



Why We Committed Murder: Views from Convicted Prisoners in Niger State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The killing of a human being by his or her fellow beats rational imagination. It becomes extremely difficult to comprehend the rationale that makes individuals become deliberately responsible for the death of their kind. Murder is a baffling issue that poses a significant threat to humanity and highlights the challenges to civilization and societal development. Its ongoing presence questions the overall health of any society. This paper examines the reasons murderers in prisons provide for their actions, using strain and social disorganization theories as a framework. Semi-structured questionnaires were given to 615 convicted violent offenders in four Niger State prisons, selected through a multi-stage sampling technique. Additionally, sixteen prison warders were interviewed for further insights. The findings indicate that low income ($P = .934$) was not statistically significant at ($P = 0.05$) level of significance for the explanation of murder unless redolent with peer pressure ($p = 0.02$). Special loan packages and partnerships for and between members of the community are suggested to be instituted and encouraged to reduce the pangs of hard economic situations and lack of social capital, which are also potent factors for the explanation of murder.

Keywords: murder, violent crime, prisoners, low income, social capital.

Paper type: Research paper

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INTRODUCTION

In their global comparative study of 163 countries on the level of persistence in homicide, Asongu and Acha-Anyi (2018) came to the conclusion that Sub-Saharan Africa was the leading region in terms of homicide. The authors listed factors responsible for political instability, poverty, and illiteracy, among others. Statistics released by the nationmaster indicate that Nigeria records 18,422 murders in a year, which makes her the fifth in the world and 42 % more than the United States. Also, the World Bank put the figure of intentional homicide in Nigeria by 2016 to 35 per 100, 000 persons. This is against the Sub-Saharan Africa average figure of 9 per 100,000 people (World Bank 2021). It therefore shows from the foregoing that murder is a big problem in Nigeria.

Crime, in its entire ramifications, has remained a social problem within human society since time immemorial, the solution of which, over the years, challenged the governments of various countries across the globe. A study aimed at empirically presenting informed decisions on issues that border on violent crimes, part of which include murder, would be a welcome idea (Usman 2021). Murder, particularly, is seen as the barometer of the state of the nation in terms of a measure of civilization (Soothill and Francis 2012). Furthermore, Brennan, Mednick, and John (1989) provide evidence of a criminal subgroup that specializes in violence, highlighting how certain individuals may be more predisposed to commit violent crimes such as murder, thereby contributing to the overall understanding of violent crime dynamics. Additionally, Aremu, and Ahmed (2011) investigate the implications of security and crime management in developing societies like Nigeria, emphasizing how effective crime management is crucial for democratic stability and addressing the root causes of violent crime.

The killing of a human being by his or her fellow beats rational imagination. It becomes extremely difficult to comprehend the rationale that makes individuals become deliberately responsible for the death of their kind. As baffling and complex the issue of murder appears, it continues to grow across countries and societies. Murder does not only serve as a great threat to the existence of humanity; its continuous presence in any human society challenges society's levels of civilization and development. Murder, especially spousal murder, in which a man or woman kills his wife or her husband. In addition to family effects, spousal murder

has negative consequences for society (Mafi, Fekrazad, and Amir Mazaheri 2021). Moreover, Oluwatayo (2008) highlights how socioeconomic factors contribute to household inequalities in rural Nigeria, which can exacerbate tensions and lead to violent outcomes, including domestic homicides.

