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CRIME AND INCIDENT ANALYSIS: A SUGGESTION FOR COMMUNITY POLICING IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This work points out how to identify a high crime rate or an unusual crime trend as the first step in crime analysis. It explains that once a crime and crime area have been identified, the next step would be to find out as much information as possible about the crime. Detailed information concerning time and location factors would help the analysts to tailor a preventive programme to a specific problem. The study therefore concludes that crime analysis involves a feedback system between field police officers and the crime analysis unit, and that crime analysis constitutes a major tool in policing and management of information in the system. The paper recommends that for effective crime analysis to take place in the Nigerian police, the interest and support of officers of the police force must be enlisted.

Introduction

The first step in problems-oriented policing is to identify and define the problem. This requires the police officer to first define the geographical or community boundaries of the area of concern.

The next step is to collect and analyze as much information as is available concerning these locations. The police officer will then use this information to identify problems and target resources on the problems, based on their priority for the community and their potential for reduction or solution. When the research and problem selection phases are complete, a focused and detailed description of the priority problems will assist the police in developing an enforcement or prevention programme targeted to those crimes. In the initial phase in which problems are identified, two major sources of information are typically used. The first is *police data*.

Presently, in Nigeria, police data have not been useful for analysis, since statistics have usually not shown the geographic distribution of crime or the way it occurred. Also, not enough detail is usually available to be useful in defining specific crime problems. It is difficult to go through files manually to narrow down areas and obtain more detailed information, this process is very costly and time-consuming.

This makes the potential for analysis to become less successful. Information cannot be made available very quickly, the use of addresses are written in hap-hazardous forms and defines very large areas. And a great deal of information is not available about offence, offender and victim. Many different sources of information are not available in Nigeria police force data. Among these unavailable information are: offence/incident reports; follow-up reports; arrest reports; field interview reports; probation or released inmate reports; stolen/recovered property reports; warrant files, juvenile contact files; accident reports and so on.

The second source of information is the *community*. There are several reasons why official crime statistics may not contain all the information needed to define a community's problems. First, victimization surveys are not done by Nigeria police, if it is done, such surveys will show that less than half of all crimes are ever reported to the police. When patterns and trends of information are clearly defined by Nigeria Police force, such information gained would be used to set priorities. From all the available data the police will search for patterns, which suggest that a crime can be solved. When crime patterns have been identified, the different offences are compared in order to set priorities. This is known as crime analysis which is the main thrust of this study.

Methodology to be Used in Crime Analysis

This is no methodology which is unique to crime analysis. The techniques are the same as those used in any other social research and can be found in any good social science research methods text. Much of the data used are of very high quality. Crime reports must be accurately prepared, as they form the basis for investigation and for preparation of a case for prosecution. However, other

data may be less than perfect, for example, the use of complaints raised as an indicator of community concerns. Since the purpose of crime analysis is to solve immediate practical problems, we can be less demanding than would be the case with other types of research as long as the limitations of the information are recognized by decision-makers.

Objective and Significance of this Study

Although there is an abundance of data available to Nigeria police force, most of it is used only in the investigation and prosecution of individual cases. Such information can be put to a much broader use, however, in defining patterns and trends. This process known as *crime analysis*, leads to better use of resources and in the long run, better service delivery. Targeting activities where they are most needed in a directed, systematic fashion can enable the Nigeria police force to be more effective.

This process also leads to a problem-oriented focus which is directed towards crime prevention and increased community involvement with the police. This process will lead to enhance preventive patrol efforts by identifying persistent or unique problem areas. This study will assist in the investigative process by correlating and communicating crime occurrences with suspects, suspected vehicles and people with strange characteristics. This study would provide the knowledge to seek for quantitative means for measuring the effectiveness of manpower resources in relationship to calls for service demands and crime suppression requirements. Crime analysis is intended to assist Nigeria police force in implementing crime analysis by describing how to collect, analyze, and use the relevant information.

Techniques of Crime Analysis

Where does one begin crime analysis? The first step is data collection. Since much of the data used by the crime analyst come from crime reports, it is important that these reports be as complete as possible. While it is possible to obtain information for particular investigations or problems by requiring people to complete extra data collection forms, there is often resistance to this from people who feel they are already over-burdened by paper work. It is therefore a great advantage to have as much information as possible contained in the basic reporting forms that are routinely used in the police force.

While crime analysis can be done manually, in all but the smallest jurisdictions computer retrieval and analysis are necessary if an analyst is to provide timely and complete information. Presently, Nigeria police force does not provide information, which is useful for crime analysis. For example, in one police command which has a number of community police posts, the computer system of the command will provide a list of individual crime incidents listed by date. The police posts then categorize incidents by location manually and keep aggregate tallies. This is very-time consuming and limits the analysis, which can be done. Since demographic information is not included in the system, rate and risk figures cannot be calculated for geo-code and are only available for use in police posts. With automated systems coupled with a good analysis capability, there will be a need for software that will facilitate the work of crime analysis both in the police command and in all police posts under it.

