

2020

## The Lived Experiences of Reformed Armed Robbers in Nigeria

Patrick Akem-Vingir  
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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Patrick Akem-Vingir

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Walden University  
2020

Abstract

The Lived Experiences of Reformed Armed Robbers in Nigeria

by

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LLM, University of Kent, 2003

LLB, University of Lagos, 1989

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Criminal Justice

Walden University

May 2020

## Abstract

Armed robbery has affected Nigeria for years and is escalating; in 2019 there were 13,278 cases reported and 15,719 persons arrested. The purpose of this phenomenological study, guided by deterrence theory and anomie theory, was to explore the lived experiences of reformed young adult armed robbers who engaged in crimes from ages 18-25 in Lagos, Nigeria and belonged to street gangs. Data were drawn from a purposeful sample of 10 reformed armed robbers and 10 rehabilitated members of street gangs. Semistructured interviews were used for data collection. The lived experiences offered textual descriptions of the factors that precipitate participation in armed robbery activities. Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach served as the analysis framework to extract relevant themes such as family background, access to small arms, peer pressure, influence of alcohol and drugs, gang membership, belief in charms, police corruption, ineffective criminal justice system, unafraid of death, and disinterested in armed robbery. Key findings of the study provided evidence that the death penalty does not deter young adults from engaging in armed robbery activities. Findings from the study and its recommendations may contribute to positive social change; government is better informed about measures to reduce crimes, communities are safer, unemployment is reduced in Nigeria, government may adopt new policy initiatives to address the danger posed by armed robbery.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to first, my Lord and Master, Jesus the Christ who works in me both to will, and to do of His good pleasure. I recognize profoundly, the love and patience of my wife Mrs. May Toluwa Akem-Vingir. I thank God for bringing our destinies together. I love you! Finally, I thank my children, Steve and Olive bearing with me as I labored to earn a Ph.D. I love you guys.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Armed robbery in Nigeria severely affects socioeconomic activities, particularly in major cities, highways, and suburban areas (Aigbovo & Eidenoje, 2016; Nwankwo & Okolie-Osemene, 2016; Obubu & Nwokolo, 2016; Owagbemi, 2017; Usman, 2015). This crime contributes to the rising wave of insecurity in the country, putting lives at significant risk, threatening commercial activities, and reducing foreign investments (Aigbovo & Eidenoje, 2016; Aliyu, Ibrahim, Mohammed, & Jatau, 2016; Oduwole, 2015). Armed robbery has affected Nigeria since its independence and immediately after the civil war in 1970. Between June 2006 and September 2015, for instance, armed robbery accounted for about 50% of the 8,516 deaths reported from 3,840 fatal incidents nationwide (Nwankwo & Okolie-Osemene, 2016).

The death penalty, also referred to as “capital punishment,” currently serves as a sanction for those convicted for armed robbery in Nigeria (Aigbovo & Eidenoje, 2016; Aliyu et al., 2016; Oduwole, 2015). Many Nigerians contend that this punishment deters armed robbery activities in the country. Though evidence on the deterrent effect of capital punishment remains controversial, the nation has maintained it as a sanction for the offense. However, it is important for Nigeria to align with many other nations that are reconsidering their capital punishment policies or even abolishing it as a sanction (Amnesty International, 2016; Amnesty International, 2017, 2018; Hood & Hoyle, 2015; Lowenstein, 2016; Sahni & Shah, 2016; Schabas, Arroyo, & Takayama, 2012), especially because there is a lack of literature regarding the extent to which capital punishment deters participation in armed robbery activities by young men in Lagos State.

## Background of the Study

Armed robbery, an offense committed using weapons to threaten or inflict injury or bodily harm, remains prevalent in Nigeria. Suspected armed robbers, some of whom are detained in maximum security prisons sometimes without trial for as long as 20 years, constitute a significant portion of the prison population (Olashore, Akanni, & Akanni, 2017; Orjiakor, et al., 2017; Oyeleke, Tanga, & Ishola 2017). The crime has reached an epidemic level in Nigeria, causing instability and negatively affecting foreign investments (Abbas, Bakari, & Abba, 2012; Abdulkabir, 2017; Arinze, 2010). Further, armed robbers (mostly young adults) inflict gunshot wounds and kill Nigerians and foreigners (Abbas et al., 2012; Aliyu et al., 2016; Etuk & Nnam, 2018), increase the levels of poverty and unemployment (Oguntunde, Ojo, Okagbue, & Oguntunde, 2018), and contribute to insecurity of lives and property (Akujobi & Jack, 2017; Duruji & Dibia, 2017; Uchechukwu & Azubuike; 2016).

Though Nigeria is the sixth largest exporter of crude oil in the world, there is underdevelopment, unemployment, and corruption (Duruji & Dibia, 2017; Osaghae, 2015; Umukoro, 2013; Watts, 2004), which leads to armed robbery. Additionally, Nigeria's status as the sixth largest oil-producing nation in the world further suggests an issue with the pervasive poverty in the country (Khan & Cheri, 2016; Obi, 2010; Ojatorotu & Olaopa, 2016; Okpanachi & Andrews, 2012) which negatively impacts young adults. Nigeria suffers from the *oil curse*; although it is richly endowed with huge reserves of crude oil and even enjoyed an oil boom in the 1970s, the petrodollars earned have not translated into development and wealth for the nation's citizens (Khan & Cheri,



2016; Obi, 2010; Ojatorotu & Olaopa, 2016; Okpanachi & Andrews, 2012). Instead, widespread corruption such as the missing \$2.8 billion in 1977 and the \$6.8 billion subsidy fraud in 2017 have placed the nation's wealth in the hands of a few individuals at the expense of the massive young, educated population who consequently resort to violent crimes like armed robbery (Aigbovo & Eidenoje, 2016; Cole, Tse, & Esposito, 2015; Ojatorotu & Olaopa, 2016; Olowa, 2012; Osondu, 2018; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2017). Beginning in the early 1960s, Nigeria has experienced chronic underdevelopment for decades, which has impacted the working population so much that in 2018 it replaced India, with a population of 1.3 billion, as the country with the most people in extreme poverty. Nigeria is now the poverty capital of the world (Ojatorotu, Kamidza, & Eesuola, 2018; Olasupo & Idemudia, 2017).

Nigeria's dependence on oil has also hindered the development of other sectors of the economy, like agriculture and manufacturing, which could have generated employment opportunities for the nation's young adults and working population (Gokmenoglu, Bekun, & Taspinar, 2016; Marwah, 2018; Ojatorotu et al., 2018). It is against this backdrop that the involvement of young adults in violent offenses such as kidnapping and armed robbery can be viewed and understood. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics (2018) indicated that the percentage of Nigerians living in poverty has been progressive, rising from 27.2% in 1980 to 67.1% in 2016. Young adults who experience poverty resort to crimes like armed robbery and kidnapping to earn a living.

Additionally, there is a large unemployed population who are mostly young adults, which means they may commit crimes like kidnapping, carjacking, and armed

robbery (Heerde, Hemphill, & Scholes-Balog, 2013; Momoh & Attah, 2018; Weber, 2019). Nigeria's working population comprised mostly of young adults stood at 111.1 million in the third quarter of 2017 and increased to 115.5 million in the third quarter of 2018 (Dauda, 2017; National Bureau of Statistics, 2018; Olasupo & Idemudia, 2017). Though the total number of people in part-time employment or those underemployed decreased in 2016, these numbers rose to 18.02 million in the third quarter of 2017 and to 18.21 million in the third quarter of 2018, partly as a result of the recession (Asogwa & Onyezere, 2018; National Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Additionally, the total number of people classified as unemployed increased from 17.6 million in 2017 to 20.9 million in 2018 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018). For the general population, in 2017, 7.9 million Nigerian young adults aged 15-34 were unemployed (David, 2015; Oduwole, 2015; National Bureau of Statistics, 2017), and 58.1% were underemployed (Adamu, Bin, Mat, & Taya, 2018; Namadi & Haruna, 2016; National Bureau of Statistics, 2017; Oduwole, 2015). This lack of employment may be responsible for the largest proportion of armed robbery activities in Nigeria (Arinze, 2010; Heerd et al., 2013; Nworu, 2018). As shown in Table 1, unemployment has significantly affected Nigeria, a major contributing factor that fosters the armed robbery epidemic in Nigeria (Arinze, 2010).

Table 1

*Youth Unemployment Rate (%) for 15 – 34 years*

Year	Rate (%)	Annual % increase
2014	8.9	
2015	14.5	63%
2016	19.4	34%
2017	26.6	37%
2018	29.7	12%

*Note.* From the National Bureau of Statistics website: <http://www.ngerianstat.gov.ng>

Armed robbery activities negatively affect quality of life, creating a general sense of insecurity that affects economic development. Robbers' activities also contribute to increasing unemployment, poverty, and disability of victims through the gunshot wounds they inflict in the course of these robberies (Egbefo & Salihu, 2014; Imoh-Itah, Amadi, & Akpan, 2016; Otu & Elechi, 2015; Peterside, 2014). Approximately 246 persons were murdered and 542 vehicles stolen, resulting in the arrest of 486 armed robbery suspects between 2006 and 2015 (Adamu et al., 2018; Namadi & Haruna, 2016). Within a year, between December 2015 and November 2016, the Lagos State Police Command arrested 472 armed robbers and recovered 390 arms and 16,034 rounds of ammunition from prospective robbers (Lambert et al., 2016; National Bureau of Statistics, n.d.). The police also recovered 321 AK-47 rifles and 3,739 locally made pistols from the armed robbers (National Bureau of Statistics, n.d.). These data suggest that the spread of light weapons, such as AK-47 rifles, and locally manufactured pistols empower young adults to engage in armed robbery.

Tables 2 and 3 include the details of the cases completed and those awaiting trial. Table 2 also shows the increase in armed robbery, as exemplified by the 2019 figures of 13,278 cases reported and 15,719 persons arrested for the year. Table 2 shows the trend of armed robbery in Nigeria over 5 years from 2015 to 2019, including the number of cases and persons arrested. However, Table 3 shows the trend for the phenomenon in Lagos State, Nigeria, which points to a rising trend nationwide. This trend is partly fueled by poverty, urbanization, Nigeria's increasing youthful population that is chiefly unemployed and mirrors the trends in other major cities and parts of the country (Amole

et al., 2017; Etuk & Macpherson, 2018) that are experiencing increases in violent crimes like armed robbery and kidnapping.

Table 2

*Armed Robbery Cases in Nigeria from 2014-2019*

Year	Number of Cases Reported	Number of Persons Arrested	Number of Persons Charge to Court	Number of Persons Convicted	Number of Persons Awaiting Trial	Number of Persons Acquittals
2015	8,568	13,138	8,925	681	8,171	73
2016	6,929	11,418	7,118	314	6,756	48
2017	9,016	12,974	7,921	418	7,474	29
2018	9,783	11,418	6,129	548	5,507	74
2019	13,278	15,719	6,865	875	5,967	23

*Note.* From the National Bureau of Statistics website: <http://www.ngerianstat.gov.ng>

Table 3

*Armed Robbery Cases in Lagos from 2015-2019*

Year	Number of Cases Reported	Number of Persons Arrested	Number of Persons Charge to Court	Number of Persons Convicted	Number of Persons Awaiting Trial	Number of Persons Acquittals
2015	396	488	310	58	235	17
2016	486	628	318	69	231	18
2017	401	581	269	34	222	13
2018	518	724	386	49	326	11
2019	627	817	312	76	228	8

*Note.* From the National Bureau of Statistics website: [www.ngerianstat.gov.ng](http://www.ngerianstat.gov.ng)

The consequences of participating in armed robbery activities in Nigeria are severe. As in many other countries, Nigeria maintains capital punishment as a public policy for several offenses, including armed robbery (Abdulkadir, 2017; Chukwu, 2018; Namadi & Haruna, 2016). Section 2 of the Nigerian Robbery and Firearms (Special Provisions) Act, 1990, punishes robberies committed while armed with the death penalty

(Robbery and Firearms (Special Provisions) Act, 1990). Moreover, many of those arrested for allegedly participating in armed robbery activities are detained for periods ranging from 1 week to 20 years without trial.

Despite severe punishment to deter armed robbery, police have not addressed it effectively, which has resulted in unconventional measures such as the formation of vigilantes and taskforces by communities and state governments to assist in securing citizens. Vigilante groups broken into teams, often work with the police, the armed forces, and some volunteers in the effected communities (Adejumo et al., 2017). However, vigilante groups not properly monitored by relevant authorities take spontaneous murder actions against suspected armed robbers, petty thieves, and kidnappers (Adejumo et al., 2017; Igbo, 2017). Vigilante justice is largely motivated by the public's perception that criminal justice from the state is nonexistent, inefficient, or ineffective. Since 1999, extrajudicial killings have accounted for approximately 15,000 unlawful deaths in Nigeria (Adejumo et al., 2017; Igbo, 2017). In 2016, the Lagos State Police Command killed 146 robbers in firefights, although 39 members of the force lost their lives to the robbers (Lambert et al., 2016; Nigeria Police Force, n.d.).

Even though armed robbery can result in death for those convicted by courts, the trend of robbery cases in Lagos State has been on the rise (Adebowale, 2017). The average armed robber in Nigeria faces the threat of death at three fronts: (a) through an execution sanctioned by the relevant court, (b) extrajudicial killing by security forces, and (c) spontaneous mob actions by communities (Agbiboa, 2015; Nworu, 2018; Salihu & Gholami, 2018). However, robberies are increasing, driven by high levels of

unemployment and poverty in addition to disparate distribution of opportunities and wealth that have left many Nigerians socioeconomically disenfranchised (Koos, 2016; Onah, Okwuosa, & Uroko, 2018; Ordu & Nnam, 2017; Otu, 2010). In some states, its sheer scale and intensity have triggered the deployment of the military and other security services to assist the police who often appear overpowered (Egbefo & Salihu, 2014; Nwagboso, 2016; Peterside, 2014).

Alleged and convicted armed robbers are mostly young men driven into crime by various factors, including unemployment, poverty, drug addiction, and other factors (Adejimi & Ogunode, 2015; Eme, 2014). Unemployed youth, mostly addicted on drugs that impair judgment, commit violent crimes, especially in major cities across Nigeria (Abdullahi, Deribe, & Kura, 2014; Namadi & Haruna, 2016). To address the increasing prevalence of armed robbery, Nigeria instituted the death penalty sanction imposed by courts in both military and civil administrations. Armed robbery is prohibited and criminalized in Nigeria under three laws: Criminal Code 6, Penal Code 7, and Robbery and Firearms (Special Provisions) Act Cap. 398 LFN 2004. However, the extrajudicial killings suspected armed robbers are subjected to, coupled with the threat of capital punishment, appears not to deter them from the crime. Therefore, this study was focused on the lived experiences of reformed young adult armed robbers who engaged in crimes from ages 18-25 in Lagos to better understand the phenomenon.

### **Problem Statement**

Nigeria has a security challenge from young adults involved in armed robbery activities. Armed robbery and other violent crimes are so prevalent that in 2016, about

486 armed robberies were reported in Lagos State alone (Adebowale, 2017; National Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Lagos State Command of the Nigeria Police Force also disclosed that in 2016, 246 persons were murdered, with 542 vehicles stolen (Nigeria Police Force, n.d.). The number of robbery cases for Lagos State over four years is also an indication of this security problem: 42,171 armed robbery offenses committed between 2014 and 2018 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019; Nigeria Police Force, n.d.).

Most armed robbery activities in Nigeria involve adults aged 18-25 (Abul, Nkpoyen, & Eteng, 2016; Adamu, Bin Mat, & Taya, 2018; Adebowale, 2017; Muramatsu, Johnson, & Yano, 2018; Namadi & Haruna, 2016). A high number of these armed robbers are unemployed or underemployed. Many studies have explored the causative factors behind the prevalence of armed robbery activities in Nigeria since the early 1970s, finding issues such as institutional failures and the ineptitude of law enforcement agencies and other state entities tasked with the prosecution of criminal cases in the various states as well as at the federal level (Imoh-Egbefo & Salihu, 2014; Itah, Amadi, & Akpan, 2016; Peterside, 2014). Additionally, the economic conditions have left many unemployed young adults incentivized to engage in crime (Adejimi & Ogunode, 2015; Namadi & Haruna, 2016). However, little is known about the possible influence of capital punishment on armed robbery activities in Lagos State.

Findings from this qualitative study may add to the growing body of knowledge on armed robbery and the influence of capital punishment as a sanction. Knowledge gained through this research may provide additional information on the effect of capital punishment on the prevalence of armed robbery activities in Lagos State. Thus, the study

will add to the growing body of knowledge on not only the phenomenon of armed robbery but also on whether the the death penalty is the most suitable punitive policy response.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of reformed armed robbers who had either completed, or were undergoing, rehabilitation. Despite the mortal consequences, young adults still participate in armed robbery, an offense that involves weapons, violence, or threat of violence. Such violence has impacted Lagos State and Nigeria in general for many decades. Several factors appear to account for this trend:

1. Irregular or infrequent executions, mostly because successive state governors have demonstrated averseness to signing execution warrants.
2. The slow pace of criminal justice in Nigeria, which allows armed robbery trials to last several years before a verdict is determined.
3. Outdated and dysfunctional policing methods executed by untrained and demoralized police officers (Duru, 2017; Emeka, Achu, Dien, & Uyang, 2016; Osasona, 2015).
4. The economic conditions in Nigeria that have left many unemployed young adults to resort to crime (Adejimi & Ogunode, 2015; Namadi & Haruna, 2016).

The influence of capital punishment on the frequency of armed robbery occurrences in Lagos State is unknown; therefore, this study addressed the extent to



which the punishment contributes to, or deters, the rise in armed robbery activities among young people in Lagos State. I explored young people's knowledge of the offense, their lived experiences, attitudes, and perceptions towards capital punishment in the state. Findings from this study may add to the body of knowledge regarding factors that reinforce or deter armed robbery in Nigeria. The study may further support efforts to review policies in relation to the implementation of the death sentence as punishment for armed robbery activities.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions for this phenomenological study were focused on the lived experiences of former armed robbers, street gang members, and area boys rehabilitated by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The research questions directly connect to the problem statement to elicit the lived experiences of the participants. The overarching research question for this study is as follows: What are the lived experiences of reformed armed robbers who started engaging in robbery activities from ages 18-25? The answers to the following subquestions provide insight into the phenomenon of inquiry:

- RQ1: How does the threat of punishment influence armed robbers' decision not to participate in robbery activities?
- RQ2: How has the punishment of young adult armed robbers in Lagos State, Nigeria, affected the frequency of armed robbery?
- RQ3: How has the punishment of armed robbers influenced the decision of street gang members, area boys not to participate in robbery activities?

## **Theoretical Foundation**

Two theories guided this study: the deterrence theory and the anomie theory of crime and deviance. I chose both theories because they complementarily explain the role of threat and social forces in creating or deterring deviant behavior. These two theories are discussed in successive paragraphs.

### **Deterrence Theory**

Deterrence theory was developed in the 18th century by legal philosophers Jeremy Bentham and Cesare Beccaria and suggests that criminal punishment is morally justified because of the power to deter crime (Beccaria, 1963). The theory further indicates that as a result of fear of external sanction, usually by the state, the punishment should be proportional to the crime committed. The theorists insisted that the decision to violate or obey the law is influenced by how potential criminals perceive the gains or consequences of their actions (Brunello, 2016; Hong & Kleck, 2018; Lee, 2017). This theory also includes the assumption that people generally have selfish tendencies; people can pursue material gain, personal safety, social reputation, and make enemies without caring if they harm others in the process if state institutions that maintain safety are insufficient (Beccaria, 1963; D'arcy & Herath, 2011). But because people are rational, there is a high probability they will refrain from crime if related punishments are sufficiently severe, certain and prompt (i.e., making sure that punishment takes place whenever there is a crime), and swift (ensuring that crimes are punished as soon as committed; Beccaria, 1963; Mendes, 2004). For this theory to operate effectively, punishment must possess some critical elements, certainty, and severity to influence the

decision of the criminal (Beccaria, 1963; Mendes, 2004; Piquero, Paternoster, Pogarsky, & Loughran, 2011).

Deterrence theory implies that individuals may only be able to compare the benefit of staying away from crime with the relative cost of committing crimes if offenders have experienced the law. The theory does not account for individuals who have never been offenders. Therefore, scholars and practitioners have criticized its inability to support the effectiveness of deterrence because it only applies to previous offenders. Additionally, the theory does not make provisions for those yet to offend, increasing the difficulty to explain why they do not offend. Despite its perceived limitations, the deterrence theory has continued to underpin studies of this nature with credible results (Beccaria, 1963; Mendes, 2004; Piquero et al., 2011).

### **Anomie Theory**

The anomie theory was proposed by Durkheim (1893) and Merton (1938) to account for people's motivation to offend (Farley & Flota, 2012; Maguire et al., 2007; Merton, 1968). Durkheim explored anomie in terms of an abnormal form of the division of labor, which when well established becomes the source of social solidarity or normalcy (DiCristina, 2016). Durkheim therefore viewed anomie as a lack of sufficient regulation, which creates a state of anomie in which criminal behavior, committed particularly by young persons, thrives. The theory explains that deviance and criminality exist because individuals cannot meet the expectations imposed by society. Society fosters a state of discontent and deregulation by denying universal and equal access of an individual to the social means of reaching social goals (Agnew, 1992; Antonaccio, Smith,

& Ghosted, 2014; DiCristina, 2016; Walsh, 2000). This situation eventually breeds crime in societies. Consequently, deviant behavior is not based on voluntariness but rather on constraints blocking the lawful satisfaction of desires (Cloward, 1968). Anomie implies that economic and social inequalities support criminal behavior by those disenfranchised; poverty and lack of economic opportunities can explain the aggregate levels of crime (Botchkovar, Title, & Antonucci, 2009).

Findings from the literature highlight significant levels of poverty and unemployment among young adults in Lagos State. Gaps in administering justice for punishments, such as the slow pace of criminal justice and outdated and dysfunctional policing methods, were also highlighted (Duru, 2017; Emeka et al., 2015; Osasona, 2015). These observations suggest that anomie theory and deterrent conditions exist in the state. Such conditions provide the basis to apply both theories as a framework for exploring and explaining how the threat of a death sentence can deter participation in armed robbery activities. Additionally, these theories provide the basis to explore capital punishment in Lagos State further and whether it can reduce armed robbery activities in the state.

### **Nature of the Study**

In this study, I applied the qualitative phenomenological approach. Phenomenological studies are used to acquire in-depth understanding of the impact of social structures on an individual's identity, behavior, intimate relationships, and family (Creswell, 2014; Frost, 2011; Polkinghorne, 1995). This approach is rooted in the traditional ethnographic research paradigm, which helps researchers learn from the

various perspectives held by the study's participants (Creswell, 2014; Lewis, 2015). The phenomenological approach is most suitable to describe a phenomenon by extracting lived experiences from the participants (Creswell, 2014; Lewis, 2015).

I used a qualitative phenomenological approach to acquire a deeper understanding of the influence of punishment on young adults' participation in armed robbery activities in Lagos State through the lens of their lived experiences. Structured and semistructured interviews were used to collect data. Informants included individuals who opted out of armed robbery activities and engaged in rehabilitative programs. Similar sessions were held with area boys, street gangs who were predisposed to the same factors that incentivized other young adults to engage in armed robbery. These programs assist in converting and reintegrating former armed robbers and street gangs into citizens living normal, productive lifestyles, associating with regular members of society, and preventing them from rejoining their former trades.

In this study I applied a purposive sampling to select respondents in Lagos State by picking volunteers who had prospects of speaking to the questions based on certain characteristics and lived experiences: former armed robbers and members of street gangs engaged in petty crimes and those rehabilitated (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Guest, 2006; Saldaña, 2016). Purposive sampling draws a smaller sample from a larger population that relates to the objectives of the research. It results in judgement sampling, which is the deliberate selection of informants because of the qualities they possess. I selected the participants from those under rehabilitation or young adults who completed the program

by asking for volunteers and selecting them in a nonrandom fashion. The interviews were audio recorded with the participants' consent.

Data collected were transcribed and triangulated. Research questions were used to structure data analysis. Descriptive analysis was used to analyze documents and data generated from interviews to identify emerging common trends, themes, and patterns for each key research question. Content analysis was used to highlight diverging views and opposing trends. The emerging issues and trends provided the basis for preliminary observations and research findings.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Armed robbery:* Armed robbery is a type of robbery aided by weapon(s) to threaten, force, and deprive a person or persons, of the right to private, public, or corporate belongings. It involves the use of an offensive weapon or any weapon (Aigbovo & Eidenoje, 2016; Nwalozie, 2011).

*Ajgunle:* A part of Lagos where gang activities are very prevalent.

*Capital punishment:* Capital punishment is the execution of an offender who has committed a criminal offense and been sentenced to death after conviction by a court of law; this sentence is used as a deterrent to commit a crime (Barry, 2015) and can be used interchangeably with death penalty.

*Death penalty:* The death penalty is the legal process by which a defendant is sentenced to death by an official court of justice (Kamble & Mullet, 2016).

*Deterrence:* Deterrence is when a state or country legislates an act to discourage an action or event through instilling doubt or fear of the consequences. Much of the time, these extreme consequences involve death penalties (Sarat et al., 2017).

*Drug abuse:* Drug abuse is the use of certain chemicals unauthorized by a doctor for creating a pleasurable effect on the brain to perform actions that could be criminal (Sarat et al., 2017).

*Extra-judicial killing:* Extrajudicial killing is the act of arbitrarily taking someone's life, denying or violating a person's right to life without recourse to the due process of the law (Ojie, 2006; Onoja, 2013; Onwuazombe, 2017).

*Mob justice:* Mob justice is when mobs take justice into their own hands. It usually ends with someone getting beaten and paraded, sometimes publicly naked, and even set on fire or killed (Foglia & Connell, 2018).

*Monkey tail:* Indian hemp soaked for 7 days in a local alcoholic drink popularly known as *ogogoro*.

*Small arms:* Small arms are handguns, such as revolvers and pistols, as well as long guns, rifles, carbines, shotguns, submachine guns, assault rifles, personal defense weapons, and light machine guns (Foglia & Connell, 2018).

*Young adults:* The concept of young adults includes persons between 18 and 25 years old (Courtney & Polich, 2012; Lowe, Dillon, Rhodes, & Zwiebach, 2013). In Nigeria, those between 18 and 35 years, comprised of all young males and females, citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, are referred to as youth (Abdullahi, Adekeye,

& Balogun, 2014; Adanikin, Oluwayemisi, Orji, & Adeyanju, 2017; National Youth Policy, 2009; Oduwole, 2015).

### **Assumptions**

Four assumptions underpinned this study. The first assumption was that an ex-armed robber's claim of quitting armed robbery practices was valid and that they would answer the interview questions honestly and to the best of their knowledge. The second assumption was that solicited participants, young people predisposed to armed robbery, would be honest about never participating in armed robbery activities. The third assumption was that the participants would trust that their identities would be protected and would be willing to participate in the study and respond honestly to the interview questions. Fourth, I assumed that both groups of participants were honest in their claims about having some knowledge about armed robbery and capital punishment.

