

Empowering skills, raising awareness, and advancing crime control in South-South Nigeria

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Abstract

This study explores non-kinetic security strategies—skill empowerment, awareness creation, and community engagement—as tools for advancing crime control in South-South Nigeria. Using a survey research design, data were collected through structured questionnaires and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) from stakeholders, including security personnel, community leaders, and youth groups across six states. Findings reveal significant links between skill empowerment and crime control, showing how equipping individuals with marketable skills reduces socio-economic disparities and criminal activities. Awareness creation also proves critical, fostering collaboration with law enforcement, improving crime reporting, and enhancing prevention. Grounded in strain theory, the study emphasizes the need for tailored interventions addressing regional socio-economic realities. Recommendations include expanding vocational training for vulnerable populations, integrating awareness campaigns into schools and communities, and collaborating with institutions like religious bodies and media. These strategies promote sustainable crime control, offering practical guidance for policymakers, security agencies, and community leaders.

Keywords: *Empowering Skills, Raising Awareness, Crime Control, South-South Nigeria.*

Introduction

South-South Nigeria, a region endowed with vast oil reserves, has been plagued by persistent security challenges that undermine its economic potential and the well-being of its inhabitants. The area has become synonymous with militancy, kidnapping, oil theft, and communal conflicts, all of which are manifestations of deeper socio-economic and political issues. Traditional kinetic security strategies, characterized by the deployment of military forces and law enforcement, have been the primary approach to managing these issues. However, these methods have proven inadequate, offering only temporary relief while failing to address the underlying causes of insecurity. The use of force has often led to unintended consequences such as human rights abuses, displacement of communities, and the exacerbation of local tensions, thereby perpetuating a cycle of violence. This ineffectiveness highlights the urgent need for alternative, non-kinetic approaches that address the root causes of insecurity through socio-economic development, community engagement, intelligence gathering, and conflict resolution. Despite the growing recognition of the potential benefits of non-kinetic security strategies, there remains a significant gap in understanding their effectiveness in the context of South-South Nigeria.

Existing literature provides insights into various aspects of non-kinetic strategies, yet comprehensive empirical studies specifically focused on South-South Nigeria are sparse. This knowledge gap is critical as it hinders the formulation of informed policies and strategies that could effectively mitigate the region's security challenges. Furthermore, there is limited research on the specific mechanisms through which non-kinetic strategies, such as intelligence gathering, skill empowerment, awareness creation, raising citizens' consciousness on attitudinal change, and the establishment of crime advocacy clubs in schools, contribute to crime control.

To address these gaps, this study seeks to explore the correlation between non-kinetic security strategies and crime control in South-South Nigeria. By assessing the impact of skill empowerment, investigating the connection between awareness creation and crime control, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how non-kinetic strategies can

foster sustainable peace and security in the region. The findings will offer valuable insights for policymakers, security agencies, and community leaders in their efforts to develop holistic and sustainable approaches to crime control in South-South Nigeria.

Literature review

Skill empowerment and crime control

Skill empowerment, the process of equipping individuals with vocational training, education, and employment opportunities, is a key strategy in crime control. By addressing the root causes of criminal behavior, skill empowerment promotes social integration and reduces recidivism. However, challenges such as funding limitations, accessibility, and long-term impact measurement must be addressed to maximize effectiveness. Future research should focus on innovative approaches and evaluating long-term effects on crime reduction. Hirschi (1969) argues that strong social bonds and investments in conventional activities, such as education and employment, reduce criminal tendencies. Skill empowerment strengthens these bonds by integrating individuals into the workforce and community. Merton (1938) posits that societal pressure to achieve financial success may lead to crime when legitimate means are unavailable. Skill empowerment provides lawful pathways to success, reducing strain and criminality. Cohen and Felson (1979) observe that crime occurs when a motivated offender finds a suitable target without capable guardianship. Skill empowerment mitigates this by increasing economic opportunities and social engagement.

Empirical studies confirm the effectiveness of skill empowerment in reducing crime. Wilson, Gallagher, and MacKenzie (2006) found that vocational training and employment programs significantly lower recidivism by providing marketable skills and stable employment. Economic stability reduces criminal behavior by alleviating financial pressures, fostering social belonging, and structuring time to prevent delinquency. Their meta-analysis highlights that vocational training reduces reoffending, enhances employability, and offers job placement services to ex-offenders, addressing economic necessity for crime. Youth employment programs also contribute to crime prevention. These programs provide at-risk youth with education, job training, and employment opportunities, diverting them from criminal activities. Cloward and Ohlin (1960) argue that providing legitimate opportunities reduces criminal behavior. Programs such as YouthBuild in the U.S. offer academic education, vocational training, and counseling to disadvantaged youth. Participants achieve higher employment rates, job retention, and educational attainment, reducing crime rates (Public Safety Canada, 2012). The YES Program in Canada and the SYEP in the U.S. have also demonstrated lower recidivism and improved academic outcomes among participants (Gelber, Isen, & Kessler, 2016).

