

Decision-making Practices in Armed Robbery among Armed Robbers in Nigeria

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Abstract

The social and psychological processes involved in decision making practices in armed robbery underlie the fact that the offenders are rational, calculative and at best remain economic men. The decision making practices of robbers centre on three key areas of the criminal behaviour: why to rob, who to rob and how to rob. This paper sets out to investigate the decision making practices of armed robbers in Nigeria as it affects these three critical areas of concern of the offending behaviour. It is based on the study of seventy six (76), convicted and the unconvicted but self-admitted armed robbers (68 by questionnaire, and 8 by in-depth oral interview) in three prisons in the southeast states of Nigeria. The questionnaires were administered on the 68 samples while the in-depth oral interview technique was conducted on another eight (8) sampled robbers who did not participate in the questionnaire section of the data collection process. Analyses and interpretation of data show that decision making practices among robbers in contemporary Nigeria are robust. In particular, the study revealed that robbers make essential decisions on the need (why) to rob, and then, rationalize it as acceptable; they make decision on who to rob (targets)—choosing targets based on certain criteria and locality preference; and finally, they make decision on how to rob based on expected gains and risks, and involving decision on whether or not to employ gun and mask in the course of operation. The paper concludes that in the light of a rational, calculative and hedonistic nature of robbers in contemporary Nigeria, effective prevention policy to robbery lies not with harsher penalties but in target hardening, situational crime prevention strategies and fundamentally, in addressing the motivation of young persons to make the choice.

Key word: Armed robbery, Armed Robbers, Decision-making, Contemporary Nigeria, Emulation.

Introduction

According to the Nigeria police force on crime statistics, armed robbery remains the top three most serious crimes reported to the police force (see Annual Report of the Nigeria Police Force for 2006, 2007 and 2008). This source put the figures of the offence at 2,704 in 2005, 2, 863 in 2006, 2,327 in 2007 and 2, 340 in 2008. The same source reported Kano, Ogun, Oyo, Delta, and Cross River states as among the top on the list of 36 states of the federation with serious robbery incidence. Adisa Jinmi (1994) described armed robbery as

Nigeria's most glamorous and fastest growing crime. A handful of other Nigerian authors (see Marenin, 1987; Iwarimie-Jaja 1987, 1998, and 1999a, 1999b; Ekpeyong, 1989; Shopeju, 1999; Odey, 2003; Ogbonnaya and Igwe, 2009; Nwani, Ogbonnaya, Igwe and Nwite, 2009,) have also at different occasions depicted the pervasiveness and deleterious effects of armed robbery in contemporary Nigeria.

Several armed robbery incidence continue to make headlines in most leading Nigeria print and electronic media (see for examples, *Tell magazine* Dec.25 2000; *Thisday Sunday Newspaper* of October 29 2000). In Afikpo, a middle commercial town in Ebonyi state, armed bandits permanently kept the town under siege for two years (see Igwe Jarome, the *Nigerian Mandate*, Jan./Feb. 2009). According to this local print media, and widely reported in other print media, between the last quarters of 2007 and third quarters of 2008, five horrendous incidence of bank robberies took place in the town with only three bank branches. The same local newspaper reported that several people lost their lives while millions of naira were carted away by the bandits. In the early part of this year, several Nigerian newspapers and BBC cable networks reported a most horrific robbery incident involving a luxurious bus along Ore-Lagos express way. According to these reports (with the crime scene picture posted on the net), there were gruesome rapes and murders of innocent Nigerians by armed bandits who carried a heist on the Lagos-bound bus from the east.

Reviews of most literatures on robbery and robbers in Nigeria show, however, the tendency to focus on the conventional facets of the offence and offenders. These are the trend, theoretical perspectives, violence/threatening nature, social causes and context, and policy issues (see Ekpeyong, 1989; Olurode, 1991; Clinard and Abbot, 1975; Iwarimie-Jaja, 1987; Marenin, 1987). Examination of the decision-making practices of the robbers especially on three key areas: why to rob (motivation), who to rob (target), and how and with what to rob with (strategies and appurtenances) has remained largely unattended to.

Quite often, robbery in contemporary Nigeria is assumed to be an irrational, unpurposeful and uncalculated act, and robbers are portrayed as helpless agents of some inexorable external social forces acting under some psychopathic dispositions. Thus, the irrational and psychopathic robber has been variously referred to, and described by several relevant quarters (see for instances, *Thisday Sunday Newspaper* of October 29 2000; *Tell Magazine*, Dec.25 2000; Otu, 2003; Marenin, 1986, and various comments by Nigerian police spokespersons and bosses).

A body of literature which recognizes the rationality and calculus of robbers stresses the importance of decision making process which consists among other things a sequence of three important elements about the robbery: (1) deciding to rob mainly for financial gain, a stage Otu (2003) described as the "incubation stage" (2) deciding what target to rob, and (3) deciding and planning the robbery strategies or what is generally known as the modus operandi which may be simple or complex (see Conklin, 1972; Cook, 1990; Morrison and O' Donnell, 2008). Once the three key areas are addressed, crucial factors at this juncture would be the offender's opinions about robbery accouterments such as the kind of weaponry required for the offence, and the preparedness of the offender to fire a gun should his threats need to be reinforced at any stage during the robbery.

