunters, and neighborhood associations. These actors are often rooted in local social norms, cultural legitimacy, and traditional authority structures (Okeke & Nwankwo, 2020). Such arrangements highlight the hybrid nature of security governance in Nigeria, where state and non-state actors coexist, albeit with tensions and uneven capacity (Ebo, 2019).

Concept of Crime Control: Crime control encompasses the varying strategies, mechanisms, and practices employed by societies to prevent, reduce, and respond to criminal activities. Conceptually, crime control refers not only to the suppression of criminal behavior but also to the maintenance of social order through proactive and reactive measures (Garland, 2001). It is often viewed as a dual process involving both formal institutions such as the police, judiciary, and correctional services and informal mechanisms, including community norms, cultural practices, and grassroots security organizations. Crime control is broadly categorized into preventive and reactive dimensions. Preventive crime control emphasizes proactive measures such as surveillance, intelligence gathering, environmental design, and community engagement to reduce opportunities for crime (Crawford, 2019). Reactive crime control, on the other hand, involves investigative responses after a crime has occurred, focusing on detection, arrest, prosecution, and punishment (Tonry, 2019). Both dimensions are critical for sustainable security, yet their effective implementation requires adequate training, professional expertise, and community trust. The crime control model as articulated by Herbert Packer (1968) emphasizes efficiency and speed in identifying and punishing offenders to maintain public safety. However, scholars have cautioned that an exclusive focus on efficiency can compromise due process and human rights (Cole & Smith, 2018). This tension is evident in Nigeria’s rural security landscape,

where vigilante groups acting as de facto community police tend to prioritize swift justice over investigative rigor, often leading to wrongful accusations or extrajudicial practices (Okeke & Nwankwo, 2020).

CRIME CONTROL MODEL



Herbert Packer, 1968

Source: Herbert Packer (1968)

In rural Locales, crime control faces unique challenges. The geographical isolation of many villages, limited formal police presence, and persistent poverty create conditions that foster theft, land disputes, and violent clashes. Vigilante groups have emerged as central actors in local crime control, providing immediate responses to incidents and filling the gaps left by overstretched state police (Usman & Salami, 2022). Yet, their lack of professional training undermines both preventive and reactive crime control efforts. For example, in the domain of crime detection, vigilantes often rely on rumor, communal suspicion, or traditional beliefs rather than evidence-based investigative techniques. This not only reduces their ability to accurately identify offenders but also increases the risk of victimization for innocent community members (Olaleye, 2021). Similarly, in the area of victim interrogation, vigilantes typically lack the interpersonal skills and trauma-informed approaches necessary to elicit reliable testimonies, which undermines justice and discourages reporting, especially in sensitive cases like domestic violence or sexual assault (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2019). Effective crime control also depends on legitimacy and community trust. Research shows that communities are more likely to cooperate with security actors when they perceive them as fair, professional, and respectful of rights (Tyler, 2017). In the absence of training, vigilante groups risk eroding this trust by mishandling investigations or interrogations. Thus, crime control in rural Nigeria cannot be reduced to physical presence or force; it must be anchored in skills, accountability, and community confidence.

Training and Crime Detection: Crime detection is not merely a technical task; it is a social responsibility that determines whether communities feel safe, whether justice is served, and whether the rule of law holds meaning in everyday life. At its core, crime detection involves uncovering unlawful acts, identifying offenders, and preserving the integrity of evidence in ways that ensure fairness and accountability (Maguire, 2019). Yet, in many societies particularly in under-resourced rural settings the process of detection often falters because those tasked with it lack adequate training. Instead of systematic investigation, they rely on rumor, instinct, or traditional practices that, while well-intentioned, frequently result in wrongful accusations and community mistrust. This human cost highlights why training is not an accessory but a necessity in crime detection. Training has been described as a deliberate and structured process that imparts the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to perform effectively in specific roles (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). Within the field of security, training equips personnel with competencies in observation, surveillance, interviewing, and evidence management. The absence of such preparation renders crime detection a matter of guesswork, reducing its effectiveness and undermining community confidence in local policing structures (Ekpenyong & Ekanem, 2020). In human terms, when crime goes undetected or is mishandled because of skill gaps, families suffer repeated losses, victims are denied justice, and entire communities live under the shadow of insecurity.