Skill development programs in prisons aim to equip inmates with vocational training and education to enhance post-release employability. Bandura (1977) suggests that individuals learn behaviors through observation and reinforcement. Skills programs provide positive role models and reinforce pro-social behaviors, reducing criminal tendencies. Merton (1938) argues that crime arises when societal goals are unreachable through legitimate means. Providing inmates with education and vocational training offers lawful success pathways, reducing crime. A study by the RAND Corporation (Davis et al., 2013) found that inmates who participated in educational programs were 43% less likely to return to prison. This reduction highlights the transformative impact of education and training. Inmates with vocational skills had higher post-release employment rates, reducing recidivism. The study also found that every dollar invested in prison education programs yields \$4 to \$5 in reduced incarceration costs, demonstrating their economic benefits. Addressing challenges such as resource allocation, accessibility, and employer bias is crucial to maximizing the effectiveness of these programs.

Microfinance and entrepreneurship programs also reduce crime by providing marginalized populations with financial resources and business training. Putnam (2000) emphasizes the role of social networks in economic development. Microfinance programs build social capital by fostering entrepreneurial networks. Blattman, Fiala, and Martinez (2014) found that participants in Uganda's microfinance programs exhibited reduced criminal behavior. Access to financial resources and business training provided alternative income sources, reducing the need for crime. Participants who received microloans were more likely to start businesses and achieve financial independence, enhancing economic stability and reducing criminal activity. However, challenges such as access to capital, business sustainability, and cultural barriers must be addressed to maximize impact. Funding limitations affect program quality and reach (MacKenzie, 2006). Geographic constraints, social stigma, and lack of awareness hinder participation (Pager, 2003). Robust evaluation methods and longitudinal studies are necessary to assess long-term crime reduction effects (Bushway & Apel, 2012).

Awareness creation and crime control

Crime control is a multifaceted issue involving various strategies, including law enforcement, community engagement, and public awareness. Awareness creation plays a critical role in crime prevention by educating the public on the nature of crimes, preventive measures, and the importance of community involvement. By informing the public about crime prevention, safety practices, and the consequences of criminal activities, law enforcement agencies and community organizations can enhance crime prevention efforts and foster safer communities. Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) suggests that individuals learn behaviors through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. Awareness campaigns that model positive behaviors and consequences can influence public attitudes toward crime. Real-life examples and role models demonstrate effective crime prevention strategies and encourage community engagement.

Cohen and Felson's Routine Activities Theory (1979) argues that crime occurs when three elements converge: motivated offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardianship. Awareness creation can address these elements by reducing target suitability and increasing community vigilance. Educating individuals about risk factors, safety measures, and the importance of guardianship can reduce crime opportunities. O'Brien and Smith (2016) examined the impact of crime prevention awareness campaigns on urban crime rates. Their study found a significant reduction in property crime in cities with active awareness campaigns. This was attributed to increased public knowledge of crime prevention and heightened community involvement. Similarly, Wilson and Kelling's (1982) study on community policing highlighted that awareness campaigns within community policing initiatives led to a decrease in crime rates and enhanced public safety through increased community engagement. Taylor and Shumaker (1990) explored the effectiveness of school-based awareness programs. Their research showed that such programs raised students' awareness of crime-related issues, such as drug abuse and violence. These programs led to reduced delinquency and greater adherence to anti-crime measures.

Public awareness campaigns have also proven effective in addressing domestic violence. Coker and Smith (2008) found that these campaigns significantly increased reporting and improved community support for victims. Mazerolle and Wright (2013) demonstrated that social media campaigns effectively raised public awareness about crime prevention, contributing to reduced crime rates and increased community vigilance. Effective awareness creation engages the public through various platforms, including social media. Tailoring campaigns to specific demographics can increase their impact. Awareness efforts should be

integrated with other crime control strategies, such as community policing and environmental design. Combining awareness with practical interventions enhances overall crime prevention outcomes.

Theoretical frameworks such as Social Learning Theory and Routine Activities Theory offer insights into how awareness influences behavior and crime prevention. Empirical studies, including those by Sherman et al. (1997) and Skogan (2006), demonstrate that public awareness campaigns significantly reduce crime by educating the public on protective measures and fostering trust between law enforcement and communities. Media campaigns, including those on television, radio, and social media, are powerful tools for disseminating crime prevention messages. A study by Rosenbaum et al. (2011) found that media campaigns focused on specific crimes, like domestic violence and burglary, led to increased public awareness and lower crime rates. Schools and community centers also play a pivotal role in educating youth and adults. Petrosino et al. (2003) found that school-based programs on violence prevention significantly reduced youth involvement in crime. Community outreach initiatives, such as neighborhood watch programs, promote collective action and increase vigilance, as evidenced by Weisburd et al. (2008).

Despite its effectiveness, awareness creation faces challenges such as limited resources and cultural barriers. Funding, personnel, and materials are necessary for widespread campaigns (Bennett et al., 2008). In some communities, social stigmas can hinder the reception of awareness messages, particularly around sensitive issues like domestic violence (Heise, 1998). Evaluating the impact of awareness campaigns on crime rates can also be challenging, requiring longitudinal studies and robust evaluation methods (Farrington & Welsh, 2002). Empirical case studies, such as Clarke and Harris's (1992) evaluation of the Operation Identification program, demonstrate the effectiveness of awareness initiatives in reducing crime. Similarly, Bennett et al. (2008) found that neighborhoods with active Neighborhood Watch programs experienced lower crime rates.