What, however, constitutes murder, otherwise called homicide in some countries, varies by definition, culture, society, and time. For instance, whoever deprived another of his/her life is charged with murder in Norway, Poland, Armenia, Germany, and the United States of America. At the same time, intent underscores the definition of murder by the European Commission, which is reflected in the laws of some countries like the United Kingdom and Scotland (Usman 2019). Further, Blom-Cooper and Morris (2004) were cited by Morrall (2006:24) as defining murder in his book *Murder and Society* to mean: a person, by any act or omission, intends to cause, or by behavior manifesting recklessness, gross negligence, or by reason of serious failure of corporate management, causes serious physical harm to another resulting in the person's death, commits the offense of criminal homicide. Additionally, Warr (1993) discusses how age and peer associations significantly influence delinquent behavior among youths, suggesting that interactions with peers can escalate tendencies toward criminal acts. Moreover, Olatunji and Abioye (2011) report on violent incidents in Kaduna that resulted in the deaths of lecturers and students, highlighting how societal violence can manifest in educational settings and contribute to a broader understanding of homicide within specific communities.

In Nigeria, the definition of murder is similar to that of the UK, perhaps due to a colonial connection. Defined as the willful killing of another, as the definition in England, the presence of a dead person was enough in the definition of murder in England, intentional or not (Smit, de Jong, and Bijleveld 2012:6). It should be noted here as per Riedel and Wayne (2016:5) that what makes any act murder, rape or anything, is reference to law, without which no act can be label criminal, no matter how heinous it may be. Additionally, Chalk, and King (1998) emphasize the importance of assessing prevention and treatment programs for violence in families, which can indirectly relate to understanding factors contributing to murder within familial contexts.

METHODS

The research design for this study is Cross-Sectional. It uses statistics or numbers to measure the behaviors of the research subjects who are in prison custody. On this basis, the study used a survey method to collect its primary data. The research plan proceeded in two phases. The first was gathering relevant materials from government agencies and ministries that were saddled with the responsibility of taking care of and improving the living conditions of people within the state. This second phase of the research centered on quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative section employed a survey method, which involved the use of a questionnaire for convicts in prisons. The qualitative involves the use of an interview guide, which was used for an in-depth interview with some experienced prison warders.

The selected prisons include those situated in Minna (old and new), Kontagora and Suleja. The selected prisons, for example, housed 783 or 81 percent of the 962 convicted persons in all the nine prisons in the state. The sampling method emphasizes the areas where information regarding violent criminal convicts could be obtained. These were the urban centers and the identified volatile areas in the state. However, the sampling method was still applied due to the dearth of time and resources. Against this background and the magnitude of the study, the researcher then took 92 percent of the 783 prisoners convicted of violent crime within the selected four prisons, which amount to 718 in all, as the sample size was adequate for a fair representation of the population which is one key element of sampling as argued by (Mohammed 2006).

Four (4) of nine (9) prisons were purposively selected because of their capacity, convict enrolment, and security capabilities. Using multi-stage cluster sampling, 718 convicts of violent crimes were selected.

1st stage: selection of 4 out of the 9 prisons.

2nd stage: selection of 783 out of the 1,825 inmates in the 4 prisons i.e. 231 of 548 in Suleja, 194 of 434 in Minna New, 174 of 414 in Minna Old, and 189 of 429 in Kontagora.

3rd stage: 718 of 783 convicted prisoners of violent crime, i.e., 211 out of 230 from Suleja, 176 out of 192 from Minna New, 160 out of 173 from Minna Old, and 176 out of 190 from Kontagora. This brings the total sample size to 718, representing

92 % of the entire population of convicted violent inmates in the four selected prisons.

The questionnaire was administered among prison inmates by the researcher with the assistance of research aids employed among the prison warders, particularly from the welfare unit of the institutions. The staff of the welfare unit were chosen because they were those who worked directly with the inmates and served as an interface between the inmates and the outside world. On the whole, 16 prison officers (four from each prison) were purposively selected for the Key Informant Interview (KII). In the end, 16 interview sessions were conducted with all the key informants selected.

The quantitative data generated from this research was analyzed using descriptive statistics and frequency. The test of research hypotheses was done through the analysis of the variance model (ANOVA), while multiple linear regression models were employed to assist in establishing relationships between variables.