These assumptions are necessary because the study used information provided by participants as data for analysis. Data accuracy is required to strengthen the validity and reliability of the study findings. Such assumptions are also necessary because in a phenomenological study all participants must have experienced the phenomenon, even if through different paradigms.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Delimitations are conditions deliberately imposed by the researcher to limit the scope of a study. The researcher achieves delimitation by establishing parameters of the participants and the location of study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Kirkwood & Price, 2013). This study included young people located in Lagos State, Nigeria, who (a) had



participated in at least one armed robbery activity and currently or previously concluded a structured rehabilitation program and (b) never participated in any armed robbery activity but were socioeconomically predisposed to armed robbery practices. These criteria were prioritized for the study because their characteristics suggested the lived experiences, perceptions, and opinions of the participants' supported the exploration of the influence of capital punishment in armed robbery prevalence among young adults in Lagos State. The study is delimited to young adult males involved in armed robbery or predisposed socioeconomically to such activities. Law enforcement officers and those currently detained as a result of alleged armed robbery convictions were not included in the study because of potential violations of ethical standards (i.e., due to law enforcement obligations and the probability of violating prison inmates' rights to participate or leave the study).

### **Limitations**

The limitations of a study refer to gaps in the feasible intent and procedural weaknesses of the study (Morse, 2015). One limitation relates to the generalizability of the study's findings (Katz, 2015). Because I conducted the study of the phenomenon without empirical analysis of collected data, nor participation of law enforcement officials and young people in other locations in Nigeria, questions regarding generalizability may arise. Despite these limitations, findings from this study may contribute to the body of knowledge regarding the effects of capital punishment in preventing crimes, specifically armed robbery by young adults in Lagos State.

Related to the generalizability of this study is the limitation of transferability. Thick descriptions within the literature improves transferability in phenomenological studies (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Therefore, I carefully documented decisions made about participant selection and other specifics regarding the settings, approach to research, and methodology.

In qualitative research, reliability can also be compromised, which is likely in this study because of potential professional bias considering my background as a law enforcement agent. To address the issue of reliability, I assumed the role of a naïve researcher. To further strengthen the reliability of the study and findings through dialogic engagement and member checking, each participant received a copy of their transcribed interview to determine if the transcript was an accurate representation of their shared experiences.

In addition, the study includes issues of dependability, another potential limitation, which was mitigated by the conduct of a field test to review data collection tools. The field test made it possible to review interview questions to ensure alignment with the research questions and purpose of the study. However, interview questions and the interview guide were examined by the dissertation chair and methodology committee member before data collection.

### **Significance of the Study**

This section includes a description of the significance of the study in terms of the following: (a) how this study may fill a gap in the literature, (b) how it can be applied professionally, and (c) how it can create positive social change.

**Significance to Practice**

Findings from this study may inform the development and effective implementation of policies and practices related to armed robbery and capital punishment in Lagos State, Nigeria. NGOs and social-good programs that target young people can use the findings as evidence for developing alternative strategies to address the issue of armed robbery among young people in the state. Legal practitioners and government agencies can also use the findings to strengthen the operationalization of the justice delivery system in Nigeria.

**Significance to Theory**

Findings from this study may provide support for, or against, propositions of the deterrence theory and anomie theory, which were the theoretical basis for this study. This will add to the body of knowledge regarding the relationship between capital punishment and armed robbery practices. Other researchers, including criminal justice scholars, may build on the study to develop grounded theory, particularly on the phenomenon of capital punishment and how it serves as a deterrent to young people's involvement in other crimes that attract the death penalty in Lagos and in other Nigerian states.

**Significance to Social Change**

This study will have significant positive impacts and implications, as it addresses a problem that impacts society and its overall well-being. The study can contribute to addressing social issues that may lead to social progress and general improvement of human living conditions (O'Cass & Griffin, 2015). At the core of social change is the

desire to inspire, influence, and impact diverse communities and, through this, positively impact and change our world for good (Brown & Baltes, 2017).

Positive social change can be achieved by providing evidence to inform policies, laws, and interventions to reduce the menace and prevalence of armed robbery practices among young people in Lagos State. The correct design and application of policy in relation to the armed robbery epidemic may drastically reduce its influence and pervasiveness, influencing the phenomenon that is almost a culture (Einarsen et al., 2016; Pastorek et al., 2015). The study consequently highlights gaps in the Lagos State, Nigeria law enforcement and justice delivery system, as it relates to capital punishment and its implementation in the state. Findings also highlight opportunities for alternative laws, policies, and interventions that can socioeconomically empower young people and deter participation in armed robbery activities.

### **Summary**

Chapter 1 contains the background of the study, a statement of the problem, and purpose of the study. This chapter also includes the study's significance, conceptual framework, assumptions, and limitations. The significance of the study to social change is also highlighted. Chapter 2 contains the literature review and an analysis of possible gaps in the existing literature in harmony with the research topic. The literature review includes a discussion of the deterrence theory and anomie theory in relation to capital punishment as a deterrent to crime in Nigeria. The associated factors driving the phenomenon of armed robbery in Nigeria and capital punishment in selected regimes around the world are also explored. The purpose is to explore how capital punishment

applies in selected counties in Africa, Asia, and Europe. The study stresses that in Nigeria, unemployment, drug addiction by youth, poverty, the breakdown of family values, and endemic corruption, among many other factors, continue to fuel the inclination of youth to resort to armed robbery activities. Similarly, I synthesized the literature on Nigeria's security architecture employed to tackle crimes like armed robbery.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Armed robbery, an offense that involves weapons and violence or threat of violence, has overwhelmed Nigeria for decades despite capital punishment laws. Between 2006 and 2015, armed robbery was responsible for about 50% of an overall 8,516 deaths in 3,840 fatal incidents nationwide (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019; Nwankwo & Okolie-Osemene, 2016), and almost every year there has been an increase of the crime. The Lagos State Police Command and other studies disclosed that between 2014 and 2018, Lagos State experienced a total of 2,333 armed robbery attacks, 359 cult-related cases, and 392 kidnapping cases (Nigeria Police Force, n.d.; Nwankwo & Okolie-Osemene, 2016; Owagbemi, 2017; Usman, 2015). The crime has contributed to the rising wave of insecurity in Nigeria, putting lives at significant risk and threatening commercial activities and foreign investments (Balogun, 2013; Nwankwo & Okolie-Osemene, 2016; Owagbemi, 2017; Usman, 2015). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of reformed young adult armed robbers between the ages of 18-25 at the time they started engaging in armed robbery activities in Lagos State.

To answer the research questions, I examined the relevant literature on the death sentence as a concept as well as how states apply it to punish armed robbery offenses in Nigeria and globally. The literature reviews were also done to explore the socioeconomic factors that predispose and incentivize young adults to commit violent crimes in addition to the role the police and other security forces play in confronting the phenomenon. The conceptual and empirical findings from the review helped better understand capital punishment and debates surrounding it, particularly its potential or otherwise as

deterrence against armed robberies in Lagos State of Nigeria. This investigation highlights key considerations in the published literature on capital punishment as deterrence against armed robberies mostly by young adults in the Lagos State. The exploration of the relevant literature also helped to garner materials to support the research methodology adopted for this study (Rowe, 2018).

### **Literature Search Strategy**

Publications examined in this review are comprised of scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles published within the last 5-years as well as some few nonpeer-reviewed publications relevant to the topic. I located relevant literature by searching the following databases: Academic Source Premier, EBSCOhost, ProQuest, Hein Online, Emerald, Sage, Business Source Premier, Questia, and Google Scholar. The keywords employed for the search included the following: *social construction theory, historical origin of armed robbery, capital punishment phenomenon, retentionists perspective, abolitionist perspective, police strategy to law enforcement, military strategy to law enforcement, extrajudicial killing, mob justice, family values and influence, peer pressure, gang membership, and societal influences, anomie, deterrence, proliferation of small arms, drug abuse by youth, unemployment and crime, societal influences and poverty and crime, and young adults, and violent crime.*

### **Conceptual Framework**

The complexity of the psycho-social underpinnings of crimes and criminalities suggests that the adoption of a heterogeneous mix of perspective will better illuminate the phenomenon under consideration. Because armed robbery fits this categorization, this

study's conceptual framework is a synthesis of the salient elements of the deterrence theory and the anomie theory of crime and deviance. Both theories were chosen because of their complementary nature to explain the role of threat and social forces in creating or deterring deviant behaviors.

### **The Deterrence Theory**

The deterrence theory was developed in the 18th century by legal philosophers Jeremy Bentham and Cesare Beccaria (Beccaria, 1963). This theory suggests that people's decision to violate or obey the law is influenced by how they perceive the gains or consequences of their actions. The theory assumes that people generally have selfish tendencies. People can pursue material gain, personal safety, and social reputation and make enemies without caring if harm occurs to others in the process, especially if a government that maintains safety appears incompetent. This theory further suggests that people will not commit crimes if the benefits of staying away from crimes outweigh the cost of committing crimes (Brunello, 2016; Hong & Kleck, 2018; Lee, 2017).

The theory also implies that individuals may only be able to compare the benefit of staying away from crime with the relative cost of committing crimes if they have once been offenders who experienced the weight of the law (Beccaria, 1963; D'arcy & Herath, 2011). Hence, many experts criticize this theory for its inability to prove the effectiveness of deterrence because only offenders experience law enforcement. This theory does not make provisions for those yet to offend; thus, it is difficult to explain why they do not offend. Further, the theory also indicates that because people are rational, they are likely to stay away from crime if related punishments are sufficiently severe, certain (i.e.,



making sure that punishment takes place whenever there is a crime), and swift (i.e., ensuring that crimes are punished as soon as they are committed). Thus, for this theory to effectively operate, punishment must possess some critical elements, certainty and severity, to influence the decision of the criminal (Beccaria, 1963, Mendes, 2004; Piquero et al., 2011).

### **Anomie Theory**

The second theory, the anomie theory, established by Durkheim (1887) and Merton (1938), fills the gap in deterrence theory (Farley & Flota, 2012; Maguire et al., 2007; Merton, 1968). This theory accounts for people's motivation to offend or not to offend. The theory explains that deviance and criminality exist because individuals lack the ability to meet the expectations imposed on them by society because the society frustrates the efforts they make to do so. In other words, society fosters a state of discontent and deregulation by denying universal and equal access to the social means of reaching social goals. These people eventually generate crime in society. In that sense, deviant behavior is not based on voluntariness but rather on constraints blocking the lawful satisfaction of desires (Cloward, 1968). Therefore, apart from the deterrence theory, the anomie theory of crime and deviance supported in this study.

Durkheim's 1893 classic anomie theory claims—with a high level of credibility—that the phenomenon occurs in a state of normlessness, when society fails to effectively regulate the expectations or behaviors of its members. Anomie occurs when aspirations develop beyond the possibility of fulfilment (DiCristina, 2016; Johnson & Duberley, 2010; Swedberg, 2016). The idea is that in well-functioning societies, ambitions are

restrained, and the collective order regulates human needs and desires by the collective order. However, in societies where this order fails, crime and deviance thrive, which is, in a sense, the social structure and its relationship with anomie (Zhao & Cao, 2010).

Some authors argue further that social anomie, another genre of anomie, can be used to explain cases of suicide in some societies (Irmak & Cam, 2014). But the anomie theory was first suggested when arguing a correlation between anomie and crime (DiCristina, 2016). Conceptualized in this fashion, Durkheim linked it to crime causation that anomie was a cause of property, violent, and juvenile crimes (as cited in Patchin & Hinduja, 2018). Durkheim defined *anomie* as an abnormal form of the division of labor, where the organs of government are not adequately regulated, resulting in a state of anomie. This state of anomie results in criminal activities largely because the division of labor produces organic solidarity (Bates, Darvell, & Watson, 2017). Durkheim insisted that anomie occurs because of abrupt crises occasioned by political, economic, and social changes (Patchin & Hinduja, 2018). For instance, Durkheim argued that anomie suicide is something that occurs due to a lack of regulation and its consequences such as economic crises resulting from loss of moral values, which creates disorder and chaos common in the economic world (as cited in Patchin & Hinduja, 2018).

Anomie also emerges in situations where cultural goals and institutional resources come into conflict (Walters, 2018). This state of conflict culminates in a breakdown of moral and cultural values at both societal and individual levels in which a state of anomie is a product of rapid sociopolitical change (Walters, 2018). Other researchers have synthesized anomie and concluded that democratic transition is the structural factor that

exerts pressure and powerful influences on individual anomie (Bates et al., 2017).

Anomie is, therefore, basically the absence of norms (Kamensky, 2016). The implication of the preceding postulation is that youth who involve themselves in armed robbery have suspended all such norms. As Durkheim (1968) noted, crime molds the boundaries of morality because it is the vehicle through which social change can be attained by the marginalized and the lower classes in a society.

Drawing from anomie theory, armed robbery offenses are committed mostly by young adults because they feel deprived, marginalized, and pressured by socioeconomic conditions and the general poverty that characterizes their daily existence. The literature review highlighted significant levels of poverty and unemployment among young people in Lagos State. It also highlighted gaps in executions of punishments, the slow pace of criminal justice, and outdated and dysfunctional policing methods and systems in Nigeria (Duru, 2017; Osasona, 2015). These observations suggest that anomie and deterrent conditions in the state can provide a framework for exploring and explaining how the threat of a death sentence deters participation in armed robbery activities for former offenders and those who have yet to commit offenses.

## **Literature Review**

### **Historical Origins of Armed Robbery and Capital Punishment in Nigeria**

Before the Nigerian Civil War, robbery was legally defined as “stealing with violence” (Ayodele, 2015; Bello, 2013; Daly, 2018; Obarisiagbon, 2017). Under the Criminal Code of 1958, two types of robberies existed in Nigeria: ordinary robbery and aggravated robbery. The former referred to the actual use or threat of violence to rob,

whereas the latter involved the use of dangerous weapons to rob leading to physical injuries to victims (Ayodele, 2015). Immediately after the war, some of the soldiers recruited and mobilized were demobilized into a competitive labor market (Ekpenyong, 1989; Igbo, 2001; Rotimi, 1984). Because the country had just emerged from war, hunger and suffering were rife in the land, so the demobilized soldiers and deserters started to rob, kill, and maim with small arms on highways, communities, and homes located in major townships (Elechi, 2003; Ilegbune, 1998). Armed robbery has resulted in deaths of civilian and members of security forces, closure of businesses, and migration of vibrant young Nigerians to Europe and North America, all negatively impacting national development (Abanyam, Lumun, Tormusa, & Orngu, 2013; Okeke, 2007; Oparah, 2007).

Due to the dramatic rise in armed robbery offenses across the country, the then Nigerian Federal Military Government repealed the section of the Criminal Code of 1958 addressing aggravated robbery, replacing it with the Armed Robbery and Firearms (Special Provisions) Decree 1970, Number 4, as a general deterrent measure (Armed Robbery and Firearms (Special Provisions) Decree 1970 Number 47; Nwankwo, Agboeze, & Nwobi, 2018). Given the dramatic rise in armed robbery offenses in the early 1970s coupled with severe disruption to socioeconomic activities, the promulgated Decree of 1970 stipulated the death penalty by firing squad (Daly, 2018; Enabule, 2014; Otu & Elechi, 2015; Tade & Adeniyi, 2017). The aim was to deter those involved in the crime and save lives in the process.

The 1970 decree is the source of the current fluid definition regarding armed robbery in Nigeria, although it is operating presently under a new title. The decree is now

known as Robbery and Firearms Act, Chapter R11 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004. This decree addresses the offender; the objects used before, during, or after the offense; the accomplices; the injury inflicted on the victim; the intent to commit the offense; the conspiracy to rob; and the requisite punishment. According to the this decree, armed robbery occurs in circumstances where a person arms him or herself with any firearms or any offensive weapon (e.g., chemical materials). Immediately before or after the time of robbery, if the said offender wounds any person, the offender shall upon conviction be sentenced to death (Nwankwo et al., 2018; Otu, 2013; Robbery and Firearms Act, Chapter R11 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004). Similarly, the law applies if any person is found in any public place in possession of any firearms, whether real or imitation, with indication that he or she has the intent to immediately or eventually commit an offense (Nwankwo et al., 2018; Robbery and Firearms Act, Chapter R11 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004). Those who conspire with any person to commit an offense, whether they are present, shall also be deemed guilty of the offense as principal offenders and shall be punished accordingly (Nwankwo et al., 2018; Robbery and Firearms Act, Chapter R11 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004).

Since the early 1970s, apart from the stipulation of the death penalty as a sanction, campaigns and programs had been set up to address this violent crime. These programs include “Operation Fire for Fire,” designed as a strong approach, as well as “Operation Flush,” “Operation Mesa,” and Operation Thunderstorm,” which involve the deployment of an admixture of military and police in the most problematic towns to conduct patrols

and respond to emergent situations (Abanyam et al., 2013). But thousands of robberies are still committed yearly despite the death penalty and the deployment of security forces.

Additionally, seeking to locate the causative factors for armed robbery, researchers have undertaken surveys and found about 7- to 10-million illicit small arms and light weapons in the West African subregion, the bulk of which are in circulation within Nigeria (Adekola, Allen, Olawole-Isaac, Akanbi, & Adewumi, 2016; Madugu, 2018; Namadi & Haruna, 2016). These rifles and light weapons are used by armed robbers to rob and kill their victims in Nigeria. Citing the production of weapons for armed robbery in Nigeria, Mallam (2018) concluded that many small arms and light weapons are in the hands of civilians and unauthorized persons. The prevalence of armed robbery in Nigeria and the factors driving the phenomenon will be addressed with more depth in subsequent parts of this literature review.

### **Executions of Armed Robbers in Nigeria**

The death penalty, which is irreversible, has been used in Nigeria for decades to sanction convicted felons involved in a variety of crimes such as armed robbery, treason, murder, and recently kidnapping (Anwo & Arowolo, 2011; Igwenyi, 2016; Lateef, 2013; Olonisakin, Ogunleye, & Adebayo, 2017). Capital punishment, which operates after a sentence of death by a court of law following a trial for an alleged criminal offense, especially for armed robbery offenses, sanctions the intentional killing of another human being by the state (Garland, 2016; Igwenyi, 2016; Lateef, 2013; Nagelsen & Huckelbury, 2016). To the leading international human rights organization Amnesty International, the death penalty has consistently been viewed as a denial of human rights—the ultimate

denial of human rights—to which every person is entitled (Amnesty International, 2010; Amnesty International, 2017). This organization, like others in sync with its views, even argued further that the death penalty is a kind of premeditated and cold-blooded killing of a human being by the state (Patry & Penrod, 2013; Phillips & Simon, 2014).

The country witnessed the first public execution in 1971, shortly after the civil war where the notorious armed robber, Dr. Ishola Oyenusi, Navy Sub-Lieutenant Williams Alders Oyazimo, and others were executed (Aigbovo & Eidenoje, 2016; Elechi, Lambert & Ventura, 2006; Nigerian Prison Headquarters Records, 2017). Subsequent public executions of hundreds of armed robbers, including famous criminals; Mr. Lawrence Anini and Mr. Monday Osunbor, failed to halt the prevalence of the crime in Nigeria (Aigbovo & Eidenoje, 2016; Igbinovia, 1988; Oakland). Over 650 prisoners were executed between 1984 and 1985, 55 of which were in one day in Enugu prison and 43 at the Kirikiri Prison in Lagos on July 23, 1995 (Amnesty International, 1994; Reuters, Tunde & Obadina, 23, 1995). Nigeria has maintained the death penalty for a variety of offenses, and in 2015, 527 persons were sentenced, bringing the number on death row to 2,285 (Amnesty International, 2017). A large portion of these were young men convicted of armed robbery offenses (Lateef, 2013; Ordu & Nnam, 2017). In Nigeria, the execution of condemned prisoners, particularly for armed robbery, has been carried out primarily through a firing squad. This pattern aligns with those practiced by the military in the early 1970s to early 1999, when approximately 2,600 armed robbers were executed by firing squad, although hanging, stoning to death, and other forms of executions existed (Amnesty International, 2016, 2017; Criminal Procedure Act, Chapter C. 38 Laws of the

Federation of Nigeria, 2004; Hynd, 2008; Olatunbosun & Oladuro, 2012). Though executions were carried out in communities of the convicted armed robbers to serve as a deterrent, the phenomenon has persisted (Adebayo, 2015; Iyaniwura, 2014; Otu, 2010).

In 1998, on the return to democratic governance, the Nigerian government placed a non-binding moratorium on executions of convicted armed robbers and other offenders, which remained in-place until 2013. However, in 2013, four out of five prisoners, whose death warrants had been signed, were executed in Benin, Edo State. Four of these five prisoners were to be executed by hanging, while the fifth was to be executed by firing squad (Amnesty International, 2014; Ayodele, 2015; Tade & Adeniyi, 2017; Tade & Mmahi, 2018). Literature from the United States and other regimes indicate that the death penalty had, at best, a very marginal effect on murders (George, 2017; Igwenyi, 2016; Lambert et al., 2008; Muramatsu, Johnson, & Yano, 2017; Nagin, 2014).

### **Factors Leading to Armed Robbery Offenses in Lagos State**

The high prevalence of armed robbery in Nigeria had been attributed to several interconnected factors like unemployment, peer pressure, societal influences, gang membership, and drug addiction among others.

**Unemployment.** Between 2015 and 2018, unemployment in Nigeria increased by nine million, comprised mostly of youths as depicted in Table 3 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Idris (2016) established the link between youth bulges in countries such as Nigeria to unemployment, political violence, and armed groups. Similar studies have in equal measure established correlations between high levels of youth or young adult unemployment to their restiveness and involvement in crimes, such as armed robbery,



kidnapping, political thuggery, militancy, and other violent engagements (Adebayo, 2013; Femi, Dada, & Ayibaabi, 2015; Stober, 2015; Usman, 2015). Onah and Okwuosa (2016) explored the phenomenon of unemployment among youth in Nigeria, focusing on its impact on peace and stability within the country. This literature appears to be in sync with the conditions advanced by the proponents of the anomie theory as being responsible for the prevalence of crime in societies.

In a related study, Ajitomi and Olaniyan (2018) traced the antecedents of cultism, its widespread nature in higher institutions in Nigeria, its impact on the education of youth, and negative effects on national development. The authors posited that cultism is generally accompanied by violent activities while equally tracing the phenomenon's roots to the country's poor economic situation. They categorized the causes of cultism to include: (a) need for protection, (b) economic and financial benefits, (c) exertion of authority or supremacy, (d) broken families, (e) drug abuse, (f) lack of guidance and direction, (g) indoctrination and deceit, (h) influence of political and school administration, (i) academic excellence (through cheating), and (j) peer influence, among others. Ajitomi and Olaniyan (2018) also discovered that cults thrive on exerting power and supremacy; consequently, violence is their major instrument of coercion and involvement in crimes like robbery and terrorism to acquire arms, as well as to pay hospital bills and legal services when members are arrested. In essence, unemployment breeds crime (Adebayo, 2013; Adejimi & Ogunode, 2018; Agara, Chizea, & Osumah, 2016; Karim & Suraj, 2016). The area boys or street gangs' phenomenon is equally driven by unemployment (Courtney & Polich, 2009). Similarly, Ewetan and Urhie (2014)

insisted that the Nigerian nation suffers from pervasive, endemic rural and urban poverty in addition to a high rate of unemployment in which the youth are disproportionately affected, resulting in debilitating young adult unemployment. This phenomenon explains the high rate of violent crimes like armed robbery, kidnapping, muggings, and thuggery in which energetic and youthful persons are intense, active participants.

**Drug addiction.** Etta and Ojedokun (2017) examined the surge in demand and supply of illicit drugs within Katsina in Nigeria and found a general increase in the use of the drugs benelyn, diazaferm (cough syrup), cannabis, and cigarettes by young adults. The researchers used interpretive or phenomenological approaches and found patterns of drug-related criminality within the peri-urban spaces of Katsina. Young adults were generally poor, socioeconomically deprived, frustrated, and depressed; thus, they found solace in drugs. Etta and Ojedokun disclosed that these drugs are mind-altering. Having conducted a related study focusing on university students in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, Donald (2017) found that peer influence, frustration, and family history of parental deprivation were notable factors that predisposed young adults to criminal behavior, thus concluding that violence and crime were associated with the use of psychoactive drugs.

Supporting these findings, Garg and Prusty (2017) highlighted in their study the relationship between drug use and criminal tendencies. They reviewed 35 articles and categorized the factors to include (a) psychological, (b) family, (c) educational, (d) peer risk, (e) biological, and (f) socioeconomic. The researchers noted that the effect of drug addiction/use on violent crimes for the young is indisputable (Anetor & Oyekan-Thomas,

2018; Gotsang, Mashalla, & Secoilwe, 2017). Although there is no published data on the number of cases for 2017 and 2018, data for 2014-2016 showed cases at 8,805, 8,778, and 8,257, respectively (<http://www.ngerianstat.gov.ng>), indicating how drug addiction may have pushed young adults into violent crimes to feed their habits. Drug-addicted young adults incapable of exercising good judgement with access to firearms kill and maim for resources to purchase drugs, which partly accounts for the large number of young adults involved in armed robbery activities (Aigbovo & Eidenoje, 2016).

**Peer pressure and gang membership.** Several studies have uncovered a correlation between peer pressure and gang memberships as being largely responsible for youth criminality (Aliyu et al., 2016; Lange et al., 2018). Otu and Elechi (2016) found that armed robbers were influenced by exposure to negative social networks that exert pressure on them. Similarly, Namadi and Haruna (2016), who examined the predisposing factors for youth crimes and delinquent behaviors, identified poverty and drugs, as well as peer group and gang influence, to be among the key factors driving or pushing young adults in Nigeria into criminal behavior. In the same vein, Aigbovo and Eidenoje (2016) argued that some armed robbers are psychotic to the extent that they are willing to kill and even be killed; they are hardened criminals and operate in gangs. Thus, peer pressure and gang membership increase the propensity of youth involvement in armed robbery offenses (Etta & Ojedokun, 2017; Heap, 2010).

According to Pedersen (2014), juveniles' joining gangs in Denmark occurs mostly in socially disadvantaged neighborhoods with a gang presence. Pedersen found that 13% of the adolescents aged 13-17 were members of street gangs in part as a result of poor

parental monitoring, as well as weak pro-social values with high-risk lifestyles; these adolescents were then more inclined to join more powerful criminal gangs and even become involved in crime. The implication of this is that gang members are generally involved in violent crimes. Another study by Bond and Bushman (2017) drew from a sample of 90 118 U.S. students aged 12-18 involved in the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. Results showed that 48% were more likely to have been in a serious fight, 183% more likely to have hurt someone badly, and 140% more likely to pull a weapon on someone if a friend of theirs had engaged in the same behavior. The study concluded that adolescents had a higher inclination to engage in violent behavior if their friends did the same, and, indeed, the toxicity of violence extended beyond immediate friends to friends of friends. These findings explain why gang members become involved in crimes like armed robbery and kidnapping in Nigeria.

**Family values and social influences.** Family instability and societal influences shape and condition some youths or young adults into getting involved in criminal activities, like armed robbery (Adebayo, 2013; Aigbovo & Eidenoje, 2016). In Nigeria, corruption, family instability, and socioeconomic pressures incentivize crimes in the mold of armed robbery, kidnapping, abduction, and murder for young adults. Ugwuoke and Onyekachi (2015), who examined the relationship between family instability and juvenile delinquency, found that children from unstable homes were more prone to engage in juvenile delinquency and even violent crimes. Some of these influences had accounted for the involvement in violent crimes, such as armed robbery (Garg & Prusty, 2017; Nwaneka & Akande, 2015; Osawe, 2015; Ugwuoke & Onyekachi, 2015).

