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Police Perception and Decision Making Related to Cult Activities in Rivers State, Nigeria

Stephen Tete
Walden University

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Walden University

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Stephen Tete

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Walden University

2020

Abstract

Police Perception and Decision Making Related to Cult Activities in Rivers State,

Nigeria

by

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MPhil, Walden University, 2019

MS, University of Cincinnati, 2015

BS, Georgia State University, 2013

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Criminal Justice

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Abstract

Cult groups are criminal youth gangs in Rivers State and Nigeria that are proscribed by law and engaged in criminal activities. The activities of cult groups are a severe problem confronting the police and communities across Rivers State, Nigeria. This qualitative phenomenological study's objective was to fill a gap in knowledge by exploring how the police perceived cult groups and the threats they posed to public safety and their decision-making processes to combat cult criminal activities. This study used Lipsky's street-level bureaucracy theory to explore how police exercise discretion to discharge their duties, considering some organizational constraints. The first research question addressed how police perceive cult groups and the threats they pose to communities in Rivers State, Nigeria. The second research question addressed the factors that influence police decision making to combat cult activities in Rivers State, Nigeria. Data were collected through semistructured interviews with 20 police officers serving in Rivers State and analyzed using Saldana's coding system to identify relevant themes. The analysis results revealed that the police view cult groups as criminals, violent, highly organized, and a threat to public safety. Results also indicated that issues of corruption, logistics, lack of equipment, inadequate personnel, lack of community collaboration, and low morale influence police decision making to combat cult activities in Rivers State. Policy and social change implications include the need to ensure that the police have needed resources to combat crime and build a collaborative relationship with all stakeholders to make communities in Rivers State a safer place to live and do business.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the memory of my late mother Madam Christiana Marwin Tete. I would forever remain grateful for the sacrifice you made and the unconditional love that you showed me and my siblings. May your soul continue to rest in peace.

This work is also dedicated to my sons: Tombari Tete, Baribor Tete, Baribefe Tete, and my one and only daughter, Nekabari Tete. I hope this work will help enhance your love for education.

Finally, I dedicate this work to the movement for the survival of the Ogoni people (MOSOP) and the memory of all those who lost their lives fighting for freedom for the Ogoni people of eastern Nigeria. For there is no greater love a man can show than to lay down his life that others may live (John 15: 13).

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Special appreciation to my wife Mrs. Gift Tete for your love, support, and understanding throughout this dissertation journey. I also want to appreciate my brother Mr. Tombari Tete, Engr. Aagbara Kpea, Chief Barifaa kponi, and members of the Mogho Ogoni foundation International Inc. for your encouragement and support throughout this process.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the men and women of the Nigerian police, Rivers State police command, for your participation in this study. You work under challenging conditions and often underappreciated for the risks you took and efforts you made to make society a better place. May God continue to protect you as you work to make communities in Rivers State a safer place.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Criminal gangs or cult groups, and their activities, are one of the major problems confronting the police and communities across Rivers State (Adiboye & Duru, 2016; Agbiboa, 2014; Nche, 2019). What started as college confraternities in the 1950s later evolved into criminal enterprises. Owonikoko (2016) noted that the pirates' confraternity formed by Nigerian Nobel Laureate Professor Wole Soyinka at the University of Ibadan was the first confraternity on a Nigerian college campus. The confraternities that existed on college campuses in the 1950s served as a unifying front to advocate for students' needs and concerns as well as espousing African pride and solidarity. The formation of more universities led to the proliferation of confraternities and the eventual struggle for supremacy. Adiboye and Duru (2016) and Owonikoko (2016) noted that the battle for power that ensued among the various confraternities was fuel in part by external political influences, money, and availability of small arms.

The constant struggle for supremacy and the attendant violence that later characterized the confraternities began to draw the attention of university administrators and the police (Brittain, 2015). Mediayanose (2016) noted that cult groups engage in criminal activities such as harassment, rape, burglary, robbery, and vandalism on college campuses. The incessant cult clashes on college campuses disrupt school academic calendars and created an environment that is not conducive to learning (Okpechi, 2014; Uchenna, 2014). School administrators in efforts to combat the criminal activities of cult

groups resorted to suspension and outright expulsion of those suspected of involvement in cult activities (Mediayanose, 2016). The government promulgated decree 47 of 1989, banning all cult activities and increasing prison time for those convicted of cult involvement. The expulsion of students suspected of cult activities into the communities marked a new dimension in cult criminal activities. Despite all efforts to curtail the activities of cult groups, cult groups continue to proliferate on college campuses and in communities across Rivers State. Owonikoko (2016) noted that approximately 100 cult groups exist in communities in Rivers State and across Nigeria. Cult groups are engaged in crimes such as kidnapping, arm robbery, assassinations, and extortion, among others (Nche, 2019; Nnam & Ordu, 2017).

Several researchers have examined the problems caused by cult groups. Research by Agbiboa (2014) and Owonikoko (2016) focused on the theme of violence and fear and insecurity created by cult groups on college campuses and communities. Nche et al. (2019) examined the influence of cult groups to include economic disruption, the decline in quality of education, and the decline in societal moral values. There is, however, limited research on how the police perceive cult groups and the threats that they pose to public safety. This study will help fill the gap in knowledge about cult groups by exploring the perception of police officers concerning cult groups and the threats they pose to public safety in Rivers State. This study will also seek to understand the decision-making processes of the police in efforts to combat the criminal activities of cult groups.

Understanding police perception of cult groups and their decision-making processes related to the criminal activities of cult groups is essential to understanding the full dimension of cult groups. The police are the leading law enforcement agency responsible for the safety and security of citizens. Understanding the challenges and successes of the police will help in the formulation of policies and allocation of resources needed to combat the criminal activities of cult groups. Understanding police perceptions and their decision-making processes will also enhance public knowledge of the police and legitimacy. A collaborative relationship between the police, communities, and other stakeholders is critical to combating the menace of cult groups in Rivers State.

Background

Research by Owonikoko (2016) traces the origin of cult groups to confraternities that existed on college campuses in colonial Nigeria in the 1950s. The study noted that what started as a medium to bridge the tribal and ethnic sentiments that existed among the Nigerian students quickly evolved into criminal gangs or cult groups in Nigeria. Owonikoko (2016) identified the influence of external influences from politicians on the confraternities, and the struggle for supremacy as the driving forces behind the transformation from confraternities to the street gangs or cults. With time, the confraternities extended their operations beyond the walls of college campuses into local communities.

Mediayanose (2016) observed that the criminal activities of the cult groups peaked in the 1980s and 1990s, drawing the attention of the government and the

communities. The proliferation of cult groups and incessant crimes that they perpetrate led to the banning of all cult groups by the Rivers State government in 2004. Seleye-Fubara and Bob-Yellowe (2005) noted that gang violence in Rivers State accounted for 60.3% of all violent deaths between 1999 and 2003. Research by Okpechi (2014), Brittain (2015), and Adiboye and Duru (2016) identified rape, armed robbery, kidnapping, assassination, and political thuggery as some of the crimes that are committed by cult groups. The criminal activities of cult groups have risen to be one of the major problems of the police and communities all across Rivers State in particular and Nigeria in general (Adiboye & Duru, 2016; Agbiboa, 2014; Owonikoko, 2016).

Ekpeyong' (2010) surveyed 380 undergraduate students in public Universities in Edo State, Nigeria, and observed that membership of cult groups are usually youths and operates along gender lines. Other researchers have noted that the majority of the cult groups are young men with some female cult groups as well (Azetta Arhedo, Aluede, & Adomeh, 2011). Poverty, peer pressure, and decline in societal moral values have been identified as some of the predictive factors or motivations for youth participation in cult activities according to studies by Sallam (2011) and Davies, Ekwere, and Uyanga (2016). The problem of cult groups is not peculiar to Rivers State but, rather, is emblematic of the socioeconomic and political inequalities that characterize life in Nigeria (Abdullahi & Issah, 2016; Alumona, 2019; Watts, 2018). Nowhere is this problem more evident than the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, which includes Rivers State, an area that is rich in oil and natural resources, yet having a high level of poverty and youth unemployment

(Bestoyin, 2018; Ogueri, 2017; Uchenna, 2014). The criminal activities of cult groups and other militant groups that exist in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria have negatively affected economic activities, social life, and decline in the quality of education as a result of fear and insecurity (Mediyanose, 2016; Owonikoko, 2016; Uchenna, 2014). It is, therefore, crucial that the police being the agency with the legal mandate to carry out law enforcement duties redouble their efforts to combat the criminal activities of cult groups.

Albert and Okoli (2016) traced the origin of the Nigerian police to a 1,200 Hausa constabulary that was formed by the British colonial masters in Lagos in 1820. Eze (2015) noted that through the years, the police, as an organization, had undergone several changes, and their numbers have grown astronomically to reflect the ever-increasing population of Nigeria amid new responsibilities. Ikeddinma (2018), who studied the organization of the Nigerian police, observed that the Nigerian Police is a highly centralized organization with a top-down management approach. The Nigerian police are headed by an inspector general of police with each state headed by a state police commissioner. Research by Eze (2015) and Otusanya, Laura, Ige, and Adelaja (2015) noted that the Nigerian Police Act, Section 4, gives the police the legal authority for the protection of lives and property and maintenance of peace, and to carry out law enforcement responsibilities.

Eze (2015) and Otusanya et al. (2015) further noted that the police had not done a better job in the discharge of their responsibilities, particularly with regard to the criminal activities of cult groups and crime in general. Several studies put the reasons for police

inability to combat the illegal activities of cult groups and crime in general to include corruption, lack of equipment, citizen perception of police legitimacy, lack of procedural justice, and political interference (Agbibo, 2015; Albert & Okoli, 2016; Oluwagbenga, 2017; Salihu & Gholami, 2018). The failure of the police to protect the citizens and their properties has left them with no option than to resort to self-help measures such as the formation of vigilante groups and mob justice (Owonikoko, 2016; Salihu & Gholami, 2018).

Problem Statement

There is a problem confronting the police and communities in Rivers State, Nigeria. That problem is explicitly the presence of criminal gangs or cult groups as they are called in Nigeria. Cult groups evolved from college confraternities that existed on college campuses in the 1950s as an avenue for bridging the ethnic and tribal divide among students (Owonikoko, 2016). Through the years, these confraternities, fueled by external political influences, struggle for supremacy, and the availability of small arms began to engage in criminal activities that extend well beyond the walls of colleges into communities (Mediyanose, 2016). Research by Uchenna (2014) concluded that there are more than 100 of these criminal gangs or cult groups operating in cities across Nigeria.

Cult groups are now one of the major problems confronting the police and communities across Rivers State, Nigeria. According to Agbibo (2014), Adiboye and Duru (2016), and Brittain, (2015), cult groups engaged in criminal activities such as arm robbery, assassination, political thuggery, kidnapping, and rape, among others (Nche et

al., 2019; Okpechi, 2014). The criminal activities perpetrated by cult groups such as arm robbery and kidnapping have resulted in the loss of lives and created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity in communities across Rivers State (Adiboye & Duru, 2016; Uchenna, 2014). Recently, the Rivers State government has passed legislation banning all cult groups and increasing prison time for those convicted of cult activities (Owonikoko, 2016). The criminal activities of cult groups such as arm robbery, rape, and kidnapping have resulted in businesses closing shops and negatively affected social life as residents fear for their lives and properties (Adiboye & Duru, 2016). Previous research on this phenomenon has focused on the motivations for youth involvement in joining gangs to include poverty, peer pressure, and the general decline in societal moral values (Azetta Arhedo et al., 2011; Davies, Ekwere, & Uyanya, 2016; Salaam, 2011). Other researchers have focused on the effects of cult activities on communities to include violence, economic disruptions, declining quality of education, and fear and insecurity (Agbiboa, 2014; Ezeonu, 2014; Usang & Ikpemme, 2015). However, researchers have yet to examine police perceptions of cult groups and their decision-making processes to combat cult activities in communities in Rivers State. This study will help fill this gap in knowledge by focusing explicitly on how the police perceived cult groups and the factors that influence police officer's decision making to combat cult activities in Rivers State, Nigeria. Information obtained from this study should help guide policy and decision makers on how to combat cult activities in communities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand police perceptions and decision making related to cult activities in Rivers State, Nigeria. To address this gap in knowledge, I utilized interviews comprising of police officers that serve in communities in Rivers State where cult activities are most prevalent. This study could provide useful insights into how police officers perceived cult groups and the threats they pose to communities in Rivers State. This study will improve understanding of the decision-making processes of police officers on how they approach cult activities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do the police perceive cult groups and the threats they pose to communities in Rivers State, Nigeria?

RQ2: What factors influence police decision making on how to combat cult activities in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that underpinned this study is Lipsky's (1976, 1980) street-level bureaucracy theory. Street-level bureaucracy theory explains the discretionary authority that is exercised by government agents as they interact with the public in the course of their work. Lipsky (1976, 1980) described street-level bureaucrats (SLBs) whose job entails frequent interactions with the public and have the authority to make decisions that affect citizens with little or no oversight. The nature of police work

enhances the exercise of discretionary power to redefine their role and make decisions that affect citizens with little or no supervision. At the core of this theory are three fundamental propositions, namely inadequate resources, threat perceptions, and conflict goals. The presence of these factors constitutes obstacles to the effective discharge of law enforcement responsibilities of state agents such as the police. Governmental agents such as the police may, therefore, devise short cuts and make sometimes unusual compromises and decisions to overcome these organizational barriers. Lipsky's (1976) street-level bureaucracy theory could help guide in understanding why government agents such as the police may choose to involve or not in efforts to combat problems such as cult activities in communities in Rivers State (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003).

Nature of Study

The nature of this study was a qualitative phenomenological study. Qualitative research is consistent in understanding individual opinions, perceptions, roles, and decision-making processes concerning a phenomenon, which is the focus of this study. The phenomenological study design is ideal in exploring individual perceptions of a phenomenon base on their lived experiences and the context in which they occur (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016)). Keeping the focus on exploring police decision making and efforts to combat cult activities in communities in Rivers State is consistent with Lipsky's street-level bureaucracy theory. I obtained data from interviews with 20 participants ($N = 20$ police officers) selected through purposive sampling (Robinson, 2014). I used Saldana's (2016) coding system and NVivo 12 qualitative software for

thematic analysis of the data. The result of this analysis could help provide answers that will help guide policies and decision making on how to combat the activities of cult groups in communities across Rivers State, Nigeria.

Definitions

Community policing: A policing strategy that emphasized police and community collaboration in efforts to combat crime and disorder in communities (Gill et al., 2014).

Cult groups: Criminal youth gangs in Nigeria that engaged in violence and crimes that are bounded by an oath of secrecy and pledge of allegiance to a charismatic leader (Owonikoko, 2016).

Police: The legal authority with the constitutional and statutory authority to enforce the laws and use force, including deadly force, when necessary to force compliance (Oluwatoyin, 2011).

Niger Delta: A geographic designation comprising of states in Nigeria that borders the River Niger that is rich in crude oil and abundant natural resources (Elum et al., 2016).

Rivers State: One of the 36 States in Nigeria that is rich in natural resources and among the six states that make up the Niger Delta region of Nigeria (RiversState.gov.ng).

Procedural justice: The notion of fairness and adherence to due process in the criminal justice system (Mastrofski, Johnthan-Zamir, Moyal, & Willis 2016).

Phenomenology: A qualitative research design that explores the perceptions of people with lived experience of an event or object (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015).

Assumptions

According to Creswell (2007), four underlying assumptions, ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological, underly research traditions. There were several assumptions in this study in keeping with the research tradition. The first assumption is that the methodology and design that was used for this study is the most appropriate in understanding the perceptions of the police related to cult activities in Rivers State. According to Patton (2015), phenomenology is an ideal research design when exploring individual opinions, feelings, and meanings ascribed to a social phenomenon based on their lived experience in a natural setting. Interviews are the best way of eliciting personal information from the participants concerning their experiences working in communities where cult activities are prevalent.

I also assumed that the participants for this study were truthful in their responses to the interview questions. The honesty of research participants to the interview questions is necessary to ensure the accuracy of the data and research findings. I further assumed that all the police officers that participated in this research study were knowledgeable about cult groups and have at least three years of working experience in communities where cult groups are prevalent. Finally, I assumed that findings from this study would help spur positive social change by guiding policies and decision makers on how better to combat the menace of cult groups in Rivers State. Research findings will help contribute to the knowledge base and help guide future researchers as they further explore the problem posed by cult groups in other states and communities across Nigeria.

Scope and Delimitations

The purpose of this study was to understand police perceptions and decision making related to cult activities in Rivers State, Nigeria. The participants for this study were limited to only police officers who work in communities in Rivers State, where cult activities are prevalent. Study participants comprised 20 police officers who were interviewed on the phone via WhatsApp and Zoom using a semistructured interview with open-ended questions. The interview questions seek to elicit information concerning how the police perceived cult groups and the threats they posed to public safety. The study also aimed to understand the decision-making processes of the police to combat the criminal activities of cult groups.

This research was delimited to understanding police perceptions of cult groups and the threats they pose to public safety in Rivers State. I also sought to understand the decision-making processes of the police in combating cult criminal activities. Another delimitation is that only police officers that serve in communities in Rivers State that have witnessed the prevalent of cult activities were included in the sample. The police officers must have served in their communities for at least 3 years. Three years is enough time for an officer to understand the communities and the activities of cult groups fully.

Limitations

This study was limited in scope as the sample was drawn from only police officers serving in communities in Rivers State, Nigeria. Although qualitative phenomenology is ideal in exploring the lived experience of people and obtaining rich

data, study findings could not be generalized to other parts of Nigeria. Also, some participants may be biased and not forthcoming in their responses due to fear and concern of maintaining anonymity and confidentiality. Furthermore, there may be a problem in getting some officers who may be more knowledgeable of the phenomenon under study to participate in this study due to concerns of anonymity and fear associated with discussing matters about police tactics and procedures. In addition, social desirability bias can present a limitation to this study. Social desirability bias could arise due to officers overreporting their experiences concerning the phenomenon to participate in the study (Brenner et al., 2013). Finally, variations in social, economic, and political conditions in different communities may constitute a limitation to this study. However, I will discuss these variations during the interpretation of the study findings.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it will help fill a gap in knowledge of cult groups and the threat that they pose to communities in Rivers State, Nigeria. Police perceptions of cult groups and their decision-making to combat cult activities in communities in Rivers State is a dimension of the overall problem of cultism that has not been well researched. Police departments may use the results of this study to come up with strategies that will help address the security challenges posed by cult activities in communities across Rivers State. Data from this study could also help other researchers to explore the issue of cultism further. Issues of safety and security require a collective approach involving all stakeholders and viewpoints to be effective. It is, therefore,

essential to explore the factors that influence police efforts to combat cult activities in communities in Rivers State through the lens of police officers who serve in communities where cult activities are most prevalent. Information that results from this study could also help with understanding some of the factors that aids or hinders police efforts in combating cult activities and help shape law enforcement decisions and priorities.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the problem that this study seeks to explore, which is police perceptions and decision making related to cult activities in Rivers State, Nigeria. Previous research on this subject has focused on motivations for youth participation in cult activities and themes of violence, fear, and insecurity. Other researchers have focused on the influence of cult activities to include economic disruption and a decline in the quality of education. However, there is limited research that examines police perceptions and decision making related to the criminal activities of cult groups. These study findings could help fill the gap in the literature on cult groups and guide policy and decision makers in efforts to combat the menace of cult groups in Rivers State.