The general regression model is given as follows:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_n X_n + E \dots \dots \dots 1$$

Where Y = dependent variable

$X_1, X_2 \dots X_n$ are the independent variables (predictor variables)

β_0 = is the intercept of the model

$\beta_1, \beta_2 \dots \beta_n$ are the slopes or parameters of the predictor variables in the model

E = is the random error term

N= signifies the end term of the predictor variables

The qualitative analysis was systematic, starting from transcription, classification, coding, and interpretation. Regarding the analysis of the interview, the thematic method was employed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This section contains the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. These include their sex, age, religion, marital status, number of children, level of education, and employment before prison.

**Table 1.
Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

Sex		Frequency	Percentage
	Male	518	84.2
	Female	97	15.8
	Total	615	100.0
Age	15 – 19	61	10.0
	20-24	218	35.7
	25-29	236	38.7
	30-34	64	10.5
	35-39	19	3.1
	40-44	10	1.6
	45 and above	2	0.3
	Total	610	100.0
	Religion	Islam	297
Christianity		279	45.5
African Traditional Religion		36	5.8
Others		1	0.5
Total		613	100.0
Marital status	Single	235	38.4
	Married	263	43.0
	Separated	92	15.0
	Widow	9	1.5
	Divorced	13	2.1
	Total	612	100.0
Number of Children	None	249	40.8
	One	218	35.7
	Two	85	13.9
	Three	40	6.6
	Four and above	18	3.0
	Total	610	100.0
Level of education	None	71	11.7
	Quranic	150	24.7
	Primary	82	13.5
	Junior secondary	78	12.8
	Senior secondary	209	34.3
	Diploma/ NCE	18	3.0
	Total	608	100.0
	Employment before prison	Employed	181
Unemployed		429	70.3
Total		615	100.0

Source: Questionnaire Administered (2017)

One vital feature of the respondents of the research in Table 1 was that they were predominantly 84.2% males, while females were 15.8 %. Similarly, respondents who fall within the age brackets between 25 and 29 years were the majority. The prisoners who fall within this age bracket represent 38.7 %. A substantial percentage, precisely 43.0 % of the respondents were married, whereas 35.7% had at least a child, with 40.8 % of them without children at all.

The data shows that the majority of the respondents had a low educational level, as only 3.0 % cumulatively went beyond the secondary level of education, such as a Diploma, National Certificate of Education (NCE), and Degree. This explains why 70.3 % were unemployed. Table 4.1 above shows in detail other demographic features of respondents as deduced from the data.

For those interviewed, precisely 43.8% (7) prison staff respondents had 10 and above years of working experience, while a similar percentage of 43.8% (7) had 15 and above years of working experience in a prison job. In fact, 2 of this category have over 20 years experience. While one for instance had 24 years experience, the other one got 26 years to his credit as a prison warden. All the selected prison warders were married with children.

Views of Respondents on Violent Crimes

This section presents the views of respondents on violent crimes. Here views obtained from quantitative data were corroborated with those expressed during interview sessions with the staff of the correctional institutions. These opinions are expressed on the causes, types, and nature of weapons employed in the course of carrying out the violent acts.

Table 2.
Violent Crimes Committed by Respondents

Offences	Murder	A/robbery	Assault	Rape	Total
Minna Old	24	38	88	10	160
Minna New	42	30	92	7	171
Kontagora	49	40	86	1	176
Suleja	56	66	85	4	211
Total	171(23.8%)	174(24.2%)	351(48.8%)	22 (3.0%)	718(100%)

Source: Questionnaire Administered 2017

Data obtained from the four prisons during fieldwork indicates that the majority (48.8%) of inmates in the prisons were convicted of assaults. The second in the list of violent crimes which convicts committed was armed robbery

(24.2%) which was followed by murder (23.8%) and rape which is at 3.0%. There was no inmate convicted of arson and kidnapping in prisons covered during the fieldwork, even though there was a substantial number of them on the awaiting trials (AT) list.

