



# Locality and Types of Crime: A Study of Prison Inmates in Owerri, Imo State

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**Abstract:** *Different shade of crime and criminality is as old as mankind and has constituted a serious threat to societal peace and development. Nigeria is no exception in this regard as various kinds of criminal activities continues to occur. These ranges from arm robbery, rape, murder, burglary and theft, kidnapping, insurgency to terrorism. This study investigated the nexus between locality and the type of crime among prison inmates in the Owerri prison in Imo State. The study found that there is a high crime prevalence among rural dwellers as 318 inmates out of the 500 respondents were rural dwellers while 182 are urban dwellers. It also found high prevalence of robbery among the respondents as 223 were either robbery suspects in detention or convicted robbers. This closely followed by rape with 127, assault with 72, fraud with 52 and finally murder with a paltry 26. The Study recommended that our criminal Justice system do more neighborhoods and areas of settlement studies in relation to crime rates, this may help to identify some other factors influencing prevalence of patterns of criminality at various locations. It also recommended that adequate social control measures should be put in place to promote public safety and security of properties.*

**Keywords:** *Locality, Crime, Prison, Inmates.*

## INTRODUCTION

This section discusses the general conceptualization of crime and different types of criminal offenses that are prevalent at various neighborhoods and localities. A background of the incidence and prevalence of criminal offenses influenced by physical environments (locality) is traced, followed by a statement of the problem. Thereafter, the research aims and questions are highlighted.

### Background to the study

Crime has been defined as a deviant behavior in human activity that violates social norms (Fattah, 1989) or an anti-social act of such a nature that its repression is necessary or is supposed to be necessary to the preservation of the existing system of society. Studies have shown that certain forms of anti-social behaviors such as arson, vandalism, homicide, murder, burglary, assault, and theft qualify as types of crime (Bryjak, 2011; Coleman, 1990). Crime obviously does not occur in a vacuum. Every crime has a unique set of causes, locations and category of offenders (Uzodinma and Udefuna, 2019). Just like natural disasters, criminal patterns are a predictable phenomenon variably affecting cities of all sizes across the globe. Schmallegger (2006) in his neighborhood studies observed that in recent years, crime rates have gone up dramatically in big cities all around the world. Noting that People who have migrated from rural areas to big cities have underlined a myriad of security problems.

Research has shown that the dimension of locality that has direct link the most to patterns of criminality is the physical environment (Coleman, 1990; Herbert & Davidson, 1995). Residents commonly report fear

of personal and property crime being heightened when they are in particular physical environments (Warr, 1990). Typically, research evidence has indicated that these are usually dark, lonely, unattractive or uncared-for areas (Vrij and Winkel, 1991). Environmentalists and Sociologists have also sought to investigate the impact of visible social controls, or lack of them, upon criminal vulnerabilities in different environments. Crime reduction policies have continued to emerge, targeting leads such as 'visible incivilities' or signs of disorder and sub-criminal activity such as litter, vandalism and youths hanging around (Newton, 1991) and, more recently, the effect of street-lighting and closed circuit television (CCTV) (Herbert and Davidson, 1995; Fyfe and Bannister, 1996; Short and Ditton, 1998). Also, some public policy initiatives have aimed to improve the feelings of safety in public space of certain groups, especially women (Whitzman, 1992). The concern is, the ability of all these initiatives to reduce crime itself seem to be taken with some degree of uncertainties, however, several experts insist that the impact on people's fears about becoming victims of crime is more visible (Whitzman, 1992; Herbert and Davidson, 1995).

Reports have shown that (Burgess, 1998; Koskela and Pain, 2000) increasing number of studies have evaluated people's reactions to 'natural' or semi-natural environments and geographical areas both within the urban centers, sub-urban areas, and rural places, which highlighted the presence of fear of attack in open countryside, dark spots, parks and other exposing spaces. Evidence is increasing, then, that particular features of the physical environment play a significant role in the contemplation and execution of criminal intentions. Besides, fear is expressed in particular environments, as their social associations may bring certain forms of criminal activities to the surface. However, critiques have argued that Women's fear of men for instance will not be easily unsettled by correcting environmental flaws (Koskela and Pain, 2000), noting that other factors could also aid criminal patterns aside the locality. Planners and architects are increasingly recognizing that relationships between physical, objective space and its social and psychological dimensions are complex and dynamic (Madanipour, 1996).