Buttressing the veracity of the findings above, Aghedo (2015) cited the debasement of social values, the pervasive culture of corruption, and infrastructural decay that are rife in the nation as factors that contribute significantly to the criminalization of youth. Aghedo equally blamed the phenomenon of youth criminality on poor learning facilities/infrastructure (Aghedo, 2015). Study after study alludes to poor family background, economic hardship, corruption, alarming levels of poverty, growing populations among the young demographic, peer pressure, and gang membership as predictive factors of young adults' involvement in crimes like armed robbery and other violent forms of criminality (Aghedo, 2015; Amaci, Moshood, & Iliyasu, 2017; Chiazor, Ozoya, & Udume, 2017; Danjuma et al., 2016; Gotsang et al., 2017; Inyang, James, & Emeh, 2016).

In a related study, Osawe (2015) surveyed the neighborhood effects and spatial stratification of poverty and crime in urban areas. He argues that expanding the focus to the network of neighborhoods to which individuals become exposed during daily routine ventures and engagements was beneficial to understanding the impact of poverty on crime. One of the theories highlighted by Osawe was that of relative deprivation, which stresses that socioeconomic standing relative to one's peers, neighbors, or even the broader society may, ultimately, influence offending behavior. In a country like Nigeria where values diminish in stature daily, where poverty and offense coexist, crimes like armed robbery are pervasive and prevalent (Osawe, 2015). Another relevant study by Burnett (2014) included exploration of the paradox of new technologies offering opportunities to youth and the reality of what they face—the high level of dissatisfaction,

unemployment, and the general marginalization that has turned them into *time bombs* waiting to explode. Broken families sometimes predispose youth to criminal lifestyles. In a penetrating study about unstable home environments, Edelstein (2018) discovered that early deviant associations and attitudes toward violence and gangs were cultivated, consequently affecting schooling, and resulted in future substance abuse, a greater propensity for violence, and other offenses (Edelstein, 2018). A combination of all these factors results in poor parenting, which may eventually produce young adults prone to criminal activities (Garg & Prusty, 2017; Ordu & Nnam, 2017; Spano, Vazsonyi, & Bolland, 2009; Young, Fitzgibbon, & Silverstone, 2014).

**The proliferation of small arms.** The West African region, and specifically Nigeria, is overflowing with small arms and light weapons sold cheaply to criminals who inevitably employ them in violent crimes. In a country like Nigeria, where values diminish in stature daily, where poverty and the attendant propensity to crime coexist, crimes like armed robbery are pervasive and prevalent (Abdulkadir, 2017; Adebayo, 2015; Idem & Udofia, 2018; Kpae & Adishi, 2017). The proliferation of small arms ensures the selling of these weapons very cheaply to individuals, groups, and armed robbers who employ them in the dangerous trade of robbing Nigerians and foreigners (Ikediashi & Akande; 2015; Okafor & Emesibe, 2015). This free flow of arms into the region and Africa in general had been attributed to several factors, including the weak enforcement and control structures that prevail (Adelaju, & Pratt, 2014; Chukwu & Nachanaa, 2016; Grip, 2015; Mallam, 2014; Ordu & Nnam; 2017; Ubhenin & Enabumene, 2011).

The constant supply of these arms into the hands of young people, accounts for their involvement in robberies, assassinations, kidnappings, and murders (Okafor & Emesibe, 2015; Otu & Elechi, 2015). The proliferation of small arms remains a global problem with over 875 million small arms in circulation around the world, mostly in the hands of nonstate actors (Ndawana, Hove, & Ghuliku, 2018). It is, therefore, not surprising that young adults experiencing social and economic deprivation engage in violent crimes like armed robbery.

**Poverty.** Burnett (2014) explored the paradox of new technologies offering opportunities to youth to confront the reality of what they face: high levels of dissatisfaction, unemployment, and the general marginalization that turn them into ticking time bombs. Like previous studies, he found that this idle population resorted to criminal activities, some of which were violent in nature (Ayuba & Okafor, 2015; Mallam, 2014; Okafor & Emesibe, 2015). The correlation between poverty and crime appears well established by the literature. Young adults feel a complete sense of hopelessness under the harsh economic realities in Nigeria, hence the resort to committing violent crimes.

Graif, Gladfelter, and Matthews (2014) looked at the impact of neighborhoods and poverty on crime by moving the discourse from residential neighborhoods to the *network of neighborhoods* individuals are exposed to in the normal course of daily activities. Interestingly, they discovered that people living in socioeconomically advantaged neighborhoods conduct daily and routine activities through *non-overlapping* neighborhoods where non-disadvantaged individuals rarely enter. In Nigeria, such

neighborhoods became targets of criminals, though they are assumed to be safe (Eze, Oluyomi, & Ikechukwu, 2017; Osagie & Ikechukwu, 2016; Usman, 2015). Pare and Felson (2014) also examined the relationships between income inequality, poverty, and various kinds of crime using a victimization survey. They found that inequality is not associated with assault, robbery, burglary, and theft when poverty is controlled.

### **Capital Punishment Phenomenon as Deterrence**

Capital punishment, the ultimate sanction for crime, continues to generate heated debates across cultures, religious beliefs, and criminal justice, as it has for centuries (Gamble, 2016; Hnidka, 2016; Smith and Jiang, 2017; Punke, 2015). This is because the death penalty is an absolute and irreversible punishment (Hnidka, 2016; Tabak, 2017). The criminal is executed following a sentence imposed by a competent public authority or organ of sovereignty (Rose, 2018). Upon execution, the punishment becomes irreversible, even if the conviction is later found to be flawed. Despite its controversial nature, several countries, including the United States and Nigeria, maintain it as a sanction for the most abhorrent crimes including murder, treason, and armed robbery. However, the efficacy of capital punishment and imprisonment in lowering crime rates or deterring potential offenders has been investigated, and the evidence remains inconclusive.

The enduring relevance of capital punishment lies in the fact that in some countries, the public desires this ultimate sanction for heinous crimes. In an exploratory study that focused on Michigan, Adinkrah and Clemens (2016) investigated whether the death penalty was to be reinstated or not and found that 52.6%, a slight majority, favored



its reinstatement as opposed to 45.7% of the respondents who opposed. Those who favored the reinstatement of capital punishment often anchor their arguments on religious, moral, and economic grounds (Punke, 2015; Ramos, 2016). They insist that it is just, morally right, and economically sound to remove a convicted felon permanently.

In another study, Ye, Sharag-Eldin, Spitzberg, and Wu (2018) assessed public opinion on capital punishment and found that 57% of those surveyed in Nebraska favored reinstatement of the death penalty versus 21% of the population that opposed it. The use of capital punishment remains controversial. A sharp division still exists across every society with two critical opposing camps of retentionists and abolitionists (Punke, 2015; Rowe, 2018). The enduring power of capital punishment as a sanction continues to generate controversy, underscoring the need for continuous research into the phenomenon.

**Retentionists' perspective.** Retentionists canvassed and anchored their support for the phenomenon on its perceived utility as a deterrence, especially to murder (Ayangwe, 2015; Biley, 2000; Sethuraju, Sole, & Oliver, 2016; Walters, 2018). However, Justice Marshall declared in 1972 in *Furman vs. Georgia* (1972), "In light of the massive amount of evidence before us, I see no alternative but to conclude that capital punishment cannot be justified on the basis of its deterrent effect" (*Furman vs. Georgia*, 408 U.S. 238, 365–66, 1972). In the same case, Justice Blackmun asserted, "*I yield to no one in the depth of my distaste, antipathy, and, indeed, abhorrence, for the death penalty . . . distaste is buttressed by a belief that capital punishment serves no useful purpose that can be demonstrated*" (*Furman vs. Georgia*, 408 U.S. 1972, pp. 238, 365–366). The Court

declared in a 5-4 decision that the imposition and execution of felons constituted cruel and unusual punishment in violation of the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments (Baumgartner, 2018). These opposing views have been replicated in almost all societies where the death penalty is practiced in the 21st Century. Series of studies have not yielded conclusive evidence to silence those on the opposing divides of the debate. Several Supreme Court decisions since Furman endeavoured to constrict the scope of the death penalty to the most heinous and egregious acts without violating the Eighth Amendment (Baumgartner, 2018).

The death penalty finds some measure of relevance in almost all the regions of the world. Sato (2014) conducted a study employing a survey method that gathered data on Zimbabweans' views of the death penalty and found that 61% supported its retention. Those who supported the retention of capital punishment contended deterrence of others from committing heinous crimes, although there is little scientific evidence for this deterrence in Zimbabwe, a country that maintained a moratorium on executions for a long period. Despite this strong support, 81% were willing to change their views if abolition were to be a government policy. Sato equally found that most, including those in support of the death penalty who were in favor of retention, still favored the exemption of pregnant women and those with mental disorders. Another key finding of the study was the lack of sympathy supporters of the death penalty had for the elderly; those aged 70 and above are currently protected from execution under the Constitution. Retentionists in Zimbabwe contended that even the elderly should face the death penalty for relevant offenses.

Singaporeans are generally retentionist. Using a survey of 1,500 respondents, Chan, Tan, Lee, and Marthi (2017) investigated the strength of public support for the death penalty in Singapore. They found that seven in ten were in favor of a mandatory or discretionary death sentence for crimes like intentional murder, drug trafficking, and any discharge of a firearm while involved in some specified crimes, whether any harm was caused due to such discharge citation. Despite the strong support, findings from the study disclosed that the government has changed its laws to allow judges more room to exercise discretion in arriving at sentences other than the death penalty (Chan et al., 2017). Similar to others, support for the death penalty is propagated by the unproven theory that it deters crime. In the United States, findings indicate that a majority of Americans support the death penalty for murders and the notion that it could reduce murder rates (Chan et al., 2017; Lambert, 2016; Nagin, 2014; Phillips & Simon, 2014).

Worthen, Rodgers, and Sharp (2014) studied the spectrum of attitudes towards the death penalty and found that support among those who held strong religious beliefs and attended churches regularly was very strong. Retentionists equally hinge their position on incapacitation, that the death penalty keeps the offender from further crimes and that the sanction of death removes the convicted felon from society permanently, eliminating the danger completely and irreversibly (George, 2017; Jabbar, 2010; Sethuraju et al., 2016). Another key pillar of the retentionists' position is the quest for ethical retribution. Although just a refinement of the very primitive urge to exact revenge, proponents insist a nexus exists—hinged on morality—between the crime of the convict and the

punishment rightly deserved (Nwagboso, 2016; Pratten, 2008; Sithole, 2016; Whited, 2016).

The death penalty is perceived by some as the most misused type of punishment, but it endures despite objections from human rights advocates and the United Nations (UN). In Africa, governments continue to use it as the most effective tool for fighting serious crimes (Ayangwe, 2015). Support for capital punishment has gone beyond deterrence, retribution, incapacitation, and public opinion (Ayangwe, 2015). Retentionists always point to strong public support for capital punishment, as can be seen in other studies (Ayangwe, 2015). However, in the United States, the support for capital punishment continues to decline (Adinkrah & Clemens, 2018; Death Penalty Information Center, 2017). Hong and Kleck (2018) explored the roots of white support for capital punishment in the United States and discovered roots in a range of attitudes, more expansive than prior research has disclosed.

The investigation indicated that social trust in government, individualistic, and authoritarian values played a part in white support. They equally uncovered and explained the impact of race on the support for capital punishment by whites in two ways. Racial prejudice predicted strong support, and black residential proximity functioned as a polarization factor (Adinkrah & Clemens, 2018). The research by Adinkrah and Clemens (2018) thus confirmed the racial hypothesis that white support for capital punishment remains strongly linked to racial prejudices. However, general support for the death penalty had dropped to a 45-year low. In its yearly measurement of support for the death penalty, a poll of 1,028 adults indicated that 55% of the Americans affirmed that they

were in support of its retention (Adinkrah & Clemens, 2018; Death Penalty Information Center, 2017). The argument for retention of the death penalty, therefore, revolves around key concepts, such as the need for retribution, deterrence, just deserts, moral necessity, and bringing closure to the victims and their families, among others (Chen, Greenberger, & Knowles, 2017; Kaplan, Dunn, & Sherman, 2016).

At Midwestern University, Sethuraju et al. (2016) explored the underlying rationales behind the support of the death penalty by 135 criminal justice and law enforcement majors. The study uncovered the infamous support the phenomenon enjoys in the United States and other retentionist nations. Among the notable reasons advanced by retentionists are that retribution or revenge and deterrence are necessary if law and order are to be maintained, as is exploring state-sanctioned violence to exert social control and incapacitation (Sethuraju et al., 2016). Another retentionist notion is that the executed person who is essentially a menace to the society is removed on a permanent basis (Badiora, Okunola, & Ojewole, 2015; Bessler, 2018; Johnson & Johnson, 2016; Kennedy & Tripodi, 2016).

Conversely, those who oppose the death penalty cite morality, the possibility that innocent persons can be killed, and insist that it is unfairly and disproportionately applied against minorities like Blacks and Hispanics, especially in the United States. The opponents also contend that this punishment does not deter murders, but rather brutalizes people to the extent of increasing the propensity to resort to violence (Badiora et al., 2015; Bessler, 2018; Broughton, 2017; Gaines, 2015). Other authors strongly contend that the death penalty affects and detracts from the human dignity to which everyone,

including the convicted person, is entitled (Burton & Barrow, 2015; Jones & Malkani, 2017; Nagelsen & Hukelbury, 2016).

Watamura, Saeki, Kiyomitsu, and Wakobe (2016) examined two issues in another study: how strongly Japanese people supported or opposed the death penalty and the reasons and beliefs underpinning their positions. The study drew from a data set of 318 Japanese university students who demonstrated high support for the death penalty: 66% of those surveyed were in favor, by far outnumbering the 17% who opposed the death penalty. However, the study indicated that those who strongly supported it were relatively few. The study equally disclosed that the international trend of life imprisonment is gradually becoming the preferred punishment for those convicted of crimes that hitherto were subjected to the death penalty. The support for the death penalty in Japan is deeply rooted, not necessarily to deter crime, but, rather because of their desire for retribution and other social policy factors.

**Abolitionists' perspective.** The main counter-argument for those who advocate for the abolishment of the death penalty is that there is no deterring effect. Amnesty International and others insisted that the death penalty has no greater deterrent effect on crime to justify its continuance (Amnesty International, 2014; Heynen, 2016). In an investigation of individual differences underlying attitudes towards the death penalty, Heynen (2016) concluded that males who supported the death sentence were more driven by retribution than other considerations. Heynen inferred that right-wing authoritarianism was a key influence bolstering support for the death penalty as opposed to its abolishment. Similarly, Edmondson (2017) explored the constitutionality of capital

punishment, employing survey case law from all the states in the United States. The researcher concluded that predictions of future danger were so flawed that abolition was the only viable solution. In other words, anchoring support for the death penalty on the prediction that it keeps dangerous people from ever offending again is a flawed postulation.

Arguments advocated for alternatives to the death penalty, pointing to the fact that death row inmates change, sometimes fundamentally, demonstrating traits of responsible citizens. Bandes (2016) used the perspective of the executioner to illuminate the debate on whether the death penalty should be abolished. The study drew on the perspectives of numerous executioners, wardens, chaplains, and general death row personnel and discovered that post-conviction character adopts positive traits. The executioners averred that death row inmates change positively over time and hold great potential for redemption. Bandes concluded that if retribution was key, then the offender's character ought to matter too.

Studies that support the death-penalty abolition, equally cited and underlined the cruel nature of capital punishment to buttress their viewpoints. These studies incorporated the contention that methods of execution like hanging, electrocution, firing squad, and lethal injection are cruel (Barry & Malkani, 2017; Bessler, 2018; Moore, 2018; Novak, 2016). In a study that invoked South Africa sentiment and international treaties, Swartz (2012) insisted that capital punishment amounted to inflicting cruelty on humans and degrading punishment. Swartz cited four grounds to justify the assertion: (a) The cruelty that is occasioned by the indeterminable delays, otherwise referred to as the death row

syndrome; (b) the irremediable nature of capital punishment; (c) the sentence failing to treat the individual as a human being worthy of respect; and (d) the inherent arbitrariness in the imposition of the death sentence. Swartz recommended that Botswana adopt the South African approach of abolition of the death penalty, using a constitutional amendment tool.

Still touching on the issue of cruelty, other investigations of the subject have contended that the waiting period for execution of a condemned death row person is above 14 years and 10 months (Kenewske & Barak, 2014; Miller, 2016; Sands, 2013). Death row experience is characterized by widespread demoralization provoked by objectively dehumanizing conditions that solitary confinement inflicts (Miller, 2016). Researchers have found that life under the death sentence is a transformative experience (Johnson, Kenewike, & Barak, 2014; McLeod, 2016). Indeed, McLeod (2016) argued that prisoners sentenced to death experience harsher conditions than do other prisoners.

McLeod (2016) explored the decision by prison administrators to establish death row and concluded that it is only rational if the intention is to punish. The study recommended that capital punishment should be abolished unless the various legislatures in states where the death penalty still exists expressly consider it, deliberately, as being capable of retribution and deterrence. It is to be noted that death row practices include the segregation of death-sentenced inmates in separate enclosures from other inmates (McLeod, 2016). The fact that such inmates are held in solitary confinement for 22 to 24 hours daily in very small cells without human contact supports the contention that capital punishment is harsh (Medrano, Ozkan, & Morris, 2017; Miller, 2016; Sun, 2014). Death



row conditions are so dire and dehumanizing that some inmates prefer and even advocate for their executions to be carried out (Medrano et al., 2017; Rountree, 2012). In Nigeria, prison conditions are chronically harsh and unbearable, including overcrowding, poor medical facilities, suffocating heat as a result of lack of power supply to prison facilities, starvation, and endless waiting for justice that drags on for as long as 20 years. (Nnam, 2016; Obarisiagbon & Aderinto, 2018; Sarat et al., 2017; Schönteich, 2012).

A similar study by Dieter (2015) made a case for abolition by sign-posting and discussing the inherent problems with the death penalty. Dieter identified these problems to include mistakes that led to the deaths of innocent convicts, the significant costs inherent in the process, the fact that it is at variance with fundamental values of Americans, and that two-thirds of the cases were reversed secondary to serious errors. Finally, in the United States, one important argument at the center of the debate is that Blacks, a minority group, are disproportionately represented in the statistics of those who receive the sentence of death (Barry & Malkani, 2018; Goldfarb, 2016; Levinson, Smith, & Young, 2014; Marshall, 2018; O'Brien, Grosso, Woodworth, & Taylor, 2016; Pierce, Radelet, & Sharp, 2017; Steiker & Steiker, 2015; Tracy, 2015; Williams, 2017).

Tortorice (2017) investigated the costs and benefits anchored on abolitionists' and retentionists' platforms, and concluded that the benefits accruable from the retention of the death penalty are outweighed by the reality of the costs. The cost of argument in the case of Pennsylvania capital punishment regime as explained by Tortorice was remarkably expensive against the backdrop of the state's few executions. The researcher further drew from the experiences of New Jersey, New York, and Maryland that

abolished the death penalty because they maintained death row but infrequently executed convicts. Tortorice found that potential benefits of capital punishment lack the ability to be measured using empirical investigations.

Li (2017) utilized the moderately revised version of Scanlon's contractualism to investigate whether the death penalty, life imprisonment, long sentences, or shorter sentences are justified against the backdrop of the non-negligible rate of erroneous conviction. Li argued on the strength of contractualism that a permissible act must be at least justifiable to everyone affected. Li concluded that mistaken convictions have significant implications for what remains acceptable to the people in each community. In another study, Lantin (2017) examined the argument for and against the death penalty in Taiwan. Lantin found that support for the death penalty is based on empirical studies that employed a sophisticated econometric method and indicated that each execution saves 18 lives. Despite the inconclusive arguments by the opposing divides, the death penalty continues to be used in different legal systems around the world. The next section includes examination of capital punishment in some selected legal systems.

### **Comparative Study Views of Selected Capital Punishment Regimes**

In this part of the literature review, the goal is to synthesize and compare selected capital punishment regimes. I focused on Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, India, and Europe to shed more light on how this controversial punishment is used in the various climates, while highlighting the abolitionists' status of some of these countries. A report by Amnesty International (2017) disclosed that executions and death sentences around the world remained at an historic low for 45 years. The report indicated that only 23

executions and 39 new death sentences took place in 2017. Despite the significant death penalty decline, it continued to be a punishment of choice for several nations. Indeed, in the past 45 years approximately 100 nation states abolished the death penalty for all crimes (Akingbehin, 2017; Kim, 2016; Novak, 2018). This global diffusion poses a puzzle because capital punishment includes historical acceptance as the ultimate criminal sanction, and its abolition had often been politically unpopular in many parts of the world. However, the death penalty had been abolished in most of sub-Saharan Africa (Akingbehin, 2017; Novak, 2018). Therefore, I undertake an exploration of the phenomenon in some selected countries.

**Capital punishment in Nigeria.** Capital punishment has been utilized as a sanction for various classes of offenses in Nigeria for centuries (Obarisiagbon, 2017). The validity of capital punishment as a sanction for some crimes in Nigeria owes its root to Section 33(1) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended). Drawing from the leverage offered by the Constitutional provision, Section 319, 49(a) 37, and 208 of the Criminal Code Act 2004 prescribed the death penalty for offenses like murder, treachery, treason, and armed robbery, among others. Lately, some states in Nigeria included kidnapping on the list of offenses resulting in the death penalty because of its increasing prevalence (Emanemua & Akinlosotu, 2017; Nwagboso, 2016; Saheed, 2016; Suraju & Zehadul Karim, 2016). Giving false evidence that leads to the death of an innocent convicted and executed on the strength of such evidence is punishable with death by Section 159 of the Penal Code, applicable in the Northern part of Nigeria. In the same vein, abatement of suicide by those below the age of 18 or an

insane or intoxicated person attracts death on conviction as prescribed by Section 227 of the Penal Code.

Nigerian courts consistently affirmed and enforced the validity of Sections 33(1), 233(2), 243 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended). In *Adeniji vs. State* (2000) (2 NWLR (Pt.645) p. 355), the Court of Appeal held that the above cited sections of the Constitution validate the death penalty. Similarly, the Supreme Court in *Anthony Okoro vs. State* (2012) LPELR – SC.187/2007) held that the death penalty and its various methods of execution were legally valid. Nigerian courts handed out more death sentences than every other country in Sub-Saharan Africa. Amnesty International (2018) reported that 621 people were sentenced to death in 2017. The report also disclosed the same year that 2,285 persons were on death row in Nigeria. The implication of this high number of convicts on death row is that executions do not keep pace with convictions.

Many convictions for the death penalty exist because Northern Nigeria's Penal Code prescribes the death penalty for offenses like sodomy, adultery, and apostasy, among others (Abangwu & Adekunbi, 2013; Penal Code (Northern states) Federal Provisions Act). In addition to these offenses in the Penal Code that draw the death penalty, some military offenses like misconduct in action, cowardly behavior in the face of an enemy, mutiny, aiding the enemy, and subversion are also punishable by death (Armed Forces Act Chapter A20 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004). Given these wide-ranging offenses under which the courts are to award a mandatory death penalty, the large pool of convicts on death row remains unexpected. Hundreds of armed robbers

have been executed in Nigeria, especially during the era of military rule (Elechi et al., 2006).

Researchers found that armed robbery offenders are mostly young men acting under societal pressures who set out as petty thieves, pickpockets, and shoplifters gradually transforming to hardened robbers and ending up with convictions that mandate the death penalty (Abangwu & Adekunbi, 2013; Chadee, Ali, & Burke, 2018; Elechi et al., 2006; Otu & Noel, 2013; Otu, Smart, Otu, & Elechi, 2015). Nigerian courts therefore convicted and executed about 2,600 armed robbers and a few other offenders between 1970 and 1999 (Amnesty International, 2017; International Commission against Death Penalty, 2013; Olonisakin, Ogunleye, & Adebayo, 2017). Nigeria has implemented the death penalty for over 50 years, and researchers indicate that Nigerians generally favor its retention (Abangwu & Adekunbi, 2013; Novak, 2016). Nigerian courts have, in general, maintained that for some offenses, the death penalty is mandatory (Abangwu & Adekunbi, 2013; Akingbehin, 2017; Obarisiagbon, 2017; Olonisakin et al., 2017).

Exemptions to a mandatory death sentence include juveniles not yet the age of 17, pregnant women, the mentally ill, and women with children (Akingbehin, 2012). The central argument by Nigerians is that the death penalty deters crime (Abangwu & Adekunbi, 2013; Obarisiagbon, 2017). However, in 2017, Nigeria was among the countries that commuted the death sentences of some convicted felons (Amnesty International, 2017). Although the death penalty retained political durability in Nigeria, its potency is diminished by the apparent self-imposed moratorium on executions (Amnesty International, 2017; Novak, 2016). While this moratorium appears as a positive

sign for abolitionists, expectations are mitigated by new developments in which there are proposals to sanction corruption and rape with capital punishment (Amnesty International, 2017; Novak, 2016). As of the time of this study, Nigeria remains a retentionist nation and many still support this status.

**Capital punishment in Ghana.** Ghana has maintained the death penalty on its statute books since 1894, when the common law became operational (Acheampong, Narteh, & Rand, 2017). The literature on the death penalty in Ghana is very scant and hardly current, despite its retentionist status. Giving credence to its continued support of death penalty as a form of punishment, Ghana abstained from the UN resolution on the moratorium on the use of the death penalty (Acheampong et al., 2017; Seneadza, 2011). Therefore, Ghana maintains the death penalty for treason, first degree murder, and armed robbery. Seneadza (2011) investigated the death penalty as practiced in Ghana, drawing from the strength of theoretical, jurisprudential, and religious accounts. The study included examination of the divergent views of those who are for or opposed to the death penalty and concluded that Ghana should put a moratorium on carrying it out. Seneadza contended that the death penalty was inconsistent with the unqualified right to life enshrined in the 1992 Constitution of Ghana. Seneadza further argued that deterring crime cannot be attained through the objectification of murderers by putting them to death. However, despite its retention of the death penalty, Ghana has not been executing criminals for about three decades.

Amnesty International (2017) found no executions in Ghana since 1993. Despite the lack of executions, the courts continued to award sentences of death for mandatory

offenses. At the end of 2016, 144 men and four women were on death row, some of whom had been on it for at least 5 years (Amnesty International, 2017; Okeke, 2015).

Amnesty International revealed that most of the convictions were made in the face of lack of proper legal representation (Amnesty International, 2017; Novak, 2014). Additionally, many of the convicts did not understand their legal right to appeal or even how to proceed.

Researchers investigated the support of the public for the death penalty in Ghana and discovered that 48.3% of Ghanaians strongly oppose it (Boakye & Atopare, 2015; Forkuor, Ofori-Dua, Forkuor, & Obeng, 2018). However, Boakye and Atopare (2015) discovered that 6 out of 10 respondents supported the abolition of the death penalty in murder cases, while 71% chose life imprisonment without the possibility of parole as an alternative to the death penalty. The report uncovered, worryingly, support for lynching or vigilante violence if the death penalty were to be abolished. Interestingly, low class indigents were inclined to oppose the death penalty. Overall, support for capital punishment was very weak in Ghana, as opposed to Nigeria where mob justice and vigilante killings are very prevalent, giving a broad, poignant hint of support for state sanctioned killing (Forkuor et al., 2018; Novak, 2016; Novak, 2018; Obarisiagbon & Novak, 2014; Okeke, 2015).