According to Morrison and O' Donnell (2008), decision making choices of typical robbery depends on the target and the offender's ability to organize others to cooperate in such a risky venture; these choices would be influenced, in turn, by the offender's access to firearms, his previous experience of armed robbery and his psychological makeup. Decision

making is very crucial to armed robbers because as Otu (2003) observed, there is also an understanding that offenders do encounter a kind of schizophrenia—split personality, marked by crisis between thoughts, feelings and actions. Feelings of guilt and indecision on whether to quit or not and so on are always bothering the offenders (Otu, 2003:341). Whether relatively straightforward, organized or sophisticated, these schemes and the decisions underlying them may provide important indicators of potential preventive techniques (e.g., see Feeney, 1986; Harding and Blake, 1989; Kapardis, 1988).

As no studies appear to have been specifically concerned with an examination of Conklin's conception of the rational, calculative decision making practices of robbery in Nigeria, this gap throws up a challenge to robbery scholars. So the central issue and research question which this current study attempts to address is whether Nigerian robbers engage themselves in some kind of decision making practices on why who and how to rob as it affects their profession so that they can be taken to be rational, calculative and economic men.

The objective of the present study therefore in addressing this issue on armed robbery in contemporary Nigeria is twofold. First and primarily, it attempts to relate Conklin's conception of the rational, calculative robber making important decision on key areas of his career: why to rob, who to rob, and how to rob, and to relate these decisions to the Nigerian robbery context. Second, it is an effort to describe, in specific and unique term, a specific type of criminal behaviour system of Nigeria extraction.

The present study relied on surveyed sample of armed robbers in three prisons across the Southeastern states of Nigeria to examine quite a number of their behavioural traits. Official record, literature on armed robbery and reports and commentaries from the media were employed as supplementary data for the study.

Theoretical Expectation

The research evolved from the analytical realm of rational choice theories of crime and in the firm understanding that armed robbery is a purposeful, goal-directed and goals-oriented activity. The rational choice theory has its root in the classical school of criminology. At the heart of this school of thought is the philosophy which holds that human beings have freewill, and that behaviour is guided by hedonism or the principle of utilitarianism. Since the classicists made their point between the late 18th and early 19th centuries, other criminological developments which can be described as the spinoffs of the classical school of criminology have emerged. They include but not limited to deterrence theory (Gibbs, 1975), Zimring and Hawkins, (1973) social context theory (Miethe and Meier, 1994), rational choice perspective (Clarke and Cornish, 1983), life-style theories of victimization (Hinderland et al., 1978). Although these theories vary in their approaches to the explanation and control of crime, they all share a common image of criminals in which they argue that temptation and opportunity are crucial to the explanation of crime (see also Cao, 2004:32). To all these theorists, law violation is a social action, and violators are purposive, calculus and goal oriented so that decision making practices on what to enhance this goal attainment is considered paramount.

The broad rational choice theory focuses on criminal involvement as a process, through which individuals, from the onset, make choices to become involved in particular forms of crime, to continue, and to desist. According to Cornish and Clarke (1986), the decisions of offenders are based on the expected effort and reward against the likelihood and

severity of punishment and other costs of the crime. This is the classical case of the cost-benefit analysis or the economic man theory so that armed robbers are seen as not just purposeless and psychopathic agents of some inexorable social forces acting aimlessly. Offenders seek to benefit in their criminal exploits which involves making decision and choices, however, constrained by time, cognitive ability, and information, resulting in a limited rather than normative rationality (see Akers, 1990; Cao, 2004:33). According to Akers (1990), rationality may also be limited by lack of information (for example, lacking an accurate appreciation of the probability of arrest, or underestimating the likely sentence), by values and by other "non-rational" influences.

The rational choice models as developed by criminologists have not been based upon the assumption that offenders only take account of all relevant factors on every occasion when an offence is contemplated (Clarke, 1983). Instead of assuming perfect utility maximization, these models have tended to work with the concept of "bounded," or "limited," rationality (Simon, 1955). Thus, a number of factors that are unrelated to the decision to commit an offence can influence an offender's behavior. Such factors may include alcohol intoxication or the desire to stave off the unpleasant withdrawal symptoms associated with certain drug addictions to accommodate. After all, researches have shown that discounted factors are as much a component of rational decision making as are positive factors (see for example, Harding, 1993).

Furthermore, deterrence, a very key strand of the rational choice theory, is based on the assumption that the costs of committing a crime will be weighed against with much zeal as the benefits to be gained. So, it is important to determine whether present attempts at armed robbery prevention are being appreciated by those they are aimed at (and if so, why, in the case of these convicted robbers at least, they have clearly failed to have the desired deterrent effect). Walsh's (1986) discovery of "free-range negative thinking" is interesting in that it suggests that economic criminals such as armed robbers do often assess the reasons for *not* committing an offence. However, the bulk of the analysis reported by Walsh appears to rest on the practical considerations of the crime rather than on the decision to commit a crime.