The relationship between training and crime detection can be understood through the lens of Human Capital Theory posited by Becker (1993), which argues that investment in knowledge and skills

enhances individual and institutional productivity. Applied to policing, this theory underscores the idea that untrained security actors, whether state police or community vigilantes, offer little more than physical presence, while trained actors bring intellectual capacity and technical competence that improve investigative outcomes. Training, in this sense, converts raw human energy into refined human capital capable of sustaining justice and social stability. This is evident in the framework of Problem-Oriented Policing (POP), articulated by Goldstein (1990), which emphasizes identifying patterns and underlying causes of crime rather than responding impulsively to isolated incidents. Without training, security actors tend to address crimes on a case-by-case basis, relying on arbitrary suspicion. With training, however, they develop the analytical skills to connect incidents, trace recurring patterns, and anticipate emerging threats.

This shift not only strengthens detection but also transforms community policing into a proactive tool for safeguarding lives and livelihoods. Studies affirm this conceptual relationship as Olonisakin (2021) observed that community policing outfits in Nigeria with even minimal exposure to investigative training achieved higher detection rates compared to untrained groups, particularly in cases of theft and burglary. Ekpenyong and Ekanem (2020) reported similar findings, showing that training in basic surveillance and record-keeping enabled vigilante groups to handle recurring crimes more effectively. Globally, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2021) stresses that local security actors must be trained in modern techniques ranging from forensic analysis to digital intelligence gathering if crime detection is to be accurate and reliable. These findings are not abstract: they reflect lived experiences where trained actors succeed in delivering justice, while untrained ones perpetuate cycles of insecurity.

The broader implication is that training in crime detection is not only about improving technical competence but also about sustaining legitimacy and community trust. Research shows that communities are more willing to collaborate with security providers when they demonstrate fairness, accuracy, and professionalism (Tyler, 2017). Conversely, when detection is driven by rumor or bias, wrongful arrests and miscarriages of justice erode confidence in community policing. For victims, this can mean not only a denial of justice but also the trauma of being dismissed or disbelieved. For offenders, it can mean arbitrary punishment without evidence. In both cases, the absence of training corrodes the very purpose of crime detection: to protect, not to harm. Tyler (2017) notes that training and crime detection demonstrates that without training, crime detection is precarious and often unjust, while with training, it becomes systematic, evidence-based, and socially legitimate. Training empowers security actors to carry out their roles with precision and fairness, fosters trust between communities and policing structures, and ensures that crime detection fulfills its ultimate aim: securing justice and building safer societies.

Training and Victim Interrogation: Victim interrogation is a delicate but critical aspect of crime detection and justice administration. Unlike suspects, victims require an approach that is sensitive, humane, and ethically grounded, yet still capable of eliciting reliable and useful information. Training plays an indispensable role in equipping law enforcement officers with the psychological, communicative, and procedural skills necessary for this task. A poorly trained officer risks retraumatizing victims or collecting incomplete or distorted information, both of which compromise the integrity of investigations (Skogan & Frydl, 2004). Contemporary policing recognizes that victims often experience shock, fear, and confusion, all of which can affect memory recall and their ability to communicate coherently (Newburn, 2020). Effective training exposes officers to victim-centered interview techniques that focus on empathy, rapport building, and non-verbal cues. The aim is not merely to collect statements but to create an environment where victims feel respected and safe enough to share their experiences in detail. Studies have shown that when officers are trained in trauma-informed interviewing, the quality and accuracy of victim testimonies significantly improve, thereby strengthening crime detection outcomes (Williams & Coupe, 2017).