In the next chapter, I will present a review of the relevant literature that supported this study. I use analysis to determine the existing gap in the literature on cult groups and provide a justification for this qualitative study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The criminal activities of cult groups have risen to become one of the main concerns of the government of Rivers State, law enforcement, and communities alike (Adiboye & Duru, 2016; Agbiboa, 2014; Brittain, 2015; Mediayanose, 2016). The activities of cult groups have resulted in the loss of innocent lives, destruction of properties, and created a general atmosphere of fear and insecurity in communities across Rivers State (Nche et al., 2019; Okpechi, 2014; Owonikoko, 2016). Police efforts at combating cult groups' activities have not been successful as cult groups continue to spread like wildfire with devastating effects. Previous research on cultism has focused on themes of violence, the decline in the educational system, and fear and insecurity (Ezeonu, 2014; Uchenna, 2014; Usang & Ikpemme, 2015). Although the police have a constitutional obligation to protect citizens' lives and properties, police perceptions of the threats posed by cult groups and their decision-making processes to combat cult activities have received minimal attention in the literature. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to fill this gap in knowledge by exploring the police's perceptions and their decision making related to the activities of cult groups in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Exploring police officers' perceptions of the threats posed by the activities of cult groups and their decision-making processes is critical to understanding the full dimension of the problem of cultism. Understanding police decision making may help guide law

enforcement leaders, policy makers, and aid in allocating resources in combating the menace of cult groups. Combating the activities of cult groups requires a holistic approach involving all stakeholders and viewpoints to be successful. A thorough understanding of the various stakeholders' challenges and successes based on their lived experiences is critical to building trust, transparency, ensuring police legitimacy, and building collaborative effort to combat crime.

In this chapter, I present the literature search strategy and discuss the geographic and historical background of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria that encompasses Rivers State. Undertook a review of the literature on cultism and policing and their decision-making processes related to cult activities in Rivers State. I also discuss the theoretical framework that helped in explaining police perceptions and decision making in efforts to combating cult criminal activities. I conclude with a discussion on the benefits of understanding police perception and decision making related to cult groups as part of the overall effort to combat the criminal activities associated with cult groups in Rivers State.

Literature Search Strategy

My main objective in this literature search strategy was to identify the existing body of research that addresses the problem of cult groups and police in Rivers State. The following database served as resources for this literature review: Walden University library databases, Emerald insights, Academic Search Complete, Criminal Justice database, ProQuest, Sage Journal, Eric, and Google Scholar. Some of the keywords that I used included *cultism*, *cult groups*, *militancy in the Niger delta*, *violence in the Niger*

Delta, gangs in Nigeria, poverty in Nigeria, policing, and police corruption in Nigeria. I ensured that research that was peer reviewed and published within the last 5 years formed the majority of sources for this research except in cases where the primary source provided better historical explanation and put the study into proper context.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is Lipsky's (1976, 1980) street-level bureaucracy theory (SLBT). Street-level bureaucracy theory explains how low-level government employees, such as the police, make decisions that affect the public they serve on behalf of the state. Due to the complexity and uncertainties surrounding police work, the police are granted enormous discretion and autonomy in the discharge of their duties. The nature of police work requires frequent interactions with citizens daily to resolve all kinds of issues ranging from law enforcement to the provision of services. The primary constitutional responsibility of modern police is to maintain law and order and to provide for the safety and security of citizens' lives and properties. In carrying out these responsibilities, the police sometimes face dilemmas and must make decisions with little or no supervision (Lipsky, 1980). The choice of front-line police officers as they choose between action and inactions related to crime and disorder in communities forms the public policy that affects the lives of people (Worden, Harris, & McClean, 2014). According to Street level bureaucracy theory, police officers' decision making is based on three cardinal factors: Threat perceptions, inadequate resources, and conflict goals. Lipsky's (1976, 1978) SLBT posited that to overcome these organizational

barriers, police officers sometimes take shortcuts and make decisions outside their standard operating procedures. According to SLBT, government employees, such as the police, are motivated by selfish interests and inclined to perform their work in ways that reduce stress and potential risks that are associated with their job.

Lipsky's (1976, 1978) street level bureaucracy theory provides the theoretical lens for understanding the factors that influence police decision making and their level of response to combating cult activities. Understanding the organizational barriers that confront public servants such as the police is critical for the thematic analysis of the interview data and understanding the reasons behind police actions or inactions in responding to crimes and enforcement of laws in any society. Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003) further added more insights on Lipsky's SLBT on the use of discretions and decision making by public servants such as the police. According to Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003), the use of discretion by police officers is contingent upon prevailing work conditions such as work hazards, resource availability, cooperation from the public, and conflicting interests from other stakeholders and not necessarily standard operating procedures and policy guidelines. Conflict goals and situations on the ground are some of the primary influencers guiding police decision-making processes.

Conditions for SLBT

Street level Bureaucrats are professionals who act on behalf of the state or an organization in their areas of operation (Lipsky, 2010). SLBs such as the police are accorded a wide range of discretionary authority to make decisions on behalf of the state

with little or no supervision (Lipsky, 2010, p.14). The nature of police work and the risks and uncertainties that police officers encounter on any given day necessitates discretion. The hazards associated with police work required frequent and quick responses, as any delay could endanger the life of both the police officer and the public that they are sworn to protect. The police also enjoy autonomy in their jurisdictions to make decisions and take actions based on the availability of resources at their disposal, vis-vis public demands, and needs.

On the other hand, communities always expect the police as the legal authority and representative of the government to ensure their safety and security. The enormous responsibility placed on the police and public expectations is often in direct contrast to the resources available to the police to carry out these responsibilities. Lipsky (1978) identified inadequate resources, threat perceptions, and conflict goals as some of the organizational barriers that SLBs, such as the police, must overcome to discharge their duties. The survival and success of the street-level bureaucrat depend, to no small extent, on their abilities to effectively navigate these organizational barriers. One of the ways that the police deal with these constraints is to device short cuts and sometimes bypass laid down rules and procedures that guides official conduct. Also, coping with the resources available may entail rationing services, avoiding specific encounters, or taking actions that may conflict with stated goals but necessary to be successful. In response, communities or the public have expressed misgivings about police conducts when their

actions and inactions fall short of expectations and their stated mission of ensuring safety and security.

Inadequate Resources

One of the organizational barriers identified by Lipsky that influences how SLBs go about their work is the availability of resources (Lipsky, 1980). The Nigerian criminal justice system, particularly the police, suffers from problems of funding. Any agency's ability to adequately prepare and discharge their responsibilities depends on the availability of resources needed to perform the task. The Nigerian police do not have the required workforce and other resources required to perform their duties. Ogunyemi and Laguda, 2016 noted that the Nigerian police are under staff compared to the population and the crime rate. The study indicated that there are simply not enough police officers to police the huge population of Nigeria effectively. Also, a study by Alumona, Osita, and Onuha (2019) and Obarisagbon and Aderinto (2018) indicated that some police departments in Nigeria, particularly in rural areas, do not have vehicles to carry out routine patrols. Inadequate resources hinder police duties and lead to inaction in responding to crime and disorder problems in communities across Rivers State. According to SLBT, public servants such as the police faced with the limited resources available and are compelled to be realistic instead of adhering to utopian official goals and stated policies. The lack of sufficient resources needed to carry out their responsibilities correctly meant that SLBs must make hard choices and set priorities that may be at odds with official policies. Police discretion entails choosing between actions

and inactions relating to crime and disorders in communities and the enforcement of laws in their areas of operation.

Threat Perception

The police are on the front lines of efforts to combat crime and disorders in Rivers State and Nigeria in general (Otusanya , Laura, Ige, & Adelaja, 2015). How the police perceive threats influences their reaction to the threats and the countermeasures that they take to resolve it. The criminal activities of cult groups undoubtedly present severe threats to the police in the performance of their duties to ensure the safety and security of lives and properties (Nche et al., 2019). Cult groups are engaged in crimes such as kidnapping, armed robbery, and other criminal activities, which put the police in a confrontation with them. Alade (2015) noted that the availability of small arms and other sophisticated weapons used by cult groups poses a significant threat to communities and the police who are on the front lines of law enforcement in Rivers State. Police perception of threats and the need to reduce risk and hazards associated with any potential encounters is the defining line between police actions and inactions.

Conflict Goals

Street level bureaucrats such as police officers, are sometimes presented with ambiguous goals to achieve (Lipsky, 1978). The police are expected to provide solutions to most ills that affect society without any clear directives on how to implement it. Also, Lipsky (2010) posited that the organizational interest the SLBs represent may conflict with their values. These conflicting goals could result in police officers not putting in

their best efforts to combat crime. A qualitative study by Owonikoko (2016) involving some community members in Rivers State found that the police some time aided and abetted cult activities by providing them with information and tools needed to commit crimes. Also, the task of combating the criminal activities of cult groups may be in direct conflict with politicians who wield enormous influence in government agencies such as the police. A study by Oluwatoyin (2011) indicated that cult groups serve as political thugs that help rig elections and assassinate political opponents. In return, politicians use their privileged positions to influence police reactions to crimes committed by cult groups.

Discretion

Discretion is a common theme in criminal justice and a fundamental aspect of Lipsky's Street level bureaucracy theory. According to Lipsky (1978), discretion is visible in most decisions of SLBs, such as the police in both the routines they establish and how they cope with the challenges that the job presents. Irrespective of the stated government policy, whatever actions and inactions are taken by the street-level bureaucrat become the official government policy or response. According to Carrington (2005), discretion is an underlying factor behind every action and inaction of a public official.

The exercise of discretion is critical to the effective functioning of the police. In carrying out legitimate law enforcement duties, the police encounter problems that no standard operating manual can adequately spell out. The complex nature of police work

required professional interpretation and quick responses to resolve (Dicke, 2004). It would be practically impossible for any police standard operating manual to adequately spell out how to resolve daily issues that confront the police promptly. The discretionary authority exercised by SLBs serves as a coping mechanism to overcome organizational constraints placed on the police in the task of enforcing government policies. Some of these regulatory constraints include limited resources, unclear policies, and rules and regulations imposed by the organization or department's hierarchy. SLBs use their judgments to make choices and set priorities on polices to enforce and postpone and ignore them.

The choices and decisions made by street level bureaucrats sometimes did not augur well for citizens who have expectations of what the government is supposed to represent. Also, the decisions that are made by street level bureaucrats result in complaints and negative public perception of the citizens toward the government or organizations that the SLB represents. The decisions resulting from the discretionary actions of SLBS are sometimes viewed through a racial lens and prejudice, and they are perceived as a sign of ineffectiveness. The use of discretion by SLBs result in complaints from the public for the elimination of discretion by SLBs. However, the public appeared to favor the use of discretion by SLBs to ensure flexibility and compassion in tackling several public problems. The discretionary authority accorded SLBS is not absolute as some constraints and limitations are placed on discretion by government employees. Lipsky (2010) posited that discretionary authority could be checked through the demand

for accountability from administrative hierarchy, rules, sanctions, and the communities that SLBs serve who can influence the choices that SLBs make voicing their concerns. These checks and balances placed on SLBs could also be done through rules and regulations and complaint channels such as civilian oversight boards and internal affairs units of some police departments.

Previous Application of SLBT

Lipsky's street level bureaucracy theory has enjoyed full applications and utility in many fields, including public policy implementation, criminal justice, nursing, and social welfare. Also, SLBT has been used in studies examining the implementation of public policies where outcomes are based on race or other demographic factors (Cyrrie & Morrell, 2015; Rocco & Tummers, 2015). Street level bureaucracy theory has been used in a qualitative study that examined the quality of service of agencies involved in public service delivery in Washington State to see if the race was a factor in service delivery (Ernst, Nguyen, & Taylor, 2013). Ernst et al. (2013) indicated that race does influence the quality of services delivered as whites appeared to have a positive experience when it comes to the quality of service compared to minorities. This study indicated that all citizens are entitled to similar treatment and service quality by public servants. However, the reality is that public servants using the enormous power of discretion determined the quality of service offered to people based on their criteria contrary to stated policy. Also, White, Nathan, and Faller (2015), in their quantitative experiment designed to measure how local election officials in some U.S. cities, responded to an email from constituents

from different ethnic groups and observed wide variations. According to this study, election officials acting as SLBs politicize questions giving to white constituents and Hispanic constituents. Election officials asked probing questions such as voter identification cards and provided accurate responses to whites than Hispanics. The use of a different set of questions and answers is contrary to the stated policy of equal treatment and the provision of free and accurate information to all citizens.

In a qualitative study investigating discretion by police officers in Norway, Bulik (2014) utilized SLBT. Bulik (2014) noted that situational factors, context, and offender characteristics influence an officer's behavior. Bulik indicated that extra-legal variables such as officer attitudes, experience, and background significantly affect their behavior during citizen encounters. Some researchers have utilized SLBT in an implied manner without mentioning it. A study by Ariel, Farrar, and Sutherland (2015) indicated that the use of discretion influences police officer's application of force, including deadly force. Although some police departments have policies in place regarding body-worn cameras while on patrol, McClure et al. (2017) noted that actual implementation of the policy depends on the individual officer's discretion and reception to the policy. The use of discretion is a constant theme in police-decision making from arrests and citations to how they combat crime and disorder, which is consistent with the major ideas contained in street-level bureaucracy theory (Ariel et al., 2016).

The Relevance of Theory to Current Study

This study is about understanding police perception and decision making related to cult criminal activities in Rivers State. As agents of the government and enforcers of the law, the police are characterized as Street level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 2010). As SLBs, the police are empowered by the Nigerian constitution and relevant statues to enforce the laws and ensure the safety and security of lives and properties. The proliferation of cult groups and the numerous crimes they commit, such as arm robbery, kidnapping, and thuggery, has made communities to question the effectiveness of the police. The ineffectiveness of the police in combatting cult groups' menace has brought the legitimacy of the police into question.

As Street level bureaucrats that they are, the police have huge responsibilities and ambiguous goals that they are expected to achieve. Achieving these goals required enormous resources and the setting of priorities. Unfortunately, the Nigerian police do not have the needed resources and personnel needed to combat the criminal activities of cult groups effectively and crime in general (Chinwokwu, 2017; Esoimeme, 2019). As such, the police have to choose between action and inaction in combating crime. Also, the ambiguous directives and goals of ensuring safety in a crime-prone environment such as Rivers State and the complexities of police work meant that officers must have the flexibility in decision making. According to Lipsky (2010), the police will have to device short cuts and sometimes improvise in order to overcome some organizational barriers and be successful in their mission of ensuring safety and security of lives and properties. These organizational barriers include inadequate resources, threat perceptions, and

conflict goals. Citizens, however, do not recognize or aware of these organizational constraints placed on the police. The police's limited resources affect their efforts to combat crime and disorder in communities across Rivers State effectively. Also, conflict goals, such as the influence of politicians who use cult groups' services to rig elections, may hamper police efforts to combat cult activities. Police officers also may have a selfish interest, such as the need to avoid risk in a job with low pay and sympathy with youths due to structural deficiencies in the system that gave birth to youth involvement in cult criminal activities. Therefore, street-level bureaucracy theory presents an ideal theoretical lens to fully understand what influences policy and decision making by the police in efforts to combat crime in Rivers State communities.

Historical Perspectives of Cult Groups

Cultism or cults is a term used to describe groups or sects that operated within the various religious organizations. Recently, the term has been used outside its original religious connotations to entail groups that are opposed to mainstream ideas and systems. Nche (2019) described cult groups as groups with the same interest and committed to protecting the interest of its members. One identifying feature of cult groups is taking of oath or pledge of allegiance to a charismatic leader or overlord (Mediyanose, 2016). Cultism in Nigeria started from Confraternities that existed on college campuses in the 1950s at a time when Nigerian Universities were under the control of the British administrators (Agbibo, 2015; Owonikoko, 2016). The first confraternity, the Pirates, was formed by Nigeria's Nobel Prize winner Wole Soyinka in 1952 at the University of

Ibadan. Owonikoko (2016) noted that the confraternities were intended to serve as an avenue to represent Nigerian students' interest in an institution that was under the administration of the British colonial masters. The confraternities also help to bridge the tribal and ethnic divide that characterized the Nigerian State pre-independence and showcase African pride and solidarity (Adiboye & Duru, 2016; Ezeonu, 2014).

Owonikoko (2016) noted that after Nigeria gained independence in 1960 from Britain, the confraternities began to witness external influences from politicians.

Politicians fearing the growing influence of the student confraternities started to infiltrate their ranks and file by giving them weapons and financial incentives to disorganized other organizations that were not supportive and loyal to them (Agbibo, 2014; Owonikoko, 2016). Also, the growth in the number of universities resulted in the formation of more confraternities, thus, resulting in the struggle for supremacy and dominance on college campuses (Brittain, 2015). The external influences on the college confraternities by politicians and the constant struggle for supremacy among the various confraternities marked the transition from confraternities to criminal gangs or cult groups as they are known in Nigerian parlance. The change from confraternities into cult groups resulted in the use of violence fueled by the ready availability of small arms and money. It also marked the expansion of their criminal activities from within the universities' four walls into the communities (Adiboye & Duru, 2016; Agbibo, 2014; Brittain, 2015).

Nche et al. (2019) noted that cult groups are, for the most part, youths of college-age but also have adults who are usually alumni of the universities as patrons. Cult

groups are gender-biased with men cults comprising the majority of the cult groups. There are, however, female cult groups, but their activities are mostly on college campuses (Agbiboa, 2014). Research by Owonikoko (2016) indicated that about one hundred cult groups operate in various States in Nigeria, including Rivers State. A study by Uchenna (2014) noted that poverty, peer pressure, the decline in societal moral values, and socio-economic inequalities are some of the reasons for youth participation in cult activities. The frequent cult clashes have resulted in disruptions of academic calendars on college campuses, the decline in quality of education, loss of innocent lives, destruction of properties, and creating a general atmosphere of fear and insecurity in communities across Rivers State (Adiboye & Duru, 2016; Mediayanose, 2016; Okpechi, 2014; Owonikoko, 2016). The prevalence of cult groups in Rivers State is due in part to the prevailing socio-economic and political marginalization of tribal groups within the oil-rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria that encompass Rivers State (Abdullahi & Issa, 2016; Alumona, 2019; Uchenna, 2014).

The Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is an area that is rich in petroleum and other natural resources. The Niger Delta region of Nigeria consists of Rivers State, Akwa Ibom State, Delta State, Bayelsa State, Cross River State, and Ondo State (Elum, Mopipi, & Henri-Ukoha, 2016). Agbiboa (2013), Bestoyin (2018), and Oghiagbephan (2016) noted that the Niger Delta region is very rich in natural resources such as crude oil and natural gas. The Niger Delta region is home to multinational oil exploration companies such as

Shell, AGIP, Chevron, and Mobil. Oil exploration from the Niger Delta region accounted for over 80% of the yearly revenue and 95% contribution to Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings in a country where oil is the mainstay of the economy (Ajayi, 2014; Ayuba & Babalola, 2015).

Despite the enormous natural resources that accrue from the Niger Delta, the people that live in the region live in abject poverty (Chukwu, 2017; Onuma, 2016; Ugoani, 2015). According to Ifere and Okusun (2017), poverty in the Niger Delta is like a stubborn fly that has defied all efforts and programs at eradication. Research by Chigunta (2016), Dauda (2017), and Ndidi (2016) attributed the failure of poverty alleviation programs in the Niger Delta to conceive initiatives and massive corruption. Most people in the Niger Delta cannot even provide for their families the necessities of life, such as housing, food, and clothing (Ikharehon & Omoregie, 2015; Ozughalu, 2016). Youth unemployment and underemployment in the Niger Delta are very high, even among college graduates. Egbefo and Abe (2017), Chiazor, Ozoya, and Udume (2017), and Oghiagbephan (2016) attributed the high unemployment rate in the Niger Delta to low educational standards and the inability of businesses and the government to provide jobs for the teeming youths.

Oil exploration and exploitation of the Niger Delta region have severely affected the economic and financial livelihood of communities that are predominantly agricultural due to environmental pollution and degradation of the environment (Nwachukwu, 2016). Research by Alumona (2019), Ugoani (2015), and Watts (2018) indicated that several

years of oil exploration and neglect by both the multinationals and successive Nigerian government had created a feeling of disenchantment among the people of the Niger Delta. Chinwokwu and Michael (2019), and Obarisiagbon and Aderinto (2018) noted that this feeling of neglect and poverty in the face of billions of dollars accruing from oil exploration activities resulted in the youths resorting to arms confrontation to drive home their demands. Research by Chukwu and Michael (2019) noted that the 1990s marked the climax of arm confrontation between the oil companies on the one hand and the federal government, on the other side. Open hostilities between the oil companies and host communities, poverty, government neglect, unemployment, and the availability of small arms created a fertile ground for all manner of criminal groups such as cult groups to operate (Egbefo & Abe, 2017; Uchenna, 2014; Watts, 2018; Ozughalu, 2016).