Despite this weak support, successive Ghanaian governments continued to urge the courts to award mandatory death sentences for some offenses. In *Johnson vs. Ghana*, the UN Human Rights Committee was asked to consider and determine whether Ghana violated its obligation under the International Covenant on Civic and Political Rights by

the mandatory imposition of the death penalty (Tankebe, Karstdt, & Adu-Poku, 2018). The Ghanaian government opposed the request. Article 13 (1) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana states, “No person shall be deprived of his life intentionally except in the exercise of the sentence of a court in respect of a criminal offense under the laws of the Ghana of which he has been convicted” (Article 13(1)).

Thus, the Ghanaian Supreme Court held that the mandatory death punishment remained consistent with the Constitution and that the discretionary death penalty regime can be emplaced by the legislature, not the courts (*Dexter Johnson vs. Republic* [2011] 2 S.C.G.L.R. 601; Novak, 2016). The current position is that although the death penalty remains on the statute books and *dejure*, there is no moratorium on execution, and a *defacto* moratorium has been in place for about three decades (Amnesty International, 2017; Boakye, 2013; Novak, 2014, 2016, 2018; Okeke, 2015; Tankebe et al., 2018). The last execution was in 1993 when 20 persons were executed by firing squad, most of whom were armed robbers and ritual murderers (Tankebe et al., 2018). Still, like Nigeria, armed robbery attracted very swift, merciless, and decisive action by vigilantes (Tankebe et al., 2018). It is one of the three crimes punished with the death penalty.

Oteng-Ababio et al. (2016) employed a longitudinal analysis of trends and patterns of crime in Ghana covering years 1980-2010. The researcher examined the nexus between crime and the dynamics of socio-politico-economic forces in Ghana within the period covered. This is based on the arguments of North American scholars that crime was the rational response to the pressure exerted by socioeconomic difficulties, such as inequality, peer pressure, urbanization, and poverty (Sedziafa, Tenkorang, Owusu, &



Sano, 2018). Sedziafa et al. (2018) concluded that age-old studies hinging on dichotomous narratives to locate the causative factors of crime in Africa were no longer tenable. Similarly, the researchers insisted that based on their findings, the perseverance of crime in Ghana was not attributable to “pure” inequality, but, rather, a complex combination of socioeconomic and political developments combined with ineffective policies (Sedziafa et al., 2018).

Criminal trends in Ghana mirror Nigerian murder, manslaughter, rape, defilement, assault, harm, abortion, child stealing, and attempted suicide (Appiah-Nyamekye & Armah-Attoh, 2018; Arthur, 2017; Sam & Abane, 2017; Sedziafa et al., 2018). Robbery is an offense against persons, but it is largely a property offense because of the profit motive behind it, and it involves confrontation and threat to persons, victims of the crime (Appiah-Nyamekye & Armah-Attoh, 2018; Arthur, 2017; Sam & Abane, 2017).

Similar to Nigeria, Ghana has the security problem of armed robbery (Appiah-Nyamekye & Armah-Attoh, 2018; Yeboah-Assiamah & Kyeremeh, 2014). More robbers had been executed than offenders in any other category except those accused of treason by military administrations in the past (Appiahene-Gyamfi, 1998). Because of the moratorium on executions and general perception of the public that Ghana’s criminal justice is ineffective, mob justice is prevalent in some communities to put *the fear of God* in criminals or to deter them from wreaking havoc in the community (Appiah-Nyamekye & Armah-Attoh, 2018; Yeboah-Assiamah & Kyeremeh, 2014). The fear of crime is so pervasive that highwalls, metal burglary-proofed windows, and doors and other self-

implemented security measures are the norm (Owusu, Wrigley-Asanteb, Oteng-Ababio, & Owusu, 2015).

However, Appiah-Nyamekye and Armah-Attoh (2018) indicated that 81% of Ghanaians denounce mob justice and insist that citizens should rely on the police. They want courts to punish those involved in acts of vigilantism, but 1-in-7 feels that citizens are justified in taking the law into their own hands sometimes. A similar study by Tankebe (2011) found a strong disapproval of vigilante violence but an ambiguous attitude to the use of force. Unlike Ghana, Nigerians appear to have a high tolerance for vigilante justice.

**Capital punishment in South Africa.** Like many countries in Africa, capital punishment was an integral part of South Africa's criminal justice system for decades; because of the apartheid system, it operated as well as high rates of crimes (Lamb, 2018; Midgley, 2016). South Africa established the mandatory death sentence in 1917, bringing into codification a common law practice (Novak, 2016). The surprising argument for its enduring presence was that white South Africa did not wish the hangman to become redundant (Midgley, 2016). The 350 years of capital punishment in South Africa came to an end in 1995 after over 1,100 persons had been executed in the 1980s alone (Bae, 2005). The death knell to South Africa's death penalty regime was dealt by the epochal decision of the Constitutional Court of South Africa on June 6, 1995, which states that everyone, including the most abominable of human beings, was entitled to life. Therefore, capital punishment was unconstitutional (Bae, 2005; Block & Suter, 2017; Kende, 2006; Owusu-Sekyere, Adjuik, & Wedam, 2017; State vs. Makwanyane,

(CCT3/94) [1995] ZACC 3). Because of its abolition, the literature on the death penalty is scant and dated.

Historically, the method of execution was death by hanging, a punishment that ruptured a man's spinal cord at the point where it entered the skull, his limbs flailing in a grotesque dance and his bowel and bladder voiding themselves, soiling his legs and dripping to the floor (Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2017). During the apartheid era, authorities employed capital punishment as both a weapon against crime and a tool for enforcing racial separation (Bae, 2005; Block & Suter, 2017; Kende, 2006; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2017). The death penalty in South Africa was in response to offenses like kidnapping, child stealing, stealing, treason, rape, robbery with aggravating circumstances, and breaking into homes with aggravating circumstances (Block & Suter, 2017; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2017). For the offense of murder, it was mandatory for judges presiding over the cases to impose the death penalty (Bae, 2005). Capital punishment was thus viewed as a tool for controlling and punishing opponents of apartheid (Bae, 2005; Kende, 2006; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2017).

From its creation as the Union of South Africa in 1910 until the imposition of moratorium on executions in 1990, over 4,200 people were hanged for cases like rape, murder, robbery or attempted robbery, child stealing, aggravated housebreaking or attempted house-breaking, and terrorism (Lamb, 2018; Midgley, 2016; Novak, 2016). Prior to its eventual abolition of executions towards the end of the 1980s, the regime could no longer withstand the pressure of international sanctions (Bae, 2005; Midgley, 2016; Super, 2014). Similarly, the quest for retribution could no longer sustain its

influence on the death penalty. The justices concluded in *State vs. Makwanyane* (CCT3/94) [1995] ZACC 3) that retribution could not be accorded the same weight under the Constitution as the weight to life. The Justices equally posited that there was no proof to support the claim that capital punishment acted as an effective deterrence to crime. Similarly, Arthur (2017) investigated that effect of the abolition of the death penalty by the case of *State vs. Makwanyane* and contended that it was effective despite overwhelming support by the populace for its reinstatement.

Super (2017) found that South Africa has the highest incarceration figures in Africa, among the highest in the world. Because of the abolition of the death penalty, there has been a significant increase in the number of prisoners serving life sentences. The prisons are overcrowded to the extent that prisoners in some cases have only 1, 2 m<sup>2</sup> of space in which to eat, sleep, and generally spend 23 hours of the day (Super, 2014). Another perceived drawback of the abolition of the death penalty in South Africa that ensued in the wake of democratization is the shift to governing through community structures, resulting in vigilante killings (Cooper-Knock, 2016; Super, 2014). The abolition of the death penalty was accomplished because of a constitutional challenge (Working Group on Death Penalty and Extrajudicial Summary or Arbitrary killings in Africa, 2017). South Africa was among the most prolific executioners in the world (Sedziafa et al., 2018). The South Africa Constitutional Court explored global evidence on the trend of abolition and surmised that the world's nations included general opposition to capital punishment, and the few that supported did so only in some extreme cases (George & Levitt, 2010).

The data on youth involvement in violence and violent crime in South Africa showed that they are extraordinarily high, indicative of lawlessness, and a moral crisis (Hargovan, 2015; Swartz & Scott, 2014). The violence includes political violence, sexual abuse, rape, gang violence, bullying, domestic violence, and homicide resulting from interpersonal conflict, causing the police to become increasingly militarized in their efforts to curb it (Lamb, 2018; Roberts et al., 2017; Swartz & Scott, 2014). This violence also explains the increasing wave of vigilantism in South Africa (Cooper-Knock & Owen, 2015; Gross, 2016; Knock, 2016; Super, 2016). Aligning these findings with the literature on the subject in Nigeria, it is clear that weak legal structures and law enforcement structures precipitate the resort to vigilantism.

**Capital punishment in India.** India is a retentionist country and has doled out the death penalty to convicted felons for several decades (Akhtar, 2008; Kantha & Rao, 2015). Under the India Code, capital punishment is meted for murder, waging war against the government, abetting mutiny, fabricating false evidence for trials that attract the death penalty, abetting the suicide of a child or an insane person, kidnapping for ransom, gang robbery involving murder, and conspiracy to commit any crime where the punishment is the death penalty (Kantha & Rao, 2015; Indian Penal Code Act, 1860; Law Commission of India Report No. 262, the Death Penalty, 2014; Novak, 2014).

The continued existence of the death penalty in India received public support. A study by Sahni and Shah (2016), using a self-administered survey method of 25,210 respondents, found that only 20% supported abolishment because of the violation of the right to life and it was barbaric. In an earlier study, Lambert, Pasupuleti, Jiang,

Jaishankar, and Bhimarasetty (2008) explored the views of college students enrolled in 20 undergraduate classes. The exploratory study surveyed 434 students and found that 44% expressed a degree of opposition while 43% supported the punishment. In the same vein, 13% were uncertain. The multivariate analysis indicated that statistically significant reasons for the support included retribution and incapacitation, while those who opposed it hinged their opposition on morality and the argument that deterrence can be achieved by the imposition of life without parole. While not abolished, the position in India is that the death penalty is to be awarded in the “rarest of rare cases,” as was laid down in *Bachan Singh vs. State of Punjab* (1980) (2 SCC 684). The Court stated that the “death penalty is irrevocable; it cannot be recalled. It extinguishes the flame of life forever and is plainly destructive of the right of all, a right without which enjoyment of no other rights is possible” (*Bachan Singh vs. State of Punjab* (1980) (2 SCC 684), p. 238).

Recent developments indicate a coalescing of views towards abolition (Law Commission of India Report No. 262, the Death Penalty, 2014; Sahni & Shah, 2016). India’s execution rates are the lowest among the retentionist nations (Novak, 2014; Novak, 2015; Sahni & Shah, 2016). Given the low execution rates in India, a culture of extra-judicial killings by the police is emerging (Novak, 2014; Sahni & Shah, 2016; Tandon, 2015). Additionally, about 30,000 murders are committed yearly in India, painting a stark picture of lawlessness because many who should otherwise be punished with the death penalty escape while a few unlucky ones receive, a situation described as a lottery (Novak, 2014). Support for the death penalty in India is low because only 44% support it versus 43% who oppose it, while 13% are not sure. About 100 people are

receive death sentences annually, but only two executions have been carried out since 1997 (Hood, 2012; Law Commission of India Report No. 262, the Death Penalty, 2014; Novak, 2014). The death penalty as a form of punishment in India has been challenged at the Supreme Court many times without success.

The Indian Supreme Court modified its position on the death penalty several times. In *Shankar Kisanrao Khade vs. State of Maharashtra* (2013) 5 SCC 546, the Court expressed misgivings about the lack of coherence and determined the purpose and basis for the death sentence. The Court called for the emplacing of a Law Commission of India hoping that the Commission may resolve the issues. At independence, India retained laws in place during the British Colonial Rule era (Parmar, 2015). These laws included the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1989, and the Indian Penal Code, 1860, which specifically prescribed punishments, including the death penalty. However, the Code of Criminal Procedure was re-enacted in 1973, which prescribed the death penalty in Section 354(3) requiring “special reasons to be given for the award of capital punishment.” The “rarest of the rare” actually rears the “worst of the worse” (Sahni & Shah, 2016; Tandon, 2015).

In another instructive study, Kamble and Mullet (2016) explored the views of 430 students from the Hindu community living in the state of Karnataka, India. The students were offered lifelike scenarios portraying a situation in which a defendant has committed a specified crime and the circumstances surrounding the crime. The researchers asked the students to denote the extent to which they thought the death penalty would be the most appropriate sanction in each distinct case. Five factors were contrasted in the scenarios: (a) the severity of the crime (burglary, rape, or homicide); (b) the level to which the

defendant's guilt had been established (fully vs. not fully); (c) whether the defendant had expressed compassion/empathy for the victims; (d) the defendant's antecedents (whether he had already committed crimes or not); and (e) the level of criminality in the area in which the crime has been committed (low vs. high). Overall, findings indicated that support for the death penalty was relatively high. While executions lack regularity in India, it still enjoys a credible level of support for some offenses, especially in the face of increased rapes, some of which result in death (Kamble & Mullet; 2016; Lodhia, 2015; Roy, 2014).

The sentence of capital punishment for murder, treason, abetting suicide, and armed robbery bears a striking resemblance to the capital punishment regime in Nigeria. In the same vein, receiving capital punishment as a sentence for terrorism and kidnapping is similar to the laws in some states in Nigeria including Lagos. As in Nigeria, the military codes of India's three branches retain capital punishment for some offenses committed by servicemen and officers (Arthur, 2017). The "rarest of the rare" is doled out for the most heinous crimes like mass murders. In 2003, the penalty was assigned to the eight members of the Yadav Caste of Dalit villagers (Arthur, 2017; Novak, 2014). The death penalty has been retained consistently by either Law Commissions or through affirmation by the Supreme Court, as can be seen in the cited cases.

**Capital punishment in Europe.** Capital punishment has been abolished in Europe, and the process took several stages through conventions and protocols in addition to works of the UN and the cooperation of international organizations like Amnesty International (Neumayer, 2008; Peshkopia & Imami, 2008; Sithole, 2016).



Europe has been a de facto death-penalty-free zone since 1997, largely through the efforts of the Council of Europe (Behrmann & Yorke, 2013; Council of Europe, 2017; Light & Kovalev, 2013; Sithole, 2016). Since then, the de jure abolition of the death penalty in all Council of Europe member states, and under all circumstances, has remained a central political objective of the organization (Council of Europe, 2017). Before the abolition of the death penalty, Britain had what was referred to as the Bloody Code, which punished petty theft, cattle stealing, cutting down trees in public places, and even shoplifting with death (Bennett, 2018; King & Ward, 2015). As of this writing, the death penalty had been largely abolished by most states on the grounds that it is the violation of international and European human rights law (Kandelina, 2016; Malkani, 2013; Malkani, 2017; Nicolau, 2013; Swiffen, 2016).

The principle of the right to life, a cardinal argument for the abolition of the death penalty, continues to play a role in its elimination, not only in Europe but, indeed, other parts of the world. The death penalty was abolished in the UK in 1965; however, it is not absolute (Barry, 2017; McClosky, 2012). The movement or evolution away from the death penalty was thus sparked by the emergence of international human rights law and its commitment, resulting in more than half the world's abolition of it (Amnesty International, 2017; Barry, 2017). The Council of Europe concluded that the death penalty is unethical or out of sync with the dictate of democratic norms (Tankebe et al., 2018). Thus, compliance of countries with the abolition of the death penalty is a requirement for membership of the Council of Europe (Tankebe et al., 2018).

The implication is that capital punishment has been abolished in the whole of Europe except for two holdouts, Russia and Belarus (Amnesty International, 2017; Swiffen, 2016). The Council of Europe has two protocols against the death penalty. Its stated goals include upholding human rights, democracy, and the rule of law (Swiffen, 2016). Under the prodding of the European Union (EU) and indeed the Council of Europe, Russia has put a moratorium on executions without renouncing the death penalty permanently (Kandelina, 2016; Light & Kovalev, 2013; Nicolau, 2013; Swiffen, 2016). Thus, Russia is the only member of the Council of Europe that hasn't abolished the death penalty in peacetime despite agreeing to comply with the requirement upon joining the council (Kandelina, 2016; Kleinstuber, Joy & Mansley, 2016; Malone, 2016; Novak, 2017; Swiffen, 2016).

The study by Light and Kovalev (2013) employed the tracing approach, covering and involving a broader historical sweep whose findings were integrated into a comparative discussion of the death penalty and state killings. The researchers found that the Council's institutional powers to coerce a state as powerful as Russia to abolish the death penalty were limited. It also discovered that while Russia does not carry out executions under the banner of the death penalty, widespread extrajudicial killings occur. The consequence is that Russia achieves the same results without employing the death penalty mechanism. Therefore, Russia is a strong holdout on the death penalty abolition quest of the Council of Europe. Nicolau (2013) traced the history of the death penalty abolition in Europe and found the beginning of its journey in Europe from Portugal in 1867, followed by the Netherlands in 1870, Norway 1905, and France 1906-1907.

Although resumed later, it was finally abolished in 1981 (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2016; Sithole, 2016; Tracy, 2015).

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights was the major instrument that galvanized European countries into taking concrete steps (the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, 1948). It proclaimed, “Every individual has the right to life, liberty and the security of his perso (Universal Declaration on Human Rights, 1948, pp. 3-4). The European Court affirmed the right to life and the abolition of the death penalty in *Soering vs. the United Kingdom* (1989) 11 EHRR 439, [1989] ECHR 14). The Court found that the decision of Britain to extradite a person to the United States who faced the prospect of receiving capital punishment and consequent execution violated Article 3 of the European Conviction that prohibits torture and inhumane and degrading punishment.

The EU maintains a strong principled position against the death penalty under all circumstances and for all cases (Hnidka, 2016). The Commission argued no scientific evidence exists to support the contention by retentionists that the death penalty deters crime more effectively than any other punishment. Behrmann and Yorke (2013) traced the role of the EU in the abolition of the death penalty—a world free of state-sanctioned or authorized judicial killing—and concluded that the efforts are cumulative, a success story of human rights. The EU developed human rights standards that are at the heart of its abolition work. Hnidka (2016) identified and revealed the EU’s internal and external policies for the abolition of the death penalty that ensured the level of success so far achieved. The abolition of the death penalty is consequently a customary norm, according to the author. Hnidka employed an analytical and descriptive method of data collection in

their investigation into the work of the EU in its abolition of the death penalty. The researcher surmised that, based on the theoretical explanation of the issue of the death penalty, the EU creates its own contracts and demarches their action plans combined with public statements to try regulating and gradually eliminating it from the legislation of states individually (Hnidka. 2016).

Unlike Nigeria, all countries in Europe other than Russia and Belarus abolished the death penalty for all offenses. Nigeria, on the other hand, punishes many offenses, including armed robbery, with capital punishment. Despite this sanction in Nigeria, armed robbery offenses, mostly by young adults, persist. Thus, the deterring influence of capital punishment in relation to the phenomenon is in doubt.

### **Influence of Capital Punishment as Deterrence against Armed Robbery**

Not surprisingly, the death penalty is an issue that generates intense debate on both sides of the divide—abolitionists and retentionists. In this portion of the literature review, the goal is to present the divergent views on whether the death penalty deters armed robbery offenses. Given that the literature is limited and scant, I turned to other crimes to interrogate the concept of capital punishment as a deterrent against all crimes that attract sanctions. Abangwu and Adekunbi (2013) examined the use of the death penalty in Nigeria and the contrasting views on the phenomenon. The researchers concluded that capital punishment appeared to be justified insofar as it helped to check certain criminal acts. However, the study did not provide credible supporting evidence for its conclusions on the efficacy of the death penalty for deterrence.

Badejogbin (2015) studied the effect of sentencing reforms in a postcolonial society and called for rationalization of sentencing discretion in Nigeria, drawing on the experiences of South Africa and England with a view to reducing the number of people in Nigerian prisons. Ukoji and Okolie-Osemene (2016) studied the prevalence of lethal and nonlethal crimes in Nigeria and found that the prevalence of weapons, among other factors, has created the crime-infested environment. Similarly, Obubu and Nwokolo (2016) modeled and forecasted armed robbery cases in Nigeria using auto regressive integrated moving average (ARIMA) models. They performed a forecast of armed robbery in Nigeria using a 29-year data series and anchored their research on the anomie theory. The generated data revealed the four most significant factors in the hierarchy of response—bad friends, money, poverty, and corruption—that may account for the involvement of youth in armed robberies. Obubu and Nwokolo found that armed robbery was on the increase in the forecasted period. Consequently, they recommended that governments in various states of the federation put up structures to keep citizens, especially young adults, busy in positive ways.

Jiang, Hu, and Lambert (2018) focused their study on criminal deterrence and whether it works. Empirical evidence from the study led to the conclusion that there is a marginal deterrent effect for legal capital punishment, but others insisted that this conclusion must be considered with a large dose of caution and skepticism. Emeka et al. (2016) looked at the awaiting trial phenomenon that keeps prisons perpetually congested, mostly because some of the detainees are indigent (unable to afford legal counsel) and, thus, left to the vagaries of harsh prison conditions across Nigeria. Emeka et al.

recommended that the indigent accused persons awaiting trial should be provided with legal representation.

Ukwayi and Okpa (2017a) critically assessed the Nigerian criminal justice system, which addressed the problem of awaiting trial in Port Harcourt Maximum Prison, Rivers State. The researchers found that the rigidity of the penal law, holding charges, and delay in the disposal of cases by the agencies of the Criminal Justice System have contributed to the problem of awaiting trial in this prison. Ukwayi and Okpa recommended that stakeholders make a more professional commitment to check the trend. Osasona (2015) examined the performance of Nigeria's criminal justice system, using quantitative and qualitative indicators. Osasona found that the Nigerian criminal justice system is fundamentally flawed because its weaknesses are discernible at every processing point on the full criminal justice system line. Osasona insisted that it is an oddly designed judicial system, an outdated and counterproductive style of policing, and a correctional service that inhumanely warehouses those considered "*innocent*" by the very law that imprisons them. He concluded that the aforementioned factors collectively rendered the system out of sync with contemporary global best practices in criminal justice system administration.

Ukwayi and Okpa (2017b) studied violent crimes, economic development, and the morality of capital punishment in Nigeria. The researchers argued from the perspective of retentionists that violent crimes such as murder, armed robbery, kidnapping, and terrorism are the cruelest, most inhuman crimes plaguing Nigeria. They contended that many civilized nations governed by law impose the severest punishment, the death

penalty, on such heinous crimes. Ukwayi and Okpa thus made a case for a selective retention of the death penalty in Nigeria's penal system in cases of culpable or intentional homicide, currently on the increase.

Brunello (2016) assessed the reasons behind the continued retention of the death penalty in the United States, identifying past opportunities that should have been exploited to abolish the phenomenon. The study took a wholesome analysis of all the contending arguments and traced the history of capital punishment, particularly in the United States. After a critical look at case law, Brunello concluded that it should be abolished, not because of morality, but because continued retention of the death penalty does not work.

By contrast, Glasser, Martin, and Kahn (2015) took a different position on the death penalty. They conducted a survey embedded experiment that took a nationally representative sample to examine the effect of verdict severity due to the defendant's race. The study discovered that respondents were more likely to be convicted when the defendant was Black. Their investigations contended that the death penalty may be a cause of racial differences, implicating threats to civil rights and effective criminal justice. The implication of the study was that jurors who are white do not necessarily convict Black defendants because of the deterring effect of capital punishment; rather, they do so because of race. However, jury bias cannot be ruled out, especially based on race, religion, and conservative views (Exum, 2017; Glasser et al., 2015; Joy & McMunigal, 2016; Levinson et al., 2014; Nasif, Sriram, & Smith, 2018; Obarisiagbon, 2017; Spohn, 2015; Thaxton, 2017).

Obarisiagbon (2017) used the functionalist theory to explore the deterring effect of capital punishment on crime. The exploratory study gathered data from 1,200 respondents, 30 in-depth interviews, and 15 key informants' interviews. A descriptive analysis of the data resulted in the conclusion that the death penalty does not in any way deter a would-be criminal. Obarisiagbon further recommended the government should focus on rehabilitation and addressing social inequalities within society instead. Although the researchers elicited the views of the general public from three states in Nigeria—Edo, Delta, and Anambra States—they did not focus on the deterring effect of capital punishment on armed robbery.

Tabak (2017) evaluated trends in capital punishment practices in the United States and found a huge drop in the granting of new verdicts. Tabak identified factors, such as the application of DNA technology, which detects errors in evidence, the requirement for unanimous jury verdicts, execution errors, and defects of state attorneys who constantly asked for the death penalty, as well as the overturning of cases following poor representation among others to be responsible for the drop-in death penalty verdict (Tabak, 2017). The evaluation revealed the presence of competent counsel in cases reduces drastically the number of death outcomes. Tabak concluded that capital punishment is an inefficient government program that yields few dividends. The implication of this study, like others, is that the death penalty serves little utility in the form of deterrence. Similarly, in evaluating the efficiency of a death sentence serving as a deterrent for future crime, Lantin (2017) examined the main argument for and against the death penalty. He looked at six arguments driving the debate on the utility or otherwise of



the death penalty: retribution, deterrence, miscarriage of justice, the argument from recidivism, the argument from incapacitation, and brutalization. Lantin closed the study with questions but failed to state a preferred position, indicating that it could go both ways. Lantin, however, staked a position for the concept of justice. In private murders, capital punishment would be permissible. In other words, the study leans toward retribution.

Muftic, Maljevic, Mandic, and Buljubasic (2015) used self-reported survey data in their study, elicited from 440 students attending the University of Sarajevo, to assess their support for the death penalty. Among those surveyed, about 52.7% were in support of the death penalty for certain crimes. The highest support for it was for murder (84.4%), while rape attracted 65.5%. However, very few students (11.2%) indicated support for the death penalty for armed robbery. Deterrence and retribution were key factors in the support of the students; the students believed that severe punishment was an effective deterrent against crime. The implication is that if an armed robbery offense resulted in the death of the victim, the student population studied was likely to support it.

Though several studies indicated that approximately 79% of the Japanese population supports the death penalty (Muramatsu et al., 2017; Sato, 2014), the deterring effect of capital punishment on crime remained uncertain despite persistent claims by its proponents (Hsu, 2015; Lee, 2017; Tibbs, 2015). Arguments proposed include that if the death penalty is to be used because of its deterring effect, one should at least be sure that it deters crime (Obarisiagbon, 2017; Muramatsu et al., 2017). When Muramatsu et al. (2017) assessed the empirical reality of the claims by Japanese officials that capital

punishment continues to be retained because of its deterring effect on homicide, they found out that neither death sentences nor executions deter robbery or homicides.

Between 1994 and 1999, Nigeria ranked fifth among the six countries of the world with the highest executions, mostly because of armed robbery offenses (Obarisiagbon, 2017). Despite these numbers of executions, armed robbery incidents have continued to rise (Lateef, 2013; Ordu & Nnam, 2017; Otu & Elechi, 2015). In reviewing a study on the death penalty from the U.S., Bandes (2018) argued that in the United States, the phenomenon remains intensely politicized institutionally and in its administration. If this is the position in the United States, with all the technical scientific and legal safeguards, it is easy to surmise that the process is not any better in Nigeria. Despite the threat of death for armed robbery, it has continued to rise progressively, which is indicative of the apparent disregard young armed robbers have for the death penalty (Nwankwo & Okolie-Osemene, 2016).