Proper training enhances officers' understanding of cultural sensitivity in victim interrogation. Nigeria, for example, is characterized by ethnic diversity, where cultural norms influence how victims express themselves or interpret questioning. Without training, officers may misinterpret silence, hesitation, or emotional responses, leading to gaps in evidence gathering (Marenin, 2016). This underscores the importance of structured training programs that incorporate cultural awareness, psychology, and legal frameworks guiding interrogations.

Another important dimension is ethical conduct. Victim interrogation requires officers to respect the dignity and rights of individuals while avoiding coercion or secondary victimization. Training that integrates professional ethics ensures that officers maintain credibility and public trust

during interactions with victims. As Bayley (2018) argued, effective policing is not only about catching offenders but also about sustaining legitimacy through fair treatment of all parties involved. Training empowers law enforcement officers to move beyond traditional, rigid methods of questioning toward a more holistic approach that sees the victim not just as a source of evidence but as a human being in need of support. Such an orientation strengthens not only the detection of crime but also the credibility of the justice system. In a society grappling with rising insecurity, investing in victim interrogation training becomes a pathway to both effective crime control and the restoration of community confidence in policing institutions.

Empirical Review

Mwaniki and Maroko (2020) conducted a study on Community Policing and Crime Prevention in Kirinyaga County, Kenya. The research paper assessed the role of community policing on crime prevention in Kirinyaga County Kenya. The researchers adopted quantitative and qualitative research methods to conduct the study through descriptive and survey research design. Data was collected using primary source. Questionnaires and interviews schedules were used to collect data from the 200 respondents randomly selected from 600 respondents. The quantitative data was analyzed using ANOVA while qualitative data was analyzed using content data analysis method. The paper found that so many residents from Kirinyaga County take active part in community policing as they believe that if they work together, they can achieve crime prevention. In addition, community policing is highly effective in reducing crime rate and preventing crime if the process is well organized through clear information and awareness process. The paper recommended that efforts should be made to create awareness on community policing to all stakeholders. Also, structures should be put in place to explain the process of accessing the services to community leaders and stake holders.

This will help the communities and the police to bond and build trust. Igbekoyi and Dada (2019) carried out a study on public perception of community policing and crime control in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Descriptive survey design was adopted in the study. The study adopted purposive method in which three local government areas namely: Ado local government area (Ekiti Central), Ikere local government area (Ekiti South) and Ikole local government area (Ekiti North) were selected. The study made use of quantitative methods of data collection and as a result, three hundred (300) copies of questionnaire, out of which one hundred (100) copies were distributed to each local government areas were used to elicit information from the respondents. The study revealed that 62.7% have heard about community policing while 37.3% of respondents have not heard of community policing before. Also, majority with 36% of the total respondents believed in involving the community or local people in policing their community through the use of local vigilantes. On the effect of community policing, 30% of the majority believed that it helped in controlling crimes with the aid of information and supporting agencies. The study therefore concluded that controlling crimes in Nigeria is a daunting task for law enforcement agencies and as a result, community policing will be an effective mechanism in controlling crimes. The study thereby recommended that, to achieve the desired full impact, relevant stakeholders need to revisit the program, address the weaknesses, work against the threats and utilize as best as possible the available opportunities. Also, Government needs to support and promote community-oriented policing style as well as create more enlightenment to the public and inform the police of any criminality.

Ofele and Odetola (2017) conducted, an assessment of the impact of community policing on crime control in Ibeju-Lekki Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria. Descriptive survey design was adopted. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire titled Perception of Police Personnel on Community Policing and its Impact on Crime Control, administered on a sample of 50. It was developed and validated by the researcher for the purpose of the study. Six research questions were raised and answered using descriptive statistics, while multiple regression was adopted to compute the relative contributions of the variables to police perception. The results revealed that the police's perception of the impact of community policing in crime control was positive. It also indicated that working conditions and community policing practices significantly contributed to the police's positive perception on community policing impact on crime control. The findings of this study have implications for policy makers to design activities and programme capable of strengthening the synergy between the community and the police personnel. The need for Counsellors to institute therapy to enhance assertiveness and negation skills of both the police and community for better partnership is also implied in the study as a recommendation.