Cult Groups vs. Militant Groups

It is essential to make some critical distinction between the two major groups in Rivers State and, by extension, the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Watts (2018) noted that several groups are operating in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, each with varying motivations and modus operandi. However, all the groups have one thing in common: the use of violence and terror to achieve their objectives (Alumona, 2019). According to Egbefe and Abe (2017) and Ozughalu (2016), the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is a region that is blessed with enormous resources and home to multinational oil and gas companies. Nevertheless, the people live in abject poverty. Onuma (2016) noted that massive unemployment and poverty characterize the region. The successive Nigerian

government and the multinational oil companies' failure to address the needs and demands of the Niger Delta's inhabitants has been at the forefront of agitations and protests. Several militant groups operate in Rivers State and the Niger Delta region of Nigeria (Abdullahi & Issah, 2016; Higgins et al., 2018).

Nnam (2014) and Oluwadare (2019) noted several groups such as the movement for the emancipation of the Niger Delta and the Niger Delta volunteer force, mention just a few with varying motivations operating in the Niger Delta region. The various militant groups that operate in the Niger delta purport to be fighting for the people's emancipation and advocate for a fair share of the proceeds of oil sales from the region. Nnam and Ordu (2017), Tantua and Maconachie (2018), and Oluwadare (2019) noted that the various militant groups adopt violence, the kidnapping of oil workers, and destruction of oil facilities as means of gaining the attention of the oil companies and the federal government of Nigeria. Agbiboa (2013) noted that the terrorist acts of the militant groups have affected the nation's revenue and created fear and insecurity for companies involved in oil exploration. To quell the grievances of the militants, the federal government has given amnesty to the militants and provided them with technical, vocational, and financial assistance to enabled them desist from violence and crime, and embrace dialogue for lasting peace in the region (Agbiboa, 2013; Chinwokwu & Michael, 2019). However, peace still eludes the region as the amnesty program only provided a stopgap measure but did not address the fundamental issues that gave birth to the public agitations.

The distinction between Militants and cult groups is, however, blurred. Nnam (2014) noted that some members of cult groups are also members of the militant groups that exist in the Niger Delta region. Also, both cult groups and militant groups are engaged in criminal acts such as kidnapping for ransom and arm robbery (Obarisagbon & Aderinto, 2018). Cult groups are not motivated by the suffering of the people and do not purport to represent the people of the Niger Delta. Also, cult groups engage in crimes such as rape, political thuggery, and assassinations, which are outside the domain of militant groups (Nnam, 2014).

Motivations for Youth involvement in Cult Groups

Salaam (2011) observed that membership of cult groups are mostly youths. The study further noted that cult members are mostly males, but there are also female cult groups. Adult members of cult groups are mostly alumni of Universities but still provide material and financial support to cult groups. The adult members do not participate in the day to day violence, and criminality perpetrated by the cult groups but only provide support and advice as needed. There are several motivations for youth participation in cult groups and their criminal activities in Rivers State. Mediyanose (2016), Okpeche (2014), and Owonikoko (2016) identified poverty, peer pressure, and a general decline in societal moral values as some of the motivations for youth involvement in cult groups and criminal activities.

Poverty

There is a dearth of research on the role of poverty in juvenile delinquency and criminality in the criminological literature (Bennett & Smith, 1985; Kallio, Kujara, & Niemala, 2019; Patterson, 1991). Early researchers from the Chicago school in their seminal study of socially disorganized neighborhoods identified poverty as a significant contributing factor to street level type offenses (Shaw & McKay, 1942). Other researchers since then have built on the ideas exposed by Shaw and McKay in one way or another to study youth crimes and the influence that socio-economic conditions of people living in a particular environment have on youth delinquency and crime (Moore & Sween, 2015; Raymond-Richmond, 2019; Shihadeh & Steffensmeier, 1994). Kujala et al. (2019) and Ogbeide and Agu (2015) posited that poverty and issues of inequality are inextricably linked to violence in any given society. The problem of socio-economic conditions is particularly real in developing and plural societies such as Nigeria, where most people live in abject poverty (Higginson et al., 2018; Ozuaghalu, 2016).

Barkan (2018) identified socio-economic status as a predictive factor in crime. Agbiboa (2013), Bestoyin (2018), and Ugoani (2015) posited that inhabitants of the Niger Delta, which includes Rivers State continue to live in abject poverty despite the enormous natural resources that accrue from the region. Unemployment and under-employment remain very high, even for those with graduate-level education (Ogbeide & Agu, 2015). According to Ozuaghalu (2016), poverty connotes a state of economic hardship where people's basic needs are not met due to a lack of financial resources. Ugoani (2015) posited that poverty results in inferiority in people's quality of life, self-insufficiency, and

the ability to access social amenities. Societies that are characterized by poverty are also known to have high unemployment rates, shortage of food production, and massive inequality, according to this research study. Poverty has, over the years, remained a constant presence in the Niger Delta and other rural communities in Nigeria. Fere and Okusun (2017), in their research study, described poverty in the Niger Delta region as a stubborn challenge that has impeded economic development and devastate the Niger Delta despite its enormous resources and contribution to the Nigerian economy. A study by Chigunta (2016) and Adetola and Oluwatomiwo (2016) suggested that despite government efforts to alleviate poverty in the Niger Delta, poverty persists with its attendant crime problems. Dauda (2017), Ifere & Okusu (2017), and Osuala, (2010) identified corruption and weak economic policies as some of the factors responsible for failures of the several economic initiatives that have thus far been implemented to improve the living condition of the people of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Peer Influence

Several studies support the contention of a positive relationship between peer pressure and youth delinquency (Ali, Chadee & Burke, 2019; Elechi & Otu, 2015; Gersher & Oberwittler, 2018). Ojo (2015) identified the influence of peers as one of the motivations of youth membership in cult groups. Nnam (2014) described a peer group as people within the same age bracket who share many things in common and have similar interests. According to this study, Peer groups also share the same geographic locations or belong to institutions, communities, and organizations where they cross-part with

another. Uchenna (2014) noted that peers usually spend more time with another and feel comfortable communicating with one another more than they do with their parents and family members. In an interview with former and current cult groups in a Nigerian university, results indicated that peer influence was one of the motivating factors for cult membership (Ezeonu, 2014). Peers often provide needed support to their fellow peers in a bid to encourage them to join their cult groups and enjoyed the protection that are accorded to its members.

Davies et al. (2016) stated that peer influence often comes in the form of financial inducement, improves social status, security guarantees from threats from other groups. In a research study that surveyed 380 students from two public universities in Edo State Nigeria, students ranked peer influence as one of the top motivations for their involvement in cult groups on college campuses (Azetta-Arhedo, Aluede & Adomeh, 2011). Chadee et al. (2019) noted that peer pressure influences not just juvenile delinquencies but also adult criminality. The study further noted that the influence of peers on behavior is restricted to negative behaviors and positive behaviors. Peers influence not only criminal behavior but positive behaviors such as abstaining from drugs and alcohol, desistance from crime, and focus on academic achievements. Research by Gershner and Oberwittler (2018) identified some of the ways that peers influence behavior to include modeling behavior, making suggestions, and badging friends into deviance. Deviant peers help convince their friends that behavior is acceptable and help to provide justifications for such behavior.

Parental Influence

Socialization, they say, begins from home. Parents are the first agents in the socialization process and play a critical role in molding behavior at the early stage of the development process (Beardslee, 2018)). Therefore, parents are the first role model of the child and have a significant influence on the child. The role of parents and how family compositions influences behavior has strong empirical support in the sociological and criminological literature (Beardslee, 2018; Chedel, 2017). Research by Whitten et al. (2019) identified poor parental upbringing as a risk factor in a child's deviant behavior and subsequent criminality. Children from broken or dysfunctional families are more susceptible to exhibit deviant behaviors (Chinwe, 2015; Nche, 2019; Ordu & Nnam, 2017). Research by Ordu and Nnam (2017) noted that children from single parents often lack the necessary attention that two-parent families can provide. Single parents have to juggle between work and family, and this often makes it challenging to spend time with the children leaving them at the mercy of their peers. A research study by Checkel (2017) noted that parents have a significant influence on their children's behavior and self-esteem. Low self-esteem has been identified as one of the predictive factors for juvenile delinquency and criminality. Also, Research by Otu and Elechi (2015) also lends credence to the notion that family disruption and composition affects children's upbringing. The study further noted that large families with multiple children present significant challenges for providing needed resources for proper upbringing. Chinwe (2015) and Azetta- Arhedo (2015) suggested that children whose parents are members of

cult groups are more likely to belong to cult groups. According to Nnam (2014), some parents provide cover and protection for their wards who are involved in cult criminal activities by ensuring that they get legal representation, financial assistance, and political connections to influence justice.

Aluede and Oyima (2019) noted that children who are not disciplined by their parents exhibit deviant and aggressive behavior that enables delinquency and criminality. A qualitative research study by Otu and Elechi (2015) noted that children from criminally minded families often grow up to be criminals themselves. Otu and Elechi (2015) noted that children are more likely to emulate their parents, including their criminal behaviors. Aluede and Oyima (2015) suggested that parental involvement is critical to combating the menace of cult groups in Communities across Rivers State and on college campuses.

Social Values

Research by Arghedo (2011) and Azetta (2019) identified declining societal moral values as one of the causes of youth participation in cult groups. Ojo (2015) noted that the core values such as honesty, integrity, and hard work that once served as the foundation of communities are eroded in place of immediate gratification. Hard work and decency have given way to material things and luxury. Wray-lake et al. (2016) noted that commitment to contributing to community improvement through personal commitments and social responsibilities is no longer the case. Uchenna (2014) noted that the quest for the acquisition of material things without the corresponding legal means to do so has force youths into crime. The means now justify the end instead of the other way around.

Youths now see crime as a sure way to success. Nche (2019) indicated that crime thrives in an environment where there is a breakdown of law and order, and where the machinery of government is weak. This study further noted that youth unwillingness to work despite the love for material acquisition is at the root of youth involvement in cult criminal activities in Rivers State. Chingunta (2016) noted that systemic corruption in Nigeria had created a society where criminals are free on the order of godfathers instead of the merit of the case and the correct application of justice. Massive corruption in the justice system is noticeable in all justice system phases, making it difficult for victims to get justice (Ndidi, 2016). Ordinary citizens without political clout and financial wherewithal have lost faith in the justice system due to police corruption.

Obarisiagbon and Aderinto (2019) noted that the proliferation of cult groups and attendant crimes such as arm robbery and kidnapping that they are involved in reflects the general State of affairs in the country. Mediayanose (2016) Posited that higher education that was once the pride of youths has been undermined due to corruption in the educational system. Research by Azetta –Arhedo et al. (2011) and Agi (2018) identified exam malpractice, money for grades, truancy, infrastructural decay, admission bribery, and administrative incompetence problems that have undermined the educational system. Political crimes such as election rigging, thuggery, and violence have come to characterized Nigeria's election processes (Angerbrandt, 2018; Chinwokwu & Michael, 2019).

Impact of Cult Groups on Communities

The criminal activities of cult groups have affected communities in Rivers State in very profound ways (Nche, 2019; Nche et al., 2015). Cult groups have been implicated in crimes such as armed robbery, kidnapping, political thuggery, and assassinations (Adiboye & Duru, 2016; Okpechi, 2014). According to Owonikoko (2016), the criminal activities perpetrated by cult groups have created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity in the minds of people who live in the communities. Nche (2019) noted that the criminal activities of cult groups had created so much fear in the communities that people have to adjust their social and economic lifestyles. Nche (2019) further noted that Community residents have to close shops early and avoid social gatherings such as clubs, parties, sporting events, and other activities at night. Businesses are fleeing the area as a result of violent acts of kidnapping that have made it difficult for people to move around at certain times of the day (Nche et al., 2019). The resultant capital flight has further compounded the problem of unemployment and poverty in communities that were already suffering from high poverty rates and unemployment before the menace of cult groups (Alumona, 2019).

The violence perpetrated by cult groups as they clash for control of the communities has resulted in the deaths of both cult members and innocent bystanders (Isumonah, 2013; Owonikoko, 2016). Isumonah (2013) and Owonikoko (2016) reported that inter cult clashes between two rival cult groups, the Deebam and Deywell, resulted in the death of 42 people in the Bodo community in Rivers State (Nche et al., 2019). The

study also noted that similar clashes between two rival cult groups resulted in the death of 40 people and destruction of properties worth millions of naira in Ugheli community of Delta State. Communities that have witnessed many cult activities have also witnessed the destruction of lives and properties (Chinwe & Mag, 2015). Nche et al. (2019) noted that the pervasive fear arising from the presence of cult groups in the communities has negatively affected the social fabric of communities in Rivers State as people and businesses move to the cities. Isumonah (2013) noted that cult activities have also resulted in the proliferation of small arms in what was once peaceful communities. Owonikoko (2016) noted that the presence of small arms mostly by cult groups had fueled inter-communal clashes that have claimed the lives of people in Rivers State communities.

Eze (2015) and Otusanya (2015) noted that despite the menace of cult groups in Rivers State communities, the police have been ineffective in combating their criminal activities. Owonikoko (2016) noted that some communities accused the police of collaborating with the cult members or keeping a blind eye on their criminal activities. Interviews conducted with some community members tend to support this assertion of police/cult relationship as those arrested are often released at the police station and appeared to know the people who reported them to the police. Owonikoko (2016) observed that communities have resorted to self-help measures such as the formation of vigilante groups. Vigilantes are community members who volunteered to safeguard the communities and confront suspected cult members. Owonikoko (2016) noted that those

suspected of involvement in cult-related activities are subjected to mob justice, which in most cases, is death. The activities of Vigilantes only fuel the cycle of violence due to reprisal attacks. In 2012, four students from the University of Port-Harcourt in Rivers State who resided off-campus in the Aluu community suspected of cult participation where murdered in a blatant act of mob justice (Owoniko, 2016). The jungle approach to justice employed by the Vigilantes and community members in response to the menace of cult groups has created a cycle of violence and retaliation that further threatened community peace and public safety (Salihu & Gholami, 2018).

Impact of Cult Groups on Education

Education is the bedrock of any society. The standard and quality of education prevalent in any society are critical to society's economic and technological development (Mediyanose, 2016). Youths are the future leaders of any society, including Nigeria; hence, they are expected to exhibit leadership attributes and get the necessary training to build them up to meet societal expectations as leaders (Chinwe & mag, 2015). Unfortunately, Mag and Chinwe (2015) suggested the future of Rivers State youths in particular and Nigerian youths in general, is not promising as a significant number of youths in universities and secondary schools are involved in one cult group or another. Several researchers suggested that youth participation in cult activities significantly contributed to the declining quality of education due to truancy, exam –malpractice, and bribe for grades (Agbiboa, 2015; Arghedo, 2015; Owonikoko, 2016; Adiboye & Duru, 2016; Mediyanose, 2016). Ordu and Nnam (2017) and Mediyanose (2016) noted that

the incessant cult crashes that have become a staple of Nigeria's educational system had created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity on college campuses.

The school campuses that are supposed to be a quiet and peaceful environment for learning have become a place of fear for students due to frequent assaults, harassment, rape, and robbery (Birabil & Okanezi, 2017). According to Azetta –Arhedo (2011), Nigerian colleges and universities have now become a breeding ground for criminals masquerading as students who have no respect for the sanctity of human lives and public properties. Azetta and Aluede (2015) and Chinwe (2015) suggested that the current security challenges pose by cult groups to colleges and universities has resulted in high rates of truancy among students in a bid to stay safe and declining academic performance. Adiboye and Duru (2016) noted that female students are often disproportionately targeted by cult groups and victims of sexual harassment by cult members. Research by Owonikoko (2016) indicated that cult groups' activities have led to the death of both cult members and innocent students on college campuses. Chinwe (2015), Mediyanose (2016), and Nnam and Ordu (2017) indicated that incessant cult crashes on college campuses had destroyed school infrastructures. The hostile school environment caused by cult groups' activities has led to a decline in students' academic performance as they no longer feel safe to study (Azetta and Aluede, 2015). Chinwe (2015) and Birabil and Okanezi (2017) noted that exam malpractice had become a severe problem as cult members often threatened their fellow students to help them with their assignments while lecturers are threatened to give cult members good grades. Omemu (2015) posited that

cult groups' problem on college campuses is further compounded as some school administrators are also members of cult groups and help shield them from school disciplinary measures such as suspension and expulsion.

Violence

One of the significant effects of cult activities in Rivers State and the Niger Delta region is the attendant violence that has become a permanent fixture of daily life (Nche, 2019; Nche et al., 2019; Owonikoko, 2016). Research by Nche (2019), Seleye –Fubara (2005), and Owonikoko noted that Cult groups and their activities are a leading source of most of the crimes and violence in Rivers State. Chinwe (2015) and Owonikoko (2016) noted that inter cult rivalries for control of territory and dominance have resulted in the loss of innocent lives and destruction of properties. Some communities have been deserted due to inter-cult battle for control of territories. Owonikoko (2016) and Nche (2019) noted that inter cult rivalry between the Deebam and Deewell cult groups was responsible for about 42 deaths in Bodo, a community in Rivers State. Also, cult clashes resulted in several deaths in Ibaa, Emohua, and Omoku communities in Rivers State in 2016 and destruction of properties worth millions of naira (Nche et al., 2016). Seleye-Fubara (2005) noted that over half of all violent deaths recorded in Rivers State are associated with cult activities in one way or another. Also, cult groups have become a significant source for the proliferation of small weapons in Rivers State and the Niger Delta region of Nigeria (Isumonah, 2013).

Chiwukwu and Michael (2019), Igbe (2013), and Owonikoko (2016) noted that weapons emanating from cult groups have help fuel arm robbery, kidnapping, and inter-communal clashes in Rivers State. Cult Member's involvement in arm robbery has become a significant source of revenue for the daily sustenance of cult groups noted Chinwe and Mag (2015). Weapons from cult groups have also helped fuel insurgency against the federal government and multinational oil companies that operate in the Niger Delta region (Chinwoku & Michael, 2019). Research by Isumonah (2013) noted that politicians had patronized cult groups to use their services during elections. Cult groups often served as political thugs during elections to rig and intimidate voters and political opponents (Nche, 2019). Findings from the study by Nche (2019) further suggested that a series of high-profile assassinations, murder, and kidnapping suspected to be politically motivated has been carried out by cult groups. In response to the violence perpetrated by cult groups, communities have resorted to vigilante groups for their safety and security (Owonikoko, 2016). The community vigilantes utilized mob justice on those suspected of cult involvement. For example, four students of the University of Port-Harcourt suspected of involvement in cult activities were murdered in broad daylight by a mob in the Choba community of Rivers State. The extrajudicial killings and punishment meted to cult groups have resulted in reprisal attacks by cult groups and created a circle of violence (Salihu & Gholami, 2018).

Economic Disruptions

Bestoyin (2018) and Watts (2018) noted that Rivers State, particularly the oil-rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria, live in abject poverty. The poverty problem prevalent in the Niger Delta region, which encompasses Rivers State, is as a result of years of economic exploitation by multinational oil companies and successive Nigerian governments (Tantua , Devine, & Maconachie, 2018). Research by Nche et al. (2019) suggested that the advent of cult and other militant groups in the Niger Delta region only aggravated the unfortunate economic situation of the Niger Delta region. Several studies have suggested that the presence of cult groups in the Niger Delta created an atmosphere that is not conducive for business (Ogbeide, 2015; Oghiagbephan, 2016). The frequent crimes that are carried out by cult groups such as kidnapping, arm robbery, and rape have made several businesses close shops and led to capital flight from the region (Nnodim & Ochogba, 2015). Some oil companies and businesses, such as the Shell petroleum development company, reportedly move their offices from Port-Harcourt in reaction to the hostile environment created by the presence of cult groups and other militant groups in Rivers State. Agbiboa (2015) noted that the few businesses that still operate in the region operate under strict fear, and some even have to close their shops earlier than usual.

