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**THE DECLINE IN TRADITIONAL VALUES AND RISE IN RURAL ROBBERY: A  
STUDY OF OWERRI-NORTH LGA, IMO STATE**

**ISIGUZO, REGINALD CHIKA  
Security Unit  
University of Port Harcourt**

**And**

**MADUAWUCHI ELEM  
Department of Sociology  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education  
Port Harcourt**

*Abstract*

*The significant impact of the Decline in Traditional Values and its associated Rise in Rural Robbery has become worrisome and perplexing not only to Owerri North Local Government Area of Imo State, and Nigerians but to the international community. This has heightened the fear of our Traditional value holders, especially; thereby threatening the foundation of peaceful co-existence as a people. The overall implication is that it has worsened the people's way of life in the affected areas. This study takes a critical look on the Decline in Traditional Values and Rise in Rural Robbery in Owerri North Local Government Area of Imo State and concludes that the Decline in our Traditional Values domiciled in Traditional Institutions has aggravated massive rise in rural robbery and creating unfriendly environment for the rural dwellers. Recommendations were made on how this wave of rural robbery should be tackled and Traditional Values rediscovered and sustained.*

*Key Words: Traditional values, Rural Robbery, Urbanization, Crime, and Security*

**Introduction**

In recent years we've begun to hear a lot of talk about something called traditional values. It seems to surface frequently as a subject of debate and controversy by the news media, in reality, traditional values refer to the standards and values which were embraced by most societies from its earliest beginnings and throughout the majority of its history. Values are those standards that are considered worthy of members of any society .And since humans are social beings; their behaviours are also based on guidelines that are learned in order for them to survive and to be effective in the society. Over the years, sociologists and anthropologists believe that humans must learn the skills, acquire knowledge and adopt to ways of behaving in the society into which they are born The implication of this

is that they must learn a culture. Kluckhohn (1951)'attest to this when he noted that, culture is a "design for living' that is held by members of a particular society.

Accordingly Value, (unlike norms) according to Storey (1997) provides more general guidelines. And to him, values are beliefs that something is good and desirable by people. In his words Igbo (cited in Okodudu 2007) has argued, that social values are ideas, beliefs or feelings shared by members of a society or group about what is good, right and desirable. Stressing further he maintained that values are more or less abstract in nature. By this, it is possible to conclude that values define what is important, worthwhile, and worth striving for. Although, values could vary from society to society, which implies that every societal value could differ from what might be held or seen by others and its people as a standard? For instance the value attached to family life, is believed by many, as values which were a great part of what made societies great and the absence of which, will likely result in the further decline of ours.

Traditionally, history has it that African Traditional values have in the past, included a faith in our deities, which has for a large part, been the foundation of other national traditions. While others included such things as honor and respect for the family, diligent work ethics (farming), absolute values of right and wrong, honesty in relationship wholesomeness in leadership, respect toward authority, moderation rather than excess, marriage as a prerequisite before having sex or bearing children, a family which consists of both a father and mother, taking responsibility to provide for our own, such as one's spouse, family and children, and so forth all of these were the hall mark of our Traditional values over the years.

Studies, have shown that in recent time all of these values have gradually eroded from our societies in the urban and rural areas owing to a number of factors. There has been a long-standing belief in the rural ideal that the countryside is a crime-free place to live. Mk\gay(19&9), argued that, crime is by no means non-existent in rural areas. Nevertheless, in recent time, criminological literatures which have exclusively focused on cities and urban problems and received a great deal of media attention has prompted concerns that rural crime problems were not being adequately addressed (Aust & Simmons, 2002; Jones, 2003; Maw by, 2004). In response, the 2000 Rural White Paper (DETR, 2000) placed crime in rural areas as a high priority area. Other studies have revealed findings of different shades on the subject matter including one by Chamlin & Cochran (2004) which concludes that population size (not density) is a strong predictor of violent and property crime counts; and another by Christens & Speer (2005) which argues that population density is among the most significant negative predictors of violent crime per capita, In the same vein there are Studies that have also attributed crime to other factors such as unemployment (Edmark, 2005; Andresen, 2006; Omotor, 2009; Hassan *et al*, 2012); absence/presence of tree canopy (Troy *et a*/, 2012); presence of young populations (Andresen, 2006); combination of industrial/commercial land use with household dwellings (Shopeju, 2006); urbanization, weak criminal justice system and negative role models (Ilassan *et al* 2012).It is in the light of

the above that this paper intends to see if Decline in Traditional Values has given rise to Rural Robbery in Owerri North Local Government Area , of Imo State Nigeria.

