

Black-On-Black Crime in London

...An Insight into Intra-Group Conflicts Management in England

Cassim Adepegba

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Executive Summary

This is a qualitative research project to explore the remote and immediate causes as well as effects of black-on-black crime within the boroughs of London, highlight the main triggers and proffer possible solutions towards drastically reducing its occurrence thereby curtailing the overall rate of crime in the metropolitan city that is a global melting pot of cultures and races. Comparatively, a qualitative research is only descriptive, subjective, studies experiences and can only generate hypotheses, while a quantitative research provides explanation, is objective, studies causes and can test hypotheses (Parker, 2011).

The Metropolitan Police report indicate that though blacks are less than fifteen percent of London's population, they are responsible for way over a half of violent crimes in the city while the race are also victims of two-third of such crimes. The literature includes articles, national statistics, police, survey, etc. The participants listed poverty, drugs, lack-of-interest in education, lack of trust, etc as obvious factors for which they felt let down by the police and government.

Many of the black communities in Britain find themselves inadvertently at the lower wrung of the socio-economic strata, a development that is made worse by broken homes where there are no father figures and most male young adults find themselves ignoring the only available parent that they live with, often the mothers, and go on to make life changing decisions that gradually see them lose interest and then drop from formal education or work and then, with peer pressure, they start leaning towards gangs and similar groups within their immediate neighbourhoods, who lure them with promise of easy money and all that comes with it.

Even where the young person is fortunate to have an older male in the family, such as an uncle, a lot of them rather turn out as negative role models as they are also likely to be neck-deep in crime and may have no good leadership to offer the younger man. As poverty get entrenched in the family, they rely more and more on state benefit and any cut in that respect does not only highly affect their daily living and may only serve as an impetus to take to crime or get engrossed in anti-establishment mayhem as witnessed in the Summer 2011 London riot.

CHAPTER 1

Central Aim and Research Plan

This research mainly aimed to find out the extent of black-on-black crime in London relying on focus group and data from a questionnaire and secondary data from existing texts on the subject matter and interviews of experts expected to have hindsight knowledge of happenings within the black community and the trends of crime in London. I looked at possible education, gang culture, drugs and single parenthood factors

My aim in this research was to get reasons why blacks kill each other in London. The research is neither aimed at justifying the Police's action or inaction about black-on-black murder and violent crime, nor is it to support those who accuse the police of institutionalized bias against blacks in its modus operandi. My only interest is to try to seek answer to the question why people of the same race would pick on each other for murder, arson, etc and how it may be stopped.

The research was primarily via a focus group discussion and administering a questionnaire to community groups, leaders, teachers, youth groups, etc whose valuable response shaped the report and form the bedrock of my recommendations. In view of the sensitivity of the subject matter, the questions asked were limited only to the information required and offered willingly by the respondents. The assignment was carried out with full compliance to all relevant data protection regulations and laws.

A focus group is an interactive setting where participants with some basic knowledge of the subject matter are gathered in one location or connected via modern communication technology to freely share their opinions, perceptions, experiences and beliefs on the issue under study. While it may be dominated by a few vocal participants, it has the advantage of refined outcomes that is however not projectable to reflect any other focus group elsewhere on exactly the same subject.

A questionnaire is a collection of questions administered on well chosen population sample that represents the desired demographic spread and it is well designed to elicit responses that would help towards making scientifically valid findings on the subject under study and leading to findings that is usually projectable and comparable with other similar research findings. However it literally restricts response choice to predetermined options

RESEARCHER'S INTEREST

As a black African man living with his family in London, with over a decade experience in working with charities in Nigeria and the United Kingdom on peace and conflict related issues as well as having formal postgraduate education in that respect, I feel personally concerned about the insane killing of blacks by fellow blacks and believes that this research and similar ones in that ilk may provide the spring board towards evolving of practical projects and programmes that may help ameliorate the sad situation.