### **Statement of the problem**

Crime has assumed an ever-evolving and ever-emerging phenomenon that affects both urban and semi-urban localities across the globe. The economic cost of combating crime is enormous and, no society can be excused from such huge burden. As the society welcomes technological innovations and development, it also accommodates new trends of criminal patterns. Thus, the more sophisticated the world becomes, the much sophisticated crimes and criminals tend to assume. Consequently, several Governments across the globe has had to initiate one form of crime reduction policy or the other in order to guarantee public safety and security of properties. In some climes, these policy strategies have relatively recorded success, while in some other societies it simply amounts to waste of resources and energy. Nigeria for example is currently battling myriads of security challenges, warranting security operatives to issue "red alerts" warning the public to avoid certain locations which appear to be the operating ports of bandits and criminals. This further adumbrate the possible nexus that exists between geographical locations and crimes. Most security experts have often warned that by design and architecture of certain urban areas, crimes are bound to happen in those areas. Yet, others have maintained that with adequate social control measures in place, no citizen would have to worry about where he or she is, and at what time. It is on the heels of this debate that this study set out to investigate the relationship that exist between residential areas (locality) and types of crime predominant in these areas.

### **Research question**

What is the relationship between locality (residential areas) and types of crime?

### **Objectives of the study**

The aim of this study is to examine the correlation between locality and types of crime.

### **Literature review**

#### **Social Disorganization Theory**

The social disorganization theory is one of the most important theories developed by the **Chicago School**, related to ecological theories. The chief proponents of this theory notable among them was Burgess (1920), opined that social disorganization is a condition that exists when a group is faced with social change, uneven development of culture, maladaptiveness, disharmony, conflict and lack of consensus.

Thus, demonstrated that crime was dependent to a considerable extent on aspects of the social structure of any locality. The theory directly links crime rates to neighborhood ecological characteristics; a core principle of social disorganization theory is that locality matters. In other words, a person's residential location is a substantial factor shaping the likelihood that that person will become involved in criminal activities. The theory suggests that, among determinants of a person's later engagement in crime, residential location is as significant as or more significant than the person's individual characteristics (e.g., **age, gender, or race**). For example, the theory suggests that young people from disadvantaged neighborhoods accommodate values and orientations which approves of delinquency, and that these youths thus acquire criminality in this social and cultural setting.

Miller (2003) stated that "crime is largely a product of unfavorable conditions in certain communities." According to the social disorganization theory, there are ecological factors that lead to high rates of crime in these communities, and these factors linked to constantly elevated levels of "high school dropouts, unemployment, deteriorating infrastructures, and single-parent homes". According to the theory, crime is more likely in communities that are large in terms of population, economically deprived, high in residential mobility and where residents lack the skills and resources to effectively assist others. People in such communities may often face the challenges of socializing their children against crime. They may hope to move to a more desirable community as soon as they are able, which lowers their investment in the community, consequently, they are less likely to intervene in neighborhood affairs.

From the foregoing, the description of the above communities matches the urban areas that lack the ability to exercise direct social control or provide the youth with a stake in conformity. There is a high tendency to participate in a non-communal and amoral lifestyle. In such a locality where people have no close ties with their neighbors but desperately do whatever it takes to 'survive' there are higher rate of crime and criminal patterns than otherwise is the case. The social disorganization theorists believe that an individual's locality or residence will influence the exhibition of various criminal tendencies or patterns, regardless of level of education or socialization. Moreover, the theory suggests that localities where people have more investment in the community by associating with community-based support organizations, and parents pay adequate attention in providing children with a stake in conformity, educating them against crime and exposing the youths to basic trainings to do well in school or relevant connections to secure a good job, people maintain close ties with their neighbors and quickly intervenes in neighborhood affairs, the rate of crime is relatively low. It is believed that such communities exercise better social control through the establishment of institutions like schools, police etc., this description meet more of the characteristics of communities in the rural areas.

### **Empirical review**

Studies have shown that crime is not randomly distributed in time and space; rather where people live affect their victimization rates, a factor known as the geography of crime (Uzodinma and Udefuna, 2019; Bryjak, 2011; Warr, 1990). The neighborhood where a person resides or grows up may also influence the likelihood of criminal behavior, Bryjak (2011). Studies of convicted criminals indicate a more frequent occurrence among blue-collar and lower-economic status neighborhoods, Dennis (1991). Richard (2005) found that place; street and neighborhood data are particularly useful to police administrators in determining where to deploy their resources. It was discovered that residential areas with greater than average number of crimes or disordered events and areas where people have higher than average risk of victimization are called "hot spot" of crimes.