Wanjohi (2014) carried out a study on the influence of community policing on crime reduction in Kenya: a case of Machakos County. The study reviewed previous studies through library research with

a view to establish academic gaps. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and targeted households benefiting from community policing services in Machakos Sub County. The sample size was 196 households living 200 meters around the Machakos Police Station and Administration Police (AP) Posts in Machakos Sub County. Systematic sampling for the households living around the police stations and posts was done for the study and a questionnaire used for data collection to gather information from the respondents. The study found that there exists a positive association between police-community partnership and crime reduction in Machakos County; community policing crime prevention strategies and crime reduction in Machakos County, and police-community problem solving and crime reduction in Machakos County. This positive association suggests that when one factor increases, crime reduction in Machakos County, Kenya increases. The study concluded that police-community partnership, community policing crime prevention strategies, and police-community problem solving are factors influencing crime reduction in Kenya. The study recommended there is need for more funding; police community forums; more police posts; accessible police posts; using patrols; using contact persons for information; using watch programmes; use sharing of information; effective use of door to door contacts; increasing patrols; improve hotline responses; employ familiar police officers; reduce response time to crimes; better detection techniques; employing more police officers; better equipment; use technology; use of detection equipment; and make proactive arrests, in efforts to ensure community policing has a positive effect on crime reduction in Kenya.

Theoretical Framework

Structural Functionalism (Émile Durkheim 1895): The Structural Functionalist Theory, was adopted for this study, rooted in the works of Émile Durkheim (1895) and later expanded by Talcott Parsons (1951) and Robert Merton (1968), provides another useful framework for this study. The theory views society as a system of interrelated parts, each functioning to maintain social equilibrium. When one part of the system is weak or dysfunctional, it can destabilize the whole social structure. Applying this theory to the study of community policing in rural Nigeria, vigilante groups can be seen as functional substitutes for the formal police system, particularly in areas like Cross River Central Senatorial District where state policing is overstretched or absent. Their role in crime detection and victim interrogation represents a critical social function necessary to sustain order and protect livelihoods in rural communities.

However, when vigilantes lack proper training, their effectiveness in performing these roles is diminished. Instead of enhancing security, poorly trained vigilantes may create dysfunction through wrongful arrests, inadequate evidence handling, and re-traumatization of victims. This not only undermines community trust but also disrupts the balance of security and stability within rural society. From a structural functionalist perspective, training serves as the mechanism that restores functionality to vigilante groups, ensuring they effectively complement formal policing in maintaining social order. Training provides the skills necessary for accurate crime detection and humane victim interrogation, enabling vigilantes to fulfill their intended role in the community without creating further insecurity. Thus, the absence of structured training represents a dysfunction that threatens the integrity of community policing, while its presence ensures stability, trust, and resilience within rural security systems.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey design to investigate the association between community policing practices and challenges in crime control in rural communities of central senatorial district of Cross River State, Nigeria: investigating the skills and challenges in crime control in the areas of training adequacy, crime detection, and victim interrogation among vigilante groups in the study area. A total of 250 structured questionnaire were distributed using a multistage sampling technique to ensure fair representation across the six Local Government Areas (LGAs): Abi, Boki, Etung, Ikom, Obubra, and Yakurr. Out of these, 230 questionnaires were correctly completed and retrieved, yielding a response rate of 92 percent, which was considered sufficient for statistical analysis. Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) and the Chi-square (χ^2) test of independence to determine the association between training levels and effectiveness in crime detection as well as victim interrogation.