Literature Review

Reputed as one of the few major global financial and economic hubs, London's crime rate has been on the downward trend over the last couple of years. It was very high with varying daily rate for murder which could at times be as high as four in just a day (LeBlond, 2009). According to the 2014, London Metropolitan Police Crime Map, only two of the city's thirty two boroughs, Richmond Upon Thames and Bexley, has below average crime rate. Two others, Camden and Islington are above average, Westminster is high while the rest are average. None was low. According to the Citizens Report, 2008 had the highest rate of teenage homicide between 2005 and 2013 via stabbing (79.3%), shooting (10.3%), beating (6.9%), arson (0.0%), strangling (0.0%) and others (3.45%).

Though in the last decade the average annual rate has dropped, there seems to be a shift in the type of murder especially in 2013 where those who died via shooting rose to 33.33% and stabbing went down to 58.33%. The rise in killings from shooting goes beyond teenagers as it is reflected in the general statistics to have upped from 11 in 2009 to 29 in 2010, with the black community having the highest rise from 8 to 15, due to easy accessibility of people, especially youngsters, to guns. Within the same period, the total victims of 'violent murder' in the city rose from 125 to 132 respectively (Davenport, 2011). Though these records indicate a general decrease since 1978, it also shows an increase for teenage murders jumping from 3 to 18. May we note hear that the rate of death from murder weapons, especially guns does not necessarily reflect the actual victims that were shot as some survived with medical help.

Three independent studies by experts came up with three different reasons into causes of crime among youths including unemployment, had been victims of rape, beaten, bullied, post-war freedom and individualism (Cohen, 1995). Childhood behavioural challenges were cited as a causative factor (Topping, 2009) and that this can best be tackled by non-racially biased education and meaningful activities for young people (Roberts, 2008)

Poverty, considered by Oxford Dictionary to be 'the state of being extremely poor', is defined by the United Nations to include 'the denial of opportunities and choices that are widely regarded as essential to lead a long creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-esteem and the respect of Others'

(www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/briefing/poverty/poverty.pdf). Though the poverty rate among UK ethnic groups have seemingly fallen at similar rate over the last decade prior to the 2008 economic downturn, the income poverty rate varied substantially between ethnic groups: Bangladeshis (65%), Pakistanis (55%) and black Africans (45%) have the highest rates; black Caribbeans (30%), Indians (25%), white Other (25%) and white British (20%) have the lowest rates (Palmer G; Kenway P, 2007) .

Education has always been deemed an easy route to break a family's poverty circle but this may not be optimally achieved in the UK as education regulators, OFSED's 2012/2013 report indicate

that the government's 'sure start' programme has not succeeded at closing the gap between the poor and rich children and it asked for the nursery system to be more structured to prepare children better for early education. Could this type of failure have led to many a poor child's loss of interest in education and easy recruit for anti-social behaviours later in life?

The Centre for Social Justice expounded on the issue of the effect of family breakdown resulting in dysfunctional homes with half-baked youths requires to be seen as a major focus on crime in the city of London and many youths on the online forum, Talk London, also seemed neither interested in the Algebra, English, etc taught in schools nor feel that the school curricular is teaching them subjects of more practicability to life after school.

Blacks make up about fifteen percent of the London population but in 2010, police data did not only indicate that two-thirds (67%) of shootings and over half (54%) of robberies and street crimes were committed by black men who, ironically, were also found to be as twice likely to be victims of such crime. Meanwhile, when feminine crime statistics was considered, black women were liable for almost half (45%) of knife crime, 58% in gun crimes and 52% in robberies (Camber, 2010). Are all these figures from random routine policing in London or are blacks being stereotyped by police or media as some people believe? (Syed R, 2012)

According to someone who actually lived there but did not take to crime, as neighbourhoods becomes populated by the poor, often blacks, it breeds a culture of the jungle where you are either aggressive or become victim of aggression. Do blacks kill their 'bad eggs' in self-policing as the police allegedly ignore their community? (Citizen Report UK, 2011). This may be why it is said that blacks are least likely to report a crime to the police, a position confirmed by government 2013 crime statistics.