Within the broad context of the rational decision making practices described above, there is the specific one which consists of a sequence of three important elements about robbery as an event. This decision involves making choices and perceived alternatives on the basis of the individual armed robber's set of characteristics and the context in which the robber operates. The sequences are (1) deciding to rob mainly for financial gain, (2) deciding what target to rob, and (3) deciding and planning the robbery strategies (see also Conklin, 1972; Cook, 1990).

Methodology

Data for the present study is extracted from a broad larger study of the sociology-criminology of armed robbers and armed robbery in contemporary Nigeria. The research design for the parent study was a cross sectional survey. Originally, a total of 86 convicted and self-accepted robbers awaiting trial were selected in three prisons and cities (Abakaliki, Umuahia and Port Harcourt) to participate in the questionnaire section of the interview. Nine withdrew (reclused themselves) while sixty-eight (about 79%) of the sample completed the questionnaires in a manner deemed appropriate for data analysis. In addition, eight (8) robbers were also selected from the three prisons in the ratio of 4.2.2 for in-depth oral

interview. These latter offenders were subjected to in-depth oral interview so as to complement information obtained from our questionnaire data. They were not among the first set of offenders selected but were recommended by correctional officials when we requested for specific target of the population for oral in-depth interview. Earlier on, we had reasoned that there were other detail and vital information about the decision making practices of the offence and offenders which the questionnaire instrument cannot capture.

Both our offenders for questionnaire and in-depth oral interviews were selected in proportion to the individual prisons' population. Because we reasoned that our subjects were prone to unannounced alterations at any times and rates (releasing of inmates and bringing in new ones), we did not bother to have accurate population of our subjects in the three prisons. However, all we made sure of was to establish that there were fairly large estimate of armed robbery offenders in the prisons during the 3-4 different occasions we visited these prisons for interview. Indeed, being guided by this practical constraint (see also Durrheim 1999 in Terre Balance and Durrheim 1999: 45), we played to the technique of "sampling to redundancy". This enabled us to continuously interviewed a number of subjects we had access to in the three selected prisons until we found that further respondents were incapable of providing any additional information relevant to the study.

From the prison officials, we had gathered that except the few female members who were described as accomplices, the population of armed robbers was mainly that of males. Thus, all the selected participants were males. Apart from two offenders who were traditionalists, all the others were Christians in the religious beliefs. They were mainly age between 16 -40 years old, mainly singles with only few married ones. Educationally, majority of our subjects were secondary school certificate holders, students, unemployed, and trained apprentices in mechanics, electrical and other artisans. Table 1 below depicts the composition of the sample of respondents drawn from all the three prisons that ultimately form the basis of analysis.

A specific kind of non-probability sampling technique known as the "respondent-driven sampling" (snowball) was used. According to Erickson (1979) while referring to *chain-referral sampling* as the same thing with snowball described it as a technique which focuses on hidden populations such as armed robbery.

Instruments/techniques for data collection: questionnaire and in-depth oral interview

Our questionnaires were pre-tested on a dozen identified armed robbers in Abakaliki prison—the home state of the lead researcher. Notwithstanding this pretest, we decided to include the prison in our sample because of convenience and accessibility, the inclining rate of the offence in the new emerging urban city, and the fact that contacts and rapports had been established earlier on. The final version of it contained 86 items (herein referred to as variables or items of measurement), and was sub-divided into two parts. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of robbers' socio-demographic characteristics: family, age, sex, marital, education, religion, and occupation. The second part of the questionnaire contained variables that sought out a wide-range of information about the offenders and the offence in greater details. The specific sub-variables included among other things the types of robbery, sources of learning, length of involvement, motives for robbery, networks, and choice of victims/targets, patterns of robbery, the appurtenances for robbery (weapons, drugs, charms, masks, etc). The variables and data for this present paper were extracted from this second

part of the questionnaire and the in-depth oral interviews conducted alongside. The questionnaires were in some cases self-administered by offenders who accepted being able to read and write, and in others, assistance was provided by correctional officials who were among the handful detailed by the Head of the Prison for security and logistics assistance. Albeit, we drafted these questionnaires in closed-ended format, provisions were made at the end of the questionnaires for optional comments and/or summary of the offenders' viewpoints.

The in-depth oral interview was interactive in form, and in some cases, took the form of word association and/or sentence completion when certain statements were made halfway and the interviewees allowed responding to the sentence. Interviews were conducted with an "interview guide" and contained items/variables not already covered in the questionnaire, or which needed further information. For instance, one of the items focused on details decision making practices of robbers and the *modus operandi* of particular armed robbery gang. Another asked the respondents to tell us how they dispose off their items used in an operation.

We found that the two groups we interviewed did not differ significantly with regard to gender, ethnicity, place of birth, and educational qualifications. Nor were there any significant differences between those interviewed by questionnaire and those by oral in-depth interview in relation to age at the time of the robbery, employment status, marital status and previous experience with the criminal justice system. Indeed, we can say with a certain degree of credulity that the robbers we interviewed appeared both reflective and representatives of documented armed robbers with respect to a variety of important socio-demographic and criminological features. Also, our insight into the details of the offences for which our interviewees had been convicted were compared with the overall pattern of the incident of serious armed robberies so far reported and in sample of recorded incidents, it appeared that the robbery offences discussed with the interviewed robbers were broadly representative of all categories of robberies: banks, highways, commercials, residential, static and non-static.