Fear and Insecurity

There is no doubt that criminal gangs or cults constitute a menace to public safety in Rivers State. Several studies concluded that the presence of cult groups and the numerous crimes that they commit is a top concern to communities in Rivers State and

law enforcement agencies (Azetta-Arhedo, 2011; Nche, 2019; Nche et al., 2019; Owonikoko, 2016). The numerous crimes that cult groups are engaged in, such as arm robbery, rape, kidnapping, and assassinations, have created enormous fear and a feeling of insecurity among citizens and businesses alike (Agbiboa, 2015; Adiboye & Duru, 2016). Mediayanose (2016) and Aghedo (2015) posited that the proliferation of secret cult groups in virtually all institutions of higher learning in Nigeria has created an uncomfortable learning environment for students. Davies et al. (2016), Okpechi (2014), and Uchenna (2014) reported widespread cases of rape, murder, and arm robbery on college campuses. The fear and insecurity of cult groups have resulted in students absconding from schools while others live off campuses. Students are forced and intimidated to join cult groups on campuses (Azetta-Arhedo, 2011). Research by Chinwe & Mag (2015) reported college lecturers being intimidated to give good grades to students, while others are forced to join cult groups for their safety. Fear of cult reprisal has forced some school administrators to join cult groups and shielded cult members away from school disciplinary actions. Nche (2019) noted that the criminal activities of cult groups, particularly robbery and kidnapping, made residents of affected communities alter their social lives due to fear and safety concerns. Most social activities such as parties and social events are either canceled out rightly or compel to end before 6 pm. Research by Nche et al. (2016) posited that citizens' safety and security in any society affects economic development. Research by Oluwadare (2019) also established a strong relationship between insecurity and underdevelopment. Oluwadare (2019) further noted

that cult groups' menace constitutes a severe hindrance to any meaningful development in communities across Rivers State and Nigeria. Ukwueze (2019) using data from global terrorism index, the central bank of Nigeria, and international research institute noted that fear and insecurity drive away foreign investments in any society and made it challenging to mobilize even members of the society to participate in economic activities out of fear and safety concern (Bestoyin, 2018).

Response to Cult Groups

Owonikoko (2016) noted that the criminal activities of cult groups peaked in the 1990s, drawing the attention of university administrators, law enforcement, and local communities. Owonikoko (2016) noted that the 1990s saw an expansion of cult groups and their criminal activities beyond the four walls of Universities into local communities. Also, cult groups began to increase their violence and sophistication as small weapons and money became available (Azetta & Arhedo, 2011; Isumonah, 2013). The criminal activities of cult groups and the threats they pose to the safety and security of lives and properties are now a top priority for law enforcement and communities (Nche, 2019).

Response to cult groups has come from schools, communities, and law enforcement agencies. Birabil and Okanezi (2017) noted that cult groups' activities began to threatened the peaceful learning environment of colleges all across the country. Research by Owonikoko (2016), Adiboye and Duru (2016), and Mediayanose (2016) indicated that inter cult rivalry was one of the primary reasons for disruptions in academic calendars and by implication number of years needed to complete college

degrees. Research by Chinwe and Mag (2015) indicated that cult groups that have been responsible for the loss of innocent lives and the destruction of infrastructural facilities on college campuses and communities. Mediayanose (2016) and Nnam and Ordu (2017) research described how cult groups created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity for students on college campuses. Also, Davies et al. (2016), Ezeonu (2014), Owonikoko (2016) concluded that the criminal activities of cult groups undermine the quality of education. As a result of the numerous problems that cult groups were causing to school administrators, efforts were made to put an end to their activities. One of the actions that were taken by school administrators was to embark on a public enlightenment campaign to dissuade students from joining cult groups (Omemu, 2016). Also, Chinwe and Mag (2015) and Owonikoko (2016) indicated that disciplinary measures such as suspension and outright expulsion of students suspected of involvement in cult activities were initiated to deterred students from joining gangs. Owonikoko (2016) noted that these measures were, to a significant extent, effective in reducing the menace caused by cult groups on college campuses but had a diffusion effect as cult groups' move into the communities with devastating consequences.

Killani (2008) noted that cult criminal activities also present severe problems for law enforcement. The menace of cult groups is no longer the headache of school administrators alone, but their movement into communities and criminal activities pose a significant threat to public safety (Ezeonu, 2014; Owonikoko, 2016). The fear and insecurity pose by cult groups, destruction of public properties, and disruption in

economic and social activities began to attract the attention of the government (Uchenna, 2014). Cult groups are involved in political thuggery and engage in election rigging by snapping ballot boxes and intimidating political opponents (Isumonah, 2013; Nnam, 2014). Also, research by Alumona (2019) and Watts (2018) suggested that cult groups are involved in some high-profile political assassinations. Chinwokwu and Michael's (2019) study indicated that violent acts of kidnapping for ransom and armed robbery were identified as some of the crimes perpetrated by cult groups. To combat the violence and criminal activities of cult groups, the government promulgated Decree 47 of 1989. Decree 47 outlawed all cult groups and increase prison sentences for those convicted of involvement in cult activities. Azetta-Arhedo (2011) noted that Decree 47 only helped to checkmate the excesses of cult groups; however, cult groups continue to proliferate since the law did not tackle the social and economic conditions that gave rise to youth involvement in cult criminal activities.

Owonikoko (2016) noted that school administrators' aggressive disciplinary approach, such as suspension and expulsion of students, led cult members to move into the communities where they continue their criminal activities. Research by Eze (2015) and Otusanya (2015) noted that the police have been unable to combat the activities of cult groups in the communities. Albert and Okoli (2016), Oluwagbenga (2017), and Salihu & Gholami (2018) identified police corruption, inadequate resources, political interference in police duties, and mistrust between citizens and the police as some of the reasons responsible for police inability to combat cult activities in communities in Rivers

State and Nigeria. Research by Owonikoko (2016) indicated that communities have responded to the threats posed by cult groups by forming vigilantes to protect the community. Owonikoko (2016) further noted that the Vigilante bypasses legal procedures and engages in mob justice for those convicted of cult activities, further fueling the cycle of violence. Also, communities have adjusted their social engagements to avoid certain places and times (Nnodim & Ocogba, 2018). Findings by Nnordim and Ocogba (2018) further indicated that businesses had closed shops before it gets dark outside, while others have relocated to other communities deemed peaceful. Research by Ordu and Nnam (2017) and Uchenna (2014) noted that cult groups' menace has threatened the social fabric of communities and affects family cohesion as people relocate to the cities.

History of Policing in Nigeria

The Nigerian Police is a creation of the British colonial administration in Nigeria. The first police force comprised of 1,200 Hausa constabulary that was formed in Lagos in 1861 (Albert & Okoli, 2016). Similar efforts were made with the creation of the Royal Niger constabulary in 1888 by the Royal Niger Company to cater to their business interests. The Hausa Constabulary and Royal Niger Constabulary were eventually merged to form the Nigerian Police force (Tamuno, 1970). Otusanya, Lauwo, Ige, and Adetoya (2015) noted that during the colonial period in Nigeria, the police were, for the most part, answerable to the local governments and native authorities. However, efforts were made to regionalize and subsequently nationalized the police force post-independence. Eze (2015) noted that what started as local and regional police has since

evolved into a more robust force with national responsibilities for law enforcement and maintenance of peace. Eze (2015) further noted that the number of police officers had increased tremendously with the ever-increasing population of Nigeria amid new responsibilities. The 1999 Nigerian constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria and Section 4 of the police act empowers the police with the mandate to enforce the laws and combat crime throughout Nigeria (Otusanya et al., 2015). Ikeddinma (2018), Who studied the Nigerian police force organization, observed that the Nigerian police operate a very centralized structure. At the helm of affairs is the inspector general of police appointed by the president who oversees the national police in the 36 states that made up Nigeria and the federal capital territory Abuja. The inspector general of police enjoys unlimited power when it comes to policy decision- making. Each state is headed by a commissioner of police under the supervision of the inspector general of police (Alade, 2015).

Barriers to police Efforts to Combat Cult activities

Studies by Owonikoko (2016) and Nche (2019) indicated that cult groups' menace has severely affected communities across Rivers State. The criminal activities of cult groups have negatively influence economic and social activities and threatened public safety and security (Agbibo, 2015; Nche et al., 2019). Eze (2015) and Otusanya et al. (2015) found that the police have not been effective in combating the criminal activities of cult groups and crime in general in Rivers State. A review of the literature indicated that both organizational and individual constraints limit the police's ability to function

effectively and deliver on their core mandate of service and security (Ikeddinma, 2018, Agbibo, 2015). Albert and Okoli (2016) and Salihu and Gholami (2018) identified corruption, lack of procedural justice, inadequate resources, lack of community collaboration, police culture, and poverty as some factors that hinder police efforts in combating cult activities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Corruption

The police have become one of the main bedrocks of modern societies (Otusanya, 2015). Otusanya (2015) noted that the police are the primary agency task with the maintenance of peace and enforcement of laws in most countries, including Nigeria. The constitutional obligation and huge responsibilities placed on the Nigerian police make citizens dependent on the police for the safety of their lives and properties (Eze, 2015). Webster (2013) noted that the nature of police jobs accorded them a wide range of discretionary authority to make decisions with little or no supervision. Webster (2013) further argued that the discretionary power given to the police is necessary to ensure that they can quickly spell out split-second decisions in a job that no standard operating procedure or manual could adequately spell out. The tremendous discretionary power and less supervision of police officers as they go about enforcing the laws also present an opportunity for corruption and other acts of deviance (Akinlabi, 2017).

Corruption is contextual and has a variety of meanings depending on the time and space in which it is used. However, the term is used generally to describe illegal and unethical actions on the part of a public official geared towards the attainment of selfish personal

and sometimes organizational interest (Hope, 2017). Hope (2017) indicated that corruption is not peculiar to Nigeria or Nigerian police, but rather, corruption is a global phenomenon that affects most countries. Nowhere is corruption more prevalent than in developing countries and emerging democracies such as Nigeria (Akinlabi, 2017). The problem of corruption presents a severe obstacle to Nigeria's overall development (Yagboyayu & Akinola, 2019). Research by Maya-Pearce (2014) and Kempe (2018) noted that corruption is institutionalized and a cankerworm permeating Nigerian society's social fabric. The anti-corruption watchdog, transparency international, has consistently ranked Nigeria among some of the world's most corrupt countries (TI, 2016). Other organizations, such as human rights watch, have decried the rampant corruption that has characterized the Nigerian police over the years (HRW, 2010).

Ladapo (2013) suggested that the police have become the poster child of corruption in Nigeria. This view of the notoriety of the Nigerian police was collaborated by Human right watch Report (2011) that indicated that the Nigerian police and other state security agencies engaged in corrupt practices and unprofessional conduct. The Nigerian police engaged in corrupt practices such as extortion of commercial bus and taxi drivers and mounting of illegal roadblocks and checkpoints to extort money from drivers (Adisa, Alabi, & Adejoh, 2018). Research by Otusanya et al. (2015) noted that the Nigerian police do not adequately investigate cases involving politicians and other social influencers, collect bribes from both complainants and arrestees to thwart the course of justice, and illegal detention of suspects to extort money among others (Agbiboa, 2012).

Research by Oluwagbenga (2017) also noted that police corruption is not limited to the public alone; some police officers, especially the hierarchy, have been implicated in misappropriating police funds and resources. Interviews conducted with current and former police officers by Human rights watch observed that rank and file officers on the street reported given returns to their superiors to gain promotion and roadblock assignments (Human right watch, 2011). The fact that all levels of the police organization are involved in corruption makes it difficult for the public to report corrupt officers as no reasonable action will be taken. Rampant corruption on the part of the Nigerian police undermines the rule of law and jeopardize the safety and security of the public that they swore to protect (Wang, 2013). Findings by Wang (2013) concluded that the rule of law is critical to the proper functioning of any society and trust in the police. Kutnjak Ivkovic, Haberfeld, and Peacock (2018) and WU and Makin (2019) identified the blue shield of secrecy inherent in most police departments, lack of proper recruitment practices, lack of necessary resources, and external influences by politicians and influential people in the society as some of the causes of police corruption. Police corruption negatively affects economic growth, waste resources, makes a mockery of the rule of law, and undermines the trust of the people in their government (wang, 2013).

Procedural Justice

The purpose of modern police is to ensure the safety and security of lives and properties (Ayinde & Ayegun, 2018). The police in most societies, including Nigeria derive their powers from the constitution and operate according to standard operating

procedures contained in police manuals (Otusanya et al., 2015). As enforcers of the law and public servants, the public expects the police to maintain the highest level of integrity and follow all due processes in the discharge of their duties (Eze, 2015). The concept of procedural justice is well known in the criminal justice system and has been researched extensively. When used concerning police officers, the term procedural justice entails the notion of fairness and due process in the discharge of police duties (Barkworth & Murphy, 2015). Akinlabi (2017) suggested that ensuring integrity in dealing with the public when carrying out police functions is critical to the police's success and the level of cooperation that they receive from the public. Huebert and Brown (2019) posited that citizen's perception of police is contingent on their personal and vicarious experience with the police during police-citizen encounters. A study by Madon, Murphy, and Sargeant (2017) that surveyed 1480 ethnic minority group members indicated that citizens feeling of fairness by police officers during their interactions enhances their perception of police legitimacy and, subsequently, their willingness to cooperate and share information with the police. A study conducted by Afon and Badiora (2016) using a sample of 463 participants from a cross-sectional survey, shows that negative citizen experiences of police deviance significantly influence their feeling of cynicism towards the police.

Akinlabi (2017) noted that the public has a negative perception of the Nigerian police and their ability to serve and protect their lives and properties. This negative public perception of the Nigerian police affects their recognition of the police as a legitimate

government entity tasked with protecting lives and properties (Gau & Brunson, 2015). Studies by Afon and Badiora (2016), Bradford (2012), and Bradford, Murphy, and Jackson (2014) indicated that the negative public perception of the police is not unfounded and reflects their negative experiences when dealing with the police. Akinlabi (2017) noted that the Nigerian police have acted like laws unto themselves instead of enforcing the laws in good faith.

According to Eze (2015), the Nigerian police, instead of serving as role models and dedicated public servants, have been among the biggest violators of the laws. Adisa, Alabi, and Adejoh (2018) and Human right watch (2014) reported that the Nigerian police have been cited severally for abuse of power and using the cover of the law to perpetrate unimaginable crimes against the public they are supposed to protect. According to Human rights watch (2014), there are several documented cases of police exhibiting violence and torture against citizens. Igbo (2017) documented cases of the police using extreme brutality to coerce suspects into confessing crimes, obtain evidence contrary to due processes, and violate police codes of conduct and international conventions.

A study by Akinlabi (2017) and Jensen and Hapal (2018) reported several cases of extrajudicial killings of suspects in police custody and violence against suspects in Nigeria and the Philippines. A qualitative study by Ladapo (2013) reported that criminal cases against influential individuals are not investigated and swept under the carpet. The Nigerian police routinely detained innocent citizens to collect bribes from them and

thwart the course of justice according to research by (Oluwagbenga, 2017). Violent acts of police deviance affect public perception of the police. Public cynicism of the police affects not only their perception of the Nigerian police as a corrupt organization. However, it limits the public's ability to form collaborative partnerships with the police to combat crime (Huebert, 2019). Several researchers have documented the importance of police/community collaboration to address crime and disorder in communities (Chinwokwu, 2018; Chinwokwu & Michael, 2019; Skilling, 2016). Ordu and Nnam (2017) and Albert and Okoli (2016) posited that enhancing public perception of the police is critical to information sharing on suspicious activities and the police's overall success as a legitimate law enforcement organization.

Funding

Funding is essential to the proper functioning of any organization, and the Nigerian police are no exception. Chinwokwu (2017) noted that inadequate funding of the Nigerian police places significant constraints on their ability to deliver core police services and fulfill their law enforcement obligations. Alumona, Osita, and Onuoha (2019) noted that inadequate funding affects virtually all law enforcement areas in Nigeria and undermines public confidence in the government's ability to safeguard the lives and properties of citizens and foreign residents in Nigeria. Research by Ladapo (2013) suggested that funding issues hamper the police's ability to carry out active investigations into the incessant cases of murder and other violent crimes in Nigeria. Ladapo (2013) further noted that even in cases where the victims are high profile citizens

as in the case of the former attorney general of the federation Bola Ige who was assassinated in his residence in 2001, the police have been unable to conclude an investigation. The police's inability to properly investigate serious crimes such as murder has further emboldened criminals and threatened public safety in Nigeria (Chinwukwu, 2017). Research by Esoimeme (2019), indicated that inadequate resources made it impossible for the police to acquire modern technological tools needed to conduct forensic analysis and resolve criminal cases. Therefore, the police have to rely on eyewitness testimony that is hard to come by due to fear and the inability of witnesses to maintain anonymity. The police need to utilize modern technologies, and communication equipment to maintaining needed contact and enhance information sharing to help combat crime (Odeyemi & Obiyan, 2018). Also, the police lack the logistics required to carry out essential law enforcement and patrol services.

Research by Obarisagbon and Aderinto (2018) noted that most police departments do not have enough patrol vehicles to transport suspects to court and conduct routine police patrol. Funding also impacted the police's ability to confront criminal groups and arm robbers that threatened the safety of the public. Alade (2015) noted that in some cases, the arms and ammunition at the police's disposal are no match to that which is used by criminals. Another area where funding has been a problem is the welfare of rank and file police officers. Schulch & Rabe-Harp (2018) noted that the Nigerian police are underpaid and work under terrible conditions. Nigerian police officer's salaries and income could not support their living situations and expose them to the tendency to seek

illegal avenues to support their financial needs. Mawby and Zempi (2018) study examined the hour's work by police officers and concluded that police officers work longer hours than other public servants. Funding also affects the Nigerian police's ability to maintain a workforce that meets the ever-increasing population and crime needs of the country. Ogunyemi and Laguda (2016) reported that the Nigerian police spend a paltry 0.6 percent of GDP compared to other countries such as the UK, US, and Germany with 2.6, 2.2, and 1.6 of their GDP respectively. Several research studies concluded that issues of funding and officer welfare are critical to reducing the stress associated with police work, reduce work-family conflict, and enhance the overall performance of police officers (Ellrich, 2016; Juulien, Somerville, & Brad, 2017; Lanzo, Aziz, & Wuesch, 2016; Mattew, 2018).

Political Interference

The Nigerian police have a constitutional obligation to ensure the safety and security of lives and property (Otusanya et al., 2015). This duty of ensuring the safety and security of lives and properties is supposed to be discharged without fear or favor but in strict adherence to the law and due process (Eze, 2015). A qualitative study by Albert and Okoli (2016) noted that the Nigerian police have not been unbiased in how they provide police services to citizens. A research survey by Chinwukwu (2017) involving 360 respondents from three States in Nigeria identified political interference in police duties as a significant barrier to the Nigerian police's effectiveness. Individuals with influence in society can influence how the police perform their duties and accorded police protection

than the average Nigerian. Political influence in police affairs in Nigeria, and by extension, Africa has colonial footprints. Several research studies noted that police in Africa was formed primarily for political purposes to protect the economic and political interest of the colonial powers (Albert & Okoli, 2016; Boateng, 2016).

Otusanya (2015) noted that the police's tradition as a force that caters to the interest of a selected few with force and intimidation continued post-British rule in Nigeria. Odeyemi and Obiyan (2017) noted that the Nigerian police is a centralized organization with the inspector general chosen by the president. It makes it difficult for the police to remain apolitical and democratic. The inspector general of police is answerable to only the president who happens to belong to the ruling party. Odeyemin and Obiyan (2017) further suggested that the president and the ruling party control the police and dictate the course of justice. Esoimeme (2019) noted that the economic and financial crime commission (EFCC), the leading anti-corruption agency in the country, had been used as a political tool and witch hunt to intimate political opponents. Otusanya and Lauwo (2019) and Solande (2019) noted that political influence in police functions affects virtually all aspects of police duties.

Oluwatoyin (2011) and Angerbrandt (2018) indicated that the police are legally mandated to ensure free and fair elections by securing ballot boxes and preventing election rigging and other acts that can threaten voters' process. However, Oluwatoyin (2011) suggested that the police are often compromised during elections and engaged in actions that undermine the sanctity of an election system that they are supposed to

protect. Also, Oluwatoyin (2011) observed that police officers attached to prominent politicians had been used to cover criminal acts committed by political thugs. Political influence in police functions is not limited to elections alone. Study by Otusanya et al. (2018) and Solande (2019) noted that politicians have often scuffled police investigations involving them and their cronies. Investigations involving politicians and other influential citizens are swept under the carpet.