While the crimes committed by those successfully prosecuted, regardless of the colour of their skin may not be disputed, the percentages ascribed to above may need to change if the police had not been recording up to a fifth of the crimes reported to it due to 'workload pressure', according to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), which inspects forty three police forces in England and Wales (BBC, 2014). With some of the unrecorded crime in this report being rape, it may not be known exactly which crimes slips through the police net, aside from those that result in death. The problem may actually be caused by the understaffing in the police, most likely to be partly due to large scale retirement of officers (Peacock, 2008)

Profile of London



Greater London Shown Within England



Flag of London

As home to the revered British royalty and government, London, the capital of Britain, is truly an international melting pot of diversity with over two hundred and fifty languages spoken by the inhabitants. London is a reputed global financial, fashion, theatre and shopping hub with its cherished historical buildings and an effective transportation system. Despite its cosmopolitan nature, there seems to be largely subsumed sharp division along racial lines bothering on presumed institutional bias. While this assumption may at times not be true, it is highly believed by a section of the minorities, especially the black race and this has informed their attitude to government and its operational arms like the police. This builds up anti-state rebellion and the feeling of unfair societal treatment has the tendency to make them resort to crime as a means of

easy financial accomplishment and social status within their communities where it seems the smartest, most callous and the first to pull the trigger survives.

Demographics

Size: 1,572.1 Square Kilometers

Population: 8,196,700 (2011 estimate)

Population Density: 5,223 per Km²

Ethnicity Breakdown: 49.9% White British

14.9% Other White

18.4% Asian

13.3% Black

5% Mixed

3.4% Other

Religion: Christian 58.2%

Muslim 8.2%

Hindu 4.1%

Jewish 2.1%

Sikh 1.5%

No religion: 15.8%

Education: London has some of the finest and highly ranked educational institutions in the world.

Greater London Established: 1st April 1965

Greater London Established By: London Government Act 1963

Methodology

In addition to a focus group, a questionnaire was administered directly and/or over the phone amongst a sample population that fairly reflect the population of London. As a subject of common interest to all, the response was great and the genuine responses were given freely. From my volunteer work in rural and poor inner city communities in Nigeria and UK, I was able to design a questionnaire that met the yearnings of the people and thereby attracted good responses.

The literature review was extensive where I tried as much as possible to infuse opinions of all relevant parties to the issue in an unbiased approach aimed at getting to the root cause and the escalating factors. While poverty has been blamed over the years for black violence, little has been done to assess what factors breeds poverty in the black community to the point of becoming entrenched rolling from one generation to the next and on and on.

Due to the sensitivity of the issue, and the black community's seeming inherent lack of trust in the police and others outside those that they personally know, I ignored taking voice responses as I suspect that it may not attract enough respondents and even if I did, they may be reluctant to state their true thought about the issue and rather had them choose options that well provided me with enough accurate data to be collated and analyzed.

In all, I administered ten questionnaires to people of different race, age and economic strata in London. I did not only save time by doing this, I was able to further clarify the question where required and also assure respondents of the usefulness of what they were required to do, that it is hoped findings would contribute towards stemming the mayhem.

The questions asked were streamlined to get responses on the following key areas of the research

- Their general view about crime in London
- Blacks and Crime in London
- Any possible stereotyping by police and/or the media
- Possible Causes and the escalating factors
- Possible Solutions and best way to carry them out

Ethical Concerns

The designed questionnaire was initially submitted to the Evelyn Oldfield Unit Ethics Committee for approval and possible suggested amendments. Participants were assured from the inception that their contribution and identity would be completely anonymous as names and any personal descriptions would not be featured in the report of findings. This eliminated whatever resistance they may have towards partaking in the exercise. The non-blacks who participated were

encouraged to express their true state of mind as no one would label them racist or make them a target for attack.