However, it seems reasonable to postulate that this group of robbers, all of whom were either still serving various prison sentences, awaiting execution, and who confessed to have participated in the offence but remained on trial list for some three years or more after the commission of the crime, consist of those who had been involved in the most serious armed robberies. The interviews, both by questionnaire and in-depth oral interviews, involving the main researcher and some correctional official assistants, took place in the chapels of the prisons and out of the sight and hearing of non-assistants prison staff. The aim of the study was explained in to them detail; notwithstanding the waiver grated by the Department of Correctional Services with authorization letter, prospective participants consents were sought after so that only those who expressed their willingness to participate were interviewed in all the prisons. Participants were assured of total confidentiality. They were told to direct all questions to the lead researcher and that if there were any questions they did not wish to answer they should simply skip or recluse from it as no further inquiry would be sought. They were offered no inducements to participate prior to the commencement of the interviews. This strategy proved extremely successful in that 95% of those inmates who were approached in person agreed to participate in the exercise.

Table.1 Composition of the sample

Prison	Respondents initially included	Respondents after withdrawals	Respondents submitted useable questionnaires	Subjects interviewed
Port Harcourt (River State)	35	30	27	4
Umuahia (Abia State)	24	20	18	2
Abakaliki (Ebonyi State)	27	25	23	2
TOTAL	86	75	68	8

Data presentation and analysis

Data were sorted out, categorised, subjected to quality control check, and coded with the assistant of a postgraduate student of statistics (see also Hardon et al.1994: 258-259).

Table 2 shows the distributions for the frequency on decision making practices bothering on “why” armed robbery; that is, the reasons which animates armed robbers to make decision to engage in the criminal behaviour of robbery. Consistence with other studies (see Conklin, 1972; Cook, 1990; Morrison and O’ Donnell, 2008), our findings revealed a robust rational decision making practice regarding reasons for robbery. For instance, from the table, we found that above two-third of our offenders suggestively made decision regarding going into robbery for one reason or the other. By percentage, 52 offenders accounting for 76.5% made the decision on the justification for engagement in robbery. Our findings showed that unemployment accounted for the highest single reason for making decision to get involved in the crime. 34.6% robbers gave unemployment which literally translates to the urge for financial support as the main reason behind their decision making practices to rob. Only 1.9% gave the need to get money easily and because of the easy access to weapons respectively as being at the centre of their decision making. Other reasons not specified were given by 36.5% of the respondents. Such reasons though not specified may probably include a high taste, family disorganisation, parent deprivation, low self-concept, and unforeseen forces such as devil or a curse (see also Iwarimie-Jaja 1999a:172).

Table 2. **Decision making practice on why (reasons) to rob**

CHOSE11					
	Reasons for deciding to rob	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Dislike for government in place	2	2.7	3.8	3.8
	To get money easily	1	1.5	1.9	5.8
	Unemployment	18	26.5	34.6	40.4
	My friends were involved	3	4.4	5.8	46.82
	To get money and help others	6	8.8	11.5	57.7
	What I've read and seen on TV	2	2.9	3.8	61.5
	Easily lay my hands on weapons	1	1.5	1.9	63.5
	Others	19	27.9	36.5	100.0
	Total	52	76.5	100.0	
Missing	System	16	23.5		
Total		68	100.0		

Table 3 is about decision making practices on the criteria for the selection of targets (victims) by gang of robbers. Again we found near consistence of offenders who responded to this question with the preceding key question. A total of 48 offenders representing 70.6% of the total sample agreed that they make decision that bothers on who to rob. Going by our findings, 41.7% of the robbers said they made decision on the choice of targets or victims guided by "informant". 14.6% said it was based on nominations by members of the robbery gang. 12.5% and 31.3% said their decisions were based on consideration of the security, the risk and the benefits, and "other" criteria respectively.

Table 3. **Decision making practice on who/where to rob including criteria for choice of victims**

INFOTIPI1					
	Means of choosing a target	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	By informant	20	29.4	41.7	41.7

	Any victim(s) nominated by member	7	10.3	14.6	56.3
	By consideration of security, risk and benefit	6	8.8	12.5	68.8
	Other	15	22.1	31.3	100.0
Missing	Total	48	70.6	100.0	
Total	System	20	29.4		
		68	100.0		

In furtherance of our exploration into decision making practice on who to or where to rob (the choice of targets/victims), Table 4 below is about the decision making practices regarding the spatial location of the offences. Since we had described armed robbery as a high risk criminal behaviour, especially in Nigeria (see Otu, 2010), decision making that involves choosing a safer and lucrative locality where the offence is to be committed is paramount to contemporary Nigerian robbers. 10.2% robbers said they made the decision to commit the offence within their compounds (neighbourhoods). 36.7% said it was within their states of origin. According to 32.7%, decision on the offence rested on doing the crime outside the states where the offenders reside. 20.4% said it was made to be committed within their Local Government Councils.