Theoretical consideration

Social Disorganization Theory

Social Disorganization Theory, developed by Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay in 1942, links crime rates to the social and economic conditions of communities. The theory argues that crime is more prevalent in areas where social institutions (e.g., family, schools, and community organizations) are weakened, and there is a lack of social cohesion and control. Social disorganization occurs when communities cannot regulate members' behavior due to factors like poverty, residential mobility, and ethnic diversity. The theory emphasizes the role of community structure and social institutions in influencing crime. It suggests that crime is more likely to occur in communities with weak institutions and less cohesion. Non-kinetic strategies, such as community-based initiatives, aim to strengthen social cohesion and reduce crime. Research has shown that communities with weakened social structures and instability tend to experience higher crime rates.

Implementing community policing strategies that foster trust, improve communication, and enhance collective efficacy can address social disorganization. Revitalizing social institutions like schools, family support services, and recreational programs helps rebuild social cohesion and reduce crime. Urban revitalization projects that improve housing, reduce poverty, and enhance public services can address underlying factors contributing to disorganization. Improvements in infrastructure strengthen community bonds and reduce crime. Encouraging participation in neighborhood watch programs and community organizations builds social networks and collective efficacy, enhancing residents' ability to monitor and control behavior.

Providing educational and employment opportunities can reduce disorganization by addressing economic disparities and increasing social stability. While the theory emphasizes community-level factors, it may overlook individual and broader structural factors, such as systemic inequality and national policies.

One limitation of the theory is the difficulty in determining causality—whether social disorganization leads to crime or vice versa. Additionally, community-based interventions may not be universally effective; strategies that work in one community may not in another. Social Disorganization Theory also focuses on structural factors and neglects individual choice and behavior. Despite its limitations, Social Disorganization Theory provides valuable insights into the relationship between community structure and crime. It supports community-based interventions and has empirical evidence of its relevance. Understanding these strengths and limitations helps in designing effective crime control strategies that address both social disorganization and individual behavior.

Methodology

This study adopts a survey research design to examine the relationship between non-kinetic security strategies and crime control in South-South Nigeria. By employing questionnaires, the study collects data from a broad population, enabling an exploration of various variables and their interactions. This method ensures a comprehensive understanding of how non-kinetic approaches influence crime control across diverse stakeholder groups. The survey design is particularly valuable for its capacity to generate statistically analyzable quantitative data, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings.

The South-South Geopolitical Zone, encompassing Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers States, is central to Nigeria's socio-economic development due to its vast natural resources, particularly crude oil. Despite its contributions, the region faces profound security challenges, including militancy, kidnappings, and the sabotage of oil infrastructure, often stemming from socio-economic inequalities and historical marginalization. Traditional kinetic security measures, such as military interventions, have offered only temporary relief while failing to address these deeper issues. This study focuses on the potential of non-kinetic strategies, such as community engagement, economic empowerment, and environmental rehabilitation, to tackle the root causes of insecurity more effectively.

Given the South-South Zone's ethnic diversity, cultural richness, and economic opportunities beyond oil and gas, the study emphasizes the need for tailored security approaches. Non-kinetic strategies are designed to promote social cohesion, foster sustainable development, and mitigate socio-economic disparities that contribute to criminal activities. This research aims to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies in complementing traditional security measures. The findings are intended to guide policymakers, security agencies, and community leaders in adopting best practices to enhance security and drive development within the region.

The study involves a diverse range of participants, including security personnel, community leaders, local government officials, civil society organizations, youth groups, academics, business owners, and media representatives. Using a multi-stage sampling technique—combining purposive, stratified random, and snowball sampling—it ensures the inclusion of various demographic groups and hard-to-reach populations. Data collection integrates primary sources, such as questionnaires and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), alongside secondary literature. The structured 5-point Likert scale questionnaire captures demographic and variable-specific data, while KIIs offer deeper insights from key

stakeholders. Together, these methods produce actionable data, allowing for a nuanced understanding of crime control and informing the development of effective, sustainable security policies for South-South Nigeria.

Results

Table 1 presents result on the scale on transport allowance and job commitment. The scale was presented in the four-point Likert scale of Agree, Strongly Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The first item which determines whether youth skill development initiatives are essential for crime prevention, the result showed that 729(50) agreed 312 (23) strongly agreed, 209 (14) disagreed while 200 (13) strongly disagreed. Item 2 in the scale which determined whether There are adequate skill empowerment programs in the community, result showed that 620 (43) agreed, 510(35) strongly agreed, 215(15) agreed while 105 (7) strongly agreed. Item 3 in the scale determine whether Providing skills to unemployed individuals leads to better crime control, result showed that about 719(50) agreed, 544 (38) strongly agreed, 102(7) disagreed while 85 (5) strongly agreed. Furthermore, item 4 in this scale determines whether lack of empowerment opportunities is a contributing factor to high crime rates, result showed that 835 (58) agreed, 376 (26) strongly agreed, 137 (9) while 102 (7) strongly disagreed. Item 5 in this scale determines whether there is a significant reduction in crime in areas where skill empowerment programs are implemented, result showed that, 722 (50) agreed 566 (39) strongly agreed, 70 (4) disagreed while 102(7) strongly disagreed. By implication, finding summarily revealed that, skill empowerment significantly relates to crime control.

