

Neighborhood Watch as a Strategy of Community Policing Program: A Case of Zanzibar

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Abstract: This study sought to establish the neighborhood watch as a strategy of community policing program in Zanzibar, Tanzania. It is a descriptive study design which used quantitative approach to collect information from 400 respondents out of 1, 303, 569 study population. Simple random sampling and stratified sampling techniques were applied to select respondents. A structured questionnaire was conducted to gather required information from respondents. Statistical Package for Social sciences (SPSS) version 1.20 was used to analyze data where the following mean scores interpretation scale was used: 3.50-4.00= strongly sympathetic, 2.50-3.49 = sympathetic, 1.50-2.49= unsympathetic and 1.00-1.49 strongly unsympathetic. After analysis the study concluded that neighborhood watch as crime prevention was not accepted by the study area community. Due to such desirable results, it is recommended that it is an essential for police to introduce effective communication with community. Police officers have to impact proper neighborhood knowledge that make individual community members understand their role in the implementation of neighborhood watch program.

Keywords: Crime prevention activities; community policing; neighborhood watch.

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Introduction

Neighborhood watch initiative as part of community policing program has been a topic of discussion by many social science and police officer academicians (Mussa, 2019; Brunton-Smith & Bullock, 2019; Schreurs et al., 2020). Their common interest is whether neighborhood watch initiative is fit and conducive for every community in prevention and reduction of crime. In few past years, neighborhood watch has sprung up in cities all over the world in different forms and names. It jumped from physical neighborhood watch form to online neighborhood watch form. This was due to technological advancements which changed every life aspect throughout the world (Schreurs et al., 2020). Police in their hand stimulate both kinds of neighborhood watch since they lack enough manpower and resources to be present 24/7 at every corner where

citizens claim for their neighborhood safety (Mussa, 2019; Schreurs et al., 2020).

Neighborhood watch has been practiced in many places throughout the world. In England and Wales, for example, neighborhood watch has long history since 1980 to 1990s where citizens were stimulated to play their roles of safeguarding their neighborhoods. It was at this period that neighborhoods were formed to be 'eyes and ears' of police by watching out and reporting suspicious activities for the sake of protecting their properties and their life (Brunton-Smith & Bullock, 2019). This is also the case in the United State of America where more than forty percent of the population participate in the neighborhood watch program with different names like Community-Based Services and Geographic Area Planning, and with different modes of operation. Like in England and Wales,

neighborhood watch in United State of America played the role of securing areas and controlling crime situations by informing police about suspicious behaviors around the areas (Mussa, 2019).

Neighborhood watch in India was initiated to safeguard the life and the welfare of elderly people. Aging women in India faced a number of challenges associated with crime like murder, theft, hurt, cheating and bag snatching by both famous and not famous criminals. Through the neighborhood watch program, elderly women living in neighborhood were known, recognized and hence their welfare was improved (Bhavsar et al., (2020).

Likewise, in Malaysia, neighborhood watch program was part and parcel of solving rapid urbanization challenges. The cities of Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Malacca and Penang were facing prevalence of crime, rising cost of living, lack of employment opportunities, air pollution and traffic congestion due to rapid urbanization. As a result, neighborhood watch program was initiated to reduce these challenges (Somasundram et al., 2018). Contrary to China, where population is so high compare to other countries in the world, neighborhood watch program was linked to central circuit television cameras so as to make people surveillance of their daily activities. This advanced technology makes Chinas government to gather and analyse vast amount of data left by citizens and visitors daily (Robinson, 2021).

Similar case is experienced in African countries. In Nigeria for example, neighborhood watch was a crucial tool to fight against serious crimes like robbery. Like other countries, Nigeria used social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to mobilize youth against anti robbery program. Youths were organized in respect to their areas to joint with the neighborhood watch for the sake of informing each other about suspicious criminal activities around respective areas (Chinaemerem & Vivian, 2022). The same pace was taken to Ghana where crimes remain the major challenge to the urban community of Ghana. Neighborhood watch program was initiated to support the police efforts in fighting and preventing crimes among the Ghana communities. Through this program, therefore, the community and crime stakeholders in Ghana provided relevant crime and offenders' information that assisted police to arrest and prosecute suspected person before the court of law. In

addition, neighborhood watch groups offered logistical supports such as motorbikes and fuel that helped police to conduct effect patrol in community neighborhood (Marfo et al., 2021).

In South Africa, neighborhood watch program was to fight high prevalence of violent crimes and violent activities. South Africa was reported to be the area of excessive use of force and destruction as a result of offenders to get entry and grab people's property. The establishment of neighborhood watch program with the help of other surveillance technologies assisted much to reduce not only serious crime cases but also the use of force in performing criminality (Chávez & Hill, 2021).

