



Challenges faced by the local private security guards (“watchmen”) in Eldoret Municipality, Kenya, towards community policing: A Criminological Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Community policing is an effort between the security agents and the community that identifies and solves community problems such as insecurity issues. This paper thus discusses the challenges facing the local private security guards toward enhancing community policing. The study found that poor working conditions, poor pay, lack of recognition from the public, inadequate working facilities, and poor communication channels were among the major challenges facing private guards in Eldoret town. The study recommends that there is need for improving working conditions as well as communication.

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Introduction

Kenya like several other countries has embraced the idea of community policing following the escalating rate of crime in the country especially in urban areas. Cities like Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu have been hit hard by high crime rates with numerous criminal activities. Furthermore, major towns; Eldoret, Nakuru, Thika, Naivasha among others have not escaped this disaster. Community policing was introduced by the government as one of the approach of curbing high crime rate in the country. The major focus however has been put on the vital information sharing between the police and members in relation to culprits of crime. Despite the private security personnel playing a major role to the country's security, their efforts have been seldom recognized and their relationship to community policing is unclear. This paper therefore sought to establish the challenges that private guards face towards community policing. Questions to be asked here include; do members of public share security pound information with private guards? Do the police cooperate with private guards in fighting crime through information and other resource sharing?

Objectives and Purpose of the Study

This study aimed at investigating the plight of the local private security guards towards enhancing community policing. Therefore, based on the introduction and the literature review this study assumed that the efforts in enabling community policing are as a result of the failures by the community in not incorporating the local private security guards. The objectives of this study were: to investigate on the on the personal challenges, the institutional challenges facing the local private security guards towards enhancing community policing and the eventual community challenges faced by the local security guards towards community policing.

Literature Review

Community policing is an effort between the security agents and the community that identifies and solves community problems such as insecurity issues. With the police no longer the sole guardians of law and order, all members of the community become active participants in the effort to enhance the safety and quality of neighborhoods (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1994).

Policing strategies that worked in the past are not always effective today. In the today's society, the desired goal, an enhanced sense of safety, security, and well-being, has not been achieved. Practitioners agree that there is a pressing need for innovation hence the need for community policing (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1994).

Levinson (2002) identifies that private security as focusing primarily on crime prevention and investigation for specific individuals and organizations at large. Private security agencies are key performers in crime control, in relation to protecting the public sector, or private property, by and large (Potgieter et al., 2008; Singh, 2008; Steenkamp & Potgieter, 2004 as cited in Lubbe, 2010). Private security companies are seen as prevention rather than law enforcement and are indeed mainly used as a measure to prevent crime (Singh, 2008). Potgieter et al., (2008) as cited in Lubbe, (2010) on the concerns about whether the private security industry can stand up to the challenge of crime prevention in the new dawn.

This has seen the increase of the private security industry in growth, and simultaneously larger demand to the involvement and participation in crime prevention (Minnaar, 2005; Minnaar & Ngoveni, 2004 as cited in Lubbe, (2010). Owing to limited budget and material resources, the public/government security agents cannot attain the safety and security needs of the public. Therefore, the private security industry fulfils the security need the police are unable to satisfy (Schönteich, 1999 as cited in Lubbe, 2010). In addition, the private security sector has the capacity to employ security officers on permanent or part-time contracts, which is impossible in public policing because of strict regulations on the recruitment of the officers (Schönteich, 1999). Studies have shown that increasing awareness of inefficiencies in providing conventional public security services by the public security agencies for instance by the police, therefore the communities and companies have bypassed their police departments altogether and contracted portions of public protective services to the private security agencies Levinson (2002) as cited in Lubbe (2010).

Merits of the local private security guards

Levinson (2002) as cited in Lubbe (2010) noted that privatizing the security industry include that personnel could be dismissed more easily if they did not abide to the organizational standards of performance. Another benefit entail the competitive encouragement by personnel to maintain high levels of quality and quantity demanded from a private security company. It also entailed the maintenance of the standards to the consumer for fear of replacement by the same consumer. Private security companies tend to encourage innovation, inventiveness and risk taking towards provision of services to the consumer as indicated, (Lubbe, 2010). Private companies tend to have a strong incentive to respond to specific and diverse user needs, suggestions and complaints and can do this more quickly.

Demerits of the local private security guards

Studies have shown that the increasing crime rates and vandalism have a significant increase the demand for the services of the private security guards (Lubbe, 2010). The challenge facing the private security industry is that some of thieves see opportunities in working in the security industry. Zielinski (2000) noted that some aspiring thieves seek work in the private security industry as security officers in order to gain access to ATM machines, bank vaults and victims themselves (as cited in Lubbe, 2010).