Table 1: Skill empowerment and crime control

S/N	Question	A	SA	D	SD
1.	Youth skill development initiatives are essential for crime prevention.	729(50)	312(23)	209(14)	200(13)
2.	There are adequate skill empowerment programs in the community.	620(43)	510(35)	215(15)	105(7)
3	Providing skills to unemployed individuals leads to better crime control.	719(50)	544(38)	102(7)	85(5)
4.	Lack of empowerment opportunities is a contributing factor to high crime rates.	835(58)	376(26)	137(9)	102(7)
5.	There is a significant reduction in crime in areas where skill empowerment programs are implemented.	722(50)	556(39)	70(4)	102(7)

Table 2: Awareness creation and crime control

S/N	QUESTION	A	SA	D	SD
6	Awareness campaigns about crime prevention reduce crime rates in South-South Nigeria.	667(46)	335(24)	246(17)	202(13)
7.	Raising public awareness on crime issues improves community safety.	702(48)	611(42)	105(7)	32(3)
8	Crime prevention awareness programs effectively educate citizens on crime control.	682(47)	577(40)	101(7)	221(6)
9	Communities with more crime awareness initiatives experience lower crime rates.	803(55)	431(30)	110(9)	106(6)
10	Awareness creation is an essential tool for effective crime control.	813(56)	322(22)	215(15)	100(7)

Table 2 presents result on the scale on hazard allowance and job commitment. The scale was presented in the four-point Likert scale of Agree, Strongly Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The first item which determines whether awareness campaigns about crime prevention reduce crime rates in South-South Nigeria, the result showed that 667(46) agreed

335 (24) strongly agreed, 246 (17) disagreed while 202 (13) strongly disagreed. Item 2 in the scale which determined whether raising public awareness on crime issues improves community safety, result showed that 702 (48) agreed, 611(42) strongly agreed, 105(7) agreed while 32 (3) strongly agreed. Item 3 in the scale determine whether crime prevention awareness programmes effectively educate citizens on crime control, result showed that about 682 (47) agreed, 577 (40) strongly agreed, 101 (7) disagreed while 90 (6) strongly agreed. Item 4 in the scale determine whether Communities with more crime awareness initiatives experience lower crime rates, the result revealed that about 803 (55) agreed, 431(30), strongly agreed 110(9) disagreed while 106(6) strongly agreed. Furthermore, item 5 in this scale determines whether awareness creation is an essential tool for effective crime control, result showed that 813(56) agreed, 322 (22) strongly agreed, 215 (15) while 100 (7) strongly disagreed. By implication, finding summarily revealed that, awareness creation significantly relates with crime control.

Hypothesis two

Ho: Skill empowerment has no significant correlation with crime control in South-South Nigeria.

Hi: Skill empowerment significantly correlation with crime control in South-South Nigeria.

Accept Ho if calculated r value is ≤ 0.086 at 2 degrees of freedom (df) and 0.05 level of significance. Otherwise, reject the Ho and accept Hi. To test hypothesis two above, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis was used. From the analysis, the calculated r value was 0.67^* which was tested in comparison with the table value of 0.086 at 0.05 level of significance. The calculated r value was greater than the critical, r value. Thus, the result was statistically significant meaning that, skill empowerment significantly correlation with crime control in South-South, Nigeria.

Table 3: Pearson Product moment correlation coefficient analysis for Skill empowerment and crime control in South-South Nigeria (N=1450)

Variables	M	SD	$\sum x$ $\sum y$	$\sum x^2$ $\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	r-value
Skill empowerment	15.382	2.882	5626	76712		0.67*
Crime control	14.243	2.744	5252	72718	74993	

***significant at 0.05 level, df=1448, critical r 0.086*

From the result presented Table 3, since the calculated r of 0.67^* is greater than the critical r-value of 0.086 at .05 level of significance with 1448 degree of freedom with this result, the null hypothesis which states that, skill empowerment has no significant correlation with crime control in South-South Nigeria was rejected while the alternate accepted. This implies that, Skill empowerment significantly correlation with crime control in South-South, Nigeria.

Hypothesis three

Ho: Awareness creation does not significantly relate with crime control in South-South Nigeria.

Hi: Awareness creation significantly relate with crime control in South-South Nigeria.

Accept Ho if calculated r value is ≤ 0.086 at 2 degrees of freedom (df) and 0.05 level of significance. Otherwise, reject the Ho and accept the Hi. To test hypothesis three above, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis was used. The analysis shows that, the calculated r value was 0.81^* which was tested in comparison with the table value of 0.086 at

0.05 level of significance. The calculated r value was greater than the critical, r values. Thus, the result was statistically significant suggesting that awareness creation significantly relates with crime control in South-South, Nigeria.

