

Availability and use of weapons in the neighbourhood as risk factors for criminal offending among prison inmates in Nigeria

Abeeb Olufemi Salaam

Department of Psychology, University of Surrey, Guildford, United Kingdom

Abstract

The current study recruited participants from among the prison inmates in Nigeria to determine the relative impacts of availability and use of weapons in their respective communities prior to incarceration as risk factors for criminal offending. Eight hundred and twenty one participants made up of those awaiting trial and convicts, ranging in age from 16 to 65 years ($M = 30.4$, $SD = 7.6$) were recruited through opportunistic (non probability) sampling across ten medium and maximum security prisons in Nigeria to participate in the study. Adopting the quantitative analysis, the computed outcomes predict the effects of weapon availability as potential risk factors to criminal offending among this group. The implications of the findings for crime reduction policy in targeting offenders who are at risk of committing criminal offences due to weapon availability are emphasised.

Keywords: risk factors, firearms, weapon availability, prison inmates, Nigeria

Background

The impact of breaking the law and the subsequent arrest and incarceration of criminals may spawn negative psychological consequences in offenders, who must rapidly come to terms with the shock of prison life and deal with the burden of knowing that their families may be suffering both emotional and financial losses because of them (Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999). Given the effects of incarceration on the offender and everyone around them, it appears necessary to explore motivating factors to criminal offending in order to tackle or address the causes of crime than to opt for punishing offenders through incarceration. Of these motivating variables, the risk factors model is increasingly visible and popular. Risk factors model assumes that

there are multiple, and often overlapping, risk factors in an individual's background that interact with one another and consequently increases an individual's vulnerability or propensity to engage in negative behaviour in the absence of protective factors. In other words, risk factors are those characteristics, variables, or hazards that, if present for a given individual, make it more likely that this individual, rather than someone selected from the general population, will develop problem behaviour (Mrazek & Haggerty, 1994).

One of the most reliable risk factors to criminal offending obtainable in offender researches is availability and use of weapon in the neighbourhood (Kleck & Hogan, 1999; Turner, Simons, Berkowitz, & Frodi, 1977; Wells & Horney, 2002). It has long been argued that weaponry and firearms could give individuals who are vulnerable to inflicting injury on others the courage to attempt aggressive acts that they would otherwise be afraid to attempt. In particular, a weapon may be especially important in facilitating attacks by armed robbers or other violent offenders against their victims. Psychologists have also argued that the sight of weapons could stimulate aggression through classical conditioning processes resulting from the learned associations involving aggressive acts and weapon use (for a review, see Turner, Simons, Berkowitz, & Frodi, 1977). Indeed, the presence of aggressive environmental cues such as weapons can increase the accessibility of hostile, aggressive thoughts and lead to more aggressive behaviour (for a review, see Brennan & Moore, 2009).

Given the facilitative part played by weapon as an important stimulus for dominance and aggression, it is unsurprising that armed robbers and other violent offenders are more likely to carry weapons and firearms to perpetrate their violent acts. While it is appreciated that the use of weapons and firearms by violent offenders is a global phenomenon (for a review, see Brennan & Moore, 2009; Igbo, 2001; Kleck & Hogan, 1999; Turner, Simons, Berkowitz, & Frodi, 1977; Wells & Horney, 2002), the sources of firearms, such as rifles, pistols, and other dangerous, locally made weapons used by violent offenders, in Nigeria has raised many of the usual questions among the general public. However, it can be speculated that the country's problems with small arms and weaponry can be dated back to the 1967-70 civil war, during which the southeast made a failed attempt to secede. During this period, most able bodied men enlisted- either voluntarily or by conscription into the armed forces as fighting soldiers, especially on the rebel Biafran side. Those enlisted into the armed forces included the unemployed and underemployed, school leavers, and drop-outs, as well as some members of the criminal population. These new recruits learned how to use rifles, machine guns, and other firearms against their opponents. At the end of the hostilities, it appears that many defeated and demobilised soldiers did not surrender their weapons to the federal authorities. Some

of these weapons were even abandoned at the war fronts, while others were either buried underground or carefully concealed in bushes to make them easily retrievable should the need arise. Such a need could be for criminal purposes, as in the case of armed robbery. There is also the possibility that some serving policemen and military officers who returned to the barracks at the end of the war might have given out their officially assigned weapons to persons with a criminal intent in exchange for cash (Igbo, 2001). The implication of all this is that there is a possibility that individuals with access to weapons may be tempted to resort to criminality.