Madanipour (1996) posited that neighborhood may not necessarily cause crime and produce victims, rather these locations host criminal activities that may well have occurred at another time and place. Dennis and Maier (1991), in their study of Cleveland, found that the amount of crime of every type was significantly higher on residential blocks with taverns or lounges than on others. Added that locations with drinking establishments as in urban areas generate crime victims for a number of reasons. Amazue (2006) opined that differential environmental influence have been suggested to account for disparity in urban and rural children's performance on varied tasks as well as other related behaviors among which morality is one. In another study by Nwankwo et al (2013), on locality, socio-economic background and moral behavior among adolescents in South-East Nigeria, it was discovered that locality has significant

influence on moral behavior. The study further revealed that adolescence that live in the rural area exhibit higher level of moral behavior than those in the urban area. Robert et al (2006), investigated differential rates of rural/urban delinquency, a questionnaire was administered to a rural and urban juvenile detention center population to investigate both extent of delinquency involvement and degree of commitment of five institutional order. As hypothesized, they found that rural areas generate lower rates of delinquency than do urban areas.

**Hypothesis**

H<sub>1</sub>: There will be a statistically significant relationship between Locality and Types of Crime.

**Method**

**Sample and Sampling technique**

The sample for this study were 500 inmates randomly drawn from Owerri Medium Security Prison with a population of over 1000 prisoners. The sample comprised males within the age bracket of 23– 55 and who have spent at least six months in the facility. The Researcher randomly obtained information regarding the inmates crimes as well as the geographical locations the crimes were committed using interviews and relying on the Prisoners’ Records Department. The ‘Records Department’ is the official custodian of the inmates’ criminal records in sequential order.

**Instrument**

The data collection instrument for this study was the Prisoners’ Criminal Records (PCR) that contains the official information of inmates in the facility and verbal interviews. The PCR is a classified information about the inmates of the facility which can only be obtained through a legitimate means. It consists of the family, court and criminal records of the inmates. The PCR is a valid and reliable source of secondary data, the Researcher sought the consent of the Prisons Authorities to use it as the main source of data for the study.

**Procedure**

The Researcher obtained approval from the Assistant Controller of prison in charge of the Owerri Medium Security Prison and adhered to the right to privacy, anonymity and confidentiality demanded by the facility Authorities. In a bid to obtain informed consent, a Focus group discussion was conducted where the Researcher explained the objectives of the research and what will be done with the data that were obtained from the inmates, The Researcher ensured that the sample had a clear understanding of the topic, then proceeded to the ‘Records Unit’ of the prisons to obtain documented data of the inmates in relation to the research interest. The study limited its focus to two levels of residential areas (urban and rural) respectively.

**Design/Statistics**

The study has a survey research design and made use of traditional data collection methods (use of secondary data and interviews). The data was generated from the Prisoners’ Criminal Record (PCR) and Interviews regarding Types of Crime and Locality, which was computed using simple frequency distribution table and Chi-square statistics was used to ascertain whether there is a statistically significant relationship between locality and crimes.

**Results**

**Table 1:** Summary of table showing frequency distribution of the samples across two localities.

Distribution by Rural and Urban settlement					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Rural	318	63.6	63.6	63.6
	Urban	182	36.4	36.4	100.0
Total		500	100.0	100.0	

The distribution across rural and urban areas showed that the sample from rural areas accounts for 63.6% while the sample from urban areas account for 36.4%.

**Table 2:** Summary of table showing frequency distribution of samples by types of crime.

Crimes in the area					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Robbery	223	44.6	44.6	44.6
	Assault	72	14.4	14.4	59.0
	Rape	127	25.4	25.4	84.4
	Fraud	52	10.4	10.4	94.8
	Murder	26	5.2	5.2	100.0
	Total	500	100.0	100.0	

The distribution of types of crime from the sample showed that robbery has 44.6%, assault accounts for 14.4%, while rape, fraud and murder account for 25.4%, 10.4% and 5.2% respectively.