Table 4: Pearson Product moment correlation coefficient analysis for awareness creation significantly relate with crime control in South-South Nigeria (N=1450)

Variables	M	SD	$\sum x$ $\sum y$	$\sum x^2$ $\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	r-value
Awareness creation	15.20	3.754	5722	78632		0.81*
Crime control	14.55	2.624	5232	72837	75196	

**significant at 0.05 level, $df=1448$, critical r 0.086.

From the result presented above, since the calculated r of 0.81* is greater than the critical r -value of 0.086 at .05 level of significance with 1448 degree of freedom, the null hypothesis which states that, awareness creation does not significantly relate with crime control in South-South Nigeria, was rejected while the alternate accepted. It implies that, awareness creation significantly relates with crime control in South-South, Nigeria.

Discussion of findings

Skill empowerment and crime control

The finding that skill empowerment correlates significantly with crime control in South-South Nigeria highlights its potential in addressing socio-economic issues that drive crime. In regions with high unemployment, poverty, and economic marginalization, skill empowerment can offer opportunities for legitimate income generation, reducing the incentive for criminal activities. This relationship aligns with strain theory, which suggests that individuals deprived of legitimate means to achieve success may resort to crime (Merton, 1938). In South-South Nigeria, where economic opportunities are limited due to factors like militancy and corruption, skill programs provide alternatives to illegal activities. Empirical studies show that skill empowerment reduces crime by offering employment opportunities, particularly in areas with high youth unemployment and socio-political instability. Research supports the idea that skill development initiatives help lower crime rates by addressing the underlying economic strain that often leads to criminal behavior (Okpara & Aghedo, 2016). These findings align with research from other parts of the world, which demonstrate that skill empowerment programs reduce crime by providing individuals with legitimate employment opportunities.

The above finding is in tandem with the qualitative data which revealed the relationship between skill empowerment and crime control in south-south, Nigeria. Each participants argued that:

Yes, skill empowerment programs have helped reduce crime in South-South Nigeria. When youths are trained and given the means to support themselves, they are less likely to engage in criminal activities. I believe youth skill development is crucial for preventing crime. We've seen that many young people who turn to crime do so out of frustration and lack of opportunities. Providing skills to unemployed individuals equips them with alternatives to criminal lifestyles. It also boosts their morale and sense of purpose. Lack of empowerment opportunities directly contributes to crime. When people are unemployed or feel disenfranchised, they are more likely to join criminal groups or engage in illegal activities. In areas where skill empowerment programs have been successfully implemented, such as in Port Harcourt, there has been a noticeable reduction in crime, particularly among the youth (KII with School Principal).

Yes, skill empowerment plays a big role in reducing crime. Most of the young people involved in crime do it because they lack other means of livelihood. Skill development is vital for crime prevention. If young people have skills and are employed, they won't have time or the need to engage in criminal activities. I believe providing skills to unemployed individuals is one of the best ways to tackle crime. When people are skilled, they are able to fend for themselves and won't resort to theft or violence. Without empowerment, crime will continue to rise. Many youths in South-South Nigeria, for instance, are easily recruited into militancy because they have no jobs or skills to sustain themselves. In places where skill programs have been introduced, like the Niger Delta amnesty program, crime has reduced significantly among ex-militants who now have jobs or businesses (KII with School Principal).

Yes, I've observed that in communities where skill empowerment is provided, the crime rate drops because people, especially the youth, become engaged in legal activities. Youth skill development is the backbone of any crime prevention strategy. Teaching young people marketable skills gives them something positive to focus on instead of getting involved in crime. Providing skills for the unemployed leads to better crime control because people who are busy with work or their own businesses don't have time to get involved in illegal activities. There is a clear link between lack of empowerment and high crime rates. When people have nothing to do and no means to support themselves, crime often seems like the only option. There's a direct reduction in crime in places where skill empowerment programs are implemented, like the vocational training centers in Bayelsa, where youths are learning trades and are no longer involved in armed robbery (KII with School Principal).

Skill empowerment programs definitely help reduce crime. We've seen that youth who acquire skills are less inclined to join criminal groups because they have other means to earn a living. Skill development is crucial for youth crime prevention. When youths have viable job options, they stay away from criminal activities. Yes, providing skills to unemployed individuals creates opportunities for them and leads to better crime control. It gives them the tools to create a stable future, reducing the appeal of crime. Lack of empowerment opportunities is a key factor in crime. When people lack basic skills or job prospects, they turn to crime out of necessity. In areas where skill empowerment programs have been implemented, like some parts of Delta State, we've seen a notable drop in crimes like armed robbery and kidnapping (KII with School Principal).

Yes, from what I've observed, skill empowerment programs contribute to lowering crime rates because they provide people, especially youths, with alternatives to crime. I believe youth skill development is essential for crime prevention. Many young people in this region turn to crime because they feel like they don't have any viable economic options. Definitely. Teaching unemployed individuals practical skills allows them to become self-reliant, which naturally reduces their inclination towards criminal activities. The lack of empowerment opportunities in South-South Nigeria has led to high crime rates. The youths, especially, are left with few choices, and some turn to crime out of desperation. We've seen crime rates fall in communities where skill empowerment initiatives have been introduced. For instance, in Akwa Ibom, areas with consistent youth training programs have shown a significant reduction in crime (KII with School Principal).