A close look at Table 2 indicates a high rate of assault convicts (48.8%) in the prisons studied, while armed robbery (24.2%) and murder (23.8%) that are often reported in the media are relegated to second and third positions respectfully. The reasons for this are diverse. While the causes of violent crimes in Nigeria range from poverty, unemployment, family adversity, parental neglect and abandonment, and undue worship of wealth regardless of source, one specific reason for assault overtaking robbery and murder in the convict list has to do with the ineffective criminal justice system. Within the prisons studied, there were more people awaiting trial for armed robbery and murder than there are for other forms of violent crime. In fact, 90 % of awaiting trials in the four prisons studied are for murder and armed robbery. The decline in robbers and murderers is a mystery that requires investigation into criminal justice institutions.

**Table 3.
Inflicted Injuries and Death**

Injury and Death	Frequency (fe)	Percentage (%)
Yes	243	39.8
No	371	60.2
Total	614	100%

Source: Questionnaire Administered (2017).

On the question of whether respondents had injured someone, which resulted in the death of the person (injured), as shown in Table 3, indicates that only 39.8 % affirmed.

**Table 4.
Views on Respondents' Justification for their Action**

Justifications	Frequency	Percentage
Mere accident	82	33.7
Intentional assault	131	54.0
Case of self defence	03	12..3
Total	243	100.0

Source: Questionnaire Administered (2017).

On the justification for their actions that led to murder, Table 4 shows that 12.3% said that even if their victim died, it was not intentional on their part; rather, it was a case of self-defense. A case of victim precipitated murder. Also, 33.7% described the death as a mere accident, while 54.0% thought otherwise and described their actions as intentional and, by extension, had committed murder. Malice and low self-control at the point of provocation could lead to intentional murder. Rivalry over a price item could be a motivational factor for deliberate murder. Also, some prison warders blamed biological factors for murder and other criminal activities (Wright, Caspi, Moffitt, and Silva 1999). Two respondents, KW4 a 45 years old with 24 years of prison work experience, and 42-year-old SW3, with 12 years of experience, blamed biological factors as the root causes of criminal involvement in Nigeria

, the issues of being a criminal, not listening to people, always being in trouble not having a feeling of mercy for people, which could always lead individuals into committing rape, assault, or even murder is in the blood. A son of a thief, our people say, is more likely to be a thief.

The other respondent felt what made an individual kill or rape another

must be in the person's blood. I do not think they will think of it before they begin to do it. It should be something that comes over them from their body.

Table 5.
Murder versus Low Income, Education, Social Capital, Peer group, Unemployment, Frustration, and Disorganized Neighborhood.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.020	.065		.306	.759
	Unemployment	-.025	.037	-.031	-.672	.502
	Education	.062	.069	.041	.908	.364
	Income	-.028	.046	-.027	-.606	.545
	PeerGroup	.073	.025	.143	2.955	.003
	SocialCapital	.033	.034	.045	.970	.333
	D.Neighborhood	.066	.023	.143	2.898	.004
	Frustration	.042	.047	.040	.884	.377

a. Dependent Variable: Murder

Source: Questionnaire Administered (2017).

Furthermore, when murder was the dependent variable of low income, low social capital, low level of education, unemployment, and disorganized neighborhood in a regression analysis, it became clear from the analysis of the variable table and the coefficient of regression model that peer influence and residing in a disorganized environment influence more than any other variable as far as the commitment of murder was concerned. Since its P-value of 0.004 for disorganized neighborhood and peer influence, 0.003 are both less than 0.05 levels of significance; they are set for the research. It, therefore, implies that when individuals live within a disorganized neighborhood and associate with bad peers, such persons are more likely to engage in murder. At the same time, variables like social capital, frustration, unemployment, Income, and educational level have no significant influence on the crime Murder. From the table, $B = 0.073$ infers that for every unit, an increase in Peer group has a significant influence on the crime murder. And for $B = 0.066$, it infers that for every unit, an increase in disorganized neighborhoods has a significant influence on the crime of murder. Additionally, Nnadi (2008) discusses how globalization affects economic structures and social dynamics in Nigeria, which may indirectly contribute to factors like neighborhood disorganization and peer influences that are critical in understanding violent crimes such as murder. The model of the regression equation is given below:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_n X_n + E \dots \dots \dots 1$$