### **Impact of Capital Punishment Among Young Adult Armed Robbers**

Many armed robbery incidents in Nigeria are found to be executed by young people, mainly because such a crime requires a lot of energy, physical strength, and a general predisposition to engage in very risky crimes of this nature (Nwankwo & James, 2016; Otu, 2015; Otu & Elechi, 2017; Tiwari, 2017). Most of these armed robbers are university graduates who are either unemployed or in need of quick money to live their desired lifestyles (Adekoye & Adebisi, 2016; Ewetan, 2014; Otu, 2015). Insecurity, partly caused by the spate of daily armed robberies, persists in Nigeria, indicative of the fact that capital punishment for some selected offenses—armed robbery, terrorism, and

recently, kidnapping—has yet to create the desired deterring effect (Eze, Akang, & Odesanmi, 2015; Obi, 2015).

Adewunyi, Eneji, Baduku, and Olofin (2017) studied urban crime patterns using the spatial-temporal analysis that covered the Abuja Municipal Area Council of the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria. They found that the types of crimes predominantly committed in the Municipal Council were theft, housebreaking (42.05%), and assault (12.4%), among others. When car snatching, armed robbery, and assault (all of which require the use of arms and force) are combined, it becomes clear that the death penalty is not reducing violent crimes (Adewunyi et al., 2017). Adewunyi et al. also found that 79.1% of respondents attributed the high rate of crime to unemployment and poverty.

Similarly, Aliyu, Mohammed, and Jatau (2016) investigated gunshot injuries at the University of Maiduguri covering 338 patients, whose ages ranged from 3 months to 76 years for over a 2-year period. Aliyu et al. discovered that the prevalence of small arms in the country and subsequent armed robbery were as a result of unemployment, poverty, and lack of adequate education. Armed robbers in Nigeria operate as gangs and sometimes share tasks, and as stated earlier, they are mostly young, largely unemployed youthful persons between 18 and 34 years old (Nwogugwu & Irechukwu, 2015). Masho, Schoeny, Webstar, and Sigel (2016) found that youth violence is a major problem, the third leading cause of death for young people between the ages of 10 and 24. The authors discovered specifically that in 2011, there were 4700 homicides of young people between the age brackets described previously, with about 13 of them killed daily. While the data for the study emanated from Youth Violence Prevention Centers covering the whole

country, the bulk of the fatalities were Blacks within the described age bracket. The implication of the study is that gang members are neither afraid to kill nor deterred by the threat of the death penalty. The core ambition of deterrence is to make threats so credible that they compel potential criminals to choose not to offend (Johnson & Johnson, 2016; Muratsu, Johnson, & Yano, 2017; Simonerich, 2015).

In a related study, Hansen et al. (2014) investigated violence using serial focus groups, with 30 young adults, to understand peer decision making. Their study yielded four recurrent themes, and the dominant experiences of the participants are categorized as follows: (a) young adults are in search of respect and pursue it; (b) they pursue respect as a means of achieving personal safety; (c) they recognize pervasive risks to their safety, thus frequently focusing on the prevalence of firearms; and (d) they balance achieving respect in an unsafe setting with limited opportunities, so they express conflict and frustration. Peer group respect is consequently achieved through involvement in behavior that may be unhealthy and violent. Violence, some of which results in death, is a side effect of the pursuit of respect (Hansen, 2016).

Melde and Esbensen (2013) sought to determine whether membership in young adults' gangs are unique forums or platforms for the amplification of violence. They found that periods of active gang membership were associated with a 10 or 21% increase in the odds of getting involved in violent incidents. The implication of this study is that being a member of a gang offers a veritable opportunity for youth to be involved in violent criminal activities. Armed robbery in Nigeria, for instance, is committed by youth who distribute roles (e.g., who to drive, fire the weapons, cut through barriers, and watch

out, among other tasks) (Adegboyega, Okesina, & Mustapha, 2016; Otu, 2014). The death penalty appears not to have had any significant impact on violent offending as substantiated by the armed robbery crime statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics and other sources (Ayodele, 2015; National Bureau of Statistics, 2017; Nwonu, 2018).

In Nigeria, armed robbery offenses have not reduced despite the application of the death penalty as a sanction. In 2014, 154 robberies were reported in the same state and 280 people were murdered (Aborisade, 2018; Chinwokwu, 2017, 2018; National Bureau of Statistics, 2015). Judging from the ubiquitous nature of the crime of armed robbery and several other violent crimes that result in the death penalty, it may be safe to conclude that capital punishment had not succeeded in deterring the offense under investigation. Although the conception of the death penalty serving as a deterrence against some type of crime—murder, treason, terrorism, kidnapping among others—lack conclusive proof, some factors are used to undergird the support it enjoys. Given the Nigerian data, the death penalty has achieved a very little deterring effect on youth involvement in armed robbery and other crimes punished with the ultimate sanction. The involvement of adults in armed robberies in Lagos State specifically and Nigeria generally is limited because the offense requires agility and energy, which become lacking as people advance in age (Chinwokwu, 2018).

### **Law Enforcement Architecture Against Armed Robbery in Nigeria**

Traditionally, the Nigeria Police is the fulcrum of the law enforcement architecture within the nation. The Nigeria Police therefore has enormous powers from the Constitution to handle preventive and after-action strategies in addition to operations

and the adoption of measures to limit criminal activities within the nation (Ajayi & Longe, 2015; Obarisiagbon & Omagie, 2018; Omagie, 2018). The Nigeria Police is the lead agency for law enforcement as empowered by the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Section 214 (1) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) and the Police Act (2009) have vested the Police with the following critical responsibilities: (a) protection of life and property; (b) detection and prevention of crime; (c) apprehension of offenders; (d) preservation of law and order; (e) the due enforcement of law regulations; and (f) the performance of other military duties within and outside Nigeria as may be required under the Act (Nigerian Constitution 1999, Police Act 2009). In addition to the police, other organs of law enforcement in Nigeria include the Armed Forces, the National Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC), Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), the Department of State Services (DSS) (like the FBI in the United States), the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), etc.

Given the prevalence of armed robbery and other violent crimes like kidnapping, militancy, terrorism, and the problems posed by cattle herders who killed thousands of Nigerians, the military had become embroiled in law enforcement duties largely because the police and other law enforcement organizations were overwhelmed (Adebayo, 2014; Higazi, 2016; Odenigbo, Ezema, & Ewurum, 2017; Okoro & Omeje, 2016; Sändig, 2015). This part of the study includes an exploration of the literature highlighting the contributions of some of the groups charged with law enforcement functions in Nigeria, especially in relation to armed robbery offenses.

## **The Nigeria Police Force in Law Enforcement**

The history of the police traces its roots to the colonial era, emerging as an offshoot of the British Imperial Guard, undergoing several historical changes to its present structure (Agbiboa, 2015; Brown, 2014; Ikuteyijo & Rotimi, 2014). The Nigeria Police is the lead organization for the prevention, detection, and investigation of crimes that bedevil Nigerian society, such as armed robbery, kidnapping, murder, fraud, corruption, terrorism, and many other crimes that occur on a daily basis (Akinlabi, 2017; Ojedokun, 2014; Otu, 2015; Owen, 2016). The Nigeria Police are controlled from the Force Headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria's Federal Capital, by the Inspector General of Police who exercises administrative and operational control (Oyemwinmina & Aibieyi, 2016). The functions of the police, as pointed out earlier, derive from its enabling instrument the Police Act and Regulations Chapter 329 Laws of the Federation and the Public Order Act CAP 382, Laws of the Federation and the Nigerian Constitution. Unfortunately, the Nigeria Police is poorly trained, ill-equipped, burdened by corruption, and demoralized and unmotivated, so much so that it is unable to operate as a professional force tasked with tackling crimes (Chinwokwu, 2018; Edet, 2017; Idowu, 2016; Onyeozili, 2005). The Nigerian populace is generally so in sync that its Police is unprofessional and thus unable to conduct law enforcement functions effectively (Edet, 2017; Idowu, 2016).

Adopting the social conflict theory, Edet (2017) analyzed the ability and strength of the Nigeria Police Force to fight crime through the lens of the Nigerians, and he found the loss of confidence by the populace is predicated on three factors: corruption,

indiscipline, and ineffectiveness. These findings support several others regarding an unprofessional, ill-equipped, and ill-motivated police force widened by systemic corruption. Perhaps the most glaring evidence of police incompetence is how it had failed to control armed robbery.

In a similar study, Obaro (2014) examined the Nigeria Police as an institution with roots to the colonial era, seeking to investigate the modifications and adaptations that have occurred in its historical functions. Obaro noted that the police have jurisdiction over the entire country faced with a serious increase in crime, violence, and general insecurity. He also found the police to be ineffective and inefficient in their quest to prevent crime, to investigate crime, and to respond to distress calls. The results of the study remain consistent with others regarding the police as an ineffective force that cannot, for instance, handle armed robbery and the danger the crime poses to the average Nigerian every day.

Other factors identified by Queen (2014) militating against the performance of the Nigeria police to tackle rising crime includes urbanization, population growth, rising inequality, unemployment, mass migration, the breakdown of older systems of social order, and weak neighboring states. Equally located in the research by Queen were the opening of economic arenas that led to crimes like robbery, kidnapping, corruption, fraudulent activities, terrorism, increasing sexual assault, communal violence (the herdsmen killings all over Nigeria), and political violence and crime, as the challenges the ill-prepared police faces. Queen and other researchers found the police to be engaging in improvisation, supporting summary punishments not based on law, torturing suspects



from whom false evidence were extracted, committing extrajudicial killings, framing suspects, collecting bribes, and engaging in other sundry unprofessional acts (Higazi, 2016; Igbo, 2017; Owen, 2016; Tiwari, 2017).

Higazi (2016) examined the scale of contributing factors to police homicide in Nigeria and uncovered a number of institutional and non-institutional factors like weak intelligence gathering mechanisms, saboteurs within the force, “bad eggs” that actually got involved in armed robbery gangs, allegiance to terrorist organizations, and poor working conditions (Higazi, 2016). Other key factors identified include the proliferation of small arms, existing mutual suspicion within its body, and poor training. Just like the police kill suspects illegally, they are also sometimes at the receiving end of mob actions orchestrated by the general public. In the same vein, police suffer homicides resulting from confrontations with armed robbers (Higazi, 2016; Ojedokum, 2014).

In another related study, Agbiboa (2015) conducted ethnographic fieldwork centered on the problem of corrupt and abusive policing in everyday Nigeria, paying attention to the threat it poses to the human rights of ordinary Nigerians. The general thread and theme that ran through the findings were that the Nigerian policing model is typified by the presence of personal gain using brutal tactics (Agbiboa, 2015). It is therefore not surprising that the police in Nigeria cannot effectively tackle the menace of armed robbery sweeping across the national (Agbiboa, 2015; Karumi, 2015). Amusan and Saka (2018) concurred that like most African police forces, the Nigeria Police are unprofessional and thus unable to embark on the tedious and cumbrous investigative processes that are the hallmark of police forces in the developed world. Consequently,

their unlawful methods like torture, harassment, threats, physical and verbal assaults, extrajudicial killings, and other unconventional actions violate the rights of the citizens they are supposed to protect. The prevalence of crimes like armed robbery is a result of professional incompetence and corruption of the police (Aborisade, 2018; Akinlabi, 2017; Idowu, 2016; Ojedokun, 2014; Owen, 2016). As such, the Nigeria Police Force includes a consistent ranking as the most corrupt public institution in Nigeria (Agbibo, 2015; Amusan & Saka, 2018).

The Police's Special Anti-Robbery Squad, renamed the Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad, specifically created to fight violent crimes like armed robbery and kidnapping, consistently extracted false confessions using brutal interrogation methods and, indeed, extrajudicial killings (Ebobo, 2016; Obidimma & Obidimma, 2015; Odeyemi & Obiyan, 2018). Another study by Chinwokwu (2017) on the factors militating against the ability of the police authorities to efficiently manage their personnel for effective crime control discovered that with respect to armed robbery, the number of personnel deployed to the regions were grossly inadequate. The research equally revealed that mismanagement of personnel, corruption, political interference, and ethnic-religious consideration, as well as lack of funds and facilities were responsible for the incompetence that permits armed robbery to become increasingly prevalent in Nigeria (Chinwokwu, 2017).

### **Nigerian Military Services and Paramilitary in Law Enforcement Roles**

The Nigerian Army is paradoxically older than the Nigerian nation, emerging from the crucible of the West African Frontier Force through several stages of growth

(Bappah, 2016; Okoro & Omeje, 2016). The Nigerian Armed Forces—Army, Navy, and Nigerian Airforce—include the combined task of maintaining the nation’s territorial integrity with law enforcement roles. Consequently, Section 217(c) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) grants the military the authority to be involved in internal security operations for the purpose of “*suppressing insurrection*” and acting in aid of civil authorities to restore order when called upon to do so by the President, but is subject to such conditions as may be prescribed by an Act of the National Assembly. Section 8 (1) of the Armed Forces Act Chapter A20 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004 confers on the President the power to determine the operational use of the Armed Forces (AFA Chapter A20, LFN, 2004). It is the combined weight of the Constitutional provisions and the already cited laws consistently utilized to insert the Nigerian Army into internal security operations in over 30 states to combating crime (Adeakin, 2016; Obi & Ukeje, 2018; Sandiq, 2015).

Peterside (2014) investigated the involvement of the military in internal security operations, focusing on prospects and challenges associated with such involvement. The researcher noted that the Nigerian nation witnessed a series of conflicts since the return to civil rule in 1999, including ethnoreligious crises, abductions, hostage takings, arson, cattle rustling, and terrorism (Peterside, 2014). Other security challenges highlighted by Peterside included armed robbery, kidnappings, pipeline vandalism, ritual killings, and abductions. He discovered that instead of aiding the police as envisaged by the Constitution, the Army and other branches of the Armed Forces had become permanent features of the nation’s law enforcement architecture, playing roles that are well outside

their core mandates and comfort zones. Peterside contended that the involvement of the Army, and the armed forces, in internal security operations and invariably policing functions include the characterization by excessive use of force, extrajudicial killings, the insistence that every threat must be neutralized, violations of the rights of the citizens, and arbitrary arrests. He concluded that the military is an integral part of the nation's internal security structure considering the security challenges bedeviling it (Peterside, 2014). The implication of this ubiquitous presence of the Army in the discharge of its internal security role is that young men involved in armed robbery operations are killed without being subjected to the judicial process (Adeakin, 2016; Obi, 2015).

Abdulqadir (2016) examined the role of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence in the security administration in Nigeria, and found that the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence officials and staff are overzealous, involved in extrajudicial killings of armed robbers and other criminals, connive with armed robbers, supply illegal arms and ammunition to criminals/cultists, and use brutal force against suspects (Abdulqadir, 2016). Additionally, the researcher uncovered other problems, like interagency and institutional rivalries, that inhibit them from working together, sharing information encouraging the proliferation of these crimes. Within this framework, the increasing wave of armed robbery can be understood. Equally militating against the Corps are factors like lack of manpower, inbred corruption, illiteracy of personnel, and lack of weapons to handle the rising tide of criminality in Nigeria. These challenges are not peculiar, and the other organizations of the Nigerian State Security architecture mirror each other. For instance, interagency rivalries exist within the armed forces (Abdulqadir,

2016; Dimejesi, Ajah, Nwoke, & Ugwu, 2017; Egbefo, 2014). These rivalries hamper the forces from performing their assigned roles optimally and professionally, hence the primacy of criminal activities like armed robbery, killings, kidnappings, and the general sense of insecurity that permeates the land (Abdulqadir, 2016; Osakwe & Audu, 2017).

Charges that the Army and other law enforcement arms of the government violate human rights, including extrajudicial killings, have persistently emerged from local and international organizations. Amnesty International (2017) revealed that thousands of young men, women, and children, were arbitrarily arrested and detained without access to lawyers. Bappah (2016) argued that the professionalism of the armed forces has been degraded to the extent that when deployed to counter the activities of robbers, kidnappers, and other security threats, they end up collecting money from road-users. Characterized by a lack of leadership, military checkpoints and Joint Task Forces have virtually outlived their usefulness (Bappah, 2016; Higazi, 2016; Karumi, 2015). The Nigerian military is thus perceived as corrupt and incompetent. Lack of reforms within the military and, indeed, the defense sector, impacted negatively on their professional output to the extent that tackling insecurity challenges, such as armed robbery, yield intangible results (Aiyede, 2015; Duke, Agbayi, & Bassey, 2017; Eugene & Osakwe, 2016). It is therefore within this framework that the prevalence of armed robbery incidents in Lagos and other parts of Nigeria can be viewed.

### **Local Vigilantes and Law Enforcement in Nigeria**

Insecurity in Nigeria is so rife that conventional security structures of government remain overwhelmed. Therefore, it is understandable that some communities resorted to

using vigilantes. In Nigeria, vigilantism is rampant in response to the increased spate of violence and insecurity, coupled with the inability of the police to tackle crime; thus, the loss of faith in security agencies resulted in self-help measures (Chukwu, 2018; Onwuazombe, 2017). Dike (2015) posited that the violence-ridden nature of Nigerian societies accounts for the resort to self-help methods, especially within the framework of the numerous small arms in the hands of unscrupulous people. Indeed, many Nigerian communities deployed vigilante structures to secure their environments. Ayodele (2015) examined the efforts of the *agba* (elder), *ajabi* (consanguinity), and *ajogbe* (co-residency) as informal structures of vigilantism aimed at controlling crime in Egba, Nigeria. Ayodele traced and located the rise of vigilantism in the poor performance of the NPF and its inability to optimally and efficiently discharge assigned roles within the Nigerian security architecture. The researcher discovered that vigilante groups across Nigeria, aside from tackling criminality, engage in unwholesome excesses. To curtail the reign of crime, the research called for a partnership between the normal police forces and vigilantes.

In a related study, Olayoku (2017) focused on the emergence and activities of Ombatse, an alternative security apparatus of the Eggon people in Nigeria. The Ombatse is a vigilante group of the Eggon people in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The researcher's findings were the result of 3 years of field research employing ethnography, which incorporated informant interviews and observation. Olayoku found that the Ombatse, like most unregulated vigilante groups in Nigeria, includes involvement in killings, like the notable event where it ambushed and killed several security agents comprised of the

police and DSS. Additionally, when security forces engage in extrajudicial killings, they are sometimes killed by vigilantes and militias, fueling reprisal attacks that result in multiple deaths on both sides (Karumi, 2015; Ojedokun, 2014; Olayoku, 2017).

Many communities in Nigeria prefer vigilantes for their security needs instead of the police for various reasons already cited in the literature review. A study by Ojedokun and Aderinto (2015), anchored on the routine activity theory, drew data from key informant interviews and focus group discussions involving 11 members of the local government highway informal policing outfit in the mold of a vigilante group with 28 other participants. The sole purpose of the highway informal policing was to tackle the constant criminal victimization of commuters plying major highways by armed robbers. Such crimes as armed robbery, kidnapping, rape, and murder are common phenomena on highways in Nigeria, and given the plethora of these security challenges and the increasing inability of the police to tackle them, vigilantes continued to fill the void (Emanemua & Akinlosom, 2016; Oyedokun & Aderinto, 2015). However, the effectiveness of vigilantes is tempered by some unwholesome practices they perpetrate. Although sanctioned in a sense by state authorities, vigilantes sometimes become a challenge to the government, exercising power well beyond the limits authorized by the rule of law (Dike, 2014; Gross, 2016; Kansaye, 2018; Nyiayaana, 2015; Tiwari, 2017).

Even some private security companies that fall within the general definition of vigilantism engage in activities like mob justice, killings, and violations of human rights (Appiah-Nyamekye & Armah-Attah, 2018; Kansaye, 2018; Orock, 2014). Super (2017) explained the relationship between state authority, vigilantism, and renal power focusing

on the violence that ensues when the state cedes some of its authority to other ad hoc law enforcement bodies. Super involved a historical analysis of how terms like *vigilance*, *vigilantism*, and *mob justice* were used in South Africa. The researcher disclosed that the specter of “the bloodthirsty and violent black mob” (Super, 2017, p. 513) is an old phenomenon in South Africa. The researcher classified vigilantism as establishment violence helping to group up the state and noted that mobs often went on a rampage, as in taking the peoples’ power.

In Nigeria, researchers alluded to the prevalence of crime in society as largely responsible for the emergence of vigilantes, specifically because the police cannot cope with their increasing crime waves (Agara, Chizea, & Osumah, 2016; Idowu, 2016; Obarisiagbon, 2018). The increasing levels of vigilantism and extrajudicial killings interact with armed robbery and the retentionist posture of Nigeria on capital punishment (Chinwokwu, 2018; Cooper-Knock & Owan, 2015; Dike, 2014; Ebobo, 2016; Wilkie, Jeffrey, Emina, & Ekpenyong, 2016). As imperfect as they are, vigilantes are a part of the security architecture in Nigeria in some circumstances, albeit in an informal manner (Abdulqadir, 2016; Chukwu, 2018, 2018; Ngwu, 2017; Ojedokun & Aderinto, 2015). The continuing incidents of armed robbery and the helplessness of the nation’s security architecture created vigilantism and the mob justice phenomenon.

### **Gaps in the Literature**

Several studies have been undertaken on punishment, specifically capital punishment and its ability to serve as a deterrent to violent crimes such as armed robbery. While the deterring effect of this punishment remains contentious, there is no specific



study on (a) how reformed young adults engaged in armed robbery activities perceive the threat of punishment in Lagos State and (b) what effect the punishment has on deterring armed robbery offenses by young adults in Lagos State. In this study, the goal is to use the qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of young adult armed robbers and how these repentant, ex-armed robbers perceive the threat of its punishment in Lagos State.

### **Summary**

The search strategy and sources of information for the literature review were part of this section that highlighted previous literature on armed robbery, its causative factors, capital punishment regimes in several countries, and the security architecture emplaced in Nigeria to tackle crimes. Chapter 2 also contains the conceptual framework that serves as the lens in the study through which to interpret results and findings. The relevance of the conceptual framework was analyzed and synthesized. The conceptual framework focuses on the deterrence theory and the anomie theory, both of which underpin the study. The application of deterrence and anomie theories to this study may shed light on why armed robbery persists despite the application of capital punishment as a sanction for the offense. Deterrence theory posits that punishment deters and discourages potential criminals from engaging in deviant behavior. In other words, when a stiff sanction like the death penalty is imposed for a crime, this strategy should deter other potential criminals from engaging. In the same vein, the anomie theory looks at the interplay of socioeconomic disenfranchisement, the uneven distribution of wealth and opportunities, and how these forces resulted in the state of anomie and, consequently, the prevalence of

crime in Nigerian society. Chapter 3 contains information on the research methodology of the study. It includes key components like a description of the research questions, design, and rationale, the study variables, the design's connection to the research questions, and constraints related to the chosen design.

### Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of reformed young adult armed robbers between the ages of 18-25 at the time they started engaging in armed robbery activities, including their punishment and its correlation to the occurrence of armed robbery activities in Lagos State. This chapter includes a description of the research questions, design, and rationale, including study variables, the design's connection to the research questions, and constraints related to the chosen design. Chapter 3 also includes the methodology related to the study population, sampling technique, data collection procedure, and data analysis plan. Additionally, the chapter underlines the threats to validity and includes descriptions of procedures that were followed to address them, including institutional review board (IRB) approvals. This section concludes with a discussion on ethical concerns related to data collection and confidentiality.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

The study is qualitative and phenomenological in nature, with primary data to understand the lived experiences of reformed armed robbers in Lagos State. The phenomenological approach is most appropriate because it admits the acquisition of a deep understanding of the impact of social structures on an individual's identity, behavior, intimate relationships, and family (Creswell, 2014; Frost, 2011; Lewis, 2015; Polkinghorne, 1995). Rooted in the traditional ethnographic research paradigm, this approach enables collection of data rich enough to reflect various perspectives of

participants (Creswell, 2014). This tradition also allows the researcher to be the tool for extracting information from participants without participating in the phenomenon.

Further, phenomenology is used to investigate observant processing while focusing on the skewed structures of the experience (Creswell, 2014; Dixon, 2015). Phenomenology enquires into the lived experiences and routine behaviors of participants, exploring their perceptions (Creswell, 2014) that are directly related events or situations that they have encountered (Weidman, 2014; Lewis, 2015). Its purpose includes capturing firsthand, detailed accounts of individuals' lived experiences with the phenomenon under investigation. The researcher places herself or himself in a position to associate with those experiences and is thus a collector of data directly related to the lived experiences under exploration (Dixon, 2015; Lewis, 2015). The researcher is essentially an observer-participant (Aitken, 2015; Patton, 2015).

Because armed robbery is a violent crime, typically perpetrated in secret, I was not able to interact, collaborate with, or observe the lived experiences of currently practicing armed robbers. Instead, the participants; reformed armed robbers, shared their lived experiences by answering the research questions. Therefore, a phenomenological design was appropriate for this study. Conversely, case study and grounded theory traditions were not applicable, as there was no intention of developing a new theory from this study or making comparisons between cases of armed robbery or implementation of the capital punishment regime in Lagos State.

### **Research Question**

The overarching research question for this study is as follows: What are the lived experiences of reformed armed robbers in Lagos State Nigeria? Answers to the following subquestions provide insight into the phenomenon of inquiry:

- RQ1: How does the threat of punishment influence armed robbers' decision not to participate in robbery activities?
- RQ2: How has the punishment of young adult armed robbers in Lagos State, Nigeria, affected the frequency of armed robbery?
- RQ3: How has the punishment of armed robbers influenced the decision of street gang members, area boys not to participate in robbery activities?

### **Role of the Researcher**

Research is an art, a craft, and a science; hence, the researcher has an essential role (Hoffding & Martiny, 2015; Lien, Pauleen, Kuo, & Wang, 2014). The qualitative researcher must possess the capacity to step outside his or her cultural environment to accurately survey and understand the impact of the phenomenon being studied on the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Dixon, 2015). His or her primary role is to capture the lived experiences of participants without bias (Dixon, 2015; Lewis, 2015). The quality of the data that results from this process is normally dependent on the skills of the researcher.

### **History of the Researcher**

In 2017, I retired from the Nigerian Army as a major general after commanding brigades, joint task forces, and multinational forces in the UN, and regional peacekeeping

and enforcement operations for three decades. Some of the commands I held in Nigeria were in formations that actively engaged in law enforcement operations combatting armed robbery activities, kidnapping, and other violent crimes. I was also at one time the provost marshal of the Nigerian Army, a position that demanded working with the police and other security forces in law enforcement functions. But in this study, I as the researcher was an observer. However, as a former law enforcement officer of the Nigerian government, my role was to maintain law and order in the country; therefore, potential researcher biases related to power differential and professional obligations may have arisen.

To prevent potential biases, I withheld my professional identity from the study participants, maintained a journal, and ensured member checking. Similarly, as advocated by researchers, I sustained trustworthiness by accepting and understanding the phenomenon of inquiry from the lens of the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Dixon, 2015; Hashimov, 2015). In the end, the participants were encouraged to describe their lived experiences, which were exclusive to them and substantiated by triangulation and immersion in the data.