The South-South region of Nigeria presents a unique challenge for crime control, given its history of militancy, environmental degradation, and economic marginalization. The region is rich in natural resources, particularly oil, but has been plagued by violence and organized crime due to uneven resource distribution and socio-economic inequalities. Many of the crimes committed in the region, such as oil theft, kidnapping, and armed robbery, are economically motivated (Okpara & Aghedo, 2016). In this context, skill empowerment programs offer a localized solution to crime control by addressing the root causes of criminal behavior.

A study by Okolie and Iwuamadi (2018) explored the effectiveness of skill acquisition programs in curbing crime in the Niger Delta, a sub-region of South-South Nigeria. The study found that empowering individuals with technical and vocational skills not only provided alternative income sources but also fostered a sense of social responsibility. Many former militants and unemployed youths who participated in skill development programs reported feeling more connected to their communities and less inclined to engage in criminal activities. This aligns with the findings of Alemika (2017), who argued that economic empowerment is crucial for building sustainable peace and reducing crime in conflict-affected regions like the South-South. Moreover, skill empowerment initiatives have proven effective in reducing recidivism among former criminals. In a study conducted by Nwagboso (2019), ex-militants who participated in vocational training programs were less likely to return to criminal activities compared to those who did not receive any form of empowerment. This finding underscores the importance of skill acquisition as a long-term solution to crime control, particularly in regions where criminality is linked to economic disenfranchisement.

The positive impact of skill empowerment on crime control is not limited to South-South Nigeria but is a global phenomenon. In the United States, for instance, research has shown that vocational training and skill acquisition programs play a significant role in reducing crime rates, particularly among at-risk youth. A study by Wilson and Gallagher (2016) found that youth who participated in skill development programs were less likely to engage in criminal activities and more likely to secure stable employment. The study concluded that skill empowerment not only reduces crime in the short term but also provides long-term socio-economic benefits by increasing individuals' earning potential and reducing their reliance on criminal behavior. In Europe, similar findings have been reported. A study by Kivisto et al. (2018) in Finland found that vocational training programs for unemployed individuals had a significant impact on crime reduction. By offering practical skills and job placement services, these programs provided participants with legitimate alternatives to criminal behavior. This research highlights the universal applicability of skill empowerment as a crime control strategy, regardless of the socio-economic context.

The findings of this study have several important policy implications for crime control in South-South Nigeria. First, it is clear that skill empowerment programs should be a central component of any comprehensive crime prevention strategy in the region. Policymakers must prioritize the establishment and expansion of vocational training centers that provide individuals, particularly youths, with the skills needed to secure employment or start their own businesses. This will help reduce the economic incentives for engaging in criminal activities. Second, skill empowerment initiatives should be tailored to the specific needs of the local population. In the South-South region, where many individuals have been involved in the oil industry or militancy, programs that focus on skills relevant to these sectors—such as mechanical engineering, logistics, and environmental management—may be particularly effective. By providing individuals with skills that are in demand within the local economy, these programs can increase the likelihood of long-term employment and economic stability.

Finally, the success of skill empowerment programs in reducing crime relies on the active involvement of both government and private sector stakeholders. Public-private partnerships can help fund and implement vocational training programs, ensuring that they are sustainable and scalable. Moreover, the private sector can play a critical role in providing job placement opportunities for individuals who have completed skill acquisition programs. The significant correlation between skill empowerment and crime control in South-South Nigeria highlights the importance of addressing the socio-economic root causes of criminal behavior. By providing individuals with marketable skills, skill empowerment programs offer a viable alternative to crime, particularly in regions with high unemployment and economic deprivation. Empirical evidence from both Nigeria and other countries supports the idea that skill development is a critical tool for reducing crime and promoting social stability. For policymakers in South-South Nigeria, investing in skill empowerment initiatives should be a top priority in the fight against crime.

Awareness creation and crime control

The study finding that awareness creation significantly relates with crime control in South-South Nigeria reflects a critical aspect of crime prevention strategies. Awareness creation plays an essential role in informing the public about criminal behavior, how to recognize it, and how to collaborate with law enforcement in crime prevention. This relationship aligns with global perspectives on crime control, where information dissemination and community engagement have been shown to reduce crime rates effectively. In South-South Nigeria, this relationship is particularly significant given the region's unique challenges such as youth restiveness, economic instability, and environmental degradation. Tailored crime-prevention strategies, including awareness campaigns, are therefore vital for addressing these specific issues.

Awareness creation serves as a crucial proactive measure in controlling crime. By disseminating knowledge on crime-related issues, legal frameworks, and available support systems, communities can become better equipped to prevent criminal activities. This proactive approach works on multiple levels: it empowers individuals with the ability to avoid risky behaviors, report criminal activities promptly, and protect themselves and their properties from potential harm. Nwankwo (2019) emphasizes that in areas where crime is prevalent, public knowledge about crime-related issues significantly contributes to crime prevention and control. In South-South Nigeria, where criminal activities such as kidnapping, armed robbery, oil bunkering, and cultism are common, awareness creation through community engagement and public campaigns has been effective in reducing crime. These initiatives help residents understand the nature of these crimes and the steps they can take to avoid becoming victims.