Once a data collection programme has been implemented, the actual job of analysis begins. The key is to look for patterns of crime. This does not mean that the analysis must be limited to official crime categories. As Uchenna has observed:

Crime analysis rests on the assumption that crimes are not totally random, isolated and unique events, but can be combined into sets sharing common features and showing distinct patterns. It assumes crimes cluster in place and/or time focus on particular types of particular range of methods (Uchenna, 2001:16).

Once a pattern has been identified, the job of the analyst is to use the information to identify suspects, to suggest tactics which can be used to deal with future occurrences, or to look for problems underlying the invitations for service.

Pattern Identification

Crime analysis is essentially a search for patterns and one of the most basic patterns is geographic mapping. This use of pin or dot to show the locations of offences has been the tools used by criminologists to identify areas of different types of crimes. Nigeria police force can adopt the method of graphic techniques in order to help summarize information and present it in a visual way. Think of how much more difficult it would be to plan actions based on written list of locations of offences compared to looking at those same crime locations presented on a map. The clarity of presentation of a map facilitates crime analysis and is also useful in educating police and other decision makers about the need for problem-oriented policing in Nigerian communities.

Searching for Hot Spots

Perhaps the most basic information used by the crime analyst is location. While address information has always been available on police crime reports, it appears to be time-consuming to collate manually. The introduction of police computer systems can make it very to list calls by address. The data base from the dispatch system will include all calls for police service, not just those for which reports are filed.

When addresses of calls for police service and criminal incidents are listed, it becomes apparent that a very small number of locations receive a high proportion of police services. For example, Efanga (1999) analysed over 200,000 calls, which were made to Zone 6 police of Nigeria police in Calabar over a year. He found that calls were highly concentrated, with over fifty percent of calls made to only 3.3% of addresses. The top 5% of locations generated an average of 24 calls each during the year while almost 40% of locations had no calls and an additional 30% and only 1 call. Predictor crimes were even more highly concentrated. 113 places had 5 or more robberies; 37 places had five or more motor theft and 12 places had five or more pick-pockets. 95% of locations had none of these offences. Other offences such as domestic disputes, assaults, and burglaries were similar concentrated. A similar analysis was done by Ekechi who found that in 1994, 3% of commercial stores in Enugu accounted for 29% armed robberies (Ekechi, 1999). While this study has considered certain neighbourhoods or parts of the city to have high crime rates requiring a high level of police service, most addresses within these areas had no crimes.

Focusing on particular locations within neighbourhoods can be a more productive way of policing as the risk of crime varies, often substantially, within communities. Analysis of characteristics of locations with high numbers of calls has great potential for reducing the overall call load by addressing the factors underlying these calls. Though, Efanga points out some of the methodological factors which must be considered in doing a complete analysis of crime locations. For example, the concentration of people affects the risk of victimization as does the hours a particular location is open. Many different methods can be used to address high crime addresses, including revoking licences of drinking parlours with a great deal of crime; improving security in commercial stores; installing surveillance cameras in streets and bank premises, etc. While it is important to focus on specific addresses, the analyst should also be aware of the fact that a crime hot spot may be larger than just one location. For example, a street with several drinking parlours may generate a large number of calls even though no individual location is particularly troublesome. An example of the potential for address-oriented analysis is described by Olubamide (2000). A sergeant in Nigeria police force noted that calls for service for vandalism, affray, and other minor offences seemed much more frequent at streets with drinking parlours than in residential buildings.

A subsequent analysis of calls showed that some streets with drinking parlours usually generate 150 calls per month while in other places only 10. Further research indicated that the only significant difference between streets with drinking parlours and streets with no drinking parlours was the amount of concentration of people in each of the two locations. The streets with drinking parlours had more people going to enjoy life without living up to their responsibilities in enforcing rules of behaviour in the drinking parlours. Other streets have buildings with residents (tenants and landlords) who were not lax in enforcing rules of behaviour in their residences.

Discussion

Physical Characteristics

Information about population size is required in computing crime rates for a community. Density also may be a causal factor in crime if overcrowding is seen as a problem by residents, or if houses are widely scattered and residents are unable to watch each other's homes. Any area which require special attention. Shopping malls may contribute to crime because they bring outsiders into the community. Since many types of crimes are associated with alcohol use, drinking establishments present particular problems. Fear of crime may be high if a high proportion of single families with unsupervised children reside in such a location.

Various crimes will flourish in areas of transition from one neighbourhood to another, particularly from an industrial or commercial area to a residential one. Observation of an area can determine whether or not it looks "orderly". Areas that are improving will likely have different problems and will require different solutions than neighbourhoods which are deteriorating.

Social Characteristics

Women are vulnerable to certain types of crime, such as sexual assault. In areas with a high proportion of unmarried women, there are certainly problems with crime and the fear of crime. Different religious, ethnic and tribal groups have distinct crime problems and may respond to these problems in different ways. Some groups may feel alienated from police services, or may be isolated because of language, religion or cultural differences. Different types of household have different crime problems. If most residents are single or members or dual-career families they will be away during the day, so there will be no natural surveillance in the area. Also, if most families are headed by poor single parents, supervision of children may be a problem. In areas with a high proportion of transients, crime rates are likely to be high and surveillance is likely to be low. After all said done, it is observed that crime rates will likely be lower and prevention programmes will be more effective in communities where there is a great deal of interaction between neighbours, residents and police and where neighbourhood organizations are strong.