### **Objective**

**The objective** of the study is to assess the information on Decline in Traditional Values and Rise in Rural Robbery in Owerri North Local Government Area of Imo state.

### **Study Area**

**Owerri North** is Local Government Area of Imo State, is one of the 27 local Government Areas that make up Imo State, Its headquarters is in the town of Orié Uratta. It has an area of 198 square km and a population of 175,395 at the 2006 census. Owerri North is semi-urban government area that reasonably encircles Owerri Municipal like a peninsular. The *Six* major roads that lead out of the Municipal cuts across Owerri North Communities. In the North, is Orlu road which leads to Amakaohia and Akwakuma communities? In the East, is Okigwe road that leads to Orji Community? In the West, is MCC road off Wetheral to Obibi Uratta and Ihitaoha communities? In the South, is Mbaise road that leads to Egbu and Emekuku communities and finally Aba road that leads to Naze, Agbala and Ulakwo communities?

### **Literature Review/Theoretical Framework.**

At this point it is important to note that no research work is however a stand -alone. Every novel empirical study relies on one or more previous works for information. While it is a fact that scholarly writings exist in the area of Decline in Traditional Values and Rise in Rural Robbery, there is the need to incorporate relevant studies so as to evaluate Rise in Rural robbery in Owerri North EGA of Imo State.

### **Theoretical framework**

Here in addition to providing insight into the decline in traditional values and possible cause of rise in rural robbery we shall draw inspiration from the theoretical explanations of the Anomie theory as advanced by Emile Durkheim's (1893/1984).

Durkheim argued that the inevitability of crime is connected to the heterogeneity of population in modern societies. He sees the concept of anomie as a state in which the social norms, values and customs have broken' down, and there exists norm and role confusion. Explaining further, he says, it is the social forces that creates environment where crime is bound to occur. In this regard, Durkheim attributed anomie to the shift from rural society to an urban one, while insisting that, the type of social solidarity that characterizes a rural society is both mechanical cohesive solidarity. The implication of this is that within the rural social setting, there is homogeneity of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and there exists a collective conscience. In the modern urban setting on the other hand, there is an organic solidarity in which the people are different and interaction is characterized by division of labor.

Since people are different, they go about meeting their needs using different methods and some of them perceive crimes as options available to them to meet these needs. It is on this bases of this explanation, that we argued that, the *disorganized urban*

*areas* are the breeding grounds of crime because the people lack legitimate opportunities to achieve socially approved goals through socially approved means. We uphold this view because if there is gap between the people's desired goals and what the economic and political realities allow them to achieve, the result is a state of formlessness or anomie. In the context of this study, I argue that the urban setting in Nigeria brings into proximity, affluence and poverty. In Owerri the state capital of Imo State, many of the people who live their daily work lives in urban centers live their night lives in working class satellite or suburban slum neighbourhood's within the state capital due to the high cost of accommodation in the middle-class residential urban areas. Like many of the cities in Nigeria there are home to very affluent people and their show of affluence may influence the desire and taste of the poor around them. The implication is a population of poor people who are exposed to the taste of the rich without having the resources of the rich. If these poor people are not able to provide for a modest living needs not to take of becoming affluent legitimately, they may resort to robbery to acquire money and/or other forms of wealth. By implication, this leads to a high crime rate in rural areas that are proximate to major cities where a measure of organic solidarity is evolving. This study raised the following two questions firstly, weather; the loss of Traditional value system is responsible for the rise in rural robbery in Owerri North local government Area of Imo state. Secondly, If in the state the high level of urbanization as measured by population density has shifted urban robbery to rural robbery because Owerri North is close to the city center?.