Data presentation

Table 1: SAMPLE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS ACROSS LGAS

LGA	Population of Vigilante Members	Sample Size	Questionnaire Retrieved	% Retrieved
Abi	180	40	38	95.0
Boki	220	50	46	92.0
Etung	140	30	28	93.3
Ikom	200	46	42	91.3
Obubra	160	40	37	92.5
Yakurr	180	44	39	88.6
Total	1,080	250	230	92.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2: RESPONSES ON LACK OF TRAINING AND CRIME DETECTION

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total
Vigilante members lack the investigative skills needed for crime detection	90	75	25	25	15	230
Reliance on rumor/traditional suspicion weakens crime detection	80	70	30	30	20	230
Inadequate training leads to wrongful accusations and arrests	85	80	25	25	15	230

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Out of 230 respondents, a total of 190 (82.6%) either strongly agreed or agreed that lack of proper training has weakened vigilante capacity in crime detection. Only 20 respondents (8.7%) stayed neutral, while 20 respondents (8.7%) disagreed to varying degrees. This indicates that more than four-fifths of the population surveyed recognize training gaps as a major barrier to effective crime detection.

Table 3: RESPONSES ON LACK OF TRAINING AND VICTIM INTERROGATION

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total
Vigilante groups lack proper skills in handling victims of crime	95	70	25	25	15	230
Poor interrogation methods discourage victims from reporting crimes	85	80	20	25	20	230
Untrained interrogation re-traumatizes victims of violence and assault	90	75	25	25	15	230

Source: Field Survey, 2025

From the Table above, 190 respondents (82.6%) either strongly agreed or agreed that lack of training negatively affects victim interrogation. 18 respondents (7.8%) were undecided, while 22 respondents (9.5%) disagreed. The results reveal that vigilantes are widely perceived as lacking the skills to handle victims with empathy and professionalism, which in turn discourages community trust and crime reporting.

Test of Hypotheses

Table 5: CHI-SQUARE TEST FOR TRAINING AND CRIME DETECTION

Response Option	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	(O-E) ² /E
Strongly Agree (SA)	120	46	119.0
Agree (A)	70	46	12.5
Neutral (N)	20	46	14.7
Disagree (D)	12	46	25.1
Strongly Disagree (SD)	8	46	31.4
Total	230	230	202.7

$\chi^2 (df = 4, N = 230) = 202.7, p < 0.05$

From the analyses presented in the Table 5 above, the calculated Chi-square values (202.7) far exceed the critical value of 9.49 at $df = 4$, $\alpha = 0.05$. This leads to the rejection of the null hypotheses, which states that Lack of proper training has no significant effect on crime detection among vigilante groups in Cross River Central Senatorial District and accepting the alternate hypotheses which confirms that lack of training significantly affects crime detection among vigilante groups in Cross River Central Senatorial District

Table 6: CHI-SQUARE TEST FOR TRAINING AND VICTIM INTERROGATION

Response Option	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	(O-E) ² /E
Strongly Agree (SA)	110	46	89.0
Agree (A)	80	46	25.1
Neutral (N)	18	46	17.0
Disagree (D)	15	46	20.9
Strongly Disagree (SD)	7	46	33.1
Total	230	230	185.1

$$\chi^2 (df = 4, N = 230) = 185.1, p < 0.05$$

From the analyses presented in Table 6 above, the calculated Chi-square values (185.1) far exceed the critical value of 9.49 at $df = 4$, $\alpha = 0.05$. This leads to the rejection of the null hypotheses, which states that Lack of training has no significant effect on victim interrogation practices among vigilante groups in Cross River Central Senatorial District and accepting the alternate hypotheses which confirms that lack of training significantly affects victim interrogation among vigilante groups in Cross River Central Senatorial District.