In some cases, the police used violence against specific demographics, especially in developing and quasi-democracies such as Nigeria. For example, the police in South Africa have been used to intimidate poor blacks (McMichael, 2016). Also, several killings have been associated with the State police in the Philippines under the guise of fighting drugs (Jensen & Hapal, 2018). Chinokwu (2017) noted that political influence in police administration had driven a wedge between the police and the people they are supposed to protect. Police services and protection now becomes a luxury for only the politicians and other influential members of society who can afford to pay for them (Akinlabi, 2017).

Police Community Relations

What has now become Nigerian Police is a product of the British colonial administrators in Nigeria. Tamuno (1970) noted that the Nigerian police force was formed primarily to protect the narrow interest of the British colonial administrators in Nigeria and their business interests. Albert and Okoli (2016) noted that the Nigerian police were not created to serve the benefit of the public, but some privileged few. A

traditions that appeared to be carried on to this day. Albert and Okoli (2016) further posited that several efforts to reform the Nigerian police over the years to reflect modern-day police ideals have proven unsuccessful. Bamidele et al. (2015) and Chinwukwu (2017) identified massive corruption and political interference as factors that hinder efforts at reform.

Studies indicated that the Nigerian public has a negative perception of the police (Akinlabi, 2017; Huebert & Brown, 2019). A qualitative study by Akinlabi (2017) examining citizen's perception of the Nigerian police indicated that the police often use force, including deadly force, to serve the interest of a selected few who have the money to buy their services. Nigerian police use of force and torture has sufficient empirical support in the literature. Babatunde (2017) noted that the use of torture is very rampant with the Nigerian police. A qualitative study by Ajayia and lounge (2014) involving 1350 members of professional groups in strategic partnership with the police noted that citizens described the police as insensitive to their needs. Ajayia and Lounge pointed out that the perception of police insensitivity affects police-community relations, crime reporting, and information sharing.

A quantitative study by Akinlabi (2017) using a cross-sectional survey of 462 residents of Lagos concluded that citizen's experience during police encounters affects how they perceived the police. A study by Afon and Badiora that surveyed 334 residents of Ille-Ife also lends credence to the fact that the police are viewed positively by people with the financial resources to acquire their services. Akinlabi (2017) and Hope (2017)

also alluded to the fact that only the rich and the powerful in Nigeria are entitled to full police service and protection. This is despite the slogan that the "police is your friend" and "justice for all." Massive corruption persists throughout the Nigerian criminal justice system, with the police being the poster child (Chinokwu, 2017; Ladapo, 2013). Cases of police brutality, torture, false imprisonment, extortion, and even murder of innocent citizens characterized the Nigerian police (Maja Pearce, 2014). Police checkpoints are now toll gates where motorists are forced to pay a bribe before they can ply the road. Motorists primarily commercial drivers who refused to pay are assaulted and, in some cases, shot (Adisa & Adejoh, 2018).

Akinlabi (2017) noted that the daily and often unpleasant experiences of average Nigerian citizens who encounter the police hinders any effort at police/community collaboration to combat crime. The negative and unfriendly relationship between the public and the Nigerian police and the need to improve police/community relations have led to reform efforts. One of the reform efforts has been the introduction of community policing in the country. Cordner (2014), Bull (2015), and Gill, Weisburd, Telep, Vitter, and Bennett (2014) described community policing as a policing strategy that emphasizes a collaborative partnership between the police and communities to combat crime. Igbo (2017) noted that despite the lofty promise of community policing, the relationship between the police and communities had hindered its implementation. Igbo (2017) further noted that the strained relationship between the police and communities affects efforts at combating crime, including the criminal activities of cult and other terrorist groups.

Improving the police-public relationship should be an integral part of any police reform and urgent priority for the police. A positive correlation between the police and the public will enhance collaboration in efforts to combat crimes and disorders (Afon & Badiora, 2016; Brown, 2017; Chinwukwu, 2018).

Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter, I reviewed the literature on cult groups and policing in Nigeria. Studies support the contention that the criminal activities of cult groups such as arm robbery, kidnapping, assassinations, and destruction of properties pose a significant threat to communities in Rivers State (Nche, 2019; Nche et al., 2019; Owoniko, 2016). Efforts to reign in cult groups have not been successful as cult groups continue to increase in communities across Rivers State. The police's inability to effectively curtail the menace of cult groups has resulted in negative public perception and diminished police legitimacy. Lipsky's (1978; 1980) street-level bureaucracy theory provides the theoretical lens that could explain how the police perceived cult groups and the threats they pose to public safety. Street-level bureaucracy theory also explains what influences police officers' decision making related to the criminal activities of cult groups in Rivers State. According to Lipsky (1978; 1980), constraints such as inadequate resources, threat perception, and conflict goals influence how SLBs like the police approach their jobs. Lipsky (1978) street-level bureaucracy theory becomes the ideal theoretical lens to understand better the reasons for police failures to combat cult groups effectively. The public is often unaware of these constraints that hinder police work. The literature review

supports the major themes contained in street-level bureaucracy theory as it relates to how inadequate resources, threat perception, and ambiguous goals hinders police efforts to combat the menace of cult groups. Studies indicated that lack of resources such as equipment, vehicles and personnel, political interference, and corruption affects police efforts to combat crime in Rivers State which is consistent with the themes identified in street-level bureaucracy theory (Bamidele & Ayodele, 2016; Hope, 2017; Huebert & Brown, 2019; Ramon & Araujo, 2017). Also, Lipsky (2010) explains how the police use their enormous power of discretion to make hard choices between actions and inactions, which may sometimes be at odds with official policies and guidelines.

Studies suggested that reforming the Nigerian police in line with democratic principles and professional standards should be a top priority for the Nigerian police (Alumona et al., 2019; Esoimeme, 2019; Mawby & Zempi, 2018; Ikoh, 2018; Odeyemi & Obiyan, 2018; Schuch & Rabe-Harp, 2018). Owonikoko (2016) posited that a more holistic approach is needed to address not just the menace of cult groups but crime in general. Active collaboration between the police and communities must be a significant part of any overall crime control strategy. Akinlabi (2017) indicated that partnership between the police and the community would help change negative perception, enhance information sharing, and police legitimacy.

A review of the literature on cult groups indicated that considerable research had been done on this phenomenon. Previous studies tend to focus on the motivations for youth involvement in cult groups to include poverty, peer pressure, and a decline in

society's moral values (Agbibo, 2014; Nnam & Ordu, 2017; Brittain, 2015). Other researchers have examined the impact of cult criminal activities on quality of education, economic and social activities, violence, and fear and insecurity as the main themes of their research (Edeme & Nkalu, 2019; Mediayanose, 2016; Uchenna, 2014; Okpechi, 2014; Nche, 2019). However, there is minimal study that examines how the police perceive cult groups and their decision-making processes to combat cult criminal activities in Rivers State. As the organization with the legal mandate to protect citizens' lives and properties, it is essential to understand how the police perceive cult groups and their decision-making processes as part of the overall effort to combating crime.

Understanding police perception of cult groups and their decision-making process will enable the public to form an informed opinion of the police, enhance police/community partnership, and enhance police legitimacy. Combating the menace of cult groups will require an all stakeholder approach to be effective. Stakeholders' collaboration could only be achieved when every stakeholder is aware of what the other is doing, their successes, hindrances, and failures. In the next chapter, I will discuss the research design and methodology that will guide this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to fill the existing gap in the literature regarding the criminal activities of gangs or cult groups as they are called in Nigeria. I sought to understand police perceptions and decision making related to the illegal activities of cult groups in Rivers State, Nigeria. Phenomenological design is useful in examining individual opinions, thoughts, feelings, observations, and experiences regarding a phenomenon to be studied (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological data are useful in describing the essence of an individual or group experience concerning a phenomenon. My objective in this study was to understand how the police perceived cult groups and the threats that they posed to public safety. I also sought to understand the decision-making processes of police officers in their efforts to combat the criminal activities of cult groups in Rivers State. In this chapter, I discuss the rationale for my choice of methodology, sampling strategy, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis, and any ethical concerns that may arise from this study and how I addressed such concerns.

Research Design and Rationale

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this qualitative phenomenological study:

RQ1: How do the police perceive cult groups and the threats they pose to communities in Rivers State, Nigeria?

RQ2: What factors influence police decision making on how to combat cult activities in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Research Design

I used a qualitative methodology with a phenomenological design for this study. Phenomenology as a research design is useful in studying and understanding the lived experiences of individuals and the true meanings that they ascribed to a phenomenon or objects based on these experiences (Husserl, 1970). Also, the use of phenomenology as a research design enables the researcher to make interpretations of the perceptions of individuals living in an environment to make an objective assessment that can be used for research purposes and make policy decisions (Morris & Crank, 2011). According to Roberts (2013), phenomenology as a research design help by providing a framework that puts research into a humanistic perspective that people can easily relate to and understand compared to quantitative research that utilizes numbers and data sets for analysis. My goal in this study was to interpret the perceptions of police officers who are serving in communities where cult activities are prevalent based on their lived experiences, which is consistent with the phenomenological approach.

According to Yin (2015), the researcher using a phenomenological design can understand how people make meanings of events in their everyday lives under varying circumstances. Yin (2015) further noted that qualitative methodology also helps in understanding the coping mechanisms that are employed by people to deal with events in natural settings such as home or work environments. In this study, I chose Rivers State,

Nigeria, as the environment that is better suited for this study based on my research on the problem of cult groups. Based on my research, Rivers State has witnessed a more significant share of the effects of cult activities; as such, the state was better suited for this study. As Yin (2015) noted, lived space is a common theme in qualitative research that describes where people live or the world in which people exist. The perspective of police officers as the legitimate law enforcement agency in Rivers State and Nigeria is critical to fully understand the full dimension of cult groups as a problem that confronts Rivers State. In carrying out this research, I worked to suspend any personal biases, assumptions, and experiences that would impede a good understanding and interpretation of the experiences of research participants. Efforts to minimize bias in this study include the use of member checking, keeping a detailed account of all steps in the research process and making sure that interpretation of study findings depends solely on the data (Carl & Ravitch, 2016). As Patton (2015) posited, understanding human behavior requires a careful recognition of the researcher's perceptions and how such opinions differ from those of the research participants. Also, understanding how social problems are affected by social, economic, and political influences is critical to making an informed interpretation of the participant's perceptions (Alase, 2017; Kruth, 2015).

Rationale

My rationale for the choice of methodology is due to two reasons. First, there is limited quantitative data needed to make empirical inferences to the population of Rivers State regarding the criminal activities of cult groups. Second, there is the need to

comprehend how the people that are affected by the illegal activities of cult groups perceived it in their own words. As Yin (2016) posited, qualitative researchers do not seek to generalize to the population as a whole but, rather, to understand how people survive in the real world and the true meanings that they ascribe to events. Qualitative research allows participants to tell their stories in their ways. There is minimal research that explores police perception of cult groups and the threats they posed to public safety in Rivers State. Several researchers have concluded that the Nigerian police suffer from negative public opinion (Afon & Badiora, 2016; Akinlabi, 2017; Bradford, 2012). Thus, it becomes necessary to understand police perception as part of the overall dimension of cult groups, and their criminal activities. Lyons et al. (2013) and Canella (2015) posited that qualitative research enables an understudied population to have a voice to tell their stories.

The qualitative researcher helps to document the personal experiences of participants as real people rather than objects to satisfy an investigative purpose (Ofonedu, Percy, Harris-Britt, & Belcher, 2013). Norlyk, Martinsen, and Dahlberg (2013) also argued that qualitative research allows for a better theoretical understanding of the subjective experiences of people that lives in an environment and are affected by the phenomenon under study. Thus, the qualitative phenomenological approach becomes the ideal approach to explore police perceptions of cult groups and the threats they posed to public safety. Exploring police perceptions of cult groups is necessary because the police

officers are on the frontline of efforts to combat the criminal activities of cult groups and crime in general in Rivers State.

Role of the Researcher

I was the primary interviewer for this study. My previous experience working in security and public safety gave me the needed competence, skills, and rigor to conduct interviews that yielded comprehensive and credible responses. My preferred data collection method was a face-to-face interview with research participants in Rivers State, Nigeria. Face-to-face interviews in qualitative research are useful to enable the researcher build rapport with the participants and help capture nonverbal clues that could help enhance understanding of participants perception of a phenomenon (Carl & Ravitch, 2016). However, due to travel restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, I selected phone interviews as an alternative data collection method. Lechuga (2012) noted that phone interviews could yield the same high-quality data in qualitative research as face-to-face interview. Phone interviews are convenient and cost effective, enable the researcher to cover a wider geographic area, and ensure privacy and confidentiality of participants and accrued data (Lechuga, 2012). The translation of interview audio recordings did not present a problem as I was familiar with local languages in Rivers State and English, which is the official language for formal communication in Nigeria.

I conducted this study with police officers serving in Rivers State, which is one of the 36 states that make up Nigeria. Only police officers from the Rivers State police command formed the sample for this study. Qualitative research is personal because the

researcher is the main instrument for measuring the data to be collected. The phenomenon to be studied is also peculiar to the participants that experience it in their daily lives (Patton, 2015). The personal nature of qualitative research inquiry makes it essential for qualitative researchers to be cognizant of the historical evolution of the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2015, P.116). Asiamah, Mensah, and Oteng-Abaye (2017) also suggested that qualitative researchers must endeavor to understand the population that they intend to study adequately. According to Yin (2016) and Rubin and Rubin (2016), excellent listening skills, interviewing skills, attention to details, data preservation skills, multitasking, and the ability to persevere are some of the attributes needed to conduct proper qualitative research.

Methodology

The qualitative phenomenological study involved the use of an interpretive approach to studying a phenomenon in their natural settings. The method helps to understand the meanings that are ascribed to an event by people who have lived experience of the event (Carl & Ravitch, 2016)). The use of qualitative research involves in-depth interviews and observations, among others, to elicit the lived experiences of participants, usually a small sample size concerning a phenomenon. According to Creswell (2013) and Lincoln and Guba (1985), qualitative research is based on the belief that events are socially constructed, and the meanings that are ascribed to them depends on the individual experience, time, and space in which the event occur. My goal in this

study was to rely as much as possible on the participant's perceptions of cult groups and the threats they posed to public safety based on their experiences as enforcers of the law.

Sample

The population for this qualitative phenomenological study was 20 police officers who work in communities in Rivers State, where cult criminal activities are most prevalent. The qualitative phenomenological study involved identifying participants who have lived experience of the phenomenon to be studied (Rudestam et al., 2015, p. 123). The use of smaller sample size is recommended for qualitative studies as opposed to quantitative studies that involve statistical data and larger populations. According to Silverman (2011), the use of a smaller sample size is necessary to ensure that the researcher can focus on the participant's personal experiences. Although there is no universal rule for sample size in qualitative research, the smaller sample size is recommended based on the nature of the phenomenon and what the researcher intends to find (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2016). Patton (2015) and Silverman (2011), however, recommended a sample size of between 10 to 20 for qualitative based research when exploring individual beliefs, perceptions, and experiences regarding a phenomenon.

Silvermann (2011) also recommended average sample size of between 10 to 20 participants for qualitative phenomenological studies when the population is homogenous. Based on the experiences of qualitative researchers, only a few additional information relevant to a study is obtained after interviewing 20 participants concerning a phenomenon (Green & Thorogood, 2009). Robinson (2014) argued that for qualitative

interpretive research, the small sample size would suffice to achieve saturation. Mason (2010) and Fusch and Ness (2015) indicated that saturation is achieved in qualitative studies when interviewing additional participants will not yield any newer information that will be useful to the study. In recruiting the 20 participants for this study, I was guided by the principle of data saturation in qualitative studies and the constraints of time and resources needed to complete the study (Green & Thorogood, 2009; Robinson, 2004).

Participant Selection

I used purposive sampling with a snowballing technique to recruit participants for this study. Purposive sampling involves identifying participants who are knowledgeable about the phenomenon and have personal experiences relevant to answering the research questions (Barrat, Ferris, & Lenton, 2015; Yin, 2016). According to Atkinson and Flint (2001) and Dotim (2016), snowballing involves identifying participants who can help recommend other participants who are knowledgeable about the phenomenon and is best suited for the research. I recruited participants for this study from a series of referrals who are police officers and worked in communities in Rivers State who witnessed the menace of cult groups (Opong, 2013). Participants for this study were police officers who have served in their respective stations for at least 3 years. I believed 3 years was enough time to understand the activities of cult groups in any community fully.

Instrumentation

I developed the questionnaire that I used for this study, and it has not been used in any previous research. I collected data through a semistructured interview. I drafted an interview guide composing of open-ended questions that were tailored to answering the research questions and personally interviewed the participants. In formulating the interview guide, I was guided by relevant literature about the criminal activities of cult groups and police in Rivers State. Using an interview guide enabled me to prepare better and discussed all issues necessary for answering the research questions. The use of open-ended questions is commonly used by qualitative researchers utilizing interviews to ensure that the participants can better express their views in their own words. Open-ended questions also enable both the researcher and participants to have flexibility in altering any aspect of the interview questions and seek clarifications that will enhance the quality of the interview and research (Yin, 2015).

Data Collection

Data collection only commenced after obtaining IRB approval for this study. I posted flyers on social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram seeking for participation in this study. I further furnished participants with a formal letter of invitation describing the nature and purpose of the study as well as the time that was required to conduct the interview. I attached a copy of an informed consent form with the invitation. The letter of informed consent explicitly spelled out the voluntary nature of participation, rights of participants, and policies and procedures that guided the interview

to ensure the confidentiality of data and privacy of participants. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point. Participants were also briefed about any potential risks and benefits that may be associated with the study.

The interview format was by phone via Zoom and WhatsApp, as the participant deemed fit. I used Sonny ICD-UX 560 digital voice recorder for audio recordings of the interviews in conjunction with handwriting notes. I arranged a date, time, and place for the interview that was convenient for the participant. The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. I was flexible throughout the interviews to ensure that all pertinent questions were covered. I asked participants to sign an informed consent form as well as sign the waiver for audio recordings of the interviews. I reiterated to the participants their rights as well as guaranteed the confidentiality of any data that accrued from the interview. I transcribed the audio recordings after each interview for data analysis.

Data Analysis plan

My data analysis plans involved developing major themes that captured the way police officers perceived cult groups and the threats they posed to public safety. Also, I developed themes that capture the factors that influence the decision making of police officers in their effort to combat the criminal activities of cult groups in Rivers State. I transcribed all the individual interviews and audio recordings into a more readable form. The transcription process was done in conjunction with notes taking during the interview to ensure accuracy. To ensure that the transcripts accurately reflect the views expressed by the participants, I allowed participants to reviewed the transcripts for accuracy

(Carlson, 2010). Once participants confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and changes made where necessary, I then proceeded to the coding process. Saldana (2016) coding system and NVivo 12 qualitative software were used for coding and thematic analysis of the data.

According to Saldana (2016), this coding process should be carried out in two cycles or phases. The first cycle will involve reading the transcripts multiple times to identify codes. Saldana (2016) described codes as words or phrases that repeatedly appeared in the transcripts that could help answer the research questions. After the initial coding of the transcripts, I then proceeded to the second cycle. My objective in the second cycle was to reconfigured and synthesized the various codes identified in the first cycle into broader categories and themes. Developing themes is a more iterative process that requires attention to detail and can be time consuming. Unlike codes, themes are broad ideas that capture the true essence of how the participants perceived the phenomenon under study based on their lived experiences. Themes could help not only to resolve the underlying research questions but help in building theories that can better explain a phenomenon.

Issues of Trustworthiness

It is essential for qualitative researchers to ensure trustworthiness throughout the research process. The validity of the data used, and the integrity of the overall research process help to ensure that research findings are valid. According to Farrelly (2013), qualitative researchers must exhibit integrity, flexibility, and ensure that the research is

carried out systematically. Issues of trustworthiness are at the very foundation of qualitative research tradition and enhance the acceptability of research findings (Ang, Embi, & Yunus, 2016). Several elements must be present to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research. They include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

Credibility

This was a qualitative phenomenological study that utilized interviews as the primary source of data collection with field notes. Credibility is vital to the validity and reliability of research findings. Credibility entails ensuring that the data that is used in qualitative research is accurate and reflects the views of the participants. As Bradley (1993) rightly pointed out, credibility in qualitative research involves accepting the perceptions and meanings that participants ascribed to social phenomena without alteration. I ensured credibility in this research study by setting aside any preconceived notions about cult groups and the police in Rivers State. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), the setting aside of personal biases and assumptions is critical to the integrity of the research process. Another way I ensured credibility in this research was by ensuring that research participants were able to review the interview transcripts before coding began. Member checking is essential in qualitative research utilizing interviews to ensure that the transcripts accurately represent the views of research participants as they will want it to be portrayed. Finally, I used data triangulation by comparing handwriting notes

from the interview to the audio recordings to reconciled areas of convergence and identify points of divergence and make necessary corrections.