All participants were assured of how the research findings would be disseminated and I offered them the option of providing a contact address, if they want, so that a copy may be mailed to them. They were asked not to answer any of the questions that they don't feel comfortable about and may even choose to withdraw from participating in the process at any point.

I did not offer any incentive to the participants as an inducement. They all participated voluntarily and willingly without any covert or overt duress. In order to ensure complete safe keeping of the data collected, all completed questionnaires would be submitted to the Evelyn Oldfield Ethics Committee for safe keeping

Chapter 2: Research Findings

(1.) How do you rate the level of crime in London?

The findings indicate that most residents of London are still generally concerned about the rate of crime in the City though they appreciate the fact that it has been on the downward trend for about a decade now, a development confirmed by the metropolitan police annual crime report.

(2.) Which type of crime are you most concerned about?

As highlighted in the police report, this research found that of major concern is threat of terrorism, the continuous rise in gun crimes, the disturbing issue of the un-abating black-on-black crime, spontaneous unprovoked attack by a total stranger when they walk the streets especially in quiet neighbourhoods or near crime hot spots where they have to constantly look over their shoulders. This has raised a specter of suspicions and high anxieties even where this was not necessary.

(3.) Have you, a family member or friend been a victim of crime?

About sixty percent of the respondents had been a victim or has a family member/friend affected by crime in London. However the rate varies across the boroughs as reflected in the different London localities of the survey participants and confirmed by the crime map of the metropolitan police

(4.) Do you think any race is stereotyped in respect of crime?

Thirty percent, including all the black participants responded in the affirmative while half gave a safe 'may be'. Majority of the non-blacks were very dodgy when it came to this issue and were either very diplomatic in their response or opted to skip the question all together. As it is a sensitive issue, they would rather be non-committal in order not to offend anybody. Though police would be the first to deny stereotyping of any race, it may seem that the black community are distancing themselves from the law enforcers as even with its rising crime rate, the community is officially recorded by the government's 2013 crime statistics as the least likely to report a crime

(5.) If yes, which race do you think is stereotyped?

Half of those surveyed, including all the blacks, believe that blacks are stereotyped when it comes to crime. The young black males feel that their colour, mode of dressing, the way they talk and walk are enough trigger to be stopped and searched. Sixty percent of those who think blacks are stereotyped by police in this research are non-blacks. If police is not bias, as one is want to believe, then is there a media conspiracy against blacks as claimed in articles like (Syed R, 2012)?

(6.) What do you think would make a black person attack a fellow black? (Please select all that may be applicable)

This multiple choice question listing intra/inter family squabbles, intra/inter gang squabbles, prestige, economic gains, territorial control and loss of cultural values, had half of the respondents selecting all as possible cause and/or escalating factors. To them, it can only be a little bit of everything with each case a little unique from the next judging by its peculiar circumstance. Only ten percent each believed that the reason may exclusively be intra-gang squabbles or loss of cultural values. The police report states that this may be due to the growing gang culture in the community.

(7.) How do you view alleged police ‘targeting of blacks’ in stop-and search, investigations, etc?

This is not a subject that many Londoners want to talk about and quite a few had to ask if I was doing the research for the police. About thirty percent believe the so-called targeting of blacks by police to be true on the average while forty percent decided to skip the question completely. As blacks and police cannot really avoid each other as vital component parts of London, there is need to discard the accusations and find a common mutually beneficial ground to forge new trust and restore ‘normalcy’ in the communities.