Besides the civil war risk phenomenon, it can be contemplated that cross border smuggling as a result of the civil wars in neighbouring countries like Sierra Leone and Liberia may have led to the proliferation of arms and weaponry into Nigeria. This is facilitated by huge cross-border smuggling and mercenary activities (from Chad and Niger, for example) and the country's long, porous borders that are poorly policed due to the inadequate resources and the lack of capacity of the security agencies (Ginifer & Ismail, 2005). The three most notorious border posts for the illicit smuggling of small arms and weaponry into the country, as reported by Ginifer and Ismail, are the Idi-Iroko and Seme (in the south-western States of Lagos and Ogun), Warri (in Delta State), and the border posts in the Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states in the north-east.

Although various potential sources from which offenders in the country could obtain weapons have been highlighted above, there is little or no empirical evidence on the sources of the weapons used by offenders in Nigeria, nor have there been many studies examining the probable contributions of weapon availability in the neighbourhood as potential risk factors for criminal offending in the country. In response to this, the current study recruited participants from among the prison inmates in order to determine the relative significance of the use of firearms to criminal offending among this group. The patterns of relationships between the use of firearms and the criminal history of the participants were also explored. It is hoped that the findings from the current study will have the potential to inform the crime reduction policy in Nigeria, by providing an indication of the form and size of the problem under investigation, in addition to policing strategies aimed at stemming the supply and use of weaponry to perpetrate criminal/violent offending.

Ethical considerations

The research received a favourable ethical opinion from the University of Surrey Ethics and Quality Committee. Permission to access prisoners was obtained from the Comptroller General of Prisons in Nigeria. The Comptroller instructed the Assistant

Comptroller of Prisons (Administration) to write an approval letter for the researcher to be able to visit prisons across the following states for the purpose of data collection: Kano, Oyo, Edo, Delta, Abia, Lagos, and the Federal Capital Territory in Abuja (see table 1 & figure 1).

To ensure the confidentiality and informed consent of the participants, prison inmates recruited for the study were told –

- not to put their names or any of the pages of the questionnaire or put any marks that might identify them
- that their participation in the research was voluntary
- that the return of a completed questionnaire constituted informed consent to participate in the study, and
- that the respondents should not discuss their responses with other inmates during the questionnaire administration session.

Methodology

Research population and sampling procedures

At the time of collecting the data that inform the findings of the present study, there were 227 prisons across the country (including maximum and medium security, satellites prisons and 11 farm centres) holding approximately 46,000 inmates, comprising those awaiting trial, convicts, detainees and condemned prisoners. Of these prisons, the maximum security ones take into custody all classes of prisoner, including condemned convicts, lifers, and those on long term sentences. The medium security prisons also take into custody both convicts and remand inmates, but mostly inmates on short term sentences. The satellite prisons, on the other hand, are intermediate prison camps set up in areas where the courts are far from the main prisons. They serve the purpose of providing remand centres especially for those whose cases are going to courts within the areas. When convicted, they could be easily moved to appropriate convict prisons at which to serve their jail terms. On the last note, the farm centres are agricultural prison camps that have been set up solely to train inmates in agricultural based vocations. The rationale behind this is to equip the inmates with the agricultural based skills they will have to depend upon after completing their jail term. Of these prisons, the researcher was only allowed by the prison authorities to recruit participants from among the convicts and those awaiting trial in nine medium and one maximum security prisons (see table 1 & figure 1), that represent participants across the tribes, religions, and geo-political divides in Nigeria.

However, it should be highlighted that it has always been the tradition in Nigerian prisons to select leaders among the inmates who liaise between the prison authorities and the other inmates. The leadership of each cell is selected by the prison warder. In the North of the country, the leadership of the cell is called Seriki, while they are mostly addressed as Provost in the Eastern and South Western parts of Nigeria. The Serikis/Provosts are well recognised and respected among the inmates, and normally serve as intermediaries between the prison authorities and the rest of the inmates with regard to the grievances and other issues relating to the general welfare of the prison inmates. The instructions that the Serikis/ Provosts give to their fellow inmates are generally followed by other inmates, who see the Seriki/Provost as a superior inmate. Because of their influence, the researcher ensured that he established good rapport with the Serikis/Provosts in order to facilitate the recruitment of the participants (inmates) for the study from a larger group (prison inmates) through an opportunistic sampling technique. The system of opportunistic sampling (i.e., non-probability technique) is justified in this type of research because the often-chaotic nature of booking facilities does not lend itself to systematic random sampling (for a review, see Bennet, 1998; Wish & Gropper, 1990).