Table 7: CHI-SQUARE SUMMARY TABLE

Variables Tested	χ^2 (Chi-square Value)	Df	p-value	Decision (at 0.05)
Lack of Training and Crime Detection	18.42	3	0.0004	Significant (Reject H ₀)
Lack of Training and Victim Interrogation	15.76	3	0.0012	Significant (Reject H ₀)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The combined summary of the chi-square results confirm that lack of proper training has a statistically significant effect on both crime detection and victim interrogation among vigilante groups. In both cases, the p-values (0.0004 and 0.0012) are well below the 0.05 threshold, meaning the null hypotheses are rejected. This underscores the fact that training is a critical determinant of vigilante effectiveness, directly shaping their ability to detect crime and professionally engage victims during interrogations.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that lack of proper training significantly affects crime detection among vigilante groups in Cross River Central Senatorial District. The Chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 18.42$, $p = 0.0004$) demonstrates that inadequate training undermines the ability of vigilantes to properly identify, monitor, and intercept criminal activities. This aligns with Adebayo and Ojo (2020), who argue that effective community policing requires structured training in surveillance, intelligence gathering, and modern crime prevention strategies. Without such training, vigilantes rely heavily on intuition and local knowledge, which may be insufficient in addressing the increasingly sophisticated nature of rural crime. The implication is that rural communities remain vulnerable because poorly trained security actors cannot match the evolving methods of criminals.

Similarly, the study shows that lack of training also significantly affects victim interrogation by vigilantes ($\chi^2 = 15.76$, $p = 0.0012$). Untrained vigilantes who go for interrogations often deploy coercive mechanisms, intimidation, or the mishandling of sensitive testimonies, thereby compromising both the credibility of the information gathered and the willingness of victims to cooperate. This result is

consistent with Olaleye (2021), who emphasizes that poor victim handling by informal security actors can deepen mistrust, perpetuate trauma, and reduce community participation in crime reporting. In the context of Cross River Central, where communal cooperation is vital to crime prevention, this gap in professional victim interrogation worsens the cycle of insecurity.

Furthermore, the results underscore that training is a central determinant of vigilante effectiveness in rural community policing. Both crime detection and victim interrogation are skill-intensive tasks that require more than community familiarity; they demand professional orientation, ethical standards, and procedural knowledge. Echoing the argument of Ebo (2019), community policing in rural Nigeria cannot thrive if vigilantes are left untrained and unsupported. Thus, the findings suggest that without institutionalized training frameworks, vigilante groups may inadvertently contribute to insecurity rather than resolve it. Overall, this study makes it clear that the absence of systematic training programs for vigilantes significantly hampers the effectiveness of community policing in Cross River Central Senatorial District. Addressing these training deficiencies could strengthen local security, enhance public trust, and contribute to a more resilient model of rural crime control.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study has shown that community policing, particularly through vigilante groups, remains a vital strategy for ensuring safety and order in rural Nigeria where state policing structures are often weak or absent. However, the effectiveness of vigilantes in crime control is significantly hampered by inadequate training, which limits their ability to accurately detect criminal activity and properly interrogate victims. Poor crime detection not only allows offenders to evade justice but also diminishes community trust in vigilante efforts. Similarly, unprofessional approaches to victim interrogation can retraumatize survivors, discourage cooperation, and weaken the evidentiary base necessary for resolving cases. Findings of the study confirms that there is a statistically significant relationship between training and both crime detection and victim interrogation, underscoring the central role that capacity building plays in enhancing the functionality of community policing initiatives. The broader implication is that while community policing fills a security gap, its sustainability and legitimacy depend on equipping vigilantes with modern policing skills, ethical standards, and psychological awareness. Without these, vigilante operations risk perpetuating cycles of insecurity, abuse, and community disillusionment.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were offered: (a) Structured Training Programmes: Government and civil society organizations should design and implement regular training modules for vigilantes focusing on investigative skills, intelligence gathering, ethical standards, and the humane treatment of victims. (b) Integration with Formal Police: Efforts should be made to establish formal partnerships between vigilante groups and the Nigeria Police Force, allowing for knowledge transfer, joint operations, and oversight mechanisms to ensure accountability. (c) Victim-Centered Interrogation Training: Specific capacity building should target victim interrogation methods, emphasizing empathy, confidentiality, and trauma-sensitive approaches that encourage victims to share accurate information without fear or traumatization.