(8.) What do you think escalates black-on-black crime? (Please tick as many as is applicable)

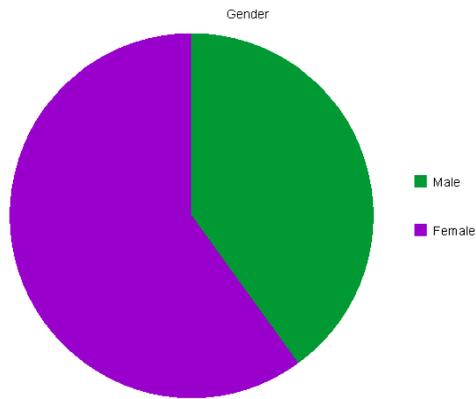
It is interesting to notice that many Londoners were eager to make their opinion known on this subject and most respondents literally ticked all the options ranging from intra/inter gang fights, easy access to weapons, economic depression in the black community, non-functional education, state-induced loss of parental control, light court punishments, inadequate social welfare, etc. Others mentioned hopelessness of an average black person in making it through the larger society no matter how well educated the person may be. This may be a subjective untrue argument and self-defeatist but unfortunately this is what quite a number of blacks believed.

(9.) Are there any activities that may reduce such crime within the communities?

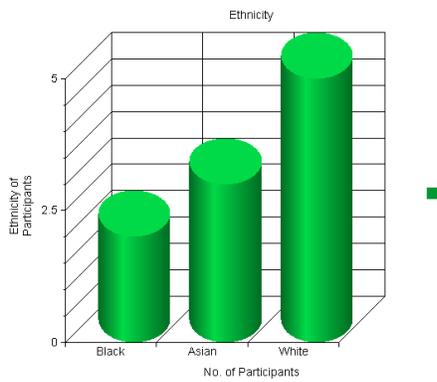
The need for more accessibility to quality education, restructuring of the curricula to be of more relevance to the students after school, job skills training for the unemployed and encouraging youths to be self-employed were acknowledged. However in view of the peculiarity of the current state of many black youths, respondents also want government to discourage family breakups by de-incentivizing single parenthood as well as initiate inner city workshops/seminars to boost self confidence and promote dignity of labour. Only ten percent abstained. To start with, as indicated in the Ofsted 2012/2013 report, the disadvantage in early education needs to be addressed to at least give more future generation of blacks chance to make success of their lives

(10.) What is your gender, ethnicity and age group? (Please select from each sub-group as appropriate)

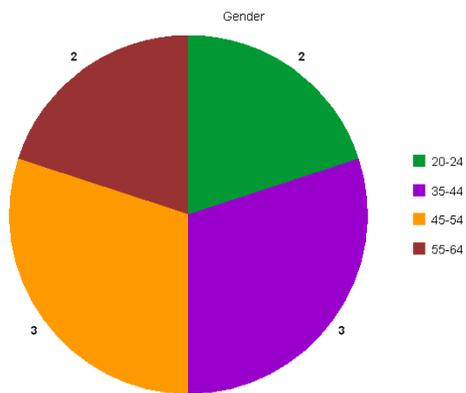
a. Gender:



b. Ethnicity



c. Age Group



Chapter 3:

Discussions & Conclusions

This research focused on the perception of black-on-black crime generally by the people of London vis-à-vis the total crime rate in the city.

Causes

- *Dysfunctional Family Units*
The high rate of divorce and children born out of ‘normal’ family setting where both father and mother are not present at the same time to mould the child’s character and attitude to conform to acceptable societal norms, make the young ones tends to see themselves as grown-ups early in life and are mostly not receptive to the warnings of the mother, with whom they live. This is well expounded in the Centre for Social Justice Report that was earlier cited.

- *Loss of Hope In A Fruitful Future and Education*

Most affected black youths don’t tend to see any positives in their future prospects if they should go through with their education and pursue opportunities within the system just like everybody else would want to do. With high rate of poverty amongst the black population and the OFSED report that poor children have ill-prepared for primary education, learning may not be providing blacks the tool towards breaking the family poverty circle. There are however a lot of other black youths who are bent to live the straight life and resist all peer pressure to veer off towards crime.