Additionally, I also recorded reflections and other observations in a reflexive journal and excluded the names and identity of participants from field notes to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of participants. The study included audio-recordings of interviews with consent from participants (Collins & Cooper, 2014) and collection of data using multiple techniques and triangulated the same to account for reporting bias

data (Braunack-Mayer et al., 2015). The goal of these steps was to minimize bias and improve the validity and reliability of the study.

### **Methodology**

The goal of this study was to explore the lived experiences of reformed armed robbers in Lagos State, Nigeria. A qualitative method was used because it is exploratory and not predictive. Rather than determine causal or inferential relationships between the study variables, as with quantitative approaches (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2007; Parker, 2014), the objective of a qualitative phenomenological study is to inquire about lived experiences (Wisdom, Cavaleri, Onwuegbuzie, & Green, 2012). This approach helps to understand the complex interplay among the core variables of focus (Guth & Asner-Self, 2017; Lee, 2012).

### **Participant Selection Logic**

Participants for this study were purposively selected, because purposive sampling has been suggested as the “golden standard of qualitative research” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 32). Additionally, researchers have recommended a narrow range of sampling strategies for phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2014). This sampling strategy is appropriate to this study because it allowed me to focus on strategic and unique contexts.

In Lagos State, NGOs implement rehabilitative interventions for young people who voluntarily decide to quit participating in armed robbery activities. Multiple street gangs who are socioeconomically challenged youth (popularly knowns as *area boys*) also exist in Lagos State. I identified these groups through an NGO that has access to their

many clusters scattered around the ghettos in the state to rehabilitate them, and I purposively selected their members to participate in interviews.

### **Sample Size**

In qualitative studies, sample sizes must be determined, which can involve different approaches such as rules of thumb and the use of conceptual models among others (Malterud, Siersma., & Guassora, 2016; Sim, Saunders, Waterfield., & Kingstone, 2018). However, the main concept employed choosing sample sizes in qualitative studies is saturation (Malterud, Siersma., & Guassora, 2016). Data saturation results in a study when the researcher is no longer able to elicit new themes, similarities, patterns, findings, or information from the participants (Guest et al., 2006).

**Key participant interviews.** It is generally accepted that the number of participants for a phenomenological study cannot be determined by a formulaic design, as generalizing a sample size for studies of this nature is problematic (Van Manen, 2014). A total of 20 participants were interviewed in the current study. Ten of these were young people who had participated in at least one armed robbery activity. The other 10 were those who have not participated in armed robberies—area boys or street gangs—but with opportunities to be involved in armed robbery.

**Rationale for sample size.** Literature has suggested that rather than emphasizing a specific sample size, researchers should seek to achieve data saturation in qualitative studies (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Jeong & Othman, 2016; Sum & Shi, 2016). Data saturation occurs when the same themes start to emerge from reports of additional participants. According to researchers like Jeong and Othman (2016) and Sum and Shi (2016), data



saturation can be reached with a small participant size of three to five. This participant size meets the needs of this type of study to explore new phenomena in a phenomenological study (Buffone, Cheinier, Schulenberg, & Sycz, 2017; Jeong & Othman, 2016; Murray, Horton, Johnson, Notestine, & Garr, 2015; Sum & Shi, 2016). However, a limitation of small sample sizes is that the breadth of the study may be compromised (Patton, 2015).

**Sampling sites.** Two sites were proposed for this study: (a) Offices of selected NGOs in Lagos State that offer rehabilitative services to young people who voluntarily quit participating in armed robbery activities, and (b) Offices of the NGOs that work with gangs or area boys, the socio-economically disadvantaged groups. In the end, only one site was used because it met the requirements for the study's setting.

### **Instrumentation**

For this study, I conducted in-depth recorded face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with participants using an interview guide that was self-authored (see Appendix). According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), interview guides ensure continuity and alignment of open-ended questions with the research questions. Telephonic interviews are also as compelling as face-to-face interviews (McGrath, & van der Spuy, 2014; Schonteich, 2014; Trimek, 2016). I recorded each with a digital audio recording device for subsequent transcription and thematic analysis. I used a Sony IC Recorder to capture the interviews; the iPhone was used as the back-up. The interviews were conducted on the premises of the NGO in a room to avoid distractions and maintain confidentiality while offering comfort to the participants.

Interview questions were semi-structured and open-ended (see Appendix) and formed the basis for the development of data collection instruments. Questions elicited information regarding participants' lived experience and perceptions towards armed robbery and the death penalty. The purpose of these questions was to explore participants' motivation for participation in armed robbery, as well as their motivation for deciding to quit committing such crimes. Appendix contains the open-ended questions for the participants involved in armed robbery activities as well as questions for the street gangs, the area boys. To address the content validity of the interview questions, my committee members reviewed my interview and discussion guides. Because content validity is also associated with the skill set of the researcher (Miles et al., 2014), I asked relevant probing questions to elicit enough information regarding the phenomenon.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

After receiving IRB approval from Walden University, and approval of the recruitment flyer by my research committee, I telephonically discussed with the management of the selected NGO about gaining access to participants. These NGOs were selected based on their successes over the years in reforming armed robbers and street gang members who are subsequently reintegrated into the society. Although the IRB approved all the cooperating organizations, only one was used for the study. I therefore placed the flyers at the premises of the NGO.

Selection included participants who met the eligibility criteria based on their willingness to participate in the study and share their experiences with the phenomenon. Selected participants received informed consent forms individually to preserve

anonymity and confidentiality. Invitations and consent forms clarified that participation was strictly voluntary. Consents were audiorecorded before commencement of interviews.

As recommended by Ravitch and Carl (2016) regarding “social exchange” (p. 356), I offered a gift of 2000 NGN (\$5.00 U.S. dollars) to each participant as a token of appreciation for participating in the study. I explained clearly that gifts are not rewards but tokens of appreciation. All participants, independent of their levels of participation, received the same gift amount to ensure that participants were transparent and objective in their responses to interview questions.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

For this study, the Ricoeur’s (1973) hermeneutic approach served as a framework for data analysis. Ricoeur called for the use of three stages in hermeneutic phenomenology: (a) naïve interpretation, (b) structural analysis, and (c) comprehensive interpretation. Consequently, interviews were recorded using two digital recorders and a cellular phone as a backup. The interviews were subsequently transcribed by an independent transcribing service, which prevented potential bias of the researcher from interfering with data collected and helped the researcher stay *naïve* and avoid burn out from data collection.

**Naïve reading.** After data were successfully transcribed, I read the interview transcripts multiple times to interpret parts of, and explore, the initial meaning of the data generated (Kennedy, 2014; Pratt-Eriksson, Bergbom, & Lyckhage, 2014; Ricoeur, 1973;

Singsuria, 2017; Tratter, 2015). Credibility was attained because the researcher was not involved in the transcribing process.

**Coding and structural analysis** After reading, I utilized thematic analysis to document the relevant codes, themes, and sub-themes in the study and to confirm my initial understanding of the participants' spoken data (Saldaña, 2016). This was an inductive process involving two cycles of coding:

- In the first cycle, I utilized NVivo coding, also known as verbatim coding, in which a participant's own words dictate the code assigned by the researcher to all aspects of the data. NVivo coding can be applied to nearly all qualitative studies and has proven useful for young qualitative researchers (Saldaña, 2016).

According to Stringer (2014), researchers are more likely to record a participant's experience when using NVivo coding. Therefore, I used the NVivo 11 Pro coding stripe and highlight feature to identify texts and phrases that stood out.

- In the second cycle, codes identified in the first cycle were patterned, grouped, or summarized (i.e., placed into categories). Similar words and phrases were grouped together in sub-themes and general themes (Impara, 2016; O'Sullivan, Kemp, & Bright, 2015; Ricoeur, 1973; Singsuria, 2017). These themes were labelled as emerging themes in the data (Saldaña, 2016) and explain the data (Miles et al., 2014).

**Comprehensive understanding and appropriation.** Finally, during the comprehensive understanding or appropriation stage (Carrier & Walby, 2015; Draper, Olsen, McGraw, & Sturtevant, 2015), I considered presuppositions, initial observations

from the naïve reading and structural analysis, and research from the peer-reviewed literature to interpret the data (Singsuria, 2017). My presuppositions consisted of personal lived experiences of being a former federal law enforcement officer who has lived in Lagos State and my own personal and professional dealings with enforcing the law.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

It is important to address and resolve issues of trustworthiness of data and the ensuing results to guarantee reliability, validity, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Morse, 2015). Validity in qualitative research permits the researcher to assess the accuracy and dependability of the data collected (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & de Lacey, 2016). All the approved steps were therefore employed to safeguard the issues of trustworthiness relating to data as captured in succeeding paragraphs. For instance, I maintained a reflexive journal in my interactions with the 20 participants, to identify and quickly eliminate any potential bias.

### **Credibility**

Miles et al. (2014) explained that credibility in qualitative research should be able to answer the question of “do the findings of the study paint an authentic portrait of what we are looking at” (p. 312). To enhance credibility of the study, I applied the member checking approach, and each participant received copies of interview transcripts and analysis of conversations to ensure conclusions were an accurate representation of their spoken data. Miles et al. (2014) and Ravitch and Carl (2016) both supported members checking as a method of increasing credibility.

**Transferability**

Researchers should be able to apply the process and findings from this study to explore the influence of capital punishment on armed robbery activities in the Lagos State (Nix & Wolfe, 2016). According to Ravitch and Carl (2016) generalizability is not the goal of qualitative studies but “transferability is achieved when the study is context-rich and applicable to broader contexts while maintaining context-specific richness” (p. 189). This approach aligns well with recommendations from Miles et al. (2014) and Ravitch and Carl regarding the use of thick description as a method to increase transferability. Although thick descriptions emerged from this study, findings cannot be generalized because of the nature of the study and its sample size.

**Dependability**

Miles et al. (2014) argued that achieving dependability in qualitative research is when the data are consistent and stable over a period of time. Ravitch and Carl (2016), as well as Babbie (2014), referred to dependability as being achieved when researchers give reasonable arguments for how to collect data in the study, and how the data gathered remains consistent with the purpose of the study. To increase dependability, I made sure to articulate an evidence-informed justification for each approach applied in this study. I created data collection tools that accurately answered the study questions. Reliance included my committee for feedback and guidance while developing data collection instruments.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability in qualitative research refers to the ability of the researcher to explain the biases inherent in a study and provide practical strategies to mitigate them (Miles et al., 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To increase the confirmability of this study, I reflected on personal biases and provided details in reflexive memos and journals of how I addressed those using relevant recommendations from the literature (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

**Ethical Procedures**

According to the Belmont Report (1979), three basic principles should guide research involving human subjects: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Reformed armed robbers are vulnerable, as are those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged. They have most likely experienced abuse, interpersonal violence, substance abuse, and mental illness. To ensure that this study promotes respect for the participants, beneficence, and justice, I ensured I sufficiently upheld the provisions of the Belmont report in this study.

Accordingly, I completed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research web-based training on protecting human research participants. Also, before data collection, I obtained approvals from Walden University IRB and the Lagos State Institutional Review Board. I also obtained letters of cooperation from the leadership of the NGOs and street gangs from which participants were sampled. In the same vein, flyers, the Invitation to Participate in Research were placed at the premises of the NGO. Furthermore, before providing consent for participation, all participants were

sufficiently informed about the benefits, risks, and potential opportunities for participating in the study. Participants were equally informed that participation in the study was voluntary and that they could discontinue at any time. Participants were not coerced at any point during the study and were offered the Informed Consent Form, and consent was audiorecorded as directed by the IRB.

Young people who participated in the study received equal treatment irrespective of whether they complete the process or not. Furthermore, Walden University's guidelines require keeping all data gathered in the study confidential. To this end, data collected in this study was temporarily stored in an external, password-protected hard drive. I also stored data in a separate universal serial bus (USB) in the event the external hard drive becomes damaged or corrupted in any way. Also included is a confidentiality agreement with Rev.com® and save data gathered for a minimum of 5 years. I will subsequently destroy the data after this time, including my reflexive memos and journals. During interviews, all audio recordings of participants, notes, and consent forms did not have any identifiers for participants.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 contains an overview of the research design and describes the qualitative method that will underpin the study. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of reformed armed robbers in Lagos State, Nigeria. The rationalization of the proposed research design for the study is a guide for the interview questions to extract information to answer the research questions. I interviewed 10 reformed armed robbers as well as 10 reformed area boys



willing to participate and share their lived experiences – the former particularly their lived experiences with the phenomenon and the latter to speak to why they were not involved in armed robbery activities in spite of being predisposed to the same incentivizing factors. I purposely selected the research participants and gained data from semi-structured individual interviews with open-ended questions.

The various sections of Chapter 3 include details of the role of the researcher, the sampling population, the data collection and analysis strategies, and techniques used to maximize reliability. The other sections were issues of trustworthiness that were achieved through research credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Chapter 4 covers the research settings, information on the participants, and a presentation of data collected and the analysis. Evidence indicating trustworthiness and the research results are also part of Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4: Results

Lagos State, like most parts of Nigeria, has for decades experienced high levels of armed robbery activities by mostly young adults aged 18-25. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of young adult armed robbers who engaged in robbery activities from ages 18-25. A phenomenological study was utilized to acquire a deeper understanding of the phenomenon through the lens of the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2014; Lewis, 2015). This chapter contains the data of the lived experiences of reformed armed robbers who had previously participated in armed robbery activities. Consequently, an analysis of the data and the results are provided. The chapter also provides details on data collection managing and analysis. The analysis was driven by this overarching research question: What are the lived experiences of reformed young armed robbers in Lagos State. Answers to the following subquestions also provided insight into the phenomenon of inquiry:

- RQ1: How does the threat of punishment influence armed robbers' decision not to participate in robbery activities?
- RQ2: How has the punishment of young adult armed robbers in Lagos State, Nigeria, affected the frequency of armed robbery?
- RQ3: How has the punishment of armed robbers influenced the decision of street gang members, area boys not to participate in robbery activities?

### **Research Setting**

The IRB approval allowed the start of scheduling face-to-face interviews with the participants. I conducted face-to-face interviews with 20 participants between March 2

and March 11, 2020. The first set included 10 participants who had participated in at least one armed robbery activity before repenting and dropping out. The second set of 10 participants were young adults who belonged to groups of streets gangs, popularly referred to as area boys, and engaged in only petty crimes like picking pockets, snatching of cell phones, and shoplifting. All participants gave audiorecorded consent as directed by the IRB and were offered copies of the interview protocols. The times of interviews, formats, and settings were mutually agreed upon.

### **Demographics**

The participants of this study were 20 young adults equally divided into two broad categories: reformed armed robbers who had participated in at least one armed robbery and area boys who did not participate in armed robbery activities but were involved in petty criminal activities. All participants were above 18 years in age at the time of recruitment and not older than 35 at the time of active criminal activities. As previously noted, the participants engaged in at least one armed robbery operation or were involved in criminal activities like picking pockets, shoplifting, snatching of cell phones, or other criminal acts. Participants were all males consistent with the general literature, which indicates that female armed robbers are rare. The participants were given pseudonyms to “humanize” them given the nature of activities in which they were engaged. The participants’ demographics are as summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

*Demographic Information*

Participant	Present Age	Age petty criminal activities began	Age armed robbery activities began	Highest level of education	Number of years in armed robbery / Reasons for leaving it
Yomis	36	9	18	Dropped out	9 / Found Christ
Dudusco	35	12	19	Primary	2 / Found Christ
Shalala	37		23	University	One robbery
Dizzy	33	12	18	Primary	2 / Found Christ
Rednose	39	13	19	Primary	4 / Found Christ
Bombito	32	12	18	Primary	1 / Found Christ
Smoker	31	14	18	Primary	3 / Found Christ
Bigman	34	16	18	University	3/NGO efforts
Bigears	35	15	20	Primary	5 / Found Christ
Blackie	32	11	25	Primary	5/NGO efforts
Leanman	32	16		Primary	11/NGO efforts
Boxer	25	19		Secondary	13/NGO efforts
Dancer	33	15		Dropped out	10/NGO efforts
Crawler	22	15		Secondary	
Watchman	24	17		Secondary	6/NGO efforts
Lifter	30	8		Primary	4/NGO efforts
Egbon	28	18		Secondary	
Leader	26	20		Secondary	15/NGO efforts
Shifter	25	14		Primary	8/NGO efforts
Jamboree	29	19		Secondary	4/NGO efforts

## **Data Collection**

A purposive random sampling method was used to recruit 20 willing participants who cooperated by offering me insight into the phenomenon through the lens of their lived experiences. Face-to-face interviews were the primary method of data collection for this study, as they presented opportunities for follow-up questions and observance of the participants' demeanor and body languages. The generated data were rich enough to reflect various perspectives of participants (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015).

### **Participants**

Data for the study were collected from 20 participants who met the criteria for participation. These participants included reformed armed robbers who started robbing between the ages of 18-25 and had engaged in at least one robbery activity. Data were equally collected from reformed street gangs, area boys, involved in petty crimes like shoplifting and snatching of phones, among others. All the participants met the stipulated requirements. Participants offered audio recorded consent and were comfortable with the setting and outline of the research questions (see Grady, 2015).

Permission to collect data from participants was granted by the IRB on February 12, 2020 with approval # 01-31-20-0641200. After IRB approval, flyers were placed at the premises of cooperating partner, the NGO responsible for the rehabilitation of the reformed armed robbers and former area boys. The interviews, which lasted between 25 and 65 minutes, were conducted between March 3, 2020 and March 11, 2020. Face-to-face interviews afforded interactions between the interviewer and interviewee as well as opportunities for follow-up questions and to witness emotional responses and

participants' body language (Bryman, 2015). These observations were noted as part of reflective journaling.

Additionally, maintaining rigor, reliability, and generalizability were important to the outcome of this study; thus, member checking with participants was employed (Marse, 2015). The intention was to maintain rigorous ethical standards that added validity to the study (Belotto, 2018; Korstjens & Moser, 2017; Sutton & Austin, 2015). The inclusion of reformed area boys/street gangs who were involved in petty crimes in the Lagos metropolis added validity by eliminating bias—it demonstrated that exposure to gang activities does not entice young adults to engage in armed robbery activities.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis process involved subjecting the transcripts of the data from face-to-face interviews to reviews line-by-line and in relation to the questions. The purpose was to identify and assign meanings to the units of the generated data (Saldana, 2013). The study was designed to elicit rich, thick descriptions from the participants (Maxwell, 2013).

### **Coding of Units**

The process of data collection, data analysis, and report writing does not occur in a distinct manner, but all are correlated and may happen simultaneously throughout the research process (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). In this study, I first generated the data and thus had prior knowledge of it and some analytic interest and thoughts (Nowell et al., 2017). I therefore engaged with the data and analysis while being honest and vigilant about my perspective and preexisting thoughts and beliefs. After a deep



In the second cycle, codes identified in the first cycle were patterned, grouped, and placed in categories. Similar texts and phrases were grouped in subthemes and general themes (see Impara, 2016; O' Sullivan, Kemp, & Bright, 2015; Ricoeur, 1973). In the comprehensive coding stage, I considered my presuppositions consisting of personal lived experiences of being a former law enforcement officer who served in Lagos State as the Commander 9 Brigade and whose soldiers supported the police in law enforcement. The data were subjected through a process in which I worked systematically through the entire data set, focusing attention on each datum and interesting aspects that formed the basis of themes. I also connected the literature review and the responses as themes developed (the core themes and subthemes). The coding framework I developed provided a clear trail of evidence to underpin the credibility of the study. The thematic analysis resulted in these core themes:

- Family background
- Access to small arms
- Peer pressure
- Belief in charms
- Gang membership
- Influence of alcohol and drugs
- Police corruption
- Ineffective criminal justice system
- Not afraid of death, disinterested in armed robbery



Almost all the participants, whether reformed armed robbers or area boys, were from dysfunctional family backgrounds that led to dropping out of school at a very young age. Other themes include ease of access to small arms, peer pressure, influence of alcohol and drugs, gangsterism, belief in charms, police corruption, and an ineffective criminal justice system. These themes are in line with the empirical findings of the literature reviewed in this study.

The data also revealed a number of subthemes that support the core findings. All but two participants did not reach the university level; most of them ended at the primary school level. Nineteen of the participants started smoking Indian hemp and eventually graduated into indulging in a high consumption of stronger drugs. All but one participant engaged in their criminal activities, whether armed robbery or petty crimes, under the influence of drugs and alcohol. The fourth theme was the use of charms. All the participants who were involved in armed robbery relied on the belief that charms protected them from bullets and from being caught or arrested. Similarly, every participant except one was desperately poor. All the participants also insisted that crimes like armed robbery are supported by the corrupt police, men and women who sometimes hire out weapons to armed robbers. Table 5 depicts the themes and subthemes generated from the data, and Tables 6 and 7 contain the coding frequencies and percentages.

Table 5

*Core Themes and Subthemes*

Themes	Subthemes
Family background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poverty</li> <li>• Lack of parental care</li> <li>• Dropped out of school</li> </ul>
Drug and alcohol use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addicted to drugs and alcohol</li> <li>• Fearless because of alcohol and drugs</li> <li>• Merciless and ruthless</li> </ul>
Easy access to small arms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small arms available for hire</li> <li>• Small arms are available from local manufacturers</li> </ul>
Belief in charm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sense of invincibility and protection from death</li> <li>• Bold and aggressive in the face of danger</li> </ul>
Police corruption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Nigeria Police are corrupt</li> <li>• Police hired out weapons out and sold ammunition</li> </ul>
Ineffective criminal justice system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of diligent prosecution</li> <li>• Prisons produce hardened criminals</li> </ul>
Not afraid of death, disinterested	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Punishment with death did not deter</li> <li>• Motivated by money and the lifestyle it offered</li> </ul>
Gang membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruited into gangs</li> <li>• The benefits of gang membership</li> </ul>
Peer pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruited into a life of crime</li> <li>• We found purpose in the gangs</li> </ul>
Not afraid of death	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not deterred by the death penalty</li> <li>• Just not interested in armed robbery</li> </ul>

Table 6

*Coding Frequencies and Percentage*

Research Question and Theme	Code	No. of occurrences of code	% of the data set included in the code
RQ1/Theme 1 Family background	Did not deter at all	18	11.9
RQ1/Theme 2 Influence of alcohol and drugs	Drug usage	19	12.6
RQ1/Theme 3 Access to small arms	Poor and had no choice	10	6.6
RQ1/Theme 4 Belief in Charms	Motivated by a sense of protection offered by charms	19	12.6
RQ1/Theme 5 Police corruption	Unprofessional police	20	13.2
RQ2/Theme 6 Ineffective criminal justice system	Did not reduce incidents	19	12.6
RQ2/Theme 7 Not afraid of death or disinterested	Inceased participation	20	13.2
RQ3/Theme 8 Gang membership	Not influenced	20	13.2
RQ3/Theme 9 Peer pressure	Influenced participation	19	12.6
Total		163	100.0

Table 7

*Theme Frequency and Percentage*

Theme Frequencies and Percentages	Number of occurrences of theme	% of the data set included in the theme
Theme 1: Family background	18	11.9
Theme 2: Drug and alcohol use	19	12.6
Theme 3: Access to small arms	10	6.6
Theme 4: Belief in charms	19	12.6
Theme 5: Police corruption	19	12.6
Theme 6: Ineffective criminal justice system	19	12.6
Theme 7: Not afraid of death/disinterested	20	13.2
Theme 8: Gang memberships	20	13.2
Theme 9: Peer Pressure	19	12.6
Total	163	100.0

### Study Results

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of reformed armed robbers who had either completed, or were undergoing, the process rehabilitation. The research employed the qualitative method because it is exploratory and not predictive (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This study utilized purposeful random sampling to recruit the willing participants who offered rich descriptions of their lived experiences. The phenomenological approach adopted for the study allows the researcher to minimize and even eliminate bias by bracketing their preconceived ideas, notions and beliefs about the topic (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The results flowed from the research questions that were used for data collection and are presented below.

### **Research Question 1**

The RQ 1 that underpinned data collection for this study is as follows: How does the threat of punishment influence armed robbers' decision not to participate in robbery activities? Data generated from this question resulted in core and subthemes. The core themes were family background, influence of alcohol and drugs, and belief in charms and peer pressure. Subthemes include poverty, broken homes, dropping out of school, economic hardship, and hopelessness.

**Emergent Theme 1: Family background.** Almost all participants were influenced by their family backgrounds to engage in criminal activities. Nineteen of the 20 participants were born in either broken or dysfunctional families where they had no parental guidance and support. A deeper probing of the data revealed some subthemes as discussed below.

***Subtheme 1: Poverty.*** Because of the very poor and dysfunctional families, poverty was endemic, and most of the participants started fending for themselves at very young ages, as young as 12. Dudusco, for instance, stated that "I ran out of the school in primary 4 and started stealing clothes, when they wash clothes, we will be stealing those clothes." Yomis started stealing at the age of 9. His father was a painter, and his mother died when he turned 15. He dropped out of school in primary 4. Dudusco started smoking early and graduated from petty crimes into armed robbery. In the same vein, Dudusco left home at the age of 12. He was used as a hawker by his mother at an early age. He stated, "My mother didn't put me to school, she now started using me as a hawker, selling palm oil." The same narrative was presented by most of the participants. For instance, Shalala,

Dizzy, Rednose, Bombito, Smoker, Blackie, and all the area boys from Leanman to Jamboree were from very poor, economically disadvantaged homes. On the follow up question of why most of them adopted armed robbery as a means of earning a living, Yomis and many others stated, “Because I don’t have another means, I don’t have another means of surviving or supporting myself.” Nineteen participants experienced extreme child poverty. These findings are supported by the literature reviewed in this study. It is clear from the data that family instability and societal influences shape and prepare some youth or young adults to engage in crimes like armed robbery (Adebayo, 2013; Aigbovo & Eidenoje, 2016).

***Subtheme 2: Lack of parental care.*** Nineteen participants experienced acute lack of parental care, many of them having been raised by a single parent, mostly their mothers. These participants indicated clearly that their backgrounds predisposed them to early criminal activities. Bombito’s mother died while giving birth to him; he grew up with a stepmother who maltreated him until he ran from home at the age of 12. He stated, “One day she beat me and rubbed me with pepper. I was naked in a room that was locked.” He started stealing with other boys at the age of 15. When Leanman was about 12, he started mixing with bad boys, and at 16 was so stubborn that his father took him to an Islamic scholar who specialized in disciplining children. He stated, “In Ibadan, they tied chains on my legs to control me. When I returned to Lagos, my father died.” The death of his father meant that he had to fend for himself and became an area boy at a very young age, at which point he was introduced to Indian hemp and drugs. Bigman left home at 9 and joined street boys who were into crime. He confirmed, “I was young. The

guys that picked me up from the streets when I ran away from home later introduced me to robbery. So, I started robbing with them. That is how we made money to survive.” In the same vein, Blackie stated, “I started that at the age of 25. So, when I joined the cult, they gave me a gun. When they gave me the gun, we’ll go to rob. We did many things that time. My dad died in 1995 and things became very hard. There was no joy in the family. So, this my friend told me that if I want back up in my life, I had to join the gang. So, in the gang we need many things. In our area, people used to go clubbing a lot, so when they’re returning from the club, I will rob them, and collect all their money.”