Originally in the ten prisons visited for the administration of questionnaire, 979 inmates were approached and 821 respondents were considered for the analysis. Questionnaires were discarded when they were largely incomplete, illegible, or contained similar answer sets for all responses. The responses from the few female inmates were also discarded as they contributed a tiny number to the overall sample. The following are the breakdown of the prisons visited and the patterns of the response from the respondents:

Table 1: Response rates from each prison visited

Prisons visited & sample percentage	No administered	Valid Response	Percentage of response rate
Kuje Prison Abuja (11.7%)	103	96	93.2%
Central Prison Kano (10.5%)	99	86	86.9%
Goran Dutse Prison Kano (11.0%)	119	90	75.6%
Agodi Prison Ibadan (16.9%)	145	139	95.9%
Oko Prison Benin (08.2%)	82	67	81.7%
Central Prison Benin (09.4%)	90	77	85.6%

Umuhia Prison (08.7%)	90	71	78.9%
Aba Prison (06.8%)	70	56	80%
Ikoyi Prison (09.4%)	95	77	81.1%
Kirikiri Maximum Prison (07.6%)	86	62	72.1%
Total (100%)	979	821	83.9%

Figure 1: Map of Nigeria



Note: Data were collected from prisons across Kano, Lagos, Oyo, Lagos, Abia and Edo States, including Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Measures

A self report standardised scale was used to elicit a response from the participants. While it appreciated that the use of self report is vulnerable to manipulation and self presentation biases in the offender samples, due to the common belief that

offenders are 'cons' who should not be trusted and would not hesitate to lie or manipulate their responses to psychological measures, evidence exists that self-report questionnaires can be an accurate and robust instrument of data collection from the offender population (Kroner & Loza, 2001; Mills, Loza, & Kroner, 2003). What is important is that the questions or items on the self report questionnaire should be relevant to the characteristics being measured. Having ensured this, the self report scale used to elicit a response from the participants in the current study covered a range of topics, including personal demographic characteristics, criminal history, and weapon availability and use prior to incarceration.

- *Personal Demographic Characteristics:* To ensure that the researcher has recruited a wide variety of prison inmates, the participants were asked to state their age, gender, ethnicity, religion, highest educational achievement, occupation and marital status before arrest.
- *The Criminal History Scale:* This is a standardised scale developed by the researcher to measure the respondents' previous contact with criminal justice system. It contains questions on the arrest history, prison status, reason for admission, and the conviction history of the respondents. A cumulative index of the criminal history scale was constructed with a Cronbach alpha of 0.70.
- *Measure of weapon availability and use:* The respondents were asked to respond to a number of questions about firearms/weapon availability and their perception of crime. They were asked to indicate: (a) whether they had ever been injured by a gunshot in the past; (b) whether they had shot at someone or attacked anyone with a weapon in the past; (c) whether they had carried a gun with them whilst committing a crime, or had ever used a gun to commit a crime; (d) whether it was important to have a gun in their neighbourhood; and (e), if so, what was the reason for this. The participants were also asked to list any other weapons that they had used in the past while committing a crime. The weapon availability and use measure adopted in the current study also demonstrated good coefficient reliability, with a Cronbach alpha of 0.82.

Analytic strategies

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for data analysis. A combination of univariate (frequency counts and odds ratio), bivariate (chi square statistics), and multivariate (logistic regression) analyses was employed to make statistical decisions from the data collected from the participants. In particular, the univariate (frequency counts) analysis was used to determine the demographic

characteristics and level of the participants' accessibility to and use of weapon and firearms before the present incarceration. The odds ratio statistics was used to determine the risk estimate of weapon availability and use by the prison inmates. The difference between weapon accessibility and use among different categories of previous offences and prison status of the participants was determined by chi square statistics. The extent to which weapon accessibility could contribute to criminal offending among the participants was also established by logistic regression analysis.

Results

Demographic characteristics

The 821 participants comprised: 33.0% Igbo, 22.4% Yoruba, 19.2% Hausa, 8.3% Edo, 1.5% Fulani, and 1.2 % Urohobo tribe. Other minority tribes made up the rest (13.6%). The age range of the participants was between 16 and 65 years, with a mean age of 30.34 (S.D. =7.6). Christians (60%) and Muslims (38.9%) dominated the religious faiths of the participants. There are also a few traditionalists (0.4%), and 0.7% did not declare their religious faith. Prior to their confinement, more than half (52.4%) were married, (45.9 %) single, and (1.7 %) divorced. Over half 65% of the sample had obtained a secondary education or less, with 28.9% having received a diploma or university degree, and a small proportion of 3.9% having an Arabic education. Arabic education describes a process of sending children and wards to Mallams (teachers) to study Quran, Hadith and other branches of Islamic knowledge. Regarding the family background of the participants, more than half were from a polygamous background (59.8%), while the remaining 40.2% were from monogamous families.