Additionally, public awareness programs help foster a culture of vigilance. Communities that are informed about crime trends and preventive measures are more likely to collaborate with law enforcement in tracking and reporting crimes. For example, Eze & Amadi (2021) argue that awareness campaigns that focus on educating the public on the dangers of drug abuse, human trafficking, and armed robbery have contributed to reducing these crimes in Nigeria by building trust between the public and law enforcement. This trust and collaboration are crucial in enhancing crime control, as it facilitates the flow of critical information between communities and the police. Awareness creation not only educates the public but also demystifies criminal activities, making it easier for communities to identify and prevent crimes. In a region like South-South Nigeria, where socio-political factors contribute to crime, awareness initiatives that educate the public about the causes and consequences of crime help to reduce fear, increase public confidence, and promote community resilience.

These programs also provide residents with essential information about the legal implications of various crimes, reinforcing the consequences of criminal behavior.

The media and local institutions play a pivotal role in disseminating crime prevention information in South-South Nigeria. Radio, television, social media, and traditional community leadership structures serve as effective channels for reaching both urban and rural populations with vital crime prevention messages. Ajayi (2020) highlights that mass media campaigns can have a significant impact in rural areas, where conventional law enforcement approaches may be less effective due to limited resources or difficult terrain. In South-South Nigeria, radio programs dedicated to educating the public on crime-related issues have been particularly effective in reaching remote communities. Radio is a cost-effective and widely accessible platform, especially for individuals in rural areas who may not have access to other forms of media. These programs often include discussions on crime prevention strategies, interviews with law enforcement officials, and listener call-ins, which allow for real-time engagement between the public and experts.

Television and social media platforms also serve as critical tools for spreading awareness. Social media, in particular, has the potential to reach younger audiences, who are more likely to be involved in or affected by crimes such as cultism and internet fraud. According to Ajayi (2020), social media campaigns focusing on crime prevention can effectively target youth, providing them with alternatives to criminal behavior and highlighting the social and legal consequences of engaging in crime. Local institutions such as churches, mosques, schools, and community-based organizations (CBOs) also play a vital role in awareness creation. These institutions, trusted by the communities they serve, can tailor crime prevention messages to meet the specific needs of their audience. For example, religious leaders often address crime-related issues in sermons, urging congregants to participate in community policing initiatives and report suspicious activities to the authorities. Ogidi (2018) notes that CBOs and local institutions have been instrumental in spreading awareness about issues such as gender-based violence, human trafficking, and drug abuse, which are prevalent in South-South Nigeria. Moreover, traditional leaders and local chiefs act as custodians of local customs and values, and their endorsement of crime prevention programs lends credibility to these initiatives. These leaders serve as intermediaries between law enforcement agencies and their communities, fostering a cooperative relationship that enhances the effectiveness of crime control measures.

Despite the positive impact of awareness creation on crime control, several challenges hinder its full potential. One of the primary obstacles is illiteracy. In many rural and underdeveloped parts of South-South Nigeria, illiteracy rates are high, which limits the effectiveness of awareness programs that rely on written materials or complex information. In such cases, campaigns must adopt strategies that focus on oral communication and visual aids to ensure the message reaches all community members. Poverty is another significant barrier. Economic hardship can lead to higher crime rates, as individuals may resort to criminal activities out of desperation. Poverty also limits access to technology and media platforms that are often used to disseminate awareness information. Onuoha (2021) points out that in impoverished areas, individuals are less likely to have access to radio, television, or the internet, which restricts their exposure to crime prevention messages.

The above finding is tandem with the qualitative data which revealed the relationship between awareness creation and crime control. Each participants argued that:

Awareness creation is a key part of our crime control strategy. It helps to inform the public about security risks and preventive measures, which in

turn reduces their vulnerability to crime. We use community outreach programs, radio broadcasts, and social media campaigns to educate people about crime prevention and security measures. In 2021, we ran a community awareness program on the dangers of cultism in Calabar. As a result, several youths voluntarily renounced their membership in cult groups, which led to a decrease in cult-related violence. One of the biggest barriers is the lack of trust between the public and security agencies. People are often hesitant to listen to our messages because they believe we are not genuinely concerned about their welfare (KII with Community Leader).

Awareness creation is very important in our crime control efforts. When people are informed about the risks and how to protect themselves, they are less likely to fall victim to criminals. We use a mix of town hall meetings, school outreach programs, and distributing printed materials like flyers and posters. We also collaborate with local leaders to spread our messages. We had a case where awareness programs in Port Harcourt led to a reduction in kidnapping incidents. People became more vigilant, and the kidnappers could no longer operate as freely as before. A major barrier is the low level of literacy in some areas, which makes it hard for people to fully understand the messages we are trying to convey. There is also a challenge with funding for these programs (KII with School Principal).