Table 4. **Decision making practice on where (locality) of offence**

CRIME54

Crime spatial distribution		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Your compound	5	7.4	10.2	10.2
	Your Local Government	10	14.7	20.4	30.6
	Your State	18	26.5	36.7	67.3
	Outside your state	16	23.5	32.7	100.0
	Total	49	72.1	100.0	
Missing	System	19	27.9		
Total		68	100.0		

Table 5 below presents information on an important decision making practice area of armed robbers regarding the types of robbery to execute. 26.5% the robbers said they committed

“residential” robbery. Highways robbery accounted for 17.6%, while 22.1% respondents said they committed commercial robbery. Only 2.2% of our robbers committed bank robbery. When the number of offenders who responded to this question are aggregated, we found consistency with responses to the other important decision-making areas.

These findings are similar to the findings of some previous studies, which found that commercial robberies accounted for 11.9%, residences 10.5%, service stations 2.9% and bank 1.4%. (see Adler et al. 1991:243). Thio (1998:328) study revealed that most robberies take place outdoors, on streets and highways, while Iwarimie-Jaja (1999a:13) found the following: residential 35.71%, streets 21.43%, highways and banks 1.79%, each respectively.

Table 5. Decision making practice on how (types) of armed robbery

NATURE55

	How/types of robbery	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Bank Robbery	1	1.5	2.2	2.2
	Residential robbery	18	26.5	39.1	41.3
	High way robbery (Road robbery)	12	17.6	26.1	67.4
	Commercial robbery (companies, stores and shop	15	22.1	32.1	100.0
	Total	46	67.6	100.0	
Missing	System	22	32.4		
Total		68	100.0		

Mask remains one of the key accoutrements in contemporary robbery. It is defined in terms of objects employed by an armed robber to veil his identity for several reasons. Respondents were asked whether they used or do often use masks during operation or not. 34.8% said, “yes”, to the fact that they used mask. 65.25% said “no” to the fact that they did not use mask or veil. One subject from the in-depth interviews added that the use of mask is “circumstantial”—it depends on the prevailing target and victims.

Table 6 Decision making practice on the use of mask

USEMASK9

	Use of mask	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	16	23.5	34.8	34.8
	No	30	44.1	65.2	100.0
	Total	46	67.6	100.0	
Missing	System	22	32.4		
Total		68	100.0		

The present and use of weapon is the singular most important distinguishing characteristic of armed robbery from other related property criminal actions (see Beirne and Messerschmidt 2000: 281). In fact, the criminal behaviour of armed robbery and armed robbers are so defined and described within the context of the use of weapons with the intent to cause bodily harm, or threat of it against a person. Our findings revealed that decision making practice on whether to use weapon or not is a robust one by armed robbers in Nigeria. A paltry of (28.3%) made decision that favoured “No” to the use of weapon in the course of their robbery operation. Expectedly, 71.7% made decision that favoured “Yes” to the use of weapon when carrying out robbery operation.

Table 7. **Decision making practice on the use of weapons**

ARMED21

	Use of arm	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	33	48.5	71.7	71.7
	No	13	19.1	28.3	100.0
	Total	46	67.6	100.0	
Missing	System	22	32.4		
Total		68	100.0		

The next stage of our analysis was on the in-depth-oral-interview data which bore direct impacts on these three key decision making areas of the robbers. Using the qualitative analytic strategies outlined by Schatzman and Straus (1973), our in-depth oral interview data analyses began early in the research process. The “analytic cycle” permitted us to continually test emerging ideas as well as to identify patterns, relationships, and processes connected to decision making practices of robbery in contemporary Nigeria (see also Otu, 2010). In addition, we employed the “constant comparative method” to analyze the data after completion of the project. This process involves careful “unitizing” and “categorizing” information unit after data have been sorted out, and subjected to quality control check, assisted by a postgraduate student and guided by Social Science Statistical Packages (SPSS) (see also Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Hardon et al.1994: 258-259). Unitizing and categorizing our data were based on our three key areas of our research question namely: “why to rob”, “who and where to rob”, and “how to rob” as “themes” for discourse. This was done after carefully reading the interviews and documents collected during the study.

An important strategy which we employed to ensure that the interpretation of the findings were accurate was that the present study trigulated multiple sources of data. In other words, data from different sources were used to corroborate our theoretical prediction. Another was that there were some experienced reserachers who were used as peer examiners. These individuals reviewed data collected periodically to provide a check on researcher bias.

Discussion

Decision making practice on why to rob

Since the classicists expounded their hedonistic/utilitarian idea of the criminals, many other criminologists have come up with more theoretically and empirically subsumed models for substantiating the rationality of criminals (see for instances, Deterrence theory by Gibbs,

1975), Zimring and Hawkins (1973), Social Context theory, (Miethe and Meier, (1994) rational choice perspective (Clarke and Cornish, 1983), life-style theories of victimization (Hinderland et al., 1978). One parallel argument shared by these rational theory criminologists is that decision making practice among criminals is a common one. As it concerned armed robbery, a major thrust of rational theorists is that offenders (robbers) make crucial decisions on why, who and how to rob (see Conklin, 1972; Cook, 1990; Morrison and O' Donnell, 2008). This study examined a few of the robbers' key decision making practices for a successful robbery operation. To this effect, decisions on why (reasons) to rob, where to rob (choice of victims), and how to rob (kind and what to rob with) in which are embedded, the location of robber and robbery accoutrements, are explored.