In Kenya, neighborhood watch was known as *Nyumba kumi*. The program was initiated following the Westgate terror attack in 2013. The idea was taken from the Tanzanian Ujamaa Policy that intended to identify community members and their visitors in respective neighborhoods. The idea helped much to reduce terrorist acts and serious crime cases in Kenya (Ndono et al., 2019).

In Tanzania, the neighborhood watch program was a result of the initiation of the community policing which is part of the Police Reform Program of 2006. The community policing in Tanzania intended to facilitate community engagement so as to solve community social challenges including crime. Neighborhood watch was one among ways of making community engagement so as to build police trust among community members and hence improving safety and wellbeing of the community (Mussa, 2019). Zanzibar neighborhood watch was one among the initiatives introduced to facilitate the community engagement strategy, building trust between the police and the community and crime reduction, but yet crime rates increased. The study, therefore, sought to establish the extent to which the community sympathizes with the neighborhood program as part of the community policing strategy.

Literature Review

The practice of neighborhood watch program differs from one area to another, according to the culture of the society, economic development, knowledge and prevalence of crime in a given country. This therefore makes different levels of community sympathy (Mussa, 2019). Schreurs et al. (2020) in the study of why citizens become members of an online neighborhood watch in the Netherlands realized that neighborhood watch came through the form of social media. Members living in the same

neighborhood formed what they called Neighborhood-WhatsApp groups with the aim of alerting each other and acting against suspicious situations. The Netherlands community sympathized with the program by forming more than 8500 active neighborhood- WhatsApp groups with lesser than fifty members each group. The results from the study indicated that neighborhood- WhatsApp groups were much successful by reducing serious crimes such as burglaries, robberies and associated serious crime.

The same development is realized in the study of van Steden and Mehlbaum (2022) about Do-it-yourself surveillance: Practices and effects of the WhatsApp Neighborhood Crime Prevention groups. Similar neighborhood- WhatsApp groups can be found in the United Kingdom and Australia by the name of Next Door. This kind of program planned to make members of the neighborhood to stay in contact with other neighborhood members on multiple issues such as planning neighborhood members' event, finding a local baby sitter, safety and crime prevention. As a result, the Next-Door program went beyond crime prevention. It created social cohesion, unity among community and increased community safety.

In a dissimilar circumstance, Peyton et al. (2019) in discussing crime prevention in the low level of community emphasized the importance of police effective communication and proper contact of the members of community on performing neighborhood watch program. The study realized that police unscrupulous communication and contact continued to frustrate the formation of the neighborhood watch. These dishonest communication and contact continued to widen up and blocked the public trust. The study concluded that one single police officer good contact can have positive multiple effects to community including enhancing the public trust, building the police legitimacy and increasing the cooperation between the police and the community.

In the same pace, the study of Schreurs et al. (2018) show the importance of community understanding of the neighborhood watch program as an effective way of crime prevention. The study realized that beside a large potential of the citizen capital in preventing crime and creating safer neighborhoods, the fact is that only small part of citizens understands and participates in the neighborhood watch program. This situation has direct effects on

the police behavior of not being ready to understand the power and influence of the community in crime prevention. The Police failed to understand the citizen potential on crime prevention. In response, the gap between the police and the community increased and hence crime rates increased in the neighborhoods.

The study of Mussa (2019) about Assessment of Community Policing as a Crime Reduction Strategy by the Police Force in Tanzania realized that neighborhood watch is one among the best initiatives by the Tanzania police force to reduce crime and fear of crime. After the introduction of community policing in Tanzania, a number of neighborhood groups were initiated with different forms and purposes. Members of neighborhoods accepted the neighborhood watch groups as a new form of assuring security. However, most of neighborhood watch groups got frozen because of poor knowledge on how to conduct neighborhood watch programs. The study realized that police force did not prepare the education and awareness programs for member of communities. Ironically, the police force did not prepare guiding policy and operation documents for community policing.

The study of Sambaiga (2018) revealed that the neighborhood watch initiative in Tanzania was operationalized mainly in urban settings. It became part of life where operated not only to single neighborhood but has gone beyond physical location like business persons and motorcyclists commonly known *bodaboda*.

That means neighborhood watch not only deals with crimes but also solves social challenges. The study also revealed that two forms of neighborhood groups existed in the study are: the first group was had residents who are ready to contribute some money to pay night patrol groups; the second one had active youth who do daily night patrols. In the same pace, Walwa (2018) and Sambaiga (2018) observed that some of neighborhood watch groups in Tanzania were not coordinated by the local government authority; instead, famous and respected people coordinated neighborhood watch groups in voluntary basis. With all information given, the application of neighborhood watch group in community remains a critical topic under discussion among different scholars (Louderback & Sen Roy, 2018).