William Brill (cited in Zielinski, 2000 & Lubbe 2010) explained that in studies conducted with convicted murderers and rapists it was found that many had worked for security companies at one point or another. The main reason for this was that it was relatively easy to gain employment as a security officer and this put them directly to their potential targets. Similarly, studies by Potgieter et al., (2008) and Zinn (2008) have noted that private security officers are involved in committing crime.

Individuals who have been hired to provide personal safety and protection of assets are often vulnerable to crime syndicates (Potgieter et al., 2008). This emphasizes the importance of conducting a thorough selection process in the private security industry. Singh (2008) elaborates that psychometric testing forms an essential part of the recruitment process of most middle-to large-sized security companies. She further notes that psychometric testing and aptitude testing form the basis of differentiating among individuals according to a set norm. Thus, it seems that the larger security companies have an adequate recruitment process involving psychometrics. However, in the case of Kenya psychometric tests tend to more expensive and less affordable.

Plight of the local private security guards

According to Upadhyaya (2011) private security personnel outnumber police in most of the countries play an extremely important role in maintaining law and order, protecting the property and lives of the people. The private security personnel perform many of the roles and duties identical to the police and have to face almost similar kind of challenges and danger to their life. In spite of all these facts, they lack adequate training and are paid too less as compared to police and defense personnel. He further reveals that most people join job as security personnel with lots of hope and expectations of improvement in their living standards. He continue by indicating that they keep changing from one agency to another with the hope of betterment. However, their hopes are seldom met as a large majority of them are not paid even the minimum wages and overtime rate wages for overtime work. Most of them have to work for excessively long hours, almost 12 hours a day on a regular basis, without

any break for lunch/dinner during duty hours. To add on, their salaries remain static for years and are not also able to gain promotional opportunities. In addition, a substantial proportion of them have also to face discrimination in terms of wages and other conditions of work as compared to the security personnel engaged directly by the organizations engaging both the categories of security personnel (Upadhyaya, 2011)

Methodology (Methods & Materials)

The study was qualitative in nature where exploratory design was used to obtain an in-depth understanding on the plight and challenges facing private guards in the dawn of community policing. The study was conducted in Eldoret town which is growing very fast and therefore security of people and properties is paramount. The town also has an increasingly large number of private security firms which offer security services to the businesses, organizations, parastatals, institutions and individuals who require the services.

The paper used private security guards popularly known as 'watchmen' who provide security services to various departments mentioned above as the target population. Purposive sampling was used to select those guards who have worked in Eldoret town for more than two years. The study used an interview schedule to gather information from the interviewees. A total of 52 interviewees were used. The number was reached at following saturation effect where information became repetitive. Qualitative data analysis was adopted where the information gathered was selectively coded put into categories according to the theme and objective of the study. Direct quotations were also used in the process of interpreting the findings.

Results

The paper discussed challenges that private guards face in three sections: personal challenges, institutional challenges and community challenges.

Personal Challenges

In relation to the personal challenges the paper established that inadequate skills and experience was the major challenge that private guards face. It should be noted that due to social transformation brought about by technology, crime and criminal activities have taken another level. People engaging in criminal activities have devised sophisticated methods which need skilled security personnel to handle them. However, with community policing, sharing of information may provide important patterns to alleviating these criminal activities.

The paper also established that private guards use inferior weapons compared to their attackers and therefore exposed their lives to danger. Due to technology, individual who engage in criminal activities use high tech weapons which the private security personnel cannot match to and therefore they are exposed. In an interview with one watchman who was guarding a supermarket over the issue of guarding weapon said;

'...sasa wacha nikuelezee ndugu yangu, sisi watchmen tunahatarisha maisha yetu kwa sababu huwezi pambana na mwizi mwenye amekucha na bunduki na wewe uko na rungu huwezi kabisa. Sasa mimi nilikuwa naomba kama serikali ingeruhusu tupewe mafunzo ya kutumia bunduki, ingekuwa sawa'. That let me tell you my brother, us watchmen risk our lives because you cannot fight robbers who have guns with a mere guarding stick, it is impossible. So I just want to request if the government can start training us on how to use guns, it will be better.

The interview above reveals how dreadful and frightened the watchmen are despite doing the job they love.

The paper also found that low wages and salaries was another personal challenge. According to the interviewee, despite them guarding properties worth millions as well as peoples' lives, watchmen are being paid peanuts which cannot adequately cater for them and their families. *'I am being paid six thousand Kenyan shillings and I use half of the money to pay house rent, there is electricity, water, food and personal upkeep. The pay is very small but I have no alternative'*; said one of the interviewee who was lamenting furiously about the little salaries that they receive.

The final major challenge that the paper established from the respondent was working for long hours with limited offs and holidays. They said that they work for relatively long hours with stringent rules which turn them to be like animals. Working for long hours also reduces the efficiency at work and therefore it will be very hard to fight crime. There is need therefore for the private security firms to employ more personnel in order to engage in shifts so as to allow them rest adequately.