In line with their degree of importance, we set out as our first line of objective, the need to examine decision making practice on why to rob bearing in mind that it touches on one of the fundamental point of departure of most studies of criminal behaviour. Our findings showed that several multiple reasons account for why robbers make decision to participate in robbery. These multiple reasons include, unemployment, lust for monetary reward, easy access to weaponries, peer and media influence, to assist needy relations, political dislike, and other reasons not specified.

Literally, and consistency with similar theoretical and empirical findings, our findings showed that unemployment accounted for the highest single reason for making decision to get involved in the crime. 34.6% robbers gave unemployment which literally translates to the urge for financial support as the main reason behind their decision making practices to rob. Only 1.9% gave the need to get money easily and because of the easy access to weapons respectively as being at the centre of their decision making. Other reasons not specified were given by 36.5% of the respondents. Such reasons though not specified may probably include a high taste, family disorganisation, parent deprivation, low self-concept, and unforeseen forces such as devil or a curse (see also Iwarimie-Jaja 1999a:172).

The finding is of sociological significant because it points to the fact that unemployment though, not an excuse for involvement in crime such as armed robbery, it remains a critical causative element. Box (1996 in Caffrey and Mundy 1996:286) explained among other things that the conditions of social and economic contribute to crime because they constrain, limit or narrow choices...

A common viewpoint among our in-depth oral interviewees read:

The act of robbery is the fastest means of getting money due to unemployment in the country. That is why we the young boys are badly in it. Government has forgotten us and we have to survive

Nevertheless, it is interesting as the findings revealed, that it is may not often be the need to get rich very quickly, or even outright joblessness, which motivates Nigerian youths to get involved in armed robbery. Given the high risk involved in the crime, especially in contemporary Nigeria where the offence attracts lengthy jail terms, outright death penalty or mob lynching, it would make sense that robbers would quit as soon as substantial amount is raised, and possibly launder the proceeds into legitimate economic activities. Indeed, earlier findings revealed that there may be some armed robbers who are motivated by the Robin Hood's ideology of robbery—the belief in robbing the propertied class while giving same to the less propertied class (see also Olurode, 1991).

Another important revealing as far as why to rob is concerned is that the curiosity to practice what was imitated, either through readings or watching on electronic media, also motivates and animates some Nigerian youths to make decision to get involved in robbery. Ake (1981:21-48) rightly noted that part of the colonisers' trick was the introduction of cinema, which displayed all kinds of western ideas and entrapped the indigenous population. Various films such as the "Italian mob" and the "Heat" portray daring armed robbery escapades that carry the aura of masculinity. These films are freely sold to the armies of unemployed youth, many who have also tasted the new western life styles on contemporary Nigeria (see *The Guardian* 11 November 2000:6).

Decision making practice on who to rob (choice of targets/victims)

According to Conklin (1972), Thio (1998:326), once the decision to rob has been made, the next step for the robbers is to select a certain target. Choice of would-be-victim or target is therefore a top priority in robbery escapades. Choices are neither ordinarily, nor haphazardly made. They are often based on certain criteria, and evaluated on cost-benefit analysis based on certain factors such as lucrative establishments and lower risk of arrest (see also Conklin, 1972; Thio, 1998:326).

The findings in this study confirm the importance of decision making practice on the choice of who to rob. We found a total of 70.6% of our 68 sample who responded to the variable accepted making such decision. Analysis of responses to this important decision making practice confirms the prevailing mindsets amongst most members of the general public about armed robbery in contemporary Nigeria who hold the view that the choice of targets or victims is an important one and appears to be done on a rotational basis. Most of our robbers who were interviewed orally chided the Nigerian police who they described as informants. The same interview revealed that often, those nominated as targets are victims' enemies, neighbours, friends, business partners or opponents. Robbers also revealed that members of armed robbery gang are often obligated to nominate a victim while they play a crucial role in the planning of the operation. However, any gang member who nominates the targets is expected, in that circumstance, to play a passive role during the actual operation.

These findings revealed that decisions on the choice of targets are not made on a vacuum and they find support with previous studies on targets or victims' selection (see Conklin, 1972; Thio, 1998) According to these authors, three factors are crucial to the gang of armed robbers or the lone-armed robber while making decision bothering on the selection of the targets. These are lucrative, establishment, and risk assessment. In addition to those factors such as informant, consideration of risk, security and benefits, and nomination by gang members, there are other criteria or factors likely to influence decision making on the choice of targets which our oral in-depth interviews revealed. These factors include paid or sponsored armed robbery in which case robbery becomes a mean of settling personal differences, "ill-luck" (innocent) victims—whereby victims are randomly picked as precursors to "big robbery scores", or as a result of the frustration encountered by a robbery gang, publicity, and revenge as when police crime fighters or their relations are targeted.