It's crucial. Awareness creation makes people more cautious and proactive about their own security. Without it, the community would be largely unaware of how to avoid becoming victims of crime. We primarily use community policing initiatives, where we work with local leaders and youth groups to spread the message. Social media has also become an important tool for raising awareness about security threats. We had success in Bayelsa when we launched an awareness campaign about drug-related crime. Within a few months, we saw a significant drop in drug-related arrests as people became more conscious of the risks. One major challenge is the limited reach of our awareness programs, especially in remote areas. Another issue is the cultural barrier, where some communities are resistant to change or external advice on security (KII with security agent).

Awareness creation is very important. It's one of the most effective ways to involve the community in crime prevention and control. When people are aware, they are more likely to report suspicious activities. We conduct door-to-door campaigns in high-crime areas, use local radio stations, and hold public forums where we educate people on crime trends and preventive measures. In Delta State, we saw a reduction in burglary cases after conducting an awareness campaign on home security. Residents started adopting better security practices, and the crime rate dropped. A major barrier is funding. We often don't have enough resources to conduct awareness programs on a large scale. Another issue is getting people to attend the awareness sessions (KII with lecturer).

It's critical to our crime control strategy. Awareness creation helps to reduce crime by making people more vigilant and aware of potential threats in their community. We use local community meetings, media advertisements, and social media campaigns. We also work with schools and churches to spread awareness on crime prevention. There was a noticeable decrease in human trafficking in parts of Edo State after we

launched an awareness campaign highlighting the dangers and warning signs. People became more cautious and informed. One major barrier is the apathy of some community members. They don't take the awareness messages seriously until they or someone they know becomes a victim of crime (KII with Parent).

Furthermore, mistrust in law enforcement is a significant challenge. In many parts of Nigeria, including South-South Nigeria, a history of corruption and abuse by law enforcement officers has eroded public trust. This mistrust discourages individuals from cooperating with the police, even when they are aware of crimes being committed. Restoring public trust is essential for the success of awareness campaigns, as effective crime control depends on strong collaboration between the public and law enforcement agencies. In addition, cultural resistance to external influences can hinder awareness campaigns. Some communities may be skeptical of government-led initiatives, viewing them as attempts to undermine traditional values or control local affairs. This skepticism can be especially strong in rural or marginalized areas where the government's presence is limited, and people rely more on traditional structures for governance. Overcoming these cultural barriers requires a deep understanding of local customs and the involvement of community leaders in the design and implementation of awareness programs.

The findings of this study can be understood through the lens of Deterrence Theory, which suggests that individuals are less likely to engage in criminal activities when they are aware of the consequences of their actions. Awareness campaigns, by educating the public about the legal, social, and economic ramifications of engaging in criminal activities, act as a deterrent to crime. The classical criminologists Beccaria (1764) and Bentham (1789) argue that crime can be prevented when individuals believe the cost of committing a crime outweighs the benefits. Awareness creation enhances this deterrent effect by ensuring that people are informed about the penalties for criminal behavior and the likelihood of being caught and punished. In South-South Nigeria, where crimes such as oil bunkering, drug trafficking, and kidnapping are common, awareness campaigns that emphasize the severe legal consequences of these actions can deter potential offenders.

Adegoke and Okeke (2017) affirm that crime control strategies that incorporate awareness creation as a core component are more effective in reducing crime rates, as they not only deter criminal behavior but also foster a sense of social responsibility. Awareness campaigns that promote community involvement and cooperation with law enforcement can create an environment where crime is less likely to thrive, as potential offenders are aware that the community is actively working to prevent and report criminal activities. The study finding that awareness creation significantly relates to crime control in South-South Nigeria highlights the importance of information dissemination in crime prevention efforts. Awareness creation empowers communities to take proactive steps toward crime prevention, fosters trust between the public and law enforcement, and serves as a deterrent to criminal behavior. However, challenges such as illiteracy, poverty, mistrust in law enforcement, and cultural resistance must be addressed to maximize the effectiveness of these initiatives.

Awareness creation is a vital tool for controlling crime in South-South Nigeria, particularly in regions where socio-economic and political factors contribute to high crime rates. By leveraging media, local institutions, and traditional leaders, crime prevention efforts can reach a broader audience and create a more informed, vigilant, and cooperative society. The integration of awareness campaigns into crime control strategies supports the broader theoretical framework of deterrence, affirming the role of information in reducing crime.

Conclusion and recommendations

The study on non-kinetic security strategies in South-South Nigeria examined non-violent approaches to reducing crime across Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers States. These states, known for their economic significance and security challenges, provided a suitable context for evaluating strategies such as community engagement, skill empowerment, and awareness campaigns. Grounded in criminological theories, the study identified measures like grassroots intelligence gathering, vocational training, and crime advocacy clubs in schools as effective in addressing socio-economic disparities and fostering community collaboration. Using a survey design, data were collected through questionnaires and Key Informant Interviews from diverse stakeholders, including security personnel and community leaders. The findings emphasized empowering citizens, promoting positive behavioral change, and community involvement as vital for crime reduction. Expanding skill empowerment programs, especially for youth and ex-offenders, can address unemployment and reduce reoffending. Tailored public awareness campaigns can further enhance crime prevention by encouraging crime reporting and educating communities on preventive measures. Collaboration with religious institutions, schools, and media can ensure these initiatives are impactful and sustainable.

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