**Table 3:** Chi-square test (Rural/Urban Area Settlement and Crime)

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	418.642 <sup>a</sup>	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	535.528	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	359.815	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	500		

**Hypothesis**

There will be statistically significant correlation between Locality and Types of Crime

**Decision:** The statistical analysis for locality and criminal patterns is significant at 5% critical value, 4 degree of freedom and a Chi-square value of 418.64, thus, we accept the hypothesis. The statistical significance implies that Area of settlement is associated with types of crime.

**Discussion**

The study attempted to investigate whether there is significant relationship between types of crime and areas of settlement (locality). The data used for the study were collected from 500 prison inmates. The distribution of samples across rural and urban areas showed that the sample from rural areas accounted for 63.6% while the sample from urban areas accounted for 36.4%. This indicates that some forms of crimes are more prevalent in the rural areas, than the urban. The analysis on types of crime showed that robbery is the highest crime with 44.6%. Other crimes such as Assault, rape, fraud and murder accounted for 14.4%, 25.4%, 10.4% and 5.2% respectively. Cross tabulating the crime rate with areas of settlement (locality) the study found that crimes of robbery and assault are common in rural areas while rape, fraud and murder are common in the urban areas.

The hypothesis which stated that there will be a significant correlation between locality and types of crime was accepted. The reason is because in an attempt to ascertain whether there is a statistical relationship between areas of settlement and types of criminality, the result of the Chi-square test employed was significant at 5% critical value, had a Chi-square value of 418.64 at 4 degrees of freedom. This implies that area of settlement is significantly related to types of crime. Further analysis showed significant association between areas of settlement with different types of crime as the Spearman correlation stood at 84%. The result agrees with the findings of Sherman et al (1989) that neighborhood may not necessarily cause crime and produce victims, rather these locations host criminal activities that may well have occurred at another time and place. Dennis and Maier (1991), in their study of Cleveland, found that the amount of crime of every type was significantly higher on residential blocks with taverns or lounges than on others. Noting that locations with drinking establishments as in urban areas tend to generate crime victims for a number of reasons.

### **Significance of the Study**

Apparently, most of our law enforcement agencies are overwhelmed with the nature of sophisticated and organized crimes that has posed real security problems to the society. This study comes very handy for policy makers who may be interested in formulating effective Crime-reduction policy strategies. Understanding the Locality-Crime relationship will help guide policy direction as well as legislation that adequately combats modern criminal trends.

### **Limitation of the Study**

This study was limited by the difficulties encountered trying to obtain classified data from the prisons authority. Only male inmates were used for the study this is yet another limitation to the study. Besides, some of the participants were people awaiting trials, not yet convicted of their alleged crimes by any court of competent jurisdiction. These classof prisoners may be innocent of the charges brought against them.

### **Recommendations/Suggestions for further Studies**

1. The Study recommends that our criminal Justice system do more neighborhoods and areas of settlement studies in relation to crime rates, this may help to identify some other factors influencing prevalence of patterns of criminality at various locations.
2. The Researcher recommends that policy makers should initiate Crime-reduction policy strategies focused on neighborhood surveillance and urban planning methods that is embedded with security measures.
3. Government should put adequate social control measures in place to promote public safety and security of properties. This will help reduce hotspots for crimes.

### **Conclusion**

The results of the study indicated that crimes of robbery and assault are common in rural areas while rape, fraud and murder are common in the urban areas. The distribution across rural and urban areas showed that the sample from rural areas accounts for 63.6% while the sample from urban areas account for 36.4%. Furthermore, analysis of the distribution of types of crime from the sample showed that robbery has 44.6%, assault accounts for 14.4%, while rape, fraud and murder account for 25.4%, 10.4% and 5.2% respectively. In addition, understanding the connection between areas of settlement and types of criminality just suggests to the law enforcement agencies, possible locations to deploy their scarce resources, when combating certain forms of crime. The study reviewed social disorganization theory which directly links crime rates to neighborhood ecological characteristics; a core principle of social disorganization theory is that locality matters, Miler (2003). In other words, a person's residential location is a substantial factor shaping the likelihood that that person will become involved in criminal activities. The theory suggests that, among determinants of a person's later engagement in crime, residential location is as significant as or more significant than the person's individual characteristics such as age, gender etc. This again is in line with the result of the study which showed that there is a close correlation between areas of settlement and types of crime.

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