Our present study also found that among our robber subjects, decisions on the choice of targets equally extend to the spatial space of the robbery. This is all about the place of the robbery *visa-vis* where the robbers reside as at when the robbery took place. Clearly, our findings did not show any obvious unique pattern in decision making as it affects the place of the robbery and the offender's place of domicile. Indeed, it can be read from our

findings that there was near parity on decision making regarding robbing from either robber's own state and outside one's state of origin. It does appear that from the robbers' point of view, decision regarding the locality of robbery—as part of the broad decision making on the choice of targets in contemporary Nigeria—should be made in such a way that targets should neither be too far nor closet to their place of residences. Of course, this decision depends on a number of factors and circumstances. In the word of some of our robbers that were interviewed by in-depth oral interview:

As offenders, we need not, and often do not commit crimes where we dey stay (where we live). But sometimes we no dey get choice (we don't have a choice) than to do that. If it's your luck, then fine. Whoever has the wad (money), even if it is in your house, your men will do it while you support them.

Previous studies reflecting on decisions about the place of the offence and the offender's residence are documented in the literature. Linda (1930a), one of the few early researchers in this area, notes that decision making on the relationship between the crime's place and the offenders' residences depends on the neighbourhood social control. Where neighbourhood has effective social control, crime and/or delinquency is curbed in the area, and this forces potential offender to go elsewhere to commit crimes. White (1932) contended that crimes against property are committed away from the offenders' residence because of the obvious desire to remain anonymous. Turner (1969: 25) using 1960 Philadelphia data found and states thus: "delinquent or offender resides close to the location of his offences irrespective of the type of offence committed, or the presence or absence of accomplices...".

Some of the reasons that were given by our in-depth oral interviewed robbers for choosing targets/victims within the perimeters of their residences included having a better knowledge and understanding of the crime environment; and as a crime strategy which gives the false impression that offenders came from afar. One of the robbers who explained while operations are carried outside the proximity of the offenders' place of domicile explained it rather colloquially:

"a crocodile no dey shop fish for im water"

(a crocodile doesn't eat fish in the rivers which it co-habits).

Thus, the decision making practices on the choice of targets and/or places of robbery, whether very near or afar from the offenders' domicile, is a product of much interplay of forces. As Otu (2004) pointed out, the envisaged potential gain, the capability of the security personnel, the possibility of intervention by bystander and raising of alarms, the presence of guards and cameras are certainly additional factors that may influence the decision on the choice of targets on robberies, even as these factors are necessary, but not at all time sufficient.

Decision making practice on how to rob including what kind, and with what, to rob with

Another crucial decision making practice of robbers in contemporary Nigeria, and which is in line with Conklin's conception is, how to rob. Embedded in the decision on how to rob are what kind of robbery and the robbery accoutrements. Since robbery is a high profile crime with high risk, decision making practices involving how to go about the robbery, and with what to carry out the operation, are considered crucial. After making decision to rob, and

deciding who to rob, robbers have to make the an-all important decision on how to defend and protect themselves against both anticipated and unanticipated confrontation and identification by the victims and law enforcement agents. Robbers also have to make decision on the supporting objects (accoutrements) to help achieve robbery objective. Some of these supporting instruments necessary for the commission of robbery include guns, cutlasses, axes, clubs, adhesives, ropes, and masks.

Our findings regarding decision making practice on how to rob reveals two striking but somewhat nuanced findings. First, and consistence to previous findings (see for instance, Iwarimie Jaja, 1999a), is the relatively low rate of bank robbery. The reason for the low rate of bank robbery statistics Otu (2003) argued may be because it is the focus of most professional armed robbery careerists, or what Katz (1996 in Conklin 1996: 171) called “hard-core robbers”. Bank robbers are adroit, efficient, effective, and sometimes well-connected so that it presents a relatively low risk of apprehension. Iwarimie-Jaja (1999a: 136) in his own view explained that the low rate of bank robbery is due to the heavy security being adopted by the banks which make robbers to presume a high risk of apprehension. Nevertheless, several newspapers reports show that bank robbery in Nigeria in recent time has increased dramatically.

Two, is the relatively high rate of highways and commercial robberies. The readily available explanation for this phenomenon is that most businesses in modern Nigeria today are conducted on cash and carry (C and C) basis thus necessitating the transportation of large sums of money along the highways. Clinard and Abbot (1973:39) argued that that the spread and growth of industrial and business enterprises require the transportation of large payrolls and other funds to Local Corporation whose security may be limited to a meagre force of unarmed guards. So, the reward more than compensates the muted risk of capture and imprisonment. The high rate of residential robberies on the other hand may be understood from the point of view that residential robbery interlocks with other forms of property crimes such as theft, burglary, and larceny, and thus blur neat categorisation.

Our findings supports Iwarimie-Jaja’s (1999a: 139) findings which showed that barely 17.86% of the total 56 armed robbers that made up his subjects made decision and used masks, in their operations. Comparatively however, our finding in this regard tends to make us suggest that decision making on robbery accoutrement may not be considered an important one to robbers in contemporary Nigeria compare to their counterparts in the western world where veiling with mask is considered essential part of the decision making practices. For instance, Maree (1999: 57) noted in her studies of bank robbery in South Africa that most of the subjects wore “balaclavas” or pulled stocking over their heads, possibly to disguise themselves. Citing Honan (1995), the author reported that 72% of bank robbers in New Zealand use “balaclavas” or cash helmets to disguise themselves. A robber interviewed orally intoned:

“I don’t use mask because I operate outside where I could be identified”.

Some other oral interviewed robbers explained thus:

“I use mask to prevent had I know, and to destroy any traces of detection”.