Transferability

The term transferability, as used in qualitative research, means the extent to which research findings can be applied in similar settings or studies (Wang, Moss, & Hiller, 2006). The problems of cult groups and their criminal activities are not peculiar to Rivers State alone but affect Nigeria in general. Thus, this study's findings and methodology could be transferred to other States in Nigeria to combat crime or understand police decision-making related to the criminal activities of gangs. One way I ensured that this study could be transferred to other settings was by keeping a detailed description of the data gathering process and analysis to ensure that the findings can be transferable (Meriam, 2014). An effort was made to provide an elaborate detail of research participants' responses to the interview questions in their own words.

Dependability

Dependability is another crucial element in ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research. Dependability in qualitative studies is like reliability in quantitative studies. Research findings must be accurate and reflect the data used in the analysis. Qualitative researchers must ensure stability and coherence throughout the research process and account for any changing condition of the phenomenon under study (Bradley, 1993). To ensure dependability in this study, I conducted member checking by allowing participants to review the transcripts before the coding process to reconcile any inconsistencies. I also

did a field test of the interview guide to ensure that they could help answer my research questions (Carlson, 2010). Finally, I ensured that the data, as well as the study findings, are dependable by triangulating the interview recordings with my handwriting notes from the interviews. According to (Patton, 2002), data triangulation helps to find points of convergence and divergence with a view to ensuring accuracy.

Confirmability

Confirmability in qualitative research connotes the ability of others who read or reviewed the research data as presented by the researcher to be able to confirm the results (Bradley, 1993). I ensured that others could verify the data collected for this study by keeping a detailed account of the data gathering process such as participants' responses to interview questions, duration, location, and other details that aided in verification without jeopardizing the confidentiality of participants. All participants in this study were verified by me to ensure that they met the criteria for inclusion. In this case, I ensured that the sample size comprised of only police officers who served in communities in Rivers State, where cult activities are prevalent. I also presented the data analysis process, including how the data was reviewed and interpreted.

Also, procedures were put in place to ensure the total confidentiality of participants' personal information. Ensuring participant confidentiality also helped with research validity as participants were freed to give honest responses to the interview questions (Shenton, 2004). Letters of informed consent stating the voluntary nature of participation in the research accompanied formal invitations to the participants. This

letter gave the participants enough time to make decisions about whether to participate and freely contribute information. Finally, the importance of honesty was emphasized to the participants as it enhanced the reliability of research findings.

Ethical Procedures

The importance of ethics in research, especially research involving human subjects, cannot be overemphasized. The achievement of high ethical standards in research required that researchers have the necessary training and knowledge needed to make sound ethical decisions that will ensure the safety of research participants (El Hussein, Jakubec, and Osuji, 2015). The institutional review board (IRB) of Walden University is responsible for ensuring that research conducted by any member of the university community adheres to the highest ethical standards. (Tsan, 2019) posited that IRB approval is required for any research involving human subjects. My first step in ensuring that my research met all ethical requirements was to seek IRB approval before contacting participants and collecting data. The voluntary nature of this study contained in an informed consent form attached to the letter of invitation. Participants were informed of any potential risks and benefits associated with this study before participating. Also, the rights of participants to withdraw from the interview at any point in time were clearly spelled out. I made all efforts to ensure that the privacy and confidentiality of data that were collected.

Ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of participants' data is critical to the integrity of the research process and the safety of the participants. The first step in

ensuring the safety of participants is to de-identified all the data collected. No personal information, such as the names of the participants, were disclosed. All participants were identified by pseudonyms. Secondly, all hard copies of the data and interview transcripts were stored in a secure place under lock and key in my home. Thirdly, audio recordings, consent forms, waivers, interview transcripts and all electronic data were stored on my personal computer using a password that is known only to me. Finally, all data about this study would be stored for five years after the study is completed. After five years, all hard copies of the file data will be shredded, and all electronic files will be deleted permanently.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand police perceptions and decision-making related to cult activities in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study also sought to understand the decision-making processes of police officers related to efforts to combat the criminal activities of cult groups in Rivers State. In this chapter, I discussed my choice of methodology and the rationale behind it. The sampling strategies, participant selection logic, data collection procedures, and data analysis were also presented. I also discussed the ethical procedures and steps that I took to ensure that I complied with Walden University's ethical standards and ensured the privacy and confidentiality of research participants. Data collection consisted of phone interviews via Zoom and WhatsApp that was audio recorded using Sonny ICD-UX 560 digital voice recorder. Participation in this study was entirely voluntary, and participants were made to

sign an informed consent form and waiver permitting recordings of the interview. No financial compensation or inducement was provided to participants beyond what is typical for research studies. The rights of participants to withdraw from the study at any point were spelled out. I also took handwriting notes to complement audio recordings. All interviews were transcribed and coded using Saldana (2016) coding system and NVivo 12 qualitative software. In the next chapter, I will present the results of the data analysis procedures.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore police perception and decision making related to the criminal activities of cult groups in Rivers State, Nigeria. The first research question focused on how the police perceived cult groups and the threats they pose to communities in Rivers State, Nigeria. The second research question focused on the factors that influence police decision making related to cult activities in Rivers State, Nigeria. To address the research questions, I recruited 20 police officers serving in communities in Rivers State with lived experience of the activities of cult groups. I used purposive sampling with snowballing techniques to recruit only police officers who have lived experience combating cult groups and their criminal activities in Rivers State. I used Semistructured phone interviews with open-ended questions to elicit responses from the participants.

Research methodologies are useful in detailing the data collection and analysis procedures and explain how the interview questions and participant responses address the research questions (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson, 2014). I obtained data from participants' responses to semistructured phone interviews using open-ended questions. I utilized Saldana's (2016) coding system to identified common codes and relevant themes that could help answer the research questions. Also, I used NVivo 12 qualitative software to organize and facilitate the data analysis process.

In this chapter, I discuss the purpose of the study and the research questions that this study seeks to answer. I also discuss the research setting, participants' demographics, and data collection, and analysis procedures. In this chapter, I also present the main themes that emerged from the responses to the semistructured phone interviews with the 20 police officers that participated in this study. I made Significant effort to ensure that trust and integrity were maintained in reporting the findings from this study.

Research Setting

I recruited participants for this study through purposive sampling with snowballing techniques. I posted flyers on social media sites, particularly on Facebook and Instagram seeking participants for this study. Seven police officers initially indicated an interest in the study by sending me private messages on WhatsApp and Facebook messenger as directed on the flyer. It was essential to ensure that interested officers did not respond directly to the flyer on my Facebook wall to ensure that if they were eventually included in the study, their confidentiality could be guaranteed. All the seven officers who initially indicated interest voluntarily provided their contact numbers and email addresses. The initial seven officers who showed interest in the study in response to my Facebook flyer each volunteered to refer their colleagues to the post and gave them my contact number and email address. In all, 27 other officers were referred, bringing the total number of officers who indicated an interest in the study to 34 police officers serving in Rivers State. I sent an email to all the officers who showed interest in the study, inviting them, and requesting consent to participate and intimating them on the

purpose of the study. The email was also accompanied by a phone call to all the participants. Overall, 34 participants were identified and referred. However, only 20 police officers were eventually recruited for this study, which was my desired sample size. I selected the 20 participants for this study based on their lived experiences fighting cult activities in Rivers State and years in service that exceeded the 3-year minimum requirement set out in my inclusion criteria. Of the 14 participants who were not chosen, five were traffic officers, four did not meet the minimum 3-year experience required for inclusion, and five were detectives in fraud and cybercrime and have little practical lived experience with cult groups and their activities. Furthermore, I contacted those not included in the study through email and a phone call thanking them for their interest in the study as well as the reasons for noninclusion.

I composed all the semistructured questions and conducted the phone interviews with all 20 police officers at a time that was convenient for the participants and me. I also used Sony ICD-UX 560 digital voice recorder to record all the interviews. The interviews occurred between April 25 and May 30, 2020, using Zoom and WhatsApp video call. The use of video calls enabled me to capture some nonverbal clues and build rapport with participants as in a face-to-face setting. Nine of the interviews took place via Zoom, whereas the remaining 11 interviews took place via WhatsApp video call. All the participants resided in Rivers State, Nigeria, and served in various communities that have witnessed the prevalence of cult activities.

Demographics

The sample for this study consisted of 20 police officers between the ranks of corporal and deputy superintendent of the police serving in Rivers State. I utilized purposive sampling to ensure that only officers who have lived experience combating activities of cult groups were recruited for the study. I verified the identity of all participants through their police identification cards. The demographics of the participants are depicted in Table 1. The sample for this study composed of 20 police officers serving in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Table 1

Participants Demographics

Name	Gender	Rank	Years of service
Participant 1	Male	DSP	35 YEARS
Participant 2	Male	ASP	29 YEARS
Participant 3	Male	ASP	26 YEARS
Participant 4	Female	INSPR	25 YEARS
Participant 5	Female	SGT	24 YEARS
Participant 6	Male	INSPR	26 YEARS
Participant 7	Male	SGT	23 YEARS
Participant 8	Male	INSPR	26 YEARS
Participant 9	Male	INSPR	27 YEARS
Participant 10	Female	SGT	5 YEARS

Participant 11	Male	SGT	23 YEARS
Participant 12	Female	INSPR	29 YEARS
Participant 13	Female	ASP	26 YEARS
Participant 14	Male	INSPR	27 YEARS
Participant 15	Male	SGT	24 YEARS
Participant 16	Male	SGT	26 YEARS
Participant 17	Female	INSPR	28 YEARS
Participant 18	Male	INSPR	29 YEARS
Participant 19	Male	SGT	20 YEARS
Participant 20	Female	SGT	23 YEARS

Note. DSP, deputy superintendent of police; ASP, assistant superintendent of police; INSPR, inspector of police; SGT, sergeant; CPL, corporal.

Data Collection

Recruitment of participants for this study commenced after receiving approval (# 04-17-20-0746524) from Walden University's institutional review board (IRB). This study sample comprised 20 police officers with lived experiences combating cult activities and serving in communities in Rivers State. I recruited the 20 police officers that participated in this study through purposive sampling with a snowballing technique. Prior to the interviews, I made participants to sign a consent form stating the voluntary nature of the interview and their right to refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the interview at any point. Participants also signed a waiver permitting the phone

interview to be recorded. I also assured participants of their confidentiality and any data accrued from the interviews. I designed the interview questions to address the research questions with the theoretical framework as a lens. I used Semistructured phone interviews with open-ended questions to elicit responses from the participants. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes at a time that was mutually acceptable to the participants and me. I further advised participants to ensure that the phone calls took place outside work hours and workspace, preferably in their home or somewhere that would ensure confidentiality and privacy. All the phone interviews took place at my home in my study room. I also used Sonny ICD-UX 560 digital voice recorder to record all the interviews. I took handwriting notes during all the phone interviews to ensure data triangulation.

After completing the interviews with the 20 participants, I began to transcribe the audio recordings from the phone interviews. I manually transcribed all the interview audio-recordings and the process entailed listening to each audio recordings several times. I made great effort to ensure that the exact words of the participants were used during transcription. However, in cases where local English (Pidgeon English) was used, I edited the responses to ensure that the meanings were more precise and in proper English language. I also reconciled the transcripts from the audio-recordings with the handwriting notes I took during the interviews to identify points of convergence and divergence (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I also carried out member checking to ensure that my understanding and interpretation of each response accurately reflect the participant's

opinion as they want it portrayed. I carried out member checking by emailing the transcripts to the participants, followed by a phone call that lasted between 15 and 20 minutes. All participants confirmed that the transcripts accurately reflected their responses to the interview questions.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data for this qualitative phenomenological study using Saldana's (2016) coding system. Saldana (2016) posited that coding should be carried out in two stages, starting with identifying codes and followed by themes that could be used to address the research questions that the study seeks to answer and to understand the phenomenon of interest. Codes are common phrases or words that appeared more frequently throughout the interviews (Saldana, 2016). Themes are an aggregation of the codes into broader ideas that could help address the research questions. I imported the transcripts into NVivo 12 QRS from Microsoft Word documents to organize better and facilitate the coding process. NVivo 12 enabled me to run a query of some of the most frequent words from participants' responses from the interviews. The word *frequency* generated by NVivo 12 was a useful first step in exploring the data. It allowed me to use the language of the data to guide my interpretation as well as note themes that were relevant to the study that needed further exploration. Also, the words from the word *frequency* served as the initial codes used in reviewing the interview transcripts. The word cloud from NVivo 12 is presented in Figure 1, and Table 2 shows the top 25 words from the word frequency query.



Figure 1. NVivo 12 Word Cloud.

Table 2

Word Frequency Count Breakdown

Word	Length	Count	Weighted percentage (%)
Cults	5	877	6.97
Groups	6	650	5.16
Police	6	607	4.83
Community	9	369	2.93
State	5	272	2.16
Activities	10	243	1.93
Rivers	6	240	1.91
Participation	13	197	1.56
Members	7	155	1.23
Combat	6	117	0.93

Criminals	9	109	0.87
Crime	5	104	0.83
People	6	98	0.78
Weapons	7	86	0.87
Organized	9	83	0.85
Businesses	10	78	0.80
Patrol	6	78	0.80
Arrest	6	75	0.80
Officers	8	74	0.76
Vehicles	8	74	0.76
Information	11	72	0.74
Kidnapping	11	64	0.66
Politicians	11	61	0.62
Fear	4	59	0.60
Arms	4	59	0.60

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is crucial in qualitative studies to ensure that research findings had integrity and accuracy. Ensuring integrity in the research process enables the study findings to have the needed effect on the problem and command respect by those who review the research. Trustworthiness entails accurate documentation of the data collection processes and the analysis procedures that led to any conclusions. As outlined in Chapter 3, ensuring trustworthiness meant that the study findings must be credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable. The steps needed to ensure trustworthiness as outline above were employed to support the results of this study and ensure trustworthiness in reporting the findings from this study. I made a great effort to ensure

that the qualitative interview protocol was strictly adhered to, keep track of the questions, and maintain uniformity in the data collection and analysis processes.

Credibility

Ensuring that study findings are credible is one of the main objectives of qualitative researchers. Interviewing participants for qualitative base studies requires having prolonged interaction with study participants during the interview process. Truthfulness in participants' responses to the research questions is critical to ensuring that study findings are credible. I intimate participants of the importance of honesty in their answers to the semistructured questions and any follow-up questions. I made efforts to build trust and create rapport with study participants by assuring them that the study was mainly for academic purposes and guaranteed their confidentiality and that of the data throughout the interview process. I also triangulated participants' responses from the phone interviews with handwriting notes taking during the interviews to find areas of convergence and reconcile any points of divergence. After transcription was complete, I undertook member checking to ensure that the transcripts accurately represent the participant's responses. Member checking enabled me to correct any discrepancies before I began the coding process. Finally, I kept a detailed account of the data collection process and the procedures for analysis. Study findings were based solely on the responses of the participants devoid of any personal biases.

Transferability

This study was limited to Rivers State; as such, study findings cannot be generalized to other States in Nigeria. However, qualitative researchers strive to ensure transferability in research processes to different settings. Transferability entails the ability to use similar research procedures in other contexts. I ensure transferability in this study by keeping a detailed account of not just the data collection and analysis processes but every single stage in the research process. A detailed report of research methods affords other researchers the ability to replicate this study approach in different settings with similar problems.

Dependability

Dependability is another vital element of trustworthiness in qualitative research. Dependability or reliability means the extent to which people can depend on the research findings to solve practical problems. I took steps to ensure that dependability was achieved in this study. One way I tried to ensure dependability in this study is to ensure that the responses of the participants served as the only tool upon which the analysis of the data depends. I took great effort to ensure that the interview questions specifically relate to the research questions and relied on existing literature for guidance in the formulation of the research questions. I also provide and kept a detailed account of every step in the data collection and analysis processes. I utilized data triangulation through participants' responses to the interview questions and handwriting notes taken during the interviews. I also conducted member checking after transcribing all the responses from

the interviews to ensure that the transcripts accurately reflect the views expressed by the participants in answers to the structured questions and during the phone interviews.

Confirmability

Confirmability in qualitative research refers to the objectivity and accuracy of data used in the analysis and study findings. It is important that others should be able to review the processes involved in research and confirmed that the procedures adhere to strict ethical standards and are accurate, as portrayed by the researcher. I ensure confirmability by keeping a detailed account of every step throughout the data collection processes. I also provided a rationale that justifies the choice of methodology and design for this study. Finally, I ensure that the undiluted responses of study participants formed the basis for analysis.

Results

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore police perception and decision making related to cult activities in Rivers State, Nigeria. The first research question was how the police perceived cult groups and the threats they pose to communities in Rivers State, Nigeria. The second research question was, what are the factors that influence police decision making related to cult activities in Rivers State, Nigeria. I recruited 20 police officers serving in communities in Rivers State with lived experience combating cult activities for this study using purposive sampling with a snowballing technique. Below, I present the major themes that emerged from the interviews, as reflected in participants' responses and triangulated with my handwriting

notes. The emerging themes are organized and will be presented according to the research questions that this study seeks to answer.

RQ1: How do the police perceived cult groups and the threats they pose to communities in Rivers State, Nigeria? Analysis of the data based on participants' responses to phone interviews and triangulated with handwriting notes revealed three main themes and two sub-themes. The themes are depicted in Table 3 below:

Table 3

How the Police Perceived Cult Groups and the Threats They Pose to Communities in Rivers State

Themes	Total frequencies (N= 20)	% of frequencies
Criminal groups	20	100%
Threat to public safety	20	100%
Cause of violent crime	20	100%
Threat to the police	20	100%
Cults are highly organized	16	72.2%

Note. The responses of several participants fall under multiple themes.

Theme 1: Cult Groups are Viewed as Criminals. The perception of Cult groups as criminals was evident throughout all 20 participants' responses. All participants viewed cult groups as criminal organizations whose activities run contrary to everything that the police stand for. Participants noted that cult groups had been banned not only in

Rivers State but across Nigeria. While the police have a responsibility to protect the lives and property of everyone in Rivers State, the activities of cult groups make that responsibility difficult. All 20 participants shared how cult groups were involved in crimes such as arm robbery, kidnapping, rape, assassination, extortion, political thuggery, and harassment. Participant 12 summed it up by stating that “When it comes to crime, especially violent crime in Rivers State, Cult members are involved in it one way or another.” Participant 12 further attributed all cases of violent crimes that are reported at their police station to be traceable to cult-related activities.

Participant 10 indicated that cult groups are engaged in criminal activities to raise much-needed money for their operations and to show how dangerous they are compared to their rivals. This sentiment was equally shared by Participant 14 who disclosed that cult members arrested confessed during interrogations that they often make a lot of money from kidnapping. Participant 14 further noted that “these boys often demand for millions of Naira for ransom.” The proceeds realized from kidnapping is what help fund the operations of cult groups in acquiring arms and ammunition and taking care of their financial needs.

Participant 13 indicated that some of the violent crimes carried out by cult members are in retaliation against rival gangs or an attempt to intimidate people suspected of cooperating with the police.

Participant 18 narrated the following concerning vengeance by cult groups:

There was an incident where cult members went to attack a rival gang member but met his absence at home. They then proceeded to execute all the family members in a very gruesome way just to make a statement.

This sentiment of cult members using violence as a tool of intimidation was also echoed by participant 15, who shared that:

All cases of assassinations and violence during election seasons that are carried out by cult members are aimed at intimidating and harassing political opponents of their paid masters.