Disseminating Crime Analysis Information

The information provided by crime analysts will not likely be used effectively unless it is designed to fit the needs of potential users and is distributed in an efficient and effective manner. Analysts should be aware of the fact that not all members of the police force will equally be receptive to their information, especially where the crime analysis function is new. Over the years people develop their own work styles, and there is often a reluctance to change. Thus analysts may have to literally market their services, a task which is most easily accomplished if the clients are able to make use of the information the analysts provide. All users need information presented in a clear, simple fashion. Technical details of the analysis should not normally be included as they may obscure the message. Most importantly, the information should help the users to work more effectively.

It is important that crime analysis be disseminated as broadly as possible within the police force. In a small police post, the process may be an informal one based on direct personal contact between the analyst and those who will be using the information. In larger police commands, distribution of information must be integrated into the operation procedures. For example, like in Zone six in Calabar, the line officers including area commanders should be given weekly print-outs showing crime trends in their areas. State Governors and Local Government Chairmen should be made accountable for actions to deal with problems that are identified by the analysis.

Special information can also be released in the form of special bulletins or memoranda if an immediate action is needed. Relevant information in the regular and special reports can be communicated to the patrol police officers either in written form or through roll calls and meetings. It is important not to burden police patrol officers with too much information, as they may become overloaded and ignore materials which are important to them. Information must also be shared with centralized sections within the police force, particularly those such as criminal investigations, special operations, and research and planning which also collect and analyze information. If the analysis function is broadened beyond a narrow focus on crime, units such as crime prevention, victim services, community relations and traffic should also be involved.

Because offenders are very mobile and because many offences such as drug importation involve widely-dispersed networks of people, information must also be disseminated to other jurisdictions. Integrated units such as the Drug Enforcement Unit in Nigeria, Immigration, Customs, Road Safety and State Security Service (SSS) will provide means of communicating information and extending crime analysis over a wide area. Such communication networks will be more important in the future as more types of crime become national and even global in scope.

Feedback to Crime Analysis Units

Crime analysis will not be successful if information flows only one way. A relationship must be built up with police field officers which results in information coming to the crime analysis unit. This will happen only if the police field officers feel that the analysis unit is useful to them. To ensure that this is the case, crime analysts should routinely assess the quality of their work by obtaining feedback from users. For example, if a central analysis unit prepares a report on youth gangs in the community, a follow-up should be done to ensure that the information was helpful and that the format of the report was effective. This can be done both by monitoring the activities of the gangs and by talking to police field officers who have made use of the materials.

Feedback can made part of the analysis process. For example, the analyst can work with police field officers to prepare a plan to deal with problems which have been identified. The process should be monitored to ensure that the steps in the plan have been carried out, and the results of the activity should be noted. Nigeria police force should develop special evaluation forms which are sent to users so that feedback becomes part of the information flow. It is probably unnecessary to gather information in this detail, however, on a continuous basis as long as a conscious efforts is made to follow-up actions which result from crime analysis. Nigeria police force should by all means track targeted crime through the weekly reporting system.

Conclusion

Information is the major tool in policing. Crime analysis provides a systematic method for collecting, analyzing and applying information. In this study, we have focused on the use of crime analysis to prevent crime and to apprehend offenders. In addition, it is used as a means of making decisions about how to deploy police resources. Since Nigerian independence, statistical information has been used by Nigeria police force in making decisions about the assignment of police officers to patrol beats. The systematic use of crime analysis can make such decisions more effective whether instruments are long-term, such as determining the staffing of police divisions, and commands or short-term, such as assigning police officers to directed patrol to deal with particular crime problems.

The fact that the information provided by crime analysis can be accessible to all levels of the police department, can help to ensure a higher degree of accountability than is now the case in Nigeria. A system in which a country is broken into police zones, and into geo-codes, within those zones crime analysis clearly locates the responsibility for the invitation of activity to reduce the impact of crime problems.

Despite its potential, there are few places where crime analysis is being used effectively. In some departments, computer software will not provide the information required by analysts. In others, crime analysis units are understaffed and underfunded. Since Nigeria police are in the business of dealing with information, a higher priority must be placed on utilizing that information more effectively. Several of Nigeria police officers interviewed for this study pointed out the need for a major initiative in developing national standards which could given direction to police in local communities and which would facilitate information sharing. They also saw a need for training programmes beginning at the recruit level with data entry (typing) skills and familiarization with data analysis and moving up to very sophisticated national courses for both junior and senior police officers in crime analysis.

Finally, this study point out that no-matter where crime analysis unit is located, it will not be successful unless it is supported by majority of members of Nigeria police force. Resources must be available to adequately collect and analyze data. Even the best information, however, cannot prevent or solve crime, except the crime analysts are actively supported by operations police officers. Unless those in patrol and investigative roles are willing to cooperate, the work of analysts will be wasted.

Internal acceptance and credibility can be assured both by clear support from high ranking police officers and through providing useful information to those police in the field.

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