Finally, as part of the decision making practices of the robbers, especially on how to rob, is the crucial decision that bothers on whether to go armed or not. Weapons carrying constitute one of the most defining features of the crime of armed robbery. By and large, findings in this study showed a high degree of semblance to findings in previous studies which showed that almost half of armed robbery that took place involved the display of weapons (see Einstadter 1975 in Rushing 1975: 449; Adler et al 1991; Thio 1996: 329). The use of weapons was, according to most of our interviewees, to defend themselves against any possible confrontation from the victims. One subject from Umuahia prisons was emphatic when he explained thus:

Me, I carry weapons especially guns because some people they behave like dey be (they are) crazy. At least, with that machine (gun) you can blow any nonsense person's head.

Conclusion

In closing, we must stress that ours is both an exploratory and explanatory study, and our somewhat nuanced conclusions are based on only 76 interviews by questionnaire and in-depth oral interviews. Also, we did not set out to test the Rational Choice model as it affects the decision making practices of armed robbers. However, drawing from the unique strength of Rational Choice Model, we have shown that rational and calculus decision making practices are parts and parcels of armed robbers in contemporary Nigeria, thereby contributing to the growing body of research on robbers and their rational decision making practices.

A growing number of armed robbery scholars share the belief that a certain degree of planning and decision making practices—involving three key traditional areas: why to rob, who rob and how to rob—is central to contemporary armed robbery (see Conklin, 1972; Cook, Maree, 1999; Morrison and O' Donnell, 2008). Since robbery is an economic crime, we expect, quite ordinarily, that they would make rational consideration to maximizing the potential rewards of the offence while lowering costs. Also, going by additional risks such as lynching, neck-lace treatment (instant burning with tyres), delayed, and truncated justice which have been identified as additional challenges to armed robbers in contemporary Nigeria (see Otu, 2003), it is just expedient that the perpetrators of this crime would take the issue of decision making practices regarding why to rob, where to rob and how to rob very seriously. Wikstrom and Loeber, (2000:1132) rightly noted that crime goes beyond being mere social action which involves choices between alternatives; it very well also involves serious decision making practices on why, where and how to do it.

However, it is important to stress there are no absolute rational, calculative robbers so that instead of assuming perfect utility maximization, the concept of "bounded," or "limited," rational robbers are what exist (see also Simon, 1955, Aker, 1990; Clarke, 1983) or Walsh (1986) merely denotes it as "differing conceptions of rationality". After all, awareness of the risks inherent in the commission of the crime has been pointed as evidence of the apparent irrationality on the part of the offenders.

In conclusion, our data which are literally interpretive showed that robbers in Nigeria were more likely to consider decision making on why" and "reasons", "who" and "how" to rob an important part of their career. It is also clear from our findings that our

robbers make important decisions on whether or not to use weapons, whether robbery should be residential, highways, bank, commercial stores or others, and whether it should take place within their locality or not) and how to rob.

Our findings thus have serious policy and preventive implications. It does appear that the mental equation weighing the pros and cons (benefits and losses) for committing the offence of armed robbery was, for these robbers, at least heavily weighed in favour of the pros. In the face of unemployment, as the most favoured reason for the decision to engage in robbery, and its continuum apparent upsurge in Nigeria, it does not seem possible and practical to expect that increase in enforcement would have any desired result. Although, to do so may help alter robbers' perceptions of the certainty of arrest to some degree, it is not unlikely that very large increases in criminal justice input would be required in order to deliver even small gains in overall clear-up figures. Other factors which impinge upon police efficiency in Nigeria may not help matter. For instance, public assistance is important in order to identify robbers and this is not easily come by on account of the public loss of confidence in the police.

It does not appear that armed robbers in Nigeria are going to be deterred by either reducing the size of the rewards, or increasing the prospect of arrest and harsher penalties so that the best immediate and short term alternative options to pursue would be that of target hardening and other situational crime prevention strategies. It has been suggested that the effects of such strategies may reach beyond primary deterrence (preventing the robbery from being attempted at all) into the sphere of secondary prevention (foiling the attempt to rob) and subsequent detection of offenders (see Morrison and O' Donnell, 2008). However, effective medium and long term preventive measures against armed robbery in Nigeria lies in the honest approach to addressing the motivation of young people making choices to the crime which we have identified as protracted unemployment.

Within the context of this effective medium and long term preventive measures, we suggest that a further study of the dynamics of robbers' interpretations in order to identify other possible essential elements of the motivation to rob be conducted. After all it has been acknowledged that individuals do not make the decision to rob in a social vacuum but are influenced by predisposing factors outside the immediate context, such as social learning and experience and other driving forces (Cornish and Clarke, 1986; Feeney, 1986; Gabor, 1988; Harding, 1993; Wright and Rossi, 1986; Iwarimie-Jaja, 1999a; Morrison and O' Donnell, 2008). This approach will surely take care of the individual armed robbers' characteristics and the social context under which they operate. Wikstrom and Loeber (2000: 1134) explained that crime prevention may be viewed as intervention with the aim of influencing individuals' exposure to and perception of alternatives, and their process of decision making, in a way that makes them less likely to violate the law.

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