- *Lack of Trust in Government & Its Agencies*
A lot of black youth raised in a typical poor black community has the ‘we and them’ attitude when it comes to government and its agencies based on real or unreal perception of bias and ill treatment.
- *Negative Role Models*
With those older than them living a life of crime seemingly with impunity and flashing the spoils of their trade in terms of cash, wine, cars and clothes, these youths gets attracted and see it as a better option than getting education and a normal job

- *Easy Access To Weapons*

The ease with which these boys access weapons especially guns, are alarming and as long as this remains so, crime as an easy means to acquire wealth, command respect and settle real or imaginary differences, would continue to attract a lot of them

- *Feeling of 'No Option'*

Rightly or wrongly, a lot of these youths make themselves and anyone who cares to listen to them to believe that the society has left them with no option but to take to crime. They believe that they are endangered species and have to strike first before they are stricken in a jungle justice.

- *Over Reliance On State Benefits*

While poverty cuts across all races in London and is not an exclusivity of blacks, it is more in percentage terms and more pronounced in their communities due to other factors that may be fallouts from their ways of life. The very thought of accessing state benefit with ease has also become a de-motivating factor for some youths especially when they believe that there is little difference in working for the national minimum wage and getting state support.

- *Making The Difference*

It suffice to state here that there are many black youths who vow to live clean lives, stay in education or vocational training, get a job, have a career and raise a family. These people are making the difference and remains beacons of future hope for others to emulate as they take all the opportunities that society opens to then in order to prosper and positively contribute to national growth. These are the community champions

Chapter 4:

Recommendations

1. Re-orientation of the black community to retrace their step and regain lost cherished and proud moral values
2. Campaign through community-based organizations to propagate the gains of perseverance through the system via education/vocational training and the chance to live clean long career-enriched lives as compared to taking the seeming short-cut route through crime and end up dead or in jail
3. Confidence-building and priceless value of dignity of labour should be incorporated in school curricula
4. School peace-projects led by professionals in peace and conflict resolution should be launched to teach youths through workshops the techniques for resolving conflicts without resorting to violence
5. While government cannot keep anyone in marriage against their will, it needs to revisit the issue of single parent-hood and make it as less attractive as possible.
6. Appointing of positive role models from poor backgrounds who have succeeded in life via the 'normal acceptable route' and in doing so, rejected crime as an option in life.
7. Continuous re-orientation of the police on fair policing in a multi cultural society with diverse ethnicity and religious affiliations
8. Set up community-led early-warning-early-response mechanism (EWER) in hot spots and guided by peaceful conflict resolution experts

The Strengths and Limitations of Research

While my over a decade experience as a community worker in Nigeria and Britain came in handy in this research, the topic was an obstacle to a great extent and I had to do a lot of explanations and offer re-assurances without cajoling or persuading anyone to partake

The time frame was also ideal and focus group was very helpful in offering quite enriching opinions that greatly enriched the final outcome

I used my social networks to reach respondents. This made it easier for me to get their support and participation since they know and trust me.

While the questionnaire was an invaluable tool, many of the participants expressed additional personal opinions with some permitting me to reflect it in my report as long as their identity is not revealed by doing so.

Moderating the focus group was not that easy as there were a lot of emotions expressed as the discussions were frank and open with everyone assured that it is a no-holds-barred session where whatever anybody says remains within the group.

The lack of budget was an extreme handicap to this research as ideally the volunteers were supposed to be paid something and mobility as well as typing, photocopy and other costs taken care of

With the right support, I intend to further explore this research topic into the inner circles of the black communities and possibly evolve an on-going corrective project. While noting that this research has been limited by time and the maximum number of words required, if I could do this research again, I would like it to be more extensive in terms of the number of questionnaires administered, the scope and depth of the focus group, the number of literatures reviewed, the involvement of black community leaders and the metropolitan police, talking to current and past gang members as case studies, engaging authorities of schools of selected crime convicts, do comparative analysis of the problem in similar global cities such as New York, probe what causes and/or escalate poverty, etc.

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