Where, Y = Murder,

β_0 = is the intercept of the model

$X_1, X_2 \dots X_n$ are the independent variables (predictor variables) represented here by income, social capital, neighborhood influence, level of education, and unemployment.

$\beta_1, \beta_2 \dots \beta_n$ are the slopes or parameters of the predictor variables in the model

E = is the random error term

Murder = 020 + -028 income + 033 social capital + 066 disorganized neighbourhood + 062 level of education + -25 unemployment + 042 frustration + peer group.

On the testing of the hypothesis, the following results were obtained. The first hypothesis, which relates the level of income with involvement in the murder, reads as follows:

H₁ There is a significant relationship between lower levels of income and involvement in murder

H₀ There is no significant relationship between lower level of income and involvement in murder

Table 6.
Testing of hypothesis between Low Income and Murder

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Anova	.015	1	.015	.007	.934 ^b
	Residual	1217.348	546	2.230		
	Total	1217.363	547			

a. Dependent Variable: Murder

b. Predictors: (Constant), Income

Source: *Questionnaire Administered (2017)*.

Table 6 shows a P-value of .934, which is greater than the 0.05 set as the level of significance from the onset. On this basis, the research hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between lower income and involvement in murder is hereby rejected, and the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between low income and involvement in murder is accepted.

The second hypothesis relates social capital with murder and produces the following result.

H₁ There is a significant relationship between social capital and involvement in murder.

H₀ There is no significant relationship between social capital and involvement in murder.

Table 7.
Testing of hypothesis between Social Capital and Murder

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Anova	20.387	1	20.387	9.254	.002
	Residual	1193.993	542	2.203		
	Total	1214.380	543			

a. Dependent Variable: Murder

b. Predictors: (Constant), Social Capital

Source: *Questionnaire Administered (2017)*.

When social capital is placed against murder in the regression analysis result (Table 7), it shows that a P-value of .002 was obtained, which is less than the P-value of 0.05 set as the level of significance. It, therefore, infers that there is a significant relationship between social capital and involvement in murder, as predicted by the research hypothesis. Consequently, the research hypothesis is accepted against the

rejection of the null hypothesis, which predicted no significant relationship between social capital and involvement in murder.

Furthermore, on whether socioeconomic status of individuals could lead to their involvement in violent crimes, the majority of the respondents agreed to this fact; for instance, respondent SW3 said:

Socioeconomic status is a serious factor in the issues of violent crime in Nigeria. Let me tell you that 95 percent of prisoners in Nigerian prisons come from poor backgrounds. The delay in the judiciary process always makes sure that it is only the poor who get to prison.

Along the same line of thought were respondents SW4, KW, and NW3, whose submissions have been represented here with that of NW:

“Economic hardship, inflation, unemployment, and lack of proper and adequate education make individuals fall prey to crime of any kind.”

Socio-Demographics of Respondents

The socio-demographic of respondents indicate a predominantly male (67.3%) with an average age that falls within the age bracket of 25 to 29 years. This finding is in accord with Murray's (2011) study on Los Angeles street youths, who were found to be predominantly male. Also, the study of Emeh, Nwaguma, and Aboroh (2012) in Lagos, Nigeria, found male-dominated. On the age of respondents, this research found out youths whose ages range mostly from 20 years to 34 years with an average bracket of 25 to 29 years as dominant perpetrators of violent crimes. This is also consistent with past studies. This outcome of youths being the leading perpetrators of violent crimes is in consonant with the findings of Murray (2011), Moffit *et al.* (2000), Ucha (2010), Baskin and Sommers (1993), Emeh, Nwaguma and Aboroh (2012), Efiom, Archibong and Ojua (2014) and Wikstrom and Treiber (2016).