### **Empirical Review**

#### **The Nigerian Culture and Value System and Loss of Societal Value**

A critical looking at Nigerian society will reveal that today have mortgaged our culture of respect, love for human lives, hard work, friendliness and receptiveness to strangers in exchange of the Western culture and ostentatious orientation which are precipitated by misguided perception of modernization. These have given birth to the modern crime and social evil destroying the core value of our society. Onovo (2009) attributed the rising crime in different regions to the celebration of fraudsters by leaders. He frowned at the appointment of individuals indicted of corruption as head of parastatals and various ministries. This explains the absence of clear direction on those in the corridor of power who are preoccupied with self-aggrandizement rather than pursuing policies that will benefit the society. He also condemned the practice in the country, where people who embezzled or misappropriated public funds are celebrated by religious and traditional rulers. Celebrating people of questionable character is an indictment on the societal and moral values which such rulers should not only protect but represent. He pointed out that one of the obvious reasons which encourage rural robbery to thrive is that people who celebrate such criminals end up encouraging them to do more.

Onovo (2009) opined that the high wave of crime in the country, especially in the South-East and South-South is fundamentally due to materialism and loss of societal values, noting that people were ready to do anything to get rich and be celebrated in the society.

While also blaming the wave of kidnapping and armed robbery in these areas on unemployment, he pointed out that most of the graduates of Nigerian universities are half-baked and cannot defend their certificates. This assertion is further formed on the 'get rich quick' syndrome which dominated the life philosophy of young men and women. In their thoughts, time spent in tertiary institutions was not mere delay to wealth acquisition but a waste. There are over 250 ethnic groups and sub-ethnic groups in Nigeria and members of each ethnic group would accept having something 'in common' with other groups, and many other things 'not in common' (Aiekwe, 2009). Cultures in all traditional Nigerian society did not encourage individual autonomy in their membership. Membership was by birth. From time immemorial, the Nigerian cultures practiced a policy of 'communalism' or collectivism (Essien-Obot, 1991). In discussing culture and identity, Jenkins (1996) argues that identities contain elements which are individually unique and the collectively shared. He explained that while each individual has an identity which is personal to them, those identities are shaped through membership of social groups. The individual elements of identity emphasize differences, as well as the collective elements similarities, but the two are closely related. By value system, all activities like tilling the land, building of living quarters, food security, leadership, etc. were approached collectively. Even children belonged to the collective society. The strong and able members were required to help the less able members of the society. This practice continues even today, in varying degrees of intensity by several ethnic groups especially in the rural areas and township associations.

However, changing societal values due partly to urbanization, dwindling economic fortunes due to bad governance have promoted parental encouragement of daughters to shamelessly engage in subtle prostitution to support the homes, conflict of belief by traditional institutions on the power of the gods of the land (which instant judgment and punishment on matters kept the sanity of communities) and that professed by the new religion of Christianity, unsubstantiated inclination to modernization by the traditional institutions leading to quest for affluence, change of regalia that has no bearing with the peoples mode of dressing, settling of chieftaincy titles to supposed 'young achievers' most of whom were fraudsters, ritual killers, armed robbers, kidnappers and the likes.

These in addition to undue involvement in politics and habitual delivery of bad judgement (favouring the richer in cases) have seriously challenged the sacredness and respect of the traditional institutions a situation of anomie's, a broken down society.

### **Roles of Traditional Institutions**

The roles of Traditional Institutions date back to the pre-colonial era when the tradition heads were both spiritual and to a reasonable extent, the administrative head of the communities. No wonder they provided veritable administrative structures for colonial administration which expanded their involvement in large scale governance.

Structure of the Traditional Institutions presents the Traditional Ruler his Prime Minister and cabinet of Nze's and traditional chiefs at the apex of administration. They have the onerous primary tasks of protection and preservation of the people's identity as enshrined in cultures and traditions. This role demands integrity, strong character, firm but humane

leadership and selflessness among the others. These attributes and virtues translated in Eze's daily cabinet encouragement to hard work among members of communities. Infact here were rural communities to cherish as the Eze's judged and dispensed justice with the fear of God.

Beyond the foregoing, the traditional institutions intermediate between the people and the government of the day, maintain law and order, settle land and marriage disputes and undertake programmes that preserve the peoples' heritage for continuity such as festivals and so on.