Methodology

The study applied the quantitative approach to collect data at the Zanzibar Island. The study adopted 400 respondents from the population of 1,303,569 individuals. Simple random sampling and stratified sampling techniques were used to obtain the representation from Zanzibar citizens. A structured questionnaire was used to gather information from the field. Statistical Package for Social Sciences was used to analyze the data in terms of mean scores and standard deviation. While a pilot test was affected to validate the questionnaire where six respondents from different groups of respondents were given questionnaires to test them, the reliability test yielded the Cronbach' Alpha of above 0.6.

The following scale of mean score interpretation was used: 3.50-4.00= strongly sympathetic, 2.50-3.49= sympathetic, 1.50-2.49= unsympathetic and 1.00-1.49=strongly unsympathetic. Secrecy and privacy were assured in concord with ethical standards. Respondents were not permitted to disclose their names in the questionnaires. Furthermore, the data gathering permit was achieved from relevant authorities in Zanzibar.

Results and Discussion

This section provides results about sympathetic of neighborhood watch initiative as community policing strategy. The study sought to establish whether the initiative fits and is accepted by the community. To reach this goal, respondents were exposed to six items in the questioners to show their agreement or disagreement.

Table 1. Sympathetic of Neighborhood Watch Initiative as Community Policing Program

| SN | Items | Mean | Std. Dev | Interpretation |
|----|--|------|----------|------------------------|
| 1 | Community policing officers communicate with neighborhood watch members. | 1.14 | .355 | strongly unsympathetic |
| 2 | Members of the community understand the neighborhood watch as a crime prevention initiative. | 1.15 | .462 | strongly unsympathetic |
| 3 | Neighborhood watch implementation supports the reduction of crime. | 1.16 | .467 | strongly unsympathetic |
| 4 | Neighborhood watch initiatives prevent crime cases. | 1.18 | .563 | strongly unsympathetic |
| 5 | Community policing officers are satisfied with the neighborhood watch. | 1.18 | .539 | strongly unsympathetic |
| 6 | What is the rate of participation in neighborhood watch initiatives? | 2.46 | 1.402 | unsympathetic |

As indicated in table 1, the mean scores for item 1 to 5 ranged between 1.00 and 1.49 meaning the respondents indicated strong unsympathetic situation in the items. The mean score for the 6th item ranged between 1.50 and 2.49 meaning respondents indicated unsympathetic situation.

In principle, police officers as a link manager with community do not communicate with the community. Therefore, members of the community do not have a clear understanding of neighborhood watch as crime prevention initiative; the implementation of neighborhood watch initiative does not reduce crime, the neighborhood watch does not prevent crime, police officers are not satisfied with the neighborhood watch and community participation on neighborhood watch is very low. Therefore, the neighborhood watch initiative is not fit and the community does not consider it as a proper initiative for crime prevention in their area.

The finding from the study differ from those by Mussa (2019), Killian and Pastory (2018) and Walwa (2018) that neighborhood watch initiative is an ideal crime prevention strategy in some part of Tanzania community. Walwa (2018), for example, in the study of Understanding community resilience amidst rising violent conflicts in Tanzania, had realized that neighborhood watch group at Changanikeni area was an ideal crime prevention initiative and had best results on crime reduction. The police officers at the Changanikeni area were very close with the community and acted as a link manager between police force and community. The police officers at Changanikeni had considered culture, norms, level of education, level of economy as well as community awareness to facilitate the implementation of neighborhood watch program. The Walwa's findings is contrary to study's findings where community do not accept Neighborhood watch initiative as a crime prevention strategy. This implies that, police officers were far away from

community. As a result, community do not have enough knowledge on neighborhood program.

Conclusions and Recommendation

Basing to study findings, one can conclude that neighborhood watch initiative is not accepted to every Zanzibar community. Communities are not in fervor with neighborhood watch as initiative of crime prevention. As police officers were not ready to communicate with the community, community members were not in a position to appreciate the neighborhood watch strategy and therefore, neighborhood watch strategy was not materialized in crime reduction.

The study recommends that there is a need for police working in Zanzibar to establish close communication with Zanzibar community. Zanzibar police have to make sure neighborhood watch knowledge is imparted to all community so as every member be in position to understand their role in the implementation of the program. Indeed, there is a need for Zanzibar police to make a thorough study on culture, norms, level of awareness, level of education and level of economy before any crime prevention initiate implementing in community.

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