Rednose left home at 12 and started stealing, swindling unsuspecting persons, and thereafter became an armed robber. He confirmed that he “started in a different form before it became armed robbery. What I actually did then was something like ‘419,’ and I go secretly in picking monies from people, but when I met with these guys, they go boldly and wake a person up and collect their money, and they give them by themselves, and I joined those them. We were 13 in number and I joined those guys in that gang.” Bigears, grew up with an uncle who refused to send him to school. He said, “I now left home I went to the street, so I was now doing some of picking iron to go and sell and before I can eat, I was doing that so that I was sleeping at the car park. I was nine years old then. I was now sleeping at the car park. I slept at the car park for over six months.” Yomis, teamed up with some gangs and started smoking and harassing people at the age of 9.

Nineteen of the participants were deeply impacted by a lack of parental care and were pushed into crime at very young ages. Blackie also asserted, “My father marries two

wives, and the other. It was lack of financial assistance. Because my father early died, there was nobody to sponsor me. My mother was taking care of the other ones, and I was not with her so...” The combined effect of the lack of parental care, poverty, distressed families, and societal influences push young people into early criminal lives (Aghedo, 2015; Amaci, Moshood, & Iliyasu, 2017; Chiazor, Ozoya, & Udume, 2017; Danjuma et al., 2016; Gotsang et al., 2017; Inyang, James, & Emeh, 2016).

*Subtheme 3: Dropped out of school.* Out of 20 participants, only two had some undergraduate education. Nineteen of the participants either dropped out at the primary school level or, at best, completed secondary level education (high school). Yomis, Dudusco, Dizzy, Rednose, Bombito, Smoker, Bigman, Bigears, and Blackie, including all the area boys, either dropped out of school or, at best, ended at the high school level but with very poor quality of schooling. Boxer admitted that he “finished secondary school. When I was to enter university, my parents were working at Apapa, and when Fashola became Governor, they destroyed where my mummy was trading. There was no money to send me to further my studies.” Blackie spoke in the same vein saying, “I dropped out in JSS 3. We are seven in the family: three girls, four boys, and my father married two wives.” Dudusco started hawking on the streets at the age of 12. He affirmed, “Mother didn’t put me to school. She now started using me as a hawker. I started hawking for her. She will say, ‘carry oil, carry oil go to Ijesha sell it’ and all that. She is really training me to trade and still not giving me food. She trains me as a slave. By this time, I was twelve years old.” Rednose stated, “I went to primary school, and I went to secondary. I don’t have power, I mean, no money to pay, nobody to pay, no sponsor for my university



education.” This theme is supported by the literature reviewed in this study, as many participants averred that their parents were too poor to support them (Ayuba & Okafor, 2015; Mallam, 2014; Okafor & Emesibe, 2015).

**Emergent Theme 2: Drugs and alcohol use.** Nineteen of the 20 participants smoked Indian Hemp and eventually graduated into more potent drugs like tramadol, opiate, and cannabis mixed with alcohol and/or left to ferment for 7 days (monkey tail), among others. A deep immersion and analysis of the data revealed the subthemes discussed in succeeding paragraphs.

***Subtheme 1: Addicted to drugs and alcohol.*** All but one of the participants were addicted to drugs and alcohol. Yomis, Dudusco, Bombito, Smoker, and Leanman all started with Indian hemp and graduated into serious drug usage. Lifter said, “I smoke and drink.” He started smoking, drinking and stealing at the age of 15. Smoker was actually selling and smoking cannabis before he turned 15. He said, “We went to African Shrine to smoke because if you smoke there, nobody will harass you. Even police come there to smoke.” He stated further, “I started selling Indian hemp on commission basis.” All the participants smoked, took stronger drugs, and consumed alcohol. Dudusco confirmed this position by stating, “I started smoking Indian hemp, from Indian hemp, gradually time came, Indian hemp cannot really impact, cannot get me high. I moved to D10; D10 it’s a drug also. It’s a tablet, but it can get you high. So, I started taking D10, from D10 time came again, D10 cannot impact me much again. That was how I move to cocaine. I become a drug addict, but I started from smoking.” Rednose asserted that they smoked, drank alcohol, and slept with prostitutes. He confirmed that “The easiest place for us to

stay is with the prostitutes, so we have to look for a hotel where there are prostitutes, drink, smoke, and stay with them.” Bigman confirmed that “Yes, I always take drugs, smoke Igbo (Indian hemp). I smoke Igbo, take Charlie (just like cocaine), I take white Charlie, I take different drugs, Beneline, Codine, Tramadol, Topoline, Endoline.

Different, different kinds of drugs that we take, just to be high.” He continued, “I sleep with different women, rape many girls. I was trouble, I did many things, sleep with different, different girls. I just messed up with life. I did not think about tomorrow, just today, anything that want to happen, let it happened.”

***Subtheme 2: Fearless because of alcohol and drugs.*** Because of the alcohol and drugs, they operated without fear. As Crawler indicated, “I smoked very well and drank alcohol heavily.” Bigears indicated that their drugs of choice before armed robbery operations were “Felagoro” and Indian hemp soaked inside a local brew known as ogogoro for some hours, and has the same potency as dry gin, or *monkey tail*. Smoker stated, “Anytime we drank *Felagoro* or *monkey tail*, we became fearless and ready for action. No one can stand on our way.” Participants insisted that high levels of alcohol and drug consumption made them operate with boldness and aggression. Participants stated that they needed money to continue enjoying alcohol, drugs, and women, so they organized parties for or entertained at night clubs; they engaged in armed robbery activities regularly to maintain the lifestyle. Several studies reviewed in this research confirm the effect of drugs on the young adults who engage in armed robbery and other social vices (Anetor & Oyekan-Thomas, 2018; Gotsang, Mashalla, & Secoilwe, 2017).

**Subtheme 3: Merciless and ruthless.** Participants confirmed that smoking, drinking, and consuming hard drugs made them fearless. Bombito asserted, “It was when I met the bad guys, because when we met together, they told me you can’t use your empty head and do all those things because you will have compassion on human beings.” Rednose confirmed the effect of the drugs by insisting that “Because me, I used to mix my Indian hemp with cocaine, just lace it and wrap it and smoke. I smoked, I was really high with all the drinks, so I just stood there, so if anybody actually moved, I will bring him down.” Yomis, Dudusco, Shalala, Rednose, Bombito, Smoker, Bigman, Bigears, and Blackie all agreed that being under the heavy influence of alcohol and drugs helped them operate without fear, especially when coupled with the belief in the effectiveness of charms, a theme that emerged from the analysis. This theme is in line with the literature reviewed in this study (Anetor & Oyekan-Thomas, 2018; Gotsang, Mashalla, & Secoilwe, 2017).

**Emergent Theme 3: Easy access to small arms.** All the reformed armed robbers, without exception, painted a picture of a country awash with small arms, AK-47 rifles, and locally made pistols that were readily available to criminals who were also willing to use them. The third theme which emerged from the data analysis was, therefore, easy access to small arms. The easy access to arms that placed weapons in the hands of very young people who operated them under the influence of drugs, alcohol, and the burden of hopelessness and frustration they experienced. The subthemes under this are discussed below.

*Subtheme 1: Small arms available for hire.* Data generated from most of the participants established that weapons were easy to acquire either by outright purchase or hire. Tella, Liberty, and Hassan (2018) maintained that they sometimes hired weapons from the police. In the same vein, Bombito stated, “Anytime we go to rob, we will get guns from other gangs or hire from even the police. Later we bought our own guns.” When asked how easily they got the small arms used in armed robberies, Bombito noted, “Not really difficult, because we used to rent guns from them.” Their collective views on the availability of arms accords with the literature review which indicates that Nigeria is almost awash with small arms like AK-47 rifles, the weapon of choice for armed robbers, kidnappers, and Boko Haram terrorists in Nigeria (Tella, Liberty, & Hassan, 2018; Nosiri & Ohazurike, 2016; Ehiane & Uwizeyimana, 2018; Salihu, 2019; Sowale & Abiodun, 2018; Adewoyin & David, 2019).

Sometimes, armed robbers attacked either lone policemen at checkpoints, duty posts, or raided police stations for weapons and ammunition. Access to weapons in such an easy manner has influenced the level of armed robbery incidents in Lagos State and, indeed, Nigeria. Participants Yomis, Shalala, Dizzy, Smoker, Bigman, and Bigears all insisted that weapons were easy to get. Dizzy stated, “We get local pistols, and one of our guys had a good English pistol, and we had one AK-47, though we hired that AK-47 at an expensive rate. The AK-47 belonged to a Yam Association Chairman, so anytime we want to go for an operation, we go there we hire it.” There is ample support for this theme in the literature reviewed for this study. The proliferation of small arms guarantees access

to individuals, gangs, and armed robbers (Ikediashi & Akande, 2015; Okafor & Emesibe, 2015).

***Subtheme 2: Small arms are available from local manufacturers.*** In addition to sophisticated weapons like AK-47 rifles, locally manufactured weapons are available to armed robbers for a price. Some of the participants confirmed this. Blackie stated, “I go to collect them from Warri, we buy them from Warri from somebody.” In addition, they had access to pump actions and cartridges. Yomis, Dudusco, Shalala, Dizzy, Rednose, Bombito, Smoker, and Bigears all confirmed that locally manufactured pistols and other small arms were available for purchase. In addition to these weapons, they sometimes attacked the police to snatch weapons. The literature reviewed for this work confirms that millions of small arms are in circulation and available to non-state actors in Nigeria (Adewoyin & David, 2019; Ehiane & Uwizeyimana, 2018; Nosiri & Ohazurike, 2016; Sowale & Abiodun, 2018; Tella, Liberty, & Hassan, 2018).

**Emergent Theme 4: Belief in charms.** All but one participant held deep beliefs in the efficacy of charms to keep them from arrest, injury, or even death. Nineteen of them believed that charms could prevent bullets from hitting them. Even the area boys who did not participate in armed robbery activities believed that charms were effective in many ways. The subthemes are discussed below.

***Subtheme 1: Sense of invincibility and protection from death.*** All but one participant expressed a strong sense of belief in the effectiveness of charms, juju, or fetish powers. Yomis said, “I do use charms, I swallowed it, some were rubbed on me, all over the body after incisions, they cut me with razor and rob it for protection. I have seen

some people they will be firing them, and they will not die, it will not enter them.”

Rednose affirmed this by stating that “they will tie a fowl or goat, they will fire the goat, it will not enter, and it will not die.” He, however, stated that one day, they fired at one of his friends and he died. Despite this, they still believed in it. Bombito stated that he “was not afraid of death because of the charms, I made up of mind that since I was killing, one day it will be my turn to be killed.” He stated that apart from the belief in charms, he needed the money the trade yielded. He stated, “Although I know it is a dangerous crime, I needed the money.”

Blackie confirmed this widespread belief in the power of charms by stating, “I always visited one powerful man to cook me up with magical power.” He continued saying, “I believed in the power of charms to keep me out of trouble.” Yomis also stated that some of his friends who were fired on by the police went and disarmed the policemen, that the bullets had no effect on them. He asserted, “It’s true, you know there is charm sir.” Smoker used to decorate his body with various types of charms. He stated, “At every given time, I had charms on my waist, wore them on my neck, I swallowed some, tied some on my wrist, and I had many in my pockets.” Smoker indicated that the charms made him fearless. He said, “Yes, I was not afraid, from there we went to Kwale, Delta State with my friends to do juju (charms) so if the shoot us, it won’t enter.” Bigman insisted, “We had water in a pot that we used to wash our face. So even you can operate in your own house and nobody can recognize your face again.”

***Subtheme 2: Bold and aggressive in the face of danger.*** The data indicated that armed robbers operating under the belief that they were fortified by charms acted boldly

and aggressively. On the question of why they were not afraid of being killed, Bigman said, “It is because of the drugs and charms, that is why we are not afraid, because once you take the drugs and have charms, you see human beings like ants, you can kill anybody, your mind is locked and zeroed even your family member you, can handle, you handle anything, you can kill. Even the police we kill them.” Bigears confirmed by maintaining, “No, I had no fear. We used to go to a man who used to cook us heavily in charms. The charms made me to be fearless because he assured us that no gun, knives, or even dagger will hurt us if ever used on us. In fact, he said the more we kill people, the more the charms become more effective and stronger.”

Dizzy posited that “The guy, the man that made the charms, cut my body and rub it in, the guy burnt a live snake to ashes and put it on our body, for protection...he said anything we want to do we can, nothing will happen to us...I always escape danger, I believed that *ogunme* (the charm) must work for me.” Bigman admitted, “I started smoking with my friends, we were smoking a lot, especially before we go and rob. You can be under the influence of drugs for some days, it can take you like one week, or two weeks and you will still feel high. I will be seeing humans like animals, you will look so small in my eyes, and so I can handle you anyhow.”

## **Research Question 2**

The RQ 2 that underpinned data collection for this study is as follows: How has the punishment of young adult armed robbers in Lagos State, Nigeria, affected the frequency of armed robbery?

**Emergent Theme 5: Police corruption.** All participants confirmed that police corruption was pervasive, widespread, and common knowledge. All the participants affirmed that crimes like armed robbery, kidnapping, and selling Indian hemp and other illicit drugs thrive in Lagos State, because of the corruption of the police. A deep immersion in the data revealed incidents of police facilitating robberies, cooperating with armed robbers, and collecting regular dues from criminals. One major implication of the corruption is that armed robbers do not get punished for committing the crime except the mob actions and extrajudicial killings to which they are subjected. The subthemes that emerged from the data are discussed subsequently.

*Subtheme 1: The Nigeria police level of corruption.* Bombito, Rednose, Smoker, Bigman, Bigears, and Dizzy all stated that there was no serious crime without the payment of “returns” to the police. They all insisted that the police sometimes hire out weapons for armed robbery operations. Yomis stated, “We pay policemen for weapons.” He insisted that “even Indian Hemp and other drugs are sold in the presence of the police.” Leanman, Boxer, Dancer, and Lifter all stated that one police station in Lagos is referred to as “the bank” because they made regular payments either to prevent raids or procure the release of arrested gang members. All the participants, including the area boys, painted a stark picture of police corruption.

Participants generally agreed that arrested armed robbers could be released by the police if there were funds to pay for their release. Bombito, Smoker, Dizzy, Bigman, and Blackie all stated that anytime a robbery gang member was arrested, the other members robbed and paid for their release. In some cases, the police, generally unable to solve



cases, will arrest just about any number of suspected armed robbers and beat them to confess to high profile crimes. Anytime armed robbers and area boys were arrested, gang members contributed money to pay for their release. Bombito stated, “No, they didn’t allow me to go, it’s money they used to get me out, and it’s money they use.” To emphasize the pervasive police corruption, Bigman stated, “Yes, armed robbers work with the police, majority of them. It’s just like selling Indian hemp. If you want to sell Indian hemp successfully you must work with the police. It’s the same thing. Because Indian hemp is forbidden, if you want to sell it, you pay them the dues, monthly dues or weekly dues, or daily dues.” The general narrative from them indicated that the extensive level of police corruption contributed to the prevalence of armed robbery and other violent crimes like kidnapping in Nigeria.

***Subtheme 2: Police hired out weapons and sold ammunition.*** Bigman and many other participants insisted that police supplied some of the weapons they used. He averred, “Sometimes the police will give us weapons, they will remove the magazine, and they will give us the empty weapons to go and terrorize people with it.” All other participants confirmed that weapons and ammunition are sourced from the police. Some participants stated that police personnel will often not respond to reports that armed robbery operation were on. Smoker said, “We operate in some places for hours, but police left us alone, victims can call but they will not come.” They concluded that policemen sell ammunition to armed robbers. Dudusco and Crawler stated, “We buy ammunition from police.” Because of this level of corruption and unprofessional conduct, most cases of armed robbery remained inconclusive. Rednose, Bombito, and Bigears

equally stated that armed robbers hired weapons from some unscrupulous policemen. In fact, they claimed that this practice was common knowledge to all armed robbers and even the general public. Bigman said, “We know the policemen to go to, some of them knew we were armed robbers, they joined us in the Shrine to smoke”

**Emergent Theme 6: Ineffective criminal justice system.** The data generated for this study portrayed a very clear picture of a criminal justice system that is inefficient and incapable of reforming criminals, or even delivering justice. The subthemes underpinning this emergent theme are discussed below.

***Subtheme 1: Lack of diligent prosecution.*** Most of the participants, whether reformed armed robbers or area boys, painted a picture of an ineffective criminal justice system that kept suspects in prison for lengthy spells, between 9-20 years, without prosecution. They mostly indicated that the prisons hardened instead of reforming them. The police generally prefer extorting money from criminals instead of conducting professional criminal investigations. The inability of the police to conduct investigations that result in diligent prosecution has ensured that the bulk of the prison population is comprised of awaiting trial men (ATM). Dizzy, Smoker, Bigman, and Bigears agreed that “many prison inmates are ATM; they don’t go to court. Many are awaiting trial; some are in death row and just stay there for many years, 15 years, and some 20 years.” All the participants had no knowledge of anyone who had been executed for the offense of armed robbery following a court sentence. A few of them who had been sentenced to death were pardoned in the end. However, many of the participants witnessed mob justice in which

gang members were either set on fire or lynched. They all agreed that the criminal justice system was so slow in dispensing justice that it was virtually useless.

***Subtheme 2: Prisons produce hardened criminals.*** In the same vein, they contended that the prisons were centers of corruption and responsible for educating and producing hardened criminals instead of reforming them. Some of the participants, including the area boys were imprisoned, released and then got back into prison repeatedly. Crawler affirmed that they slept like sardines in the prison. He declared “We sleep like this, like sardines, like sardines. The food is small; the food is small. Mosquitos, everything is there, bed bugs, everything plenty. We have one bucket for toilet, it will be full. Every Thursday we do environmental sanitation; we clean once in a week.” This is supported by the literature review in this study. After they were released, some participants returned to prison within weeks for the same crimes they had earlier been in detention for. Bigman affirmed, “I went to prison two times before the third time when I spent 9 years. Each time I went back into robbery, I got arrested again. It was until I gave my life to Christ that I gave up that lifestyle.” From the data and literature reviewed in this study, little efforts are made towards rehabilitating prisoners.

**Emergent Theme 7: Not afraid of capital punishment.** Most of the participants simply had no fear of death or capital punishment. They knew the offense of armed robbery attracted the death penalty but did not care. The subthemes underpinning the core theme are discussed in succeeding paragraphs.

***Subtheme 1: Punishment with death did not deter.*** Bigman dismissed the threat of the death penalty by saying, “I didn’t care, and anything can happen, if you die, you

die.” Yomis was sentenced to death, but the penalty was not carried out, and after many years he regained freedom. He spent 19 years in custody. He stated that they had no fear of death or capital punishment. Yomis asserted, “Because I need money. I need money because you know I start from. I start from ghetto. You know, that is, and you know, I don’t care, I just need money.” All the participants who were involved in armed robbery activities stated that they had absolutely no fear of death, the capital punishment, or even mob justice. Yomis said, “Robbery was all we know. We knew it was dangerous but rob once and you are hooked, fear goes.” He continued, “I did not think about death at all.” The nonchalance exhibited towards the threat of death by the reformed armed robbers in this study casts a lot doubt on the deterring effect of the death penalty as argued by some scholars (Barry & Malkani, 2018; Goldfarb, 2016; Levinson, Smith, & Young, 2014; Marshall, 2018; O’Brien, Grosso, Woodworth, & Taylor, 2016; Pierce, Radelet, & Sharp, 2017; Steiker & Steiker, 2015; Tracy, 2015; Williams, 2017).

Similarly, Rednose attested to the same notion saying, “We were always on drugs. We fear nothing. If you die you die.” Smoker stated, “We had no choice, it was the only work I knew, I have no handwork” (meaning he had no skills or trade outside of robbery). Bombito and Rednose both insisted that when you get into armed robbery, you do not think about death. Smoker contended that his life meant nothing, as he was already useless to the society. Most of the participants equally felt they were invincible, that with all the charms they carried on their persons, it was not possible for anything or anyone to kill them. Anytime one of them was killed, they explained it away, found excuses issued by the man who prepared the charms. One of them wore a vest taken off a dead man that

had been buried with the belief that bullets would not penetrate his body. A number of the participants had used tires put around their necks, about to be set on fire in mob actions but were rescued by the police. They, therefore, had so many near death encounters but were nevertheless not deterred. Most of the reformed armed robbers testified that they liked the life they were living, the money, women, alcohol, and drugs and saw those as incentives to continue robbing. Blackie and many others confirmed this. He said, "We were not afraid. The drugs and charms will just charge you up. Human beings will just be like ant in your eyes. Anybody that gets in our way, we can just kill, even family members. At that time, you have just zeroed our mind. Anything that comes your way you will just handle it."

*Subtheme 2: Motivated by money and the lifestyle it offered.* Participants generally agreed that because of their lifestyles, they constantly needed money. Money from armed robbery operations was always spent on alcohol, drugs, and women of easy virtue. Shalala stated, "We spent heavily on women and alcohol. It was night club straight after robbery operation." Bigears said they needed money all the time so there was no thought of death. He posited, "We needed money to live the good life." Blackie substantiated this assertion by stating that "without money, I feel sick. I must go out and look for money. I have to look for target and rob." The constant pursuit of money through armed robbery operations blinded them to its danger. Blackie was of the view that he felt a sense of power. He affirmed, "We are just lavishing the money, drinking, smoking, go to club, take hard drugs, I always take drugs, because everybody is afraid of me in *Ajgunle*, I was the king in that area."

### Research Question 3

The RQ 3 that underpinned data collection for this study is as follows: How has the punishment of armed robbers influenced the decision of street gang members, area boys not to participate in robbery activities?

**Emergent Theme 8: Gang membership.** Gang membership was a common theme that applied to both reformed armed robbers and area boys. Area boys by their very nature operate as gangs to steal, fight, exercise dominance over territories, and extort money from market women and other victims of their criminal activities. Nineteen of the participants were members of the gangs that recruited them. One of them was a member of a cult group that he headed and eventually turned into an armed robbery gang that executed many robbery operations. He confirmed that his gang killed other cult members. The themes under gang membership are discussed in succeeding paragraphs.

**Subtheme 1: Recruited into gangs.** Most of the area boys and armed robbers were recruited at very young ages. The relationship between gang membership and predisposition to crime has been established in the literature reviewed for this study. Watchman affirmed, “The guys that picked me up from the street introduced me to their lifestyle. I was influenced by them. I started smoking with them, harassing people in the streets. At night we look for some street and block, and then we take their phone and money, everything.” In the same vein, Dancer confirmed, “I joined the gang at 15, picking pockets and snatching phones.” Boxer also became a gang member after trying his hands at being a conductor and tricycle driver. He said, “I was a bad guy in the street.” Leanman started smoking when he joined the gang. Watchman asserted, “I am a

street person. I don't sleep in the house; I sleep in the street with the boys." He confirmed that he was in a 15-member gang that smoked Indian hemp, stole, drank, and fought other gangs for dominance. Gangs exercised dominance over areas for extorting petty traders, mostly women. Gang membership influences participation in criminal activities by young adults and youth (Aliyu et al., 2016; Lange et al., 2018; Pedersen, 2014).

***Subtheme 2: The benefits of gang membership.*** Area boys and reformed armed robbers posited that some benefits and advantages are attached to gang membership. Crawler indicated that one of the benefits of gang membership was that he had money in his pocket all the time. He insisted, "I get money to maintain myself, buy Indian hemp to smoke. And as the chairman of Ladipo area, I help other people who come with their problems. If I fill my pocket, I give them, I help them too." Another major benefit of gang membership was that they ate together. If any of them were down on their luck, the rest took care of his food, smoking, and drinking needs. They equally contributed money to pay police to the release arrested members, and this was very frequently. One of them, Shalala, was arrested ten times by the police for various offenses like possession of Indian Hemp, stealing, and loitering, an offense that has been declared unconstitutional but is used by the police against area boys who do not know their rights.

**Emergent Theme 9: Peer pressure.** Area boys and those participants who were involved in armed robbery activities attested to the effect or influence of peer pressure on their decision to become gang members. Some confessed that the environment they were raised in had a very negative impact on their lives. The effect of peer pressure on young

persons who end up in crime has been supported by the literature in this study (Otu and Elechi, 2016; Haruna, 2016).

*Subtheme 1: Recruited into a life of crime.* Some participants, including Leanman, Boxer, Dancer, and Crawler admitted they were recruited into gangs whose main purpose for existing was to commit crimes. Crawler confessed, “It is my friend that influenced me to all these activities, it was my environment...environment is everything.” Yomis confirmed that “We collect money from women that sell market.” Similarly, Boxer confirmed that he accepted recruitment because “there was no money to send me for further my studies, and when I stopped schooling, I don’t have anything to do and no money for my parents to feed me that was how I started joining all this bad groups.” Watchman stated that because he was stubborn, joining a gang was very natural, especially because his parents were poor and unable to care for him and his siblings. He averred, “I joined the bad boys and began smoking Indian hemp and stealing.” Egbon was recruited into gang membership and became a regular at bus stations, where he and the boys fought other gangs for dominance and control of territories, stole, and extorted money from frightened members of the public. He confessed, “We fought with other [gangs] at bus stops, we fought to collect bus stops from them.” Ajitomi and Olaniyan (2018) found that cults and gangs thrive on exerting power, supremacy, and violence, which is their major instrument of coercion—involvement in crimes like robbery and terrorism to acquire arms, as well as to pay hospital bills and legal services when members are arrested. All the area boys admitted that they benefitted from gang membership and the crimes in which they engaged.



***Subtheme 2: We found purpose in the gangs.*** Area boys particularly felt a sense of belonging and found purpose in the gang activity. Most area boys and armed robbers felt their lives were hopeless and without meaning. Leanman, Boxer, Dancer, Crawler, Watchman, Lifter, Egbon, Leader, Shifter, and Jamboree all agreed that their lives had no meaning and direction. Crawler contended that he “didn’t have parents, because all my parents are gone that’s why I joined the gang, I don’t have any option...I have no option, Nigeria is tough. With the boys, I can eat, so I stayed with them. I feel happy with Chelsea dry gin.” Lifter said, “I just had to do something but only stealing. I am on the street with my friends. If I see a phone, I can take it.” He continued that, “We get money to smoke Indian hemp together. If the police raids catch me now, I can call them, they will bring food for me and help bail me out.” Leader said, “My friends protect me, they look after me, they will protect me anytime and I protect them...we sleep together and go out in the morning, I have something to do every day.” Boxer insisted, “I joined the gang to survive.”

**Emergent Theme 10: Not afraid of death.** The participants, including area boys who did not engage in armed robbery, were generally not deterred by the death penalty that the offense attracted; they were ultimately not interested. Many area boys indicated that they simply did not consider it.

***Subtheme 1: Not deterred by the death penalty.*** The data for this study indicates that the death penalty did not deter area boys from the crime of armed robbery. Watchman stated, “I know that armed robbery is death but I did not think that way, my interest is not in it.” Egbon said, “I do not like it. I steal phones, money from somebody’s

pocket, but can't carry gun." Like the armed robbers, area boys who did not participate in robberies didn't think about the punishment for the offense. Most of them expressly stated that they did not like armed robbery. Shifter said, "I do not want to be armed robber, I do not like it, I do not like it." It was also clear from the data that most of them did not indulge in it because their friends were not into the crime. Crawler said, "That was not our job, we steal, fight, but robbery? No." When asked repeatedly whether they were deterred by the penalty for armed robbery, all participants affirmed that it had no impact on their decision.