In view of the prevailing situation, we feel compelled to ask to what extent is traditional institution still revered. How far have they upheld their roles in the current dispensation? Is their present ideological disposition and moral standard still presenting robbery and other prevailing high profile crimes taboos in our rural settings? To what extent has the so called modernization and politicization of the traditional institutions contributed to the breakdown of rural values and encouraged rural robbery? We can go on and on to ask state unequivocally that traditional institutions have been abashed, mesmerized and disoriented by political actors assault on our traditional values.

### **Major Causes of Rural Robbery**

Rural crime is different from crime that occurs in cities. In many rural areas, residents live far distances away from their neighbours with natural bush in between compounds. Residents may also drive into the city to go to work or go shopping during the day, and children and youth often have to travel long distances to go to school. This means that houses and other property are left unattended during the daytime and into the evening hours. There is also little police presence in many rural areas because of the large areas these officers have to patrol. All of these factors mean that crimes can be committed in rural areas fairly easily without anyone seeing (Sagarin, Donnermeyer, & Carter, 1982).

### **Loss of societal value**

We make bold to say that the political actors are the greatest ever to societal homogeneity. Homogeneity breeds cohesion, respect, shared cultural values and peace all of which engender progress and community development. However, the political slogan of taking government administration to the grassroots as well as embarking on the so called effective administrative structure have led to the balkanization of homogeneous communities into different "autonomous communities". This is the actualization of the principle of "divide and rule".

With this, each autonomous community was entitled to a traditional ruler. This gave rise to the concept of modern and modernization of traditional rulers. In the main, instead of the people selecting their ruler through enshrined traditional processes built on nominees honesty, integrity and love for the community, the state Governor would appoint his maternal in laws, business associates son or state government cabinet members choice. Today, traditional rulers administer their communities from another state of the federation. These are part of the

woes and owerri-North Local Government is not excluded. Therefore the traditional ruler has to be economically comfortable and this cannot be easily sustained in rural residence.

From the foregoing, the creation of 'unwarranted autonomous communities as a party-member-compensation programme' coupled with direct state government interference in the appointment of traditional rulers with monthly salary from the government among others have significantly taken their toll on the very essence of the traditional institutions. This is part of the dilemma of Owerri-North Local Government Area of Imo State of recent the State Government involvement in chieftaincy dispute in Agbala polarized Agbala community, crating acronomy, hatred and insecurity in the community. Some other communities in the Local Government also have their fair share of undue government interference.

Consequently, societal values which are legacies that shape the character of the young ones are eroded and very little or nothing is left to bequest the generations. The product is youths without a conscience that do not believe in getting rich through hard work. The local government has survived the ferocious assault of 419 and ritual killings for wealth youths and will certainly overcome the 'Malaysia boys' on board. However, rural robbery has persisted for further obvious reason attributable to urban encroachment on the rural communities which provide affordable accommodation to youth's robbery gangs.

## Methods

Searches for relevant literature were conducted on several academic databases review and we took a three tier methodology. First we carried out the initial scoping, cross-referencing, and supplementary data collection and analysis. In addition, internet searches were carried out to identify publicly available documentation from government and nongovernmental sources. In line work the initial scoping phase, several iterations of cross-referencing, citation and author searches were carried out to build a comprehensive and detailed library of information related to Decline in Traditional Values and Rise in Rural Robbery, particularly in Nigeria showing Imo State with a generalization was made on Owerri North Local Government Area. Care was taken to assess the quality of the material investigated with respect to degrees of bias and methodological imperfections finally, up-to-date official crime statistics were collated and analysed which included information not necessarily referred to in the available literature.

## Findings

Table 1 shows the land area of Nigeria by states and the 2006 population. It also shows the reported cases of armed robbery, the computed population density and crime rate per 100,000 persons presented for the 36 states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja).