Institutional Challenges

In relation to the institutional challenges, the paper found that inadequate resources by the security firms were among the major challenges. Interviewees revealed that some of their organization did not have adequate facilities like, 'walkie talkies' or the security mobile phone, mobile response vehicles, alarm responses and even trained human resources personnel.

The study also found that some of the security firms have poor management particularly coordinating their employees on the ground. They care less about employees' welfare and other issues. One of the interviewee who was guarding one of the commercial banks in town said; *'my employer is very harsh and strict he does not want to know you health status or family issues as long as you are working. To make it worse, if you suddenly become sick for one or two days, then you will be deducted from the salary. They also deduct money from your salary for the days that you asked for an off'*

Interviewees also said that security firms are being driven by the concept of profit oriented. Thus, the watchmen are being exploited. *'I know that my client pays twenty three thousand shillings every month to my employer for the services that I provide, however, I am being paid only eight thousand shillings. My question is where does the other fifteen thousand shillings go? Why don't I be paid fifteen thousand why they dedicate the eight thousand to their expenses?'* this therefore implies that the private security guards are being exploited.

Community Challenges

In relation to the community challenges, the paper established that members of the public do not recognize the private guards in a manner they think they should. They don't respect them and the job that they are doing. *'Here when you say that you are a watchman people think that you are lesser compared to them because of the kind of services that you provide. What they forget is that we cannot all do the same work, somebody somewhere must do the dirty work for life to continue and my family and I are sustained by this work that most people look down upon'* said one respondent who was guarding a shopping mall in town.

The study also established that the community is hostile to the private guards because they don't want to share security information with them. *'We are doing this work blindly you cannot expect to get sensitive information from these members but God is with us'* said one watchman who was guarding ATM machines belonging to one of the commercial banks in town.

In relation to the community challenges, the paper also established that members of the public has gender prejudice on

the role of female private guards towards community policing. Women are not accorded due respect as compared to their male counterparts in terms of security efforts.

One of the female day guard interviewee who was guarding one of the business premises in town said *' sisi wanawake tunadharauliwa sana kwasababu kila mwanaume anapopita ananiambia nafaa kufanya kazi ya nymbani na si kazi ya watchman... hata hatuwezi pewa chance ya kufanya kazi night shift kwasababu mimi ni mwanamke'* we women are taken for granted because every time men pass by they tell me that my responsibilities be done at home... I cannot even be given a chance to work night shift because I am a woman.

The study established that there is gender disparity in the roles and responsibility played by the security guard. *'We have the ability as compared to men, trust is all we need'* said one female watchman who was guarding a commercial building in town.

Summary

In summary, the personal challenges faced by the local private security guards include; inadequate skills and experience, lack of effective weapons for guarding, long working hours and low pay were the major personal challenges that private guards in Eldoret town experience.

In summary, the institutional challenges included the following; inadequate resources by the security firms were among the major challenges for instance, inadequate facilities like, 'walkie talkies' or the security mobile phone, mobile response vehicles, alarm responses and even trained human resources personnel. There is also poor management particularly coordinating their employees on the ground hence staff welfare. Finally, the security firms are being driven by the concept of profit oriented hence there is tendency of overexploitation.

In summary, the Community challenges include the following; that the members of the public do not recognize the private guards; that there is community hostility towards the private guards hence they don't want to share security information with them. There is also the issue of gender prejudice where members of the public still do not feel that there is no role of female private guards towards community policing.

Conclusion

Community policing is an important tool for checking and curbing criminality in the country however, without proper management and coordination, it becomes a useless tool. Private security guards are equally important and therefore should form part of the community policing scheme. Important and valuable information concerning security matters should be shared between the police and private guards in order to fight crime as a team.

Recommendations

The paper after investigations provides the following recommendations;

In the study it was established that private guards were complaining about being left out in relation to sharing sensitive security information. There is need therefore to integrate private security guards in the scheme of community policing which will allow them to fight the sophisticated criminals and their activities in the country. This is through the introduction of information technology in communication.

From the findings it was established that private security guards are lowly paid. There is need to reinforce the labour laws to ensure that security guards are not exploited and underpaid for their services and at the same time induce a wage/ salary mechanisms such as introducing benefits and allowances.

The private guards also complained about the inferior weapons that they use. The government therefore needs to act fast in terms of whether it can provide effective weapon like guns but after vivid training has been done in order to curb the high rate of crime in the urban areas, for instance, cyber training in detecting crime and introductory forensic training.

From the findings it was also established that there was gender prejudice on the roles and responsibilities played by the female private guards. There should be laws allowing for women to play their roles equally to men and not classifying tasks according to gender.

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