***Subtheme 20: Just not interested in armed robbery.*** Analyzed data indicate area boys who largely street gangs are made individual decisions not to participate in armed robbery but not because of the death penalty attached to it. Dancer said, "I do not have power you see. I am lean. I do not even like to fight. I do not have mind, but if they attack my friends, I fight." Boxer stated, "My mind is not in that area, our gang do not do armed robbery." Reverting to Pidgin English, he said, "God no go let me do that kind work," meaning God will not allow me to do that kind of work. Crawler said, "I am not a robber because I do not like it." Lifter stated, "Nobody in my family do that one." In the same vein, Watchman averred, "Armed robbery, no, I will not do that one, I will not do armed robbery, it did not enter my mind," meaning it did not cross his mind. Leader said he was not interested in armed robbery, although some boys in his neighborhood were suspected of being armed robbers because they always had money to spend and wore expensive jewelry.

**Discrepant Cases**

The transcribed data was reviewed along with the audio-recorded questions and answers proffered by the participants, and there was no discrepant case disclosed in the data.

**Evidence of Trustworthiness**

In conducting research, it is critical that researchers address the trustworthiness of collected data and results to ensure reliability, validity, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of obtained results (Morse, 2015). Qualitative researchers establish credibility by emplacing and executing the strategies of triangulation, member checking, presenting thick descriptions, and considering negative cases (Creswell, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In addition to aforementioned strategies, I inveterated the interpretation of the data with the participants. Participants were provided with the transcripts of their interviews to check for inaccuracies (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Creswell, 2014).

**Credibility**

In gathering data, one important goal was to ensure credibility. Multiple recording devices were, therefore, employed in the data collection process in addition to notes that captured key moment and facts. I deliberately interviewed no more than three participants per day. To mitigate against inherent bias and to maintain credibility, I employed triangulation, which resulted in enhanced rigor and credibility postulated (Daniel, 2019; Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018). Credibility was further achieved through careful data description, analysis, and the verification of the sources of data collected with the

participants (Daniel, 2019). In the same vein, the final report or themes were subjected to member checking. Credibility was thus achieved by the fit or similarity between the respondents' or participants' views and the representation I made of them. The finding of the research represented the plausible data or information drawn from the participants. Finally, it was confirmed that initial questions and follow-up questions aligned with the data that were generated.

### **Transferability**

In order to ensure that results of the research met the threshold and remained capable of being transferred to other contexts and settings, thick descriptions were used. The behaviors of the participants, their experiences, their context, locations, methods, and their characteristics were presented in a manner that the study can be replicated by others. Ravitch & Cail (2016) insist that the provision of thick description makes the experiences of the participants available to the reader. Their study elicited data from ten reformed armed robbers and ten reformed area boys whose responses afforded the attainment of saturation, triangulation, credibility, and transferability. In fact, detailed or thick descriptions mentally place the readers at the setting, invariably acquainting them with the experiences of the study's participants (Creswell, 2016).

### **Dependability**

The dependability, or stability, of the findings of a study over time will largely rest on whether participants' evaluations of the findings, the interpretation of data, and recommendations are supported by what was received from the participants (Korstjens

& Moser, 2018). Therefore, to achieve dependability, detailed steps of data collection, analysis, and development of relevant themes are provided by the researcher.

Furthermore, an audit trail was employed in the process, and the protocol for the study and process of data generation were signposted and discussed in the study (Sutton & Austin, 2015; Belotto, 2015; Theron, 2015). Similarly, triangulation was employed to ensure credibility and dependability as already discussed.

### **Confirmability**

There is always a tendency for the researcher to be biased in qualitative studies. To guard against this, confirmability is established to ensure that data generated and the findings flowing therefrom are not figments of the researcher's imagination (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Records were therefore generated and kept for this study, which incorporated an audit trail in its design. The participants were equally afforded opportunities to freely respond to the research questions and the inevitable follow-up questions. Similarly, direct quotes from the participants were used to ensure the accuracy of the data generated.

### **Summary**

In Chapter 4 of this phenomenological exploration of the lived experiences of reformed armed robbers in Lagos State, I presented the outcomes, the three research questions, and the themes generated in the face-to-face interviews with of the participants. Patterns and theme emerging from the data were located and categorized as proposed by Patton (2015). The themes elaborately depicted the experiences of the participants with the phenomenon and answered the research questions extensively.

The first research question was: How does the threat of punishment influence armed robbers' decision not to participate in robbery activities? Four major themes emerged in response to this question. The first theme indicated family background that contributed in incentivizing the young adults to participate in armed robbery activities. Almost all participants were predisposed by their family backgrounds to engage in criminal activities. The second theme indicated that participants were addicted to drugs and alcohol and this made them fearless during armed robbery operations. The third theme showed that participants had easy access to small arms like AK-47 rifles and locally made pistols and amunitions. The fourth theme revealed that the armed robbers held deep beliefs in the efficacy of charms to keep them from arrest, injury, or even death.

The second research question was: How has the punishment of young adult armed robbers in Lagos State, Nigeria, affected the frequency of armed robbery? Three themes emerged to answer this research question. The first theme was police corruption - as all participants confirmed that police corruption was pervasive, widespread, and common knowledge. The second theme that emerged in response to the question was an ineffective criminal justice system incapable of reforming criminals or even delivering justice. The third theme was that participants had no fear of death or capital punishment. They knew the offense of armed robbery attracted the death penalty but did not care.

The third research question was: How has the punishment of armed robbers influenced the decision of street gang members, area boys not to participate in robbery activities? Three themes emerged to answer this research question. The first theme was

gang membership, a common theme that applied to both reformed armed robbers and area boys. The second theme that emerged under this question was peer pressure as area boys and the participants who were involved in armed robbery activities attested to the influence of peer pressure on their decisions to become gang members. The third theme was that the area boys were generally not deterred by the death penalty the offense attracted; they were ultimately not interested in armed robbery activities. Many area boys indicated that they simply did not consider it. In Chapter 5 I present the interpretation and implications of these results.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of reformed young adult armed robbers in Lagos State. The study addresses the gap on the perception of young adult armed robbers on why they engaged in armed robbery activities despite the threat of death on several levels (e.g., court-sanctioned executions, mob actions by the populace, and extra judicial killings or death resulting in engagements with the police). The qualitative phenomenological approach, with face-to-face interviews, offered thick descriptions of the phenomenon of inquiry. Semistructured interviews also offered opportunities for follow up questions, which yielded relevant data. Participants were recruited through flyers placed at the premises of the cooperating NGO. The 20 participants fell into two distinct categories: 10 reformed armed robbers who had participated in at least one armed robbery operation, and 10 reformed area boys who were engaged in petty criminal activities but not armed robberies. The data generated from the interview provides insight into the lived experiences of the participants.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The phenomenological approach adopted for this study offered individual participants enough flexibility to describe their lived experiences. Findings from the study aligned with the supporting theory of anomie; however, participants did not witness the execution of convicted armed robbers, so the deterrence theory was not fully evaluated in this study. Although some of the participants witnessed the death of gang members through mob actions by the public, it did not deter them from engaging in



armed robberies. Similarly, the findings aligned with the literature review for the study. After deep immersion in the data, analysis, coding, and thematic identification, key findings emerged.

**Finding 1: Participants Were Largely from Poor, Dysfunctional, Broken Homes, and Lack of Parental Care**

Most participants for this study were from poor, dysfunctional, broken homes, and lacked parental supervision and guidance. Consequently, they were predisposed to criminality as predicted by the literature review (Ayuba & Okafor, 2015; Mallam, 2014; Okafor & Emesibe, 2015). The correlation between poverty and crime is well established by the literature. Participants admitted that they felt a sense of despondency under the economic realities in Nigeria and resorted to violent crimes and, in some cases, petty crimes. Many participants also grew up in environments that often had criminal activities by juveniles and young adults. One of the participants, Blackie, stressed the role the environment played in his life:

My mum was the second wife. So, it's a long-extended family. There was no joy in the family; there was trouble and "wahala" every day. My parents tried their best, but environment matters a lot, environment is everything. The environment I grew up in was filled with bad people. That kind of environment was not good for training children.

The same view was shared by 18 other participants whose parents were either too poor to finance their educational pursuit or too dysfunctional to offer the needed parental care.

The generated data, including reviewed literature, suggested that some noteworthy factors

like bad friends, money, poverty, and corruption account for the involvement of youth in armed robberies (e.g., Obubu & Nwokolo, 2016; Ukoji & Okolie-Osemene, 2016).

**Finding 2: Easy Access to Small Arms Increases the Prevalence of Armed Robbery**

Another key finding that coincided with the literature review was the easy access participants had to small arms, which they either hired from the police or bought from dealers or local manufacturers. Participants admitted that small arms like AK-47 rifles, pump action guns, the English pistol, or Berretta were commonly available. Additionally, small arms used in robbery operations were hired from the police, which Dudusco and Crawler confirmed when admitting that they would buy ammunition from police. The production of small arms ensures the selling of these weapons cheaply to individuals, groups, and armed robbers who employ them in the dangerous trade of robbing Nigerians and foreigners (Ikediashi & Akande; 2015; Okafor & Emesibe, 2015). The constant supply of these arms into the hands of young people accounts for their involvement in robberies, assassinations, kidnappings, and murders (Okafor & Emesibe, 2015; Otu & Elechi, 2015). The prevalence of weapons, among other factors, has created a crime-infested environment (Ukoji & Okolie-Osemene, 2016).

**Finding 3: Armed Robbers Depend Heavily on Drugs and Alcohol**

Findings indicated that participants were also dependent on alcohol and drugs, fueling the boldness they needed for armed robbery operations. In fact, even the area boys who were only involved in petty criminal activities abused alcohol and drugs. Heavy consumption of alcohol and drugs like monkey tail, Tramadol, Beneline, and Codine made participants fearless during operations. Crawler indicated he “smoked very

well and drank alcohol heavily.” Smoker, Bigman, Bigears, and Blackie all agreed that being under the heavy influence of alcohol and drugs helped them operate without fear, especially when coupled with the belief in the effectiveness of charms. Smoker stated, “Anytime we drank Felagoro, we became fearless and ready for action. No one can stand on our way.” Data on the number of cases have shown over 8,000 young adults who suffered from drug addiction (<http://www.ngerianstat.gov.ng>), pushing them into violent crimes to feed their habits. Drug addicted young adults incapable of exercising good judgement with access to firearms kill and maim for resources to purchase drugs, which partly accounts for the large number of young adults involved in armed robbery activities, all of which are supported in the literature reviewed for this study (Aigbovo & Eidenoje, 2016).

#### **Finding 4: Death Penalty Did Not Deter**

Participants for this study, including the 10 area boys who were only involved in petty crimes, all affirmed that they were not afraid of the death penalty. The death penalty did not deter participants from engaging in armed robbery for several reasons. For instance, some indicated that their conditions were already too desperate to the extent that death was meaningless. Others felt that they had no choice, and it was the only option available to them. Similarly, participants thought they were invincible because of the strong belief in the protective power of charms. Yomis confirmed, “I did not think about death at all.” Smoker stated, “Anytime we drank Felagoro, we became fearless and ready for action, no one can stand on our way.” Even when gang members were killed, the rest rationalized and made excuses that the dead person broke a law against the charms. Thus,

this study indicated that the death penalty as a punishment does not deter armed robbers, and some of the literature reviewed in this research confirmed this (Badiora et al., 2015; Bessler, 2018; Broughton, 2017; Gaines, 2015).

#### **Finding 5: Peer Pressure Plays a Significant Role**

The study also showed that participants were mostly influenced by peer pressure to join gangs that either committed robberies or engaged in petty crimes. This finding is also in sync with the literature review (see Etta & Ojedokun, 2017; Heap, 2010). Egbon, for instance, was recruited into gang membership and hung around at bus stations with the boys where they fought other gangs for dominance and control of territories, stole, and extorted money from frightened members of the public. All the area boys admitted that they benefitted from gang membership and the crimes they engaged in. Crawler contended,

I didn't have parents, because all my parents are gone. That's why I joined the gang; I don't have any option...I have no option. Nigeria is tough. With the boys, I can eat, so I stayed with them. I feel happy with Chelsea dry gin.

#### **Finding 6: Nigeria's Criminal Justice System is Ineffective**

Similarly, the study uncovered an ineffective, dysfunctional criminal justice system that delayed investigations of reported crimes, kept unconvicted suspects in prison for as long as 20 years, failed to reform criminals, and instead released hardened criminals into the society, as indicated by the literature review. Nigeria's prison conditions are harsh and unbearable due to overcrowding, poor medical facilities, suffocating heat due to lack of power supply to prison facilities, starvation, and endless

waiting for justice as long as 20 years (Nnam, 2016; Obarisiagbon & Aderinto, 2018; Sarat et al., 2017; Schönreich, 2012). Crawler affirmed that they slept like sardines in the prison:

We sleep like this, like sardines, like sardines. The food is small; the food is small. Mosquitos, everything is there, bed bugs, everything plenty. We have one bucket for toilet; it will be full. Every Thursday we do environmental sanitation; we clean once in a week.

These conditions are compounded by the fact that suspects wait in jail for prosecutions from 15 to 20 years.

#### **Finding 7: Nigeria's Police Force is Corrupt and Unprofessional**

The study also found that Nigeria's police force is generally corrupt and unprofessional. Participants disclosed that they purchased weapons from the police for armed robbery operation. The area boys named a police station "the bank" because officers from the station routinely raided motor parks, Indian hemp joints, open markets, and arrested them to extort money. The area boys and armed robbery suspects routinely paid money to the police to either release arrested members or act as protection fees. The study also found that the reformed armed robbers had no fear of death while they engaged in robberies. Although they were aware of the death penalty, it did not influence them, even after witnessing gang members die from mob actions or in encounters with the police.

These findings align with the literature reviewed in this study. Many studies have concluded that Nigeria's Police Force is unprofessional and thus unable to conduct law

enforcement functions effectively (Edet, 2017; Idowu, 2016). Rednose, Bombito, and Bigears also stated that armed robbers hired weapons from some unscrupulous policemen. In fact, they claimed that this practice was common knowledge to all armed robbers and even the general public. Supporting this assertion, Bigman said, “We know the policemen to go to. Some of them knew we were armed robbers. They joined us in the Shrine to smoke.” Literature that confirmed these testimonies revealed that the Nigeria police are poorly trained, ill-equipped, and encumbered by corruption. They are also demoralized and unmotivated, so much so that the force is unable to operate as professionals tasked with tackling criminality (Chinwokwu, 2018; Edet, 2017; Idowu, 2016; Onyeozili, 2005).

#### **Finding 8: Armed Robbers Believe in the Efficacy of Charms**

The most unexpected finding was participants near unanimous belief in the efficacy of charms. Participants believed in the protective power of charms; even when they appeared to fail, rationalizations were made to continue believing in them. Even the reformed armed robbers who have embraced Christ and are now active Christians insisted that they found charms to be effective. They stated that they witnessed the protective powers of the charms, which only failed occasionally because some rules were broken. All but one participant expressed a strong sense of belief in the effectiveness of charms, juju, or fetish powers. Yomis said, “I do use charms. I swallowed it, some were rubbed on me, all over the body after incisions; they cut me with razor and rub it for protection.” The area boys who did not engage in robbery activities also believed in the protection they thought the charms offered. Rednose affirmed this by stating, “They will tie a fowl

or goat, they will fire the goat, it will not enter, and it will not die.” This finding has not been highlighted by literature like the other findings.

### **Finding 9: Area Boys Predisposed to Criminal Activities Did Not Engage in Armed Robbery**

The study found that area boys who were predisposed to criminal activity by the same factors as the reformed armed robbers to engage in robbery activities did not. Area boys indicated that they were just not interested in armed robbery. All area boys affirmed that while they were familiar with the punishment for armed robbery, it did not serve as a deterrent—they simply elected not to be involved in that kind of crime. Boxer stated, “My mind is not in that area. Our gang do not do armed robbery.” Reverting to Pidgin English, he said, “God no go let me do that kind work,” meaning God will not allow him to do that kind of work. Crawler said, “I am not a robber because I do not like it.” Lifter stated, “Nobody in my family do that one.” Similarly, Watchman averred that “Armed robbery, no, I will not do that one, I will not do armed robbery, it did not enter my mind,” meaning it did not cross his mind. As suggested by the literature (Lebas, 2013; Salaam & Brown, 2012; Uyieh, 2018), area boys engage in violent crimes (like fighting for supremacy and dominance, which include the use of knives and clubs) but not armed robbery.

### **Limitation of the Study**

Every study suffers from some limitation, and this one was no exception (Aguinis & Solarino, 2015; Belotto, 2018; Chapman, Hadfield, & Chapman, 2015; Weis & Willems, 2017). The first limitation is the uncertain homogeneity of the sample size in

this qualitative study as the findings emerged from a small sample of armed robbers (Boddy, 2016; Polit & Beck, 2010; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) thus cannot be generalized to a larger population. The goal was to provide a rich, contextualized understanding of the lived experiences of reformed armed robbers in Lagos State. Indeed, the goal of this qualitative research like many others was to obtain insights into a social phenomenon that exists within a specific location and context as suggested by Onwuegbuzie & Leech (2010).

The second limitation was the inability to confirm the effectiveness of the charms most reformed armed robbers claimed were integral for protection. The researcher's experience in the military made the claims that bullets fired from an AK-47 rifle were ineffective against some of the participants difficult to believe. A third limitation of the study was the researcher's potential bias having commanded troops that played law enforcement roles in support of the police and arrested armed robbers. I maintained credibility by accepting and understanding the phenomenon of inquiry from the laws of the participants. In the end, the participants were encouraged to describe their lived experiences, which were exclusive to them and confirmed by triangulation and immersion in the data. Trustworthiness and credibility resulted from the findings and painted an authentic portrait of what the study set out to search (Miles et al., 2014). Additionally, members checking increased credibility (Aguinis & Solarino, 2015; Belotto, 2018; Chapman, Hadfield, & Chapman, 2015). Similarly, the recommended steps to ensure and strengthen trustworthiness with respect to data collection and storage were followed.



## **Recommendations**

Most of the previous research on the phenomenon focused largely on the causative factors driving it. Indeed, no research sought to look at the phenomenon from the lived experiences of its key actors—armed robbers—in relation to their perception of the death penalty and whether it served as a deterrence. This study has therefore contributed by filling the gap and adding to the body of knowledge on the phenomenon.

The following recommendations are therefore made:

### **Recommendation for Future Research**

There are possible areas of further research that may add to the emerging body of knowledge on armed robbery in Nigeria.

1. The relationship between the incidents of armed robbery and police corruption.
2. Armed robbery and the prevailing socioeconomic factors.
3. The relationship between armed robbery and the criminal justice system needs further investigation.
4. The contributions of the prisons in hardening criminals instead of reforming them needs further investigation.
5. A similar study may be conducted in other parts of Nigeria.

### **Recommendation for Government Intervention**

The Nigerian government and its agencies may look beyond punishing armed robbers and young adults involved in crime. Social-economic interventions and social safety nets may be emplaced to take care of unemployed young adults. Additionally,

criminal justice reforms that will speed up the delivery of justice, tackle prison congestion and corruption, and emplace strategies that tackle police corruption may be initiated without delay.

## **Implications**

### **Implications for Criminal Justice Reforms**

The results of this study may trigger far-reaching criminal justice reforms that could result in prison decongestion, improved conditions, reformation of prisoners, and the tackling of police corruption. The results of the study may impact the training and equipment of the police and other law enforcement agencies in Nigeria. Data generated from this study paints a picture of an unprofessional, dysfunctional and inept criminal justice system totally unequipped and unable to tackle the growing menace of armed robbery activities by a large number of young adults. Additionally, special attention may be paid to training and equipping the police and other supporting agencies to effectively discharge their law enforcement functions. In the same vein, the Nigerian judicial process is burdened by problems that results in delays of criminal cases ranging from 10 - 20 yearas and this may be addressed by the government through reforms.

### **Policy Implications**

Similarly, the prevalence of drugs on the streets of Nigeria needs urgent intervention by the government and NGOs (Anetor & Oyekan-Thomas, 2018; Gotsang, Mashalla, & Secoilwe, 2017). Furthermore, the prevalence of small arms that places guns into the hands of young adult armed robbers needs urgent government attention. In the same vein, the death penalty attached to the offense of armed robbery is not even effective when implemented and

may be replaced with a sanction that accords with international best practices. It may be replaced with a sentence that serves as a deterrent while reforming the individual.

Additionally, unlawful policing methods like torture, harassment, threats, physical and verbal assaults, extrajudicial killings, and other unconventional actions violate the rights of the citizens by the police and must stop. The prevalence of crimes like armed robbery is directly linked, in large measure, to professional incompetence and corruption of the police (Aborisade, 2018; Akinlabi, 2017; Idowu, 2016; Ojedokun, 2014; Owen, 2016).

### **Implications to Practice**

Findings from this study may inform the development and effective implementation of policies and practices related to armed robbery and capital punishment in Lagos State, Nigeria. Similarly, NGOs and social-good programs that target young people can use the findings as evidence for developing alternative approaches to address the issue of armed robbery among young people in the state. In the same vein, legal practitioners and government organs may utilize the findings to improve the the justice delivery system in Nigeria.

### **Implications to Theory**

Findings from this study provide support for propositions of the Deterrence Theory and Anomie Theory. This will add to the body of knowledge regarding the relationship between capital punishment and armed robbery practices. Other researchers, including criminal justice scholars, may build on the study to develop grounded theory, particularly on the phenomenon of capital punishment and how it serves as a deterrent to

young people's involvement in other crimes that attract the death penalty in Lagos and in other Nigerian states.

### **Implications to Social Change**

This study may have significant positive impacts and implications on social change, as it addresses a persistent conundrum that impacts the Nigerian society in a way that hurts its overall well-being. Such change refers to the ability of the study to contribute to addressing social issues that may lead to social progress and general improvement of human living conditions (O'Cass & Griffin, 2015). The crux of social change is the desire to inspire, influence, and impact diverse communities and, through this, positively impact and change our world for good (Brown & Baltes, 2017).

It is against this background that this study may contribute to positive social change by offering evidence to inform policies, laws, and interventions to reduce the menace and prevalence of armed robbery practices among young people in Lagos State. The correct design and application of policy in relation to the armed robbery epidemic may significantly reduce its influence and prevalence, invariably influencing the phenomenon that is almost a culture (Einarsen et al., 2016; Pastorek et al., 2015). The study thus highlights gaps in the Lagos State, Nigeria law enforcement and justice delivery system, specifically as relates to capital punishment and its implementation in the state. Findings also underscore opportunities for alternative laws, policies, and interventions that can socioeconomically empower young people and deter participation in armed robbery activities.

## Conclusions

Nigeria has a problem with armed robbery, an offense committed with weapons coupled with threats to inflict injury or bodily harm. This study set out to explore and investigate the lived experiences of young adult armed robbers who either have gone through or are going through the rehabilitative process. Data for the study were generated through semi-structured interviews with 20 participants. The face-to-face interviews lasted between 25 and 65 minutes and afforded the participants opportunities to freely share their lived experiences with the phenomenon. The study was anchored by three research questions:

**RQ1:** How does the threat of punishment influence armed robbers' decision not to participate in robbery activities?

**RQ2:** How has the punishment of young adult armed robbers in Lagos State, Nigeria, affected the frequency of armed robbery?

**RQ3:** How has the punishment of armed robbers influenced the decision of street gang members, area boys not to participate in robbery activities?

The study was underpinned by two theories: the anomie theory and the deterrence theory. The recorded interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Results yielded the following core themes:

- Family background
- Access to small arms
- Peer pressure
- Influence of alcohol and drugs
- Gang membership

- Belief in charms
- Police corruption
- Ineffective criminal justice system
- Not afraid of death, not interested in armed robbery

The study has many implications: the young adults, criminal justice reforms, policing, prison reforms, socioeconomic engineering to impact young adults positively, and the abolishing of the death penalty for the offense of armed robbery. It was clear from the transcribed data that the death penalty had no deterring effect on the participants' decision to cease participating in armed robbery activities. Several factors were identified as incentivizing young adults to participate in criminal activities like armed robbery and petty stealing. The most common were poor and dysfunctional family backgrounds, peer pressure, the influence of alcohol and drugs, unwavering belief in the power of charms to protect them, an ineffective criminal justice system and poverty.

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## Appendix: Interview Protocol

Dissertation Research: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Experiences of Reformed Young Adult Armed Robbers Aged 18-25 in Lagos State, Nigeria

Interviewer: Patrick Akem-Vingir

Interviewee code ID# assigned by the researcher:

Time of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

*(Ask for permission to record the interview):* Part of the interview process includes audio-recording so the data may be reviewed. You as a participant will be briefed on the procedures and the purpose of this study before the interview and the journaling process begin. You will also be provided with assurance about ethical principles, such as anonymity and confidentiality. Do you give consent to be audio-recorded during this interview session?

*(Review the purpose of the study):* The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of reformed young adult armed robbers, aged 18-25; the repentant armed robbers are no longer involved in criminal activities.

*(Framing of the interview):* The planned and structured research questions will serve as a guide in this interview; however, clarifying or follow-up

questions may be asked in regard to what participants describe about the phenomenon to capture the whole picture or develop a greater understanding of the experience. This study will involve an interview that will be completed in one hour or less.

Please remember that the interview responses are confidential. If there is a question you would prefer not to answer or you need further clarification, please inform me. If you think at any time you would like to stop the interview or resign as a participant in this study, please alert me and you may do so with no consequence to you. As a reminder, this entire interview is being audio recorded and will be transcribed. Please hold for one moment while I start the recording [press \*9] . . . thank you, Participant # \_\_\_\_\_. You will have an opportunity to review the transcription once all data have been collected and transcribed. Your interview transcription will be e-mailed to you for review. Please provide verbal confirmation that you have reviewed the informed consent form and consent to participating in this study. [Pause for reply] Thank you. We will begin.

#### Semi-structured Armed Robbery Participation Interview Questions

1. Can you give me a brief background of yourself?
2. What was the economic status of your family while growing up?
3. What is your level of education?
4. Why did you get into armed robbery activities?

5. At what age did you get involved in armed robbery?
6. Did you belong to a gang?
7. How did you get involved in crime/armed robbery? Were you recruited?
8. Were you aware of the punishment that armed robbery attracts?
9. As a former armed robber, were you afraid of the punishments for armed robbery?
10. Were you not afraid of being killed in the course of an armed robbery operation?
11. Do you know of fellow armed robbers who were killed by the government after conviction?
12. Are you aware of any armed robber killed by mob action?
13. Do you know of armed robbers killed by the Police or other law enforcement agencies in the course of a robbery?
14. Have you ever consumed any form of illegal drugs (marijuana, cocaine, ecstasy, heroine etc)? If yes:
  - a. At what age did you start using drugs?
  - b. How did you get into drugs?
15. Why did you stop participating in armed robbery activities?
16. Do you think the punishment of death influences people not to commit armed robbery offences?
17. How do armed robbers get weapons for the activities?
18. Are the police and other law enforcement agencies effective in combatting armed robbery activities?
19. Are the courts effective?

20. How were you getting weapons for the robberies?
21. Do you know of any arrested person who was released back into armed robbery activities?
22. How quickly do the police and judiciary complete the process of investigation and trial?
23. What do you think the Lagos state government should do to armed robbers?