Theme 2: Cult Groups Viewed as a threat to public safety and security: Cult groups present a severe threat to the safety and security of people living in communities in Rivers State. All 20 participants shared this sentiment in their responses to the interview questions. All participants stated that violent crimes perpetrated by members of cult groups created an environment in which people are fearful of going about their daily activities. Social, economic, and religious activities are severely impacted by the presence of cult members in any community. Participant 4 indicated that the frequent cult clashes in most cities across Rivers State have also affected academic calendars of schools that are in such communities. Cult clashes often result in the exchange of gunshots involving rival cult groups. Participant 5, 6, and 7 expressed the views that the security and safety of people in communities in Rivers State have deteriorated to the point where some residents have relocated to other cities. Cult activities have also forced some businesses to close shop or move their operational headquarters outside the State.

Participant 11 narrated how the frequent killings, rape, robbery, and kidnappings have made it impossible for people to engage in their normal activities. For example.

Participant 11 stated that:

These cult boys will boldly go to people's houses and businesses and asked them to give them money. Those who are unable or refused to pay are beaten, kidnapped, or have their properties vandalized.

Participant 11 further mentioned that he had received complaints of how Cult boys sent messages to people living in the cities asking them never to return home unless they send them money or be prepared to bury their parents and even grandparents. Intimidation and harassment are some of the tools used by cult groups to scare people from reporting their activities to the police.

Other participants equally echoed this feeling of insecurity. Participant 7, for instance, mentioned that:

One man approached our station and reported that some cult boys asked him to pay some money before doing his wedding ceremony if he wants it to be peaceful and successful. He had no choice than to cooperate with them to avoid their problem.

In some communities across the State, cult members appeared to have usurped existing leadership structures and became the de facto authorities regulating all social and economic activities.

A similar sentiment was echoed by participant 9, who said that two years ago, the security situation in the State was so severe that kidnappings were the other of the day. Participant 9 further stated that “at any point, we always have an active case of cult kidnapping or attempted kidnapping that we are working on.” There was consensus among participants that the activities of cult groups created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity in Rivers communities and threatened public safety.

Subtheme 1: Cult Groups Viewed as the Cause of Most Violent Crimes

All 20 participants noted that cult groups are responsible for the majority of the violent crimes occurring in Rivers State. Participants indicated that though cult groups are present in other states in Nigeria, Rivers State was at the epicenter of cult activities. Participant 1 mentioned that the various cult groups employed a lot of violence to instill fear in the public as well as to raise their profile among other rival cult groups.

Participant 2 stated:

The politicians sponsor cult groups to carry out most of their dirty games, especially during elections. The politicians armed these young boys during elections and abandoned most of them after elections. They have no option, therefore than to use these weapons to carry out violent crimes that can fetch them money.

Participant 2 also mentioned that most of the assassinations recorded in the state were carried out by members of secret cults on behalf of politicians. Cult members have strong ties with politicians in a kind of symbiotic relationship. Cult groups serves as political

thugs and help rig elections through hijacking of ballot boxes and intimidating political opponents while politicians provide them legal cover and material support.

Participant 16 concluded that cult groups are the “mother of all violent crimes in Rivers State.”

According to Participant 6, no single day passes without a reported incidence involving cult-related shootings. Most of these shootings are a result of cult clashes that often claimed not only the lives of rival cult members but also innocent bystanders.

Participant 17 recalled an incident that he investigated on New Year’s Eve in 2018, where cult members opened fire on innocent churchgoers killing several people.

Participant 17 also mentioned another event in which cult members completely wiped out a family of 5, including the father and mother, and deposited their bodies in the street.

Incidences like the ones described above, only demonstrate how violent cult groups are and the extent they can go to instill fear in the lives of communities in Rivers State.

Participant 17 further added that “Human lives do not mean anything to these cult boys.”

Subtheme 2: Cult Groups Viewed as Threat to Police Duties

One of the sub-themes that emerged from this study is that cult groups are viewed as a threat to police duties. All participants noted that cult groups are banned in Rivers State and Nigeria, making their very existence illegal. The activities of cult groups are antithetical to everything the police stand for as the legitimate law enforcement agency in the State with the constitutional mandate to protect lives and properties. Participant 1 stated that “we viewed cult groups as terrorists and an enemy of the State and I believe

they see us as an enemy too." By their mandate as a law enforcement agency, the police always have to engage heavily armed cult groups. These arm confrontation between the police and cult groups often do not end well as the police some time sustain casualties in the process. Most of the cult groups are heavily armed and have even more sophisticated weapons compared to the police. Participant 3 disclosed that "the weapons that we have are grossly inadequate and outdated compared to the type of weapons that cults have." The police have to intensify patrols and be extra vigilant as they are often the target of cult groups. Participant 7 stated that:

Not that we are afraid of cult groups, but we have to be more careful when we go on patrols. We make sure that we go in twos and threes with our weapon ready for any confrontation. The cult boys are always willing to give us a surprise attack while on routine patrol so that they can obtain our guns.

The enforcement of laws in Rivers State has become a perilous mission even for minor offenses. You never know what you are up against when going into most communities. Participant 8 mentioned that most communities have the presence of multiple cult groups, making their presence risky both on and off duty. Participant 8 further stated that:

We, the police, are not spirits. We are humans and have our life to live as well. We also have families that we have to return to at the end of the day; thus, we are cautious not to take any unnecessary risk. There are specific communities and places that are no go area unless you are prepared for war.

The risk posed to the police by cult groups is further aggravated by a corrupt judicial system that is willing to let arrested cult members free even with the most substantial evidence. Participant 9 narrated an incident where the court released a notorious cult member he arrested and prosecuted that was caught with guns. Participant 9 further stated that the risk posed by cult members that have been arrested and released on frivolous excuses by police hierarchy and judges present a grave danger to the police. This sentiment was echoed by participant 12, who narrated the following:

I was on off duty one day and saw a notorious cult member I have arrested a couple of weeks earlier. He was convicted by the court for cult related offenses only to be released within weeks. The said individual walk up to me and said officer, remember me? Am back. I will meet you again in the field. I later found out the boy was the son of one of the wealthy politicians in the State and a university student.

The incidence above only buttresses the dangers posed to officers in combating cult activities in a system that is marred by massive corruption. Participant 16 disclosed that cult groups had infiltrated the police making it difficult even to trust fellow officers. Participant 16 further stated that "you don't even know who you are working with as some officers are cult informants sadly."

Theme 3: Cult Groups are Viewed as Highly Organized. Another theme that came from participants' responses to the interview questions was the perception of cult groups as being very organized. 17 out of the 20 participants were of the opinion that cult

groups have a high degree of organization and leadership structure. However, 3 participants believe that cult groups were somehow organized and do not have a strong formal structure.

Participant 11 mentioned that cult groups operate a military-style leadership structure. The Capon is the leader, followed by other lieutenants. Punishment is very severe for any mistake. Some cult groups have their color of cap or hand bangle.

Participant 16 narrated how a particular cult using their enormous membership presence and networking was able to track one of their victims to another remote community and killed him. The various cult groups have presence in almost all the communities in Rivers State making it easier for them to track anyone that they consider an enemy. Similar sentiments were shared by participant 19, who stated that the “organization of cults goes way deeper than we know.” Participant 9 shared a story where one of the suspects who was arrested and taken into custody, utilized his enormous connection to get out. Participant 9 further stated that it was not up to an hour after he was caught with guns that several high-profile individuals began calling the station to inquire about the suspect. The Divisional police officer invited him to his office and ordered him to release the suspect. He tried to ask why, and the DPO stated that “it was an order from above.” The organization of cult groups goes beyond the street. Cult members exist in all strata of the Nigerian society.

Participants 13, 15, and 20, however, mentioned that cult groups are not as organized as we think. Participant 13, for example, indicated that members are not as

loyal to the group as previously believed. Participant 13 further mentioned that members often do whatever they want to do outside the group's control. Participant 20 expressed the view that the only thing that binds members together is the charisma of the leader. Once the leader is no longer there, things tend to fall apart.

RQ2: What factors influence police decision- making related to cult activities in Rivers State, Nigeria. Analysis of the data based on participants' phone interviews and triangulated with handwritten notes reveal six main themes. The themes are depicted in table 4 below.

Table 4

Factors That Influence Police Decision Making to Combat Cult Activities in Rivers State, Nigeria

Themes	Total frequency (N= 20)	% of frequencies
Logistics	20	100%
Equipment	20	100%
Political consideration	18	90%
Community collaboration	17	85%
Morale	20	100%
Personnel	15	75%

Note. The responses of several participants fall under multiple themes.

Theme 1: Logistics: Logistics is one of the biggest challenges facing the police in Rivers State in combating the criminal activities of cult groups based on the responses of

all 20 participants interviewed. The lack of operational vehicles needed to carry out patrols coupled with the geographical terrain of Rivers State presents a severe obstacle to active patrol of the communities. The problem of logistics was echoed by all 20 participants making it one of the top barriers that impede police efforts to combat cult activities in Rivers State.

Participant 19 narrated how someone came to the station and reported an incident of cult boys terrorizing one community. but the police do not have any vehicle to respond to the event. Participant 1 further stated that ordinarily, such a complaint would have warranted an immediate response, but there was simply no vehicle available to convey officers to respond to that situation. A similar sentiment was shared by participant 7 Who stated: "I know one police station serving 17 communities with only two operational vehicles." Under these circumstances, it is practically impossible to respond to service calls or carry out law enforcement responsibilities.

Participant 9 stated: "Some police stations that I know cannot boast of one vehicle in good working condition. This is how bad it is sadly." Participant 15 stated: "My station only has two working vehicles for patrols as I speak to you." Participant 10 indicated that:

There is no single police division in Rivers State that can honestly say that they have enough working vehicles for officer's responses to crime in Rivers State. It is even worse for communities in the Riverine areas of the State.

Participant 14 mentioned that the terrain of Rivers State makes it difficult for the police to access every part of the State. Participant 14 further shared that Rivers State comprises of the Riverine and upland. He stated that while it is easier for the police to access most places in the upland, the same cannot be said about the Riverine areas.

This sentiment was also shared by participant 6, who shared that Sometimes the police received reports of cults terrorizing some communities in the Riverine areas but are utterly helpless because they do not have any means of getting to the creeks. “We do not even have patrol cars much more speed boats to access communities along the Rivers and Creeks.”

Theme 2: Lack of Equipment. Another serious challenge facing the police in Rivers State in combating cult activities in Rivers State is the lack or shortage of necessary equipment. The theme of equipment shortage or lack thereof was present in all 20 participant's responses when asked about the factors that hinder police effort to combat cult activities in Rivers State. The term equipment, as used here, includes things like arms and ammunition, personal protective equipment like bulletproof vests, radios, uniforms, flashlights, and other electronic devices and first aid, among others. The lack of equipment puts police officers at a disadvantage and undue harm when in combat against well-armed cult groups.

Participant 1 discussed that cult groups have more sophisticated weapons that they acquire through proceeds from oil bunkering, kidnapping, and arm robbery.

Participant 1 further mentioned that some cult groups even have all-purpose machine

guns, anti-aircraft rockets, grenades, and other military-style weapons. “We, the police, cannot lay our hands on any of these types of firearms.”

Participant 5 disclosed that: the weapons that the police have are outdated and often no match for the kinds of weapons that the cult members have. This has seriously put us at a disadvantage during encounters with cult groups and other criminals in Rivers State.

Participant 8 mentioned that some divisions in Rivers State “do not even have 25 arms in their armory. Even the 25 arms may not have enough ammunition in them.” So, you have a situation whereby most officers work without a gun on them. Participant 8 further shared that most rank and file police officers do not go home with a service weapon as in other countries, so they cannot even respond to any crime off duty. Lack of necessary equipment especially arms and ammunition not only hampered police ability to combat the criminal activities of cult groups but pose a serious threat to officer’s safety. Participant 7 disclosed that equipment such as radios are a rare commodity in almost all the police stations in Rivers State. Participant 7 shared the following:

No single police station in Rivers State have a radio for every officer on duty.

Some police stations with about 100 officers may have like six radios and two chargers. So, you have a case whereby a police patrol vehicle with about six officers will have only one radio for communication. Even the radio available could not transmit all over the city. There is no tracking device accessible to the police units, except maybe the elite units.

Theme 3: Political consideration. The influence of politicians looms significant over police decision- making to combat cult activities in Rivers State. Politicians wield considerable power over the police and any public official in Rivers State. Most police officers stated that police actions are contingent and dependent on the interest of politicians and other wealthy individuals in the State. All 20 participants indicated that cult groups are the creation of politicians in the State. The latter armed and used them to intimidate their opponents and rigged elections and abandoned them when the election is over. The participants noted that some of the politicians are themselves patrons of the various cult groups.

Participant 11 mentioned that it is an open secret that there are “sacred cows who are known cult kingpins that must not be touched by the police.” Even if you arrest them, the politicians will call the police chief and got them released. So, it’s like a wasted effort for the police to arrest some cult members suspected of criminal activities This sentiment was shared by other participants as well.

Participant 9 stated that:

One of the notorious cultists that we were looking for was staying openly in the compound of a well-respected politician. I informed my Boss about it, and he said I should let him handle it from there. I never heard anything about it again.

Participant 5 stated that:

A lot of things go on behind the scenes that people do not know. The last thing that you want to do is to act against the interest of a powerful politician in the State. The politicians can orchestrate your transfer and even dismissal. It is that simple. Even the police chiefs have a political Godfather that he or she answers to. That is Nigeria for you.

Theme 4: Lack of Community Collaboration. Another item that emerged from an analysis of the semi-structured interview was the importance of community collaboration in police decision making to combat cult groups. Several participants mentioned that the level of cooperation between the police and some communities determines how police respond to cult activities. Participant 6 shared that some cities are hostile to the police and unwilling to share information on the hideouts of cult boys. Participant 6 further mentioned that some community chiefs use these boys to fight their inter-communal and chieftaincy battles and are reluctant to reveal their identities. Participant 13 said that even when the police respond to cult crashes in some communities, people who are eyewitnesses to murder refuses to talk to the police. Participant 16 stated:

When we received a report of cult crashes in some communities, you will start hearing officers saying let them sort it out themselves because when we asked them to give us information on these boys, they refused.

Participant 11 mentioned that, unfortunately, the police are not getting needed information from the community members who happened to know the cult members and

where they live. Participant 11 mentioned that the lack of trust between the police and the community hampered information sharing. Also, some of the community heads and youth leaders happened to belong to one cult group or another and will do whatever it takes to shield them away from the police.

Participant 17 stated:

A vehicle belonging to a notorious kidnapper and cultist was found in the compound of a community chief while the police were busy looking for him. The only time that the community will cooperate with the police is when they have information about cult members that are not supporting them.

Participant 15 shared that although the cult groups have sophisticated weapons, accurate information can put the police in a better situation when they encounter cult groups.

Participant 15 further mentioned that precise information given to the police led to the arrest of some cult members that were planning criminal activities in a forest in Rivers State. Assorted sophisticated arms and ammunition were recovered from them as the police took them by surprise.

Theme 5. Police Officer's Low Morale. All 20 participants in their responses to the interview questions indicated that the confidence of police officers in Rivers State is low. Participants mentioned that the condition of service of police officers is deplorable and negatively impacted their ability to put in their best efforts. Participant 8 mentioned that the issue of cultism in Rivers State is very complex, and even the government is doing lip service when it comes to combating cult activities. Participant 8 also said that

“the same government that wants you to fight cultism is the same one sponsoring the cult groups and providing them with financial and material support.”

Participant 6 mentioned that: Sometimes I wonder whether fighting cult groups is worth the risk. “How can I risk my life and my family because of police work when my salary cannot even take care of my family.”

Participant 5 stated that:

Even some senior police officers will tell you that you should not carry police work on your head. That if you want to last in the force, you should not try to be a hero because even the IG (inspector general) does not have your back.

Participant 3 shared that the only reason he is still in the force is that he had no alternative source of income. Participant 3 also stated that the police do not provide uniform or any assistance to do the job. According to participant 3, the police have to resort to taking bribe from motorists and citizens just to buy gas and repair police vehicles.

Theme 6: Inadequate Personnel. Personnel shortage was also one of the recurring themes that show up in most participants' responses to the interview questions. 15 out of the 20 participants believed that personnel shortage hampered smooth policing and efforts to combat cult groups. Participant 16 mentioned that the number of police officers available is not enough for the ever-growing population of Rivers State. Participant 10 mentioned that part of the reason for personnel shortage is due to mismanagement of available personnel. Participant 10 further suggested that most of the

police officers are assigned to politicians and people considered very important personalities or VIPs at the expense of public security.

Participant 6 shared that sometimes when reports of cult clashes are received, most police stations do not have the necessary number of officers that can quiet things down. It may take a combined unit from multiple divisions to respond. Personnel shortage no doubt hampered the ability of the police to respond to multiple incidences of cult activities.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore police perception and decision making -related to cult activities in Rivers State, Nigeria. In this chapter, I present the findings from the analysis of the semistructured phone interviews conducted with 20 police officers who serve in communities in Rivers State with lived experience combating cult activities. I coded and analyzed the data using Saldana's (2016) coding system to identify themes that addressed the research questions. Through data analysis, the two research questions of How do the police perceived cult groups and the threats they pose to communities in Rivers State and what factors influence police decision making related to cult activities in Rivers State, Nigeria, were adequately addressed.

In the next chapter, I will present the interpretations of my study findings, limitations of the study, as well as make some recommendations for future research on

this topic. I will also discuss the implications for public policy and positive social change and provide a conclusion to this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The criminal activities of cult groups in communities across Rivers State possess serious threat to the safety and security of lives and properties (Britain, 2015; Medianayose, 2016). The illegal activities of cult groups also threatened the police in the discharge of their constitutional duties of protecting lives and properties. Cult groups are engaged in criminal activities such as arm robbery, rape, kidnapping, assassinations, oil bunkering, destruction of properties, and political thuggery (Adiboye & Duru, 2016; Owonikoko, 2016). The illegal activities of cult groups have led to the loss of lives and damage of properties, and have created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity. Economic and social activities have suffered as a result of the uncertainty that has characterized life in communities in Rivers State (Agbiboa, 2014; Nche et al., 2019). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore police perception and decision making related to cult activities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

This study sample comprised of 20 police officers ($N = 20$) with lived experience combating cult activities and serving in communities in Rivers State. I selected participants for this study through purposive sampling with a snowballing technique to ensure that only participants with practical knowledge of cult groups and their criminal activities in Rivers State were included in the study. I obtained data through semistructured phone interviews conducted via Zoom and WhatsApp. The interviews occurred between April 25 and May 30, 2020. Each of the interviews lasted between 30

and 45 minutes and was audio recorded using Sonny ICD-UX 560 digital voice recorder. This study filled an existing gap in the literature on cult groups and their criminal activities in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Interpretation of the Findings

To explore police perception and decision making related to cult activities in Rivers State, I recruited and interviewed 20 police officers serving in communities in Rivers State, where cult activities are prevalent. I conducted this qualitative phenomenological study to answer two research questions. RQ1: How do the police perceived cult groups and the threats they pose to communities in Rivers State? RQ2: What factors influence police decision making to combat cult activities in Rivers State, Nigeria? Lipsky's (1978; 1980) SLBT served as the theoretical framework that I used to interpret the findings of this study. SLBT explains how public servants such as police officers exercise discretion in the performance of their duties in light of threat perception, resource availability, and conflict goals. I will now present the themes and interpret the results to address the two research questions in the next section.

RQ1: How do the police perceive cult groups and the threats they pose to communities in Rivers State?

Theme 1: Cult Groups Viewed as Criminal groups

The first research question was: How do the police perceived cult groups and the threats they pose to communities in Rivers State, Nigeria? One of the themes that emerged from this study was that the police viewed cult groups as criminals. The

perception of cult groups as criminals is because cult groups are legally banned not only in Rivers State but all across Nigeria (Owonikoko, 2016). As criminal groups, participants noted that cult groups are engaged in a variety of crimes that fall within Rivers State and Nigeria's criminal codes. This perception is consistent with previous studies that have indicated that cult groups were involved in a sundry of criminal offenses such as rape, arm robbery, assassinations, and kidnapping (Brittain, 2015; Mediayanose, 2016). The perception of cult groups as criminals and not just some wayward youths influences how the police approach cult-related issues. As criminals who are well equipped with dangerous weapons, the police must weigh their responses to cult groups against the availability of resources needed to engage and be successful in an armed confrontation. Lipsky (1978; 1980) indicated that the police, as SLBs, are motivated by selfish interest and are inclined to perform their work in ways that minimize harm and maximize success.