Table 1: 2006 Indicators of		population density and armed robbery in Nigeria			
State	A Land area (km <sup>2</sup> )	B 2006 Population	C Population density	D Reported cases of robbery	E Crime rate (per 100,000 persons)
Abia	1914.06	2845380	,581	97	3
Adamawa	15117.19	3178950	82	106	3
Akwa Ibom	2695.31	3902051	566	51	1
Anambra	1900.39	4177828	859	125	3
Bauchi	19187.11	4653066	95	51	1

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Bayelsa	3538.67	1704515	188	51	3
Benue	12031.25	4253641	138	32	1
Borno	28362.89	4171104	57	61	1
Cross River	8510.55 6682.81	2892988	133	134	5
Delta	6682.81	4112445	240	121	3
Ebonyi	2500.00	2176947	340	62	3
Edo	7494.92	3233366	169	163	5
Ekiti	2123.05	2398957	441	36	2
Enugu	2942.97	1326787	434	44	1
Gombe	6679.69	2365040	138	22	1
Imo	2065.63	3927563	743	172	4
Jigawa	9096.48	4361002	187	23	1
Kaduna	16594.14	6113503	144	55	1
Kano	7921.88	9401288	464	56	1
Katsina	9203.52	5801584	246	55	1
Kebbi	14447.27	3256541	88	30	1
Kogi	10838.67	3314043	119	57	2
Kwara	13947.27	2365353	66	20	1
Lagos	1433.98	9113605	2483	300	3
Nassarawa	11224.61	1869377	65	131	7
Niger	26923.83	3954772	57	43	1
Ogun	6406.25	3751140	229	166	4
Ondo	6179.69	3460877	219	70	2
Osun	3525.78	3416959	379	31	1
Oyo	10351.56	5580894	211	194	3
Plateau	10604.30	3206531	118	43	1
Rivers	4130.86	5198716	492	138	3
Sokoto	10869.14	3702676	133	21	1
Taraba	21985.16	2294800	41	38	2
Yobe	18206.64	2321339	50	24	1
Zamfara	14816.80	3278873	86	39	1
FCT(Abuja)	2971.48	1406239	185	48	3

**Sources: a - National Bureau of Statistics, 2009; b - National Population Commission, 2009; c - Computed**

Population density ranged from about 41 persons per square km to 2,483 persons per square km in the country. All but one of the states in the South-Eastern part of the country had 400 persons per square km. In the zone, Anambra had the highest density (859 persons per square km). Next in density to Anambra was Imo state with about 743 persons per square km



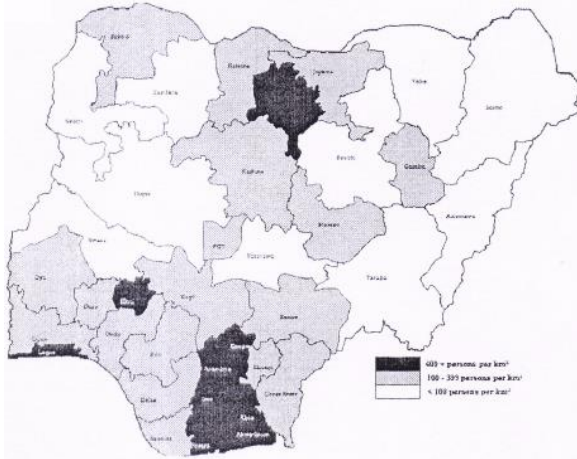
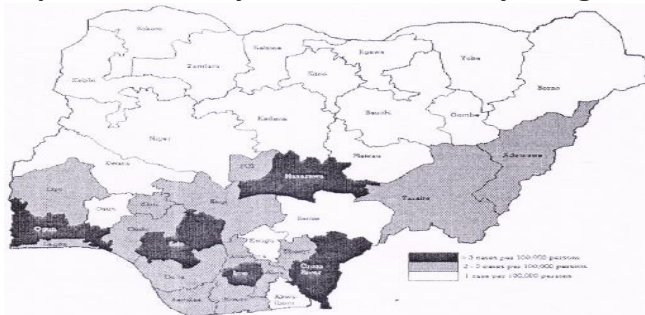


Table 1 shows that Lagos state had the highest number of reported cases of robbery (306) in the year. Other states with high cases of robbery include Oyo (194), Imo (172), Ogun (166), Edo (163), Rivers (138), Anambra (125) and Adamawa (106). Kwara state had the least (20) number of reported cases of robbery in the same year. When rates of robbery (that is number of cases of robbery per 100,000 persons) were considered, the state with the highest rate was Nasarawa, with about 7 cases of robbery per 100,000 persons. This is followed by Cross River and Edo with the rate of 5 cases of robbery per 100,000 persons each; and Imo and Ogun states with the rate of 4 cases of robbery per 100,000 persons each.