The majority (42.4%) of the respondents were married. However, only 35.1% said they had at least one child. This finding is surprisingly at variance with the findings of many studies Baskin and Summers, 1993; Emeh, Nwaguma, and Aboroh (2012) Efiom, Archibong, and Ojua (2014) and Wikstrom and Treiber (2016), all in effect found their respondents to be predominantly single. Here again, culture plays a role, as the study area is not only Muslim but also falls within

the north-central axis of Nigeria, which most often marries early in life (Oloyede 2014).

Low Income and Murder

It was found that respondents with low incomes did not participate in murder. Since the calculated P-value of .934 was greater than 0.05 set earlier as the level of significance. It was an indication that low levels of income did not independently motivate individuals to commit homicide. This finding is in agreement with earlier findings of Sharkey, Besbris, and Friedson (2017) that indicated no significant relationship between low income and violent crime. Sittner and Gentzler (2016), however, argued for a robust relationship between low income and involvement in violent crimes.

However, the data revealed that respondents who have low income but have criminal peers are more likely to engage in murder than those who do not because the P-value of .000 obtained was less than 0.05 level of significance set for the research. The point is that low income could not solely explain involvement in murder-type violent crimes among respondents unless it is associated with another factor- peer group influence.

Social Capital versus Murder

Furthermore, the finding of the study, which relates social capital with murder, shows a significant relationship. An outcome of regression analysis from Table 7 shows a P-value of .002, which is less than the P-value of 0.05 set earlier, which equally indicates a strong relationship between social capital and the involvement of individuals in murder. The finding is in accord with a study conducted in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria (Adebayo 2013), which reported the effect that unemployed youths with no safety valve like social capital are disproportionately represented as perpetrators of murder and robbery in the Oyo State crime scene.

Also, frustration among research subjects also contributed to their involvement in murder as it was not only acknowledged by the inmates themselves but when frustration as a variable was compared with murder in a regression model, a significant p-value of .001 was obtained. It could be stressed that the situation has something to do with the harsh socio-economic conditions presented to this crop of

people; peer group influence and growing discontent manifested by frustration were all contributory factors to the explanation of murder as perpetrated by the research subjects with the four prisons covered in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Hypothesis II, which stated that there was a significant relationship between low level of income and involvement in murder, was rejected because the P-value obtained of .934 was greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Also, hypothesis VI, which stated a significant relationship between social capital and involvement in murder, was accepted because the calculated P-value of .002 was less than the 0.05 level of significance set earlier. Murder, according to this paper, is explained not by a single factor like being socially disadvantaged with low income, but more likely when the individual lacks the requisite social capital within his/her social settings. This study supports the proposition that the socio-economic status of perpetrators contributes significantly to their involvement in violent forms of crime. While socio-economic factors like education, income, and unemployment could not all independently present a significant relationship, when combined with other variables before, influence on violent crimes was achieved. It therefore follows that a combination of variables could better explain complex phenomena like involvement in violent crimes. Intervention programmes should be directed toward empowering parents to be able to discharge their parental responsibilities to their children/wards. The findings implicated the absence of social capital as a function of violent crime involvement by youths in Nigeria. Government and donor agencies should try to establish scholarship schemes for youths to encourage them to obtain higher educational certificates, which would, by extension, reduce their involvement in violent crimes. Governments at all levels should make attempts to introduce and maintain a social security program for both the youth and the parents to serve as a safety valve against prevailing harsh economic conditions experienced by the unemployed and the elderly. Furthermore, studies have shown that high levels of social connectedness can significantly reduce various types of crimes, including murder, rape, robbery, assault, burglary, and motor vehicle theft (National Population Statistics and ICF Macro 2009)

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