Theme 2: Cult Groups Viewed as Threat to Public Safety and Security

The presence of cult groups in Rivers State has negatively affected the safety and security of lives and property. The menace posed by the various cult groups operating in Rivers State and its negative impact on social and economic activities has drawn the police's attention. In a state with a high unemployment rate, especially among the teeming youth population, cult groups' actions have further aggravated the already-precarious situation (Chiazor et al., 2017; Egbefo et al., 2017). Police perception of cult groups as a threat to public safety accounts for why the police have been very proactive

in combating cult groups. Police efforts in setting up units such as anticultism unit, kidnapping unit, and other rapid crime response squads undermined the severe obligation of the police to safeguarding public lives and property. Lipsky (1978) identified threat perception as one of the factors that can be attributed to SLBs' actions or inaction. The threat posed by cult groups to the safety and security of lives in Rivers State has received much-needed attention in the literature (Abiboa & Duru, 2014; Nche et al., 2016; Owonikoko, 2016). Cult groups and the criminal activities that they are engaged in have created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity in Rivers State (Ezeonu, 2014; Usang & Ikpemme, 2015; Uchenna, 2014).

Subtheme 1: Cult Groups Viewed as Cause of Most Violent Crimes

Police officers perceived cult groups as the leading cause of violent crimes in Rivers State. The use of extreme violence characterizes the operations of cult groups (Nche, 2019). Cult groups employ violence as a tool of intimidation and instill fear in not just the public but also rival cults. The use of violence by cult groups influences how police officers approach their work. Lipsky (1980) characterized police officers as SLBs who often work under complicated circumstances and are expected to solve all societal ills. Lipsky (1978) noted that police officers carrying out their work are motivated by selfish reasons and the desire to perform their work while avoiding harm. The decision to avoid the risk associated with police work may sometimes account for police actions and inactions in combating cult groups and their criminal activities. The theme of violence is consistent with existing literature on cultism. Seleye-Fubara and Bob-Yellowe (2005)

noted that cult groups accounted for more than 60.3% of all violent crimes in Rivers State between 1999 and 2003.

Subtheme 2: Cult Groups Viewed as a Threat to Police Duties

The police have a constitutional obligation to protect the lives and properties of Rivers State communities (Eze, 2015; Otusanya et al., 2015). The activities of cult groups hamper the performance of this legal obligation. Based on participants' responses to the research questions, it is undeniable that cult activities pose a threat to the police as well. The police are often the target of the various cult groups who perceive the police as a threat to their criminal activities. The activities of cult groups are antithetical to everything the police stand for, and that explains the reason for the deep hatred of cult groups towards the police. The ability of cult groups to possess sophisticated arms and ammunition and their extensive networking makes police officers vulnerable to attacks.

According to participants, cult groups possess sophisticated arms and ammunition compared to the outdated weapons of the police (Ozughalu, 2016; Watts, 2018). The lack of sufficient and updated arms and ammo puts the police at a severe disadvantage during encounters with cult groups (Ogunyemi & Laguda, 2016). In view of the threats posed by cult groups, the police must resort to discretion in how they approach their work, which is consistent with the ideas embodied in Lipsky's street-level bureaucracy theory. How the police perceive the threats posed by cult groups to their ability to discharge their duties accounts for police action or inaction in responding to incidences involving cult groups in Rivers State communities. Threat perception is one of the three propositions identified in

street-level bureaucracy theory that influences how public servants such as the police approach their work.

Theme 3: Cult Groups Viewed as Highly Organized

Another notable theme that emerged from this study when asked how participants perceived cult groups is the perception that cult groups are highly organized. An active organization is an essential element that influences the survivability of any group, and cult groups are no exceptions. Cult groups continuous proliferation in communities across Rivers State could be attributed in part to their active organization and leadership structure. Most participants noted that the police had found it challenging to penetrate cult groups and gather needed intelligence to help the police in combating cultism. The absence of equipment and resources needed to gather intelligence affects police ability to penetrate the inner workings of cult groups. Lipsky (1978; 1980) identified resource availability as an essential factor influencing how SLBs perform their work. Cult groups operate a military-style structure with a strong emphasis on discipline and cohesiveness. The active organization of cult groups has enabled them to increase their recruitment and build networking structures across virtually all communities in Rivers State. The continuous proliferation of cult groups despite police efforts to combat them is well documented in the literature (Adiboye & Duru, 2016; Owonikoko, 2016).

RQ2: What factors influence police decision making related to cult activities in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Theme 1: Logistics

Logistic is one of the recurring themes in all participants' responses when asked about the factors that influence police decision making to combat cult activities in Rivers State. The police in Rivers State does not have enough vehicles to carry out a preventative patrol of the communities and respond to service calls (Ogunyemi & Laguda, 2016). Several participants mentioned that most police stations in Rivers State serving multiple communities do not have more than five operational patrol vehicles. The lack of operational vehicles has resulted in a situation whereby police officers are helpless to respond to cult activities and crime in general. The lack of patrol vehicles is due to inadequate police funding, corruption, and bad maintenance culture (Bamidele & Ayodele, 2016; Hope, 2017). Lipsky (1978) identified resource availability as one factor taking into consideration by SLBs, such as the police, in the discharge of their duties. The enormous responsibility that police work entails, coupled with public demand, does not square with the resources available, forcing the police to delay specific actions or avoid them altogether. The police's inability to respond to issues of cult activities often result in a public complaint of police ineffectiveness because they are unaware of this logistic constraint.

Theme 2: Lack of Equipment

Another theme that emerged from an analysis of participants' responses to the semistructured interview questions was the lack of equipment needed to do their work. All 20 police officers interviewed decried the lack of necessary equipment required to carry out their work. Researchers have indicated that the police lack the resources to

carry out their work. Studies by Albert and Okoli (2016), Oluwagbenga (2017), and Salihu and Gholami (2018) have indicated that the Nigerian police lack basic things such as patrol vehicles and communication equipment. The Nigerian police work under very extraordinary circumstances that pose grave danger and harm to them. Police officers have a constitutional responsibility to protect the lives and properties of people living in communities in Rivers State. Police task of law enforcement and maintaining the peace required that they encounter criminals who are well equipped with dangerous weapons and bent on disturbing the peace (Agbiboa, 2015). Therefore, the police must have all the necessary tools needed to be effective. Unfortunately, the police in Rivers State lack essential devices such as radios for communication, flashlights, bulletproof vests, and, most important, arms and ammunition. The lack of needed equipment puts police officers at a disadvantage when combating cult groups. Therefore, police officers are constrained to make very unusual decisions that may conflict with their stated mission of protecting lives and properties. The use of discretion is an essential element of street-level bureaucracy theory. The difference between action and inaction by the police is contingent on resource availability and other situational factors and not on any standard policy guidelines (Lipsky, 2010).

Theme 3: Political Consideration

The role played by politicians in transforming college confraternities into cult groups has strong empirical support in the literature on cultism (Mediayanose, 2016; Owonokoko, 2016). We now know that cult groups were primarily created by politicians

who armed and equipped unemployed youths to cause violence, intimidate political opponents, and rig elections. Politics is seen as a do or die affair in Nigeria; as such, some politicians often use violence to ensure that they win elections. Once in office, the politicians do whatever is necessary to protect members of cult groups who have done their bidding and ensure that they won their elections. Politicians in Nigeria wield enormous power over the police, starting with the inspector general of police who is appointed by the president (Otusanya et al., 2017). The politicians use their ill-gotten wealth to influence police decisions. Several participants interviewed alluded to the political influence that is made to bear on the police as to whom to arrest and who not to arrest. Police decision- making, and the exercise of discretion depends tremendously upon the prevailing political environment and the interest of influential stakeholders mostly politicians (Albert & Okoli, 2016). Therefore, police actions and inactions in combating cult groups tend not to conflict with the interest of other stakeholders who control police funding, promotion, and even transfers and dismissal. Lipsky (1978;1980) identified conflict goals as one of the organizational barriers that confront SLBs, and how they resolve these conflicts determines their survivability.

Theme 4: Lack of Community Collaboration

Cult groups are prevalent in most communities across Rivers State (Nche, 2019; Nche et al., 2019). The fact that cult members are youths who are supposed to be the leaders of tomorrow require not only a law enforcement approach to solving it but a more holistic approach. Cult members are youths who reside in various communities and are

known by people who live in those communities. A recognition of this fact was one of the driving forces behind the introduction of community policing in Rivers State and Nigeria. Community policing is a policing strategy that required active collaboration between the police and the communities to identify and solve crime and disorders (Mafstroki et al., 2016). Police community collaboration enhances information sharing that could help with police decision-making. Lipsky (1980) identified threat perception as an essential factor that influences the exercise of discretion. How the police perceived the threats pose by cult groups affects the kind of collaborative relationships that they formed with communities in Rivers State (Lipsky, 1978; 1980).

Theme 5: Police Officer's Low Morale

The police in Rivers State work under harsh conditions, yet underpaid. Like in most countries, the police in Rivers State has been a blue-collar job with relatively low pay. Police officers comprised one of the lowest-paid public servants in Nigeria. Chinwokwu (2017) and Ladapo (2013) noted that police salaries in Nigeria could not support a family of two or enable officers to meet up their basic financial needs. The poor working conditions of police officers was collaborated by most of the participants I interviewed for this study. Also, police officers work very long hours and under very stressful circumstances. The condition of service of police officers in Rivers State is deplorable (Schulch & Rabe-Harp, 2018).

Officers must use their meager salary to buy even uniforms and other things that the police should provide ordinary. Participants interviewed reported that even survivors

of police officers who died in the line of duty have difficulty getting their entitlements. The poor conditions of the work of police negatively affect the officer's morale and the ability to fight criminals such as cult members. Systemic corruption in Nigerian society and the police and bureaucratic bottlenecks makes it difficult for the police to have better salary and conditions of service (Akinlabi, 2017; Hope, 2017). The low morale of police officers resulting from the paltry wage and condition of service presents a conflict of interest against the policy goals of the police organization. Lipsky's street-level bureaucracy theory indicated that SLBs such as the police are motivated by selfish reasons. These selfish reasons include the desire to avoid harm considering the poor conditions of service that they perceived as unfair. When the achievement of these selfish goals appeared unrealizable, it pitches the officers' interest against organizational goals and affects policy objectives.

Theme 6: Inadequate Personnel

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was the issue of personnel shortage. Police officers have a responsibility to protect the lives and properties of residents in Rivers State. Protecting the lives and properties of people in Rivers communities' entails patrolling all nook and crannies of the cities enforcing laws, maintaining the peace, and providing services to the citizens. Entib et al. (2018) noted that the police are asked to respond to all kinds of services outside their traditional duty. Ensuring timely response to the numerous calls for service and policing a state like Rivers State with cult activities and criminals on the rampage require having sufficient

police officers. Ogunyemi and Laguda (2016) noted that police recruitment had not kept pace with Nigeria's ever-increasing population. Ogunyemi and Laguda (2016) put the number of police officers in Nigeria at 370,000, which approximates to a ratio of 1 police officer to every 459 Nigerians. The mismanagement of police personnel further compounds the shortage of personnel. Participants interviewed for this study recanted the unusual allocation of scarce police resources, especially staff, to protect politicians and other people considered very important personalities (VIPs). Allocating many police officers to protect private individuals has severely affected the ability to adequately provide safety and security for the teeming population of Rivers State. The problem of personnel shortage meant that the police had to exercise discretion and ration service to focus their patrol. Lipsky's (1978, 1980) Street-level bureaucracy theory explains how low-level government employees, such as the police, are given very ambiguous goals to achieve with little or no resources to achieve set goals. The issue of resource availability forces the police to make very significant compromises and avoid specific actions. The exercise of police discretion based on personnel shortage does not augur well with citizens who expect more of the police and thus citizen complaints of police ineffectiveness.

Limitations of the Study

This qualitative phenomenological study is limited to Rivers state and involved only participants serving in Rivers State communities where cult activities are prevalent. Although the methodology and design used for this study can be replicated to study

similar problems in other settings, results emanating from this study cannot be generalized to other states in Nigeria. Another limitation was that this study took place during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic; thus, my preferred format of a face to face interview was replaced with zoom and WhatsApp. While the use of zoom and WhatsApp does not affect the results in any way, the intimacy and ability to capture detail nonverbal clues and establishing rapport with study participants as in a face to face setting was limited. Also, there was the possibility of social desirability bias. Participants could have exaggerated their experiences combating the criminal activities of cult groups in Rivers State to be in the research or omitted some details that could have further enriched the study outcome. This problem was, however, addressed as participants were instructed to be honest in their responses to interview questions. Finally, the sample used in this study may not be representative of all police officers serving in Rivers State. While having a representative sample was not a target for this study, I however, took great effort to ensure that the sample used in this study have both male and female participants.

Recommendations for future Research

The purpose of this study was to extend the body of knowledge concerning a phenomenon. This research filled a gap in knowledge concerning cult groups and their criminal activities in Rivers State, Nigeria. The data from this study will help future researchers to understand the full dimension of cult groups and their illegal activities. Future researchers could further explore each of the barriers confronting the police to gain a deeper understanding of their impacts on police efforts to combat cult activities.

Another recommendation is that other researchers should explore the use of different methodologies and theoretical frameworks to examine further some of the challenges confronting the police in combating cult activities in Rivers State and how those challenges affects police decision making. The phenomenological approach used in this current study was useful to understand individual experiences concerning cult activities. Finally, future researchers should replicate this study in a different setting or State in Nigeria to see if differences in political environments and socio-economic factors affect police perception of cult groups and their decision making to combat cult activities.

Implications for Policy

The criminal activities of cult groups in Rivers State undoubtedly present severe threats to the safety and security of lives and properties. The illegal activities of cult groups equally affect the Police as the enforcement of laws and peace maintenance becomes a dangerous mission in Rivers State. Cult groups and other criminals operating in Rivers State did not happen in a vacuum. Chwukwu (2017), Onuma (2016), and Here and Okusun (2017) has attributed the presence of cult groups and youth criminality in Rivers State to be due in part to structural deficiencies that have created an environment that is characterized by extreme poverty and youth unemployment. Ugoani (2015) noted that successive Nigerian governments and multi-national oil companies operating in Rivers State and the Niger Delta region have failed to make needed investment in the area despite its enormous resources and contribution to the Nigerian economy. The time has come for Rivers State government and businesses operating in the State to invest in

human resource development such as job training, education, and financial assistance such as soft loans to enable people to start small scale businesses. These measures will help reduce the high level of unemployment in the State and provide alternatives to youths considering joining cult groups and engaging in crime. Systemic corruption at all levels of the Nigerian society, including the Police, has made it impossible to have a professional Police that can virtually attend to the security needs of the teeming population of Rivers State. Corruption at all levels of society, including the Police, must be addressed vigorously to ensure that the Police have needed resources to discharge their duties. Improving the working conditions of the Police couple with adequate training and improve wages are critical to reducing police corruption and boosting officer's morale. Setting up a police ombudsman could help provide oversight of police resources management and enhance police administrators' accountability.

Study findings suggest the need for an overhaul of the Police in Rivers State and Nigeria. No agency of the criminal justice system work in isolation and the Police is no exception. Ensuring that the Police fulfill their constitutional role and effectively combat crime will require active collaboration between all justice system agencies. Also, the need for an all stakeholder approach, including families, civil society, businesses, religious, and non-governmental organizations, is needed in the battle against cult groups. All stakeholders must emphasize the need for value re-orientation and sensitization of youths on the dangers of joining cult groups and crime in general. Understanding some of the police's challenges could help create good police/community collaboration in combating

crime and improving police legitimacy. Another policy implication of this study is the need to effectively manage scarce police resources, especially personnel, to better focus on crime prevention.

Finally, laws must be able to keep pace with evolving trends concerning cult activities. The legislature must ensure that laws are up to date, strict, and capable of providing both specific and general deterrents to youths considering joining cult groups. Also, adequate mechanisms must be put in place to ensure laws and due processes in the criminal justice system.

This research aimed to understand better how the Police perceived cult groups and the factors that influence their decision-making in combating cult criminal activities. I believe those two goals have been addressed based on the results of this study.

Implications for Social change

Cult illegal activities threatened the safety of lives and properties in Rivers State. Cult groups are engaged in such crimes as rape, arm robbery, kidnapping, oil bunkering, political thuggery, and assassinations. Fear and insecurity have characterized life in communities across the state. This study's findings could help contribute to positive social change for the police and communities across Rivers State. The first step needed to ensure positive social change is transparency. Communities across Rivers State need to know the challenges that confront the police to know the reasons for police actions and inactions concerning the criminal activities of cult groups and crime in general. Understanding some of the challenges that confront the police can help build a good

working relationship between the police and communities and enhance information sharing to combat the menace of cult groups. Another step needed to create positive social change is to ensure that corruption is minimized in public life, including the police. There is no doubt that corruption has negatively impacted police funding and makes it difficult for the police to get much-needed resources and improved service conditions. Findings from this study indicate that conditions of service of police officers in Rivers State and Nigeria are deplorable compared to their counterparts in developed countries. The poor working conditions of police officers in Rivers State have affected their morale and commitment to perform their duties effectively. Ensuring that the police have needed resources and improved conditions of service will enable them to better combat cult activities, thereby making communities in Rivers State safe.

Understanding police perception and decision making will help the police better prioritize their resources and enhance police effectiveness. Data from this study will help police and policymakers in their decision-making processes to better combat the criminal activities of cult groups. Having well-trained police with the resources needed to perform their duties alongside communities and other stakeholders is the key to combating cult activities and making communities in Rivers State a safer place to live and do business. Data from this study would help the police curtail the menace of cult groups, reduce the fear of crime, and ensure the safety and security of lives and properties. The ability of the police to effectively combat the criminal activities of cult groups would be a positive

social change that would improve economic and social conditions of communities across Rivers State.

Conclusion

Cult groups are youth groups engaged in all sorts of criminal activities operating in Rivers State and all parts of Nigeria. Cult groups that originated from campus confraternities have become so deadly that their activities have been banned in Rivers state and across Nigeria. The actions of cult groups present severe challenges to the police in the discharge of their duties and the safety and security of lives and properties of communities across Rivers state. This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to explore police perception and decision making related to cult activities in Rivers State. Understanding police perception and decision making are critical to understanding the full dimension of cult groups as a phenomenon of interest to the police and communities across Rivers State.

The continuous proliferation of cult groups and the accompanying destruction of lives and properties resulting from their activities have raised a serious question concerning the police's effectiveness as the preeminent law enforcement agency in the State. This feeling of police ineffectiveness in the face of a continuous threat by cult groups has led to citizen complaints. Therefore, it was essential to understand how the police perceived cult groups and what factors guide their decision making in combating cult activities. Lipsky's street-level bureaucracy theory served as the theoretical lens through which the two research questions are addressed. Street-level bureaucracy theory

explains the disconnect between government policies and implementation by low-level employees such as the police. The importance of resource availability, threat perception, and conflict goals and the need for discretion because of these challenges help guide this study.

The findings of this study support existing literature on cult groups in Rivers State. Police perception of cult groups as criminals, violent, organized, a threat to public safety, and harming the socio-economic lives of Rivers State is well supported in the literature (Nche, 2019; Nche et al., 2019; Owonikoko, 2016)). On the second research question of the factors that influence police decision making in their effort to combat cult activities, results also support previous studies. Issues of corruption, logistics, equipment, lack of community collaboration, and officers' morale identified in this study are also supported in the literature (Albert & Okoli, 2016; Oluwagbenga, 2017; Salihu & Gholami, 2018; Schulch & Rabe-Harp, 2018).

Cult groups present a severe problem to the police and citizens of Rivers communities due to the criminal activities they are engaged in. The need to have professional and well-equipped police are needed to combat the activities of cult groups better. An all hands-on deck approach involving the police, communities, government, and other stakeholders is required to better combat cult groups and their activities. In this chapter, I present the interpretations of the study findings, discuss the limitations of the study, make some recommendations for future research, and discuss the

implications for public policy and positive social change. This chapter concludes the study.

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