#### Population Density and Armed Robbery in Nigeria by Kunnuji



A spatial analysis of crime rates in the country suggests that high crime rates were somewhat localized within the Southern regions of the state, the only exception being Nasarawa which in fact has the highest rate of crime of 7 cases of robbery per 100,000 persons in the country. The data show that among the states with very high crime rates of more than 4 cases of robbery per 100,000 persons, only Imo had a high density of more than 400 persons per square km. The other dark spots (that is Cross River, Edo, Imo and Ogun) recorded moderate densities of between 100 and 399 persons per square km. It should be noted however, that the state with the highest rate of crime (Nasarawa) also had a very low population density. Statistical tests show that there is no significant correlation between population density and crime rate.

#### Conclusion

This study concludes that there is a significant variation in incidence of Decline in Traditional values and Rise in the rates of Rural Robbery in owerri North LGA of Imo state. While population density is a significant predictor of incidence of robbery crime in the urban center, it is

not a significant predictor of robbery crime in the rural Area. Rather it is the nearness to a major cosmopolitan city like Owerri that has resulted in a high rate of rural robbery crime which may in fact be higher than the rates recorded in the cosmopolitan city of Owerri. This is as a result of exposure to high living standards by residents of states in proximity with cosmopolitan states, without commensurate opportunities/access to resources in those less cosmopolitan cities.

There is sufficient scientific cause to argue that there is a high level of other forms of crime in areas with high levels of armed robbery. Usman *et al* (2013) found through a study that there is correlation between crimes against persons and crimes against properties. This study concludes therefore, that states with high levels of population density have the tendency to record high incidence of armed robbery and other forms of crime, More than the states with high density and other urban features themselves, states that are proximate to high density states run the risk of recording a high level of the incidence and rate of crime. The problem of crime in Nigeria can be reduced, however, if the federal government can create a comprehensive database containing the vital socio-demographic as well as biometric details of all adult individuals in the country. This will help reduce the problem of anonymity and assist forensic criminal investigation in the country. Other solutions to be considered include the keeping of records of permanent and semi-permanent internal movement within the country and the revitalization of the manufacturing sector to boost the country's economic absorptive capacity for the creation of jobs. If these measures are put in place, it is believed that the problem of high incidence and rates of crime in the country will be brought under control. This will impact positively on Imo state and Owerri-North Local Government Area in particular.

### **Recommendations**

The situation in Owerri-North Local Government Area of how State and Imo state in general is not peculiar to Imo state alone. It is common to at least South-East and South-South states and calls for both Federal and State governments concerns. We suggest that the government should have a comprehensive plan for the development of satellite towns which act as rural communities adjoining main cities. This should take care of social goods associated with rural transformation such as health, housing, education, water, access roads, security and other facilities.

Also specific for Imo State is the need for sincere government commitment to reactivate the cottage industries established by the then governor Mbakwe administration. These cut across agriculture, poultry, ceramic and manufacturing which provided employment and galvanized rural economies.

In the same vein, it is advised that the state government should reduce its interference in the Traditional Institutions, stop adopting it directly as an arm of its administration in order to restore the integrity of the traditional institutions.

While we thank the illustrious and well-meaning sons and daughters of Imo State and specifically His Lordship, Very Rev. Dr. Obinna, the Bishop of Owerri Arch Dioceses for the promotion and 'renaissance of cultural values among the Igbos, we suggest that Traditional Institution actors should address themselves to the following local government in order to rekindle and in still values consciousness in Owerri-North Local Government Area

communities; Ikeji and Irijohuru, (New yam festival), Traditional Marriage Rites, Burial rites and solidarity, Ibouzo (road clearing between communities), Age grades, Ita kazi (for Emi Emekuku) and Traditional wrestling among others. Finally, we urge the religious leaders to shun the recognition of people with questionable character and means of wealth while the traditional rulers should stop selling and conferring titles of recognition to unscrupulous community members with criminal tendencies.

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