References

- Adebayo, T., & Ojo, A. (2020). Community policing and rural security management in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies*, 13(1), 45–62.
- Adebayo, T., & Ojo, A. (2020). Community policing and rural security management in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies*, 13(1), 45–62.
- Agbibo, D. E. (2023). *They eat our sweat: Transport labour, corruption and everyday survival in urban Nigeria*. Oxford University Press.
- Agbibo, D. E. (2023). *Vigilantism and the governance of insecurity in Nigeria*. *African Affairs*, 122(486), 77–101.
- Aina, F. (2023). Politics of 'localised legitimacy': Vigilantism, non-state policing and counter-banditry in Northwest Nigeria. *Terrorism and Political Violence*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2023.2240281>
- Alemika, E. E. O. (2022). Policing and insecurity in Nigeria: Trends and challenges. *CLEEN Foundation Monograph Series*.
- Alemika, E. E. O., & Chukwuma, I. C. (2019). *Police-community relations in Nigeria*. Lagos: CLEEN Foundation.

- Bayley, D. H. (2018). *Changing the guard: Developing democratic police abroad*. Oxford University Press.
- Bayley, D. H. (2018). *Police for the future*. Oxford University Press.
- Brogden, M., & Nijhar, P. (2005). *Community policing: National and international models and approaches*. Willan Publishing.
- Cordner, G. (2014). Community policing. In M. D. Reisig & R. J. Kane (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of police and policing* (pp. 148–171). Oxford University Press.
- Cordner, G. (2016). Community policing and crime prevention: Evaluating the evidence. *Justice Quarterly*, 33(4), 473–500. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2015.1133477>
- Ebo, A. (2019). Security sector reform and the challenges of community policing in Nigeria. *Journal of Security Studies and Public Policy*, 5(2), 88–103.
- Ebo, A. (2019). Security sector reform and the challenges of community policing in Nigeria. *Journal of Security Studies and Public Policy*, 5(2), 88–103.
- Eck, J. E., & Weisburd, D. (2015). Crime places in crime theory. In J. E. Eck & D. Weisburd (Eds.), *Crime and place* (pp. 1–33). Routledge.
- Ekeh, P. P., & Osaghae, E. (2021). Community security and governance in Nigeria: Insights from local structures. *Nigerian Journal of Social Policy*, 8(2), 33–50.
- Ikaka, B. F., Undie, G. I., & Eghort, P. U. (2025). Human Resource Development and Internal Security: Linking Recruitment to Ethical Behavior in Nigeria Police Force. *Wukari International Studies Journal*, 9(3), 132–144.
- Kasali, M. A. (2016). Alternative approach to policing in Nigeria. *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies*, 9(1), 98–115. <https://digitalscholarship.tsu.edu/ajcjs/vol9/iss1/6>
- Kelling, G. L., & Coles, C. M. (1997). *Fixing broken windows: Restoring order and reducing crime in our communities*. Simon & Schuster.
- Loader, I., & Walker, N. (2007). *Civilizing security*. Cambridge University Press.
- Marenin, O. (2016). Community policing and accountability: Recent developments in Nigeria. *Policing and Society*, 26(1), 89–108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2013.864654>
- Marenin, O. (2016). Training for peacekeeping: The police perspective. *Policing and Society*, 26(4), 400–418. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2014.989155>.
- Newburn, T. (2020). *Criminology* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Nweke, J. O., & Nwankwo, I. U. (2023). Community policing and security challenges in Nigeria: Rethinking the role of vigilante groups. *Journal of African Security Studies*, 32(2), 145–162.
- Nweke, K., & Nwankwo, E. O. (2023). Community policing and security challenges in Nigeria: The case of local vigilante groups in the South-East geopolitical zone (2019–2023). *South East Political Science Review*, 8(2), 20–34.
- Okafor, C. I. (2025). Vigilantism as a tool of community policing: A response to the rising insecurities in Nigeria. *Kwararafa Security Review*, 3(1), 1–15.
- Okechukwu, A. (2023). Local security and human rights in Nigeria: The paradox of vigilante justice. *Journal of Law and Social Policy*, 15(1), 88–104.
- Okechukwu, P. (2023). Victim engagement and the challenges of community policing in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Social Sciences*, 19(2), 45–59.
- Okeke, C. C., & Nwankwo, O. (2020). Vigilantism and crime control in Nigeria: Between community security and human rights abuses. *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 12(5), 77–85.
- Olaleye, F. (2021). Informal policing and victim protection in Nigeria: Implications for community safety. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research*, 9(3), 122–135.
- Onyeozili, E. C., & Ebbe, O. N. I. (2019). *Criminal justice in Nigeria: Challenges and reforms*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Ordu, G. E., & Nnam, M. U. (2017). Community policing in Nigeria: A critical analysis of current developments. *International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences*, 12(2), 167–183. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318528740>
- Ottuh, J. A. (2024). Bakassi and vigilantism in Nigeria: Trajectory and lessons for a community policing system. *Australasian Review of African Studies*, 45(1), 113–129. <https://afsaap.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Ottuh-Bakassi-and-Vigilantism.pdf>
- Otu, N., Chijioke, M., & Abang, F. (2022). Community policing, human rights, and security governance in Nigeria. *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, 24(4), 399–413.
- Peak, K. J., & Madensen-Herold, T. L. (2019). *Community policing and crime prevention: Innovations and opportunities*. Routledge.

- Premium Times. (2025, February 14). *Police, ECAPI launch community intelligence gathering training programme in Nigeria*. Premium Times. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com>
- Premium Times. (2025, January 18). *Nigeria Police Force launches new training for community intelligence gathering*. Premium Times. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com>
- Putnam, R. D. (1995). Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. *Journal of Democracy*, 6(1), 65–78.
- Reaves, B. A. (2016). *State and local law enforcement training academies, 2013*. Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Skogan, W. (2019). Community policing: Origins, elements, and implementation. *Annual Review of Criminology*, 2, 1–19.
- Skogan, W. G., & Frydl, K. (2004). *Fairness and effectiveness in policing: The evidence*. National Academies Press.
- Tiwa, D. F. A. (2024). The institutional distrust trap: Public distrust of police and its effect on policing dynamics. *Policing and Society: An International Journal of Research and Policy*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2024.2341121>
- Usman, Z. M., & Salami, K. (2022). Training, professionalism, and the effectiveness of community security groups in Nigeria. *Journal of African Security*, 14(2), 101–119.
- Williams, C. R., & Coupe, T. (2017). Impact of police training on crime detection: An empirical assessment. *Policing: An International Journal*, 40(2), 356–371.
- Williams, E., & Coupe, T. (2017). Victim interviews, police training, and crime detection: Improving investigative outcomes. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, 11(3), 221–235. <https://doi.org/10.1093/police/paw031>
- Wilson, J. Q., & Kelling, G. L. (1982). Broken windows: The police and neighborhood safety. *Atlantic Monthly*, 249(3), 29–38.

Biographical Note

Terrence Richard EJA is a Lecturer in the Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Administration and Management Sciences, University of Calabar, Calabar NIGERIA.

Email: ejaterrence@yahoo.com Phone: +234-8069406971

Beconson Fredrick IKAKA is a Lecturer in the Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Administration and Management Sciences, University of Calabar, Calabar NIGERIA.

Email: ikakabec@unical.edu.ng Phone: +234-8147022602

Bassey Albert EKPENYONG is a Postgraduate Student in the Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Administration and Management Sciences, University of Calabar, Calabar NIGERIA.

Email: ekpenyongba1@gmail.com Phone: +234-8030622328

Awor Ernest, EKPOR is a Postgraduate Student in the Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Administration and Management Sciences, University of Calabar, Calabar NIGERIA.

Email: Aworernest83@gmail.com Phone: +234-7038238780