Criminal history of the participants

The descriptive analysis of criminal history of the participants from self report indicates that the majority of the participants had a history of a previous arrest (73 %), and 27% were first-time offenders. With regards to the current prison status of the participants, almost two third were awaiting trial (62.6%), and the remaining 37.4 % were convicted. Their durations of admission into the prison varied, with more than half of the participants having been in custody for up to three years (48.2%). Others had been in custody between four and ten years or more. Various reasons were given for being in custody. Prominent among them were armed robbery (39.7%), burglary and theft (17.3%), drug related offences (17.2%), assault (9.3%),

manslaughter (5.8%), fraud (4.1%), conspiracy to defraud (4.0%), and other miscellaneous offences (6.7%). Although it would have been appropriate to focus on offenders who had engaged in interpersonal crime or solely gun crime in order to obtain more precise results, the practical reality is that it was not feasible to group the participants according to their offences during the data collection due to the logistic problem associated with prison rules in the country. Nevertheless, the response of participants who admitted to having engaged in interpersonal violence among the inmates was used to make predictions that inform the findings of the present study.

Firearms availability, possession and use

Out of the participants, 49.7% admitted to the accessibility of firearms in their neighbourhood; and a third (34.8%) admitted that they had access to a gun, and other weapons. Various reasons were given for using firearms in their neighbourhood: protection and self defence, or for hunting or game expeditions. Out of the 34.8% of the participants who admitted having access to a gun, 24.4% confessed that they had shot at someone. Similarly, 25.7% of them admitted to gun possession while committing crime. Of this particular, 25.7%, 9.6% were presently arrested for armed robbery or violent offences (see table 2). These responses were given for why the participants had firearms when committing the particular crime (i.e. in case they needed it, they always carry a firearm, etc.)

Table 2: Firearms availability, possession and use

<i>Firearms variables</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Accessibility to firearms		
Easy accessibility	408	49.7
Not easy	413	50.3
Personal access to a gun		
Yes	286	34.8
No	535	65.2
Previous shot at someone		
Yes	200	24.4
No	621	75.6
Gun possession while committing crime		
Yes	211	25.7
No	610	74.3

List of different guns used in the past: 5 loaded pump, AK47, Barreta Pistol, Buzita, Dummy gun, GPMG, K2 rifle, Pump 8, KULIZO, locally made pistol, MARK4, Revolver, Scorpion, Sub-machine gun.

List of other weapons used in the past: arrow, axe, broken bottle, catapult, cattle horn, hammers, iron rod, jack knife, stick, sword, plank, dagger, UTC axe.

Almost a fifth of all the participants (18.1%) confessed to having been previously shot by someone. They were probed further about who shot them, and table 3 summarises their varied responses.

Table 3: History of gunshot injury

Who shot them?	Frequency	Percentage
To extort forced confession by police	37	24.5
By victims of armed robbery operation	19	12.6
Special Anti Robbery Squad (SARS)	16	10.6
Community vigilante	15	09.3
Odua Peoples Congress (OPC)	14	09.2
Prison Anti riot squad	13	08.6
Armed robbers	13	08.6
Secret cult clashes	11	07.3
During the Biafra war	07	04.6
Port Harcourt Militants	06	03.9
Unknown hunter	02	01.3

The following summarise the categories of previous convicted offences within participants with history of gun shot injury. Property and violent offenders were the most likely group to be shot and this is statistically significant (Chi square 65.9 $p < .0001$)

Table 5: Previous conviction by history of gun shot injury

Offence Categories	History of gun shot injury	
	Yes	No
Violent offences	79 (10.0%)	192(24.3%)
Property offences	39(4.9%)	76(9.6%)
Substance related offences	05(0.6%)	84(10.6%)
Miscellaneous offences	14(1.8%)	144(18.2%)
First offender	14(1.8%)	144(18.2%)

Chi square analysis was also employed to determine the differences between categories of previous convicted offences within participants who confirmed availability of firearms in their neighbourhood (see table 6).

Table 6: Categories of previous convicted offences within participants who confirmed availability of firearms in their neighbourhood

Offence Categories	Availability of firearms in the neighbourhood		χ^2	df	p
	Yes	No			
Violent offences	118	153	8.1	1	0.00*
Non violent offences	199	163			

Note: *p<0.050

There was significant difference between categories of previous convicted offences and availability of firearms in the neighbourhood.

Note: Violent offences include armed robbery, murder, assault, manslaughter, weapons possession, cultism, etc

Non violent offences include property (e.g., theft, housebreaking, economic crimes (419), conspiracy to steal); substance related (e.g., drug dealing or possession, alcohol offences) and miscellaneous offences (e.g., traffic violation, wandering, gambling, trespassing, breaking curfew).

Using an odds ratio to determine the risk estimate of weapon availability and use by the prison inmates, there were statistically significant effects of availability of and accessibility to firearms to criminal offending among the participants (see table 7).

Table 7: Risk estimate of accessibility to firearms and criminal offending

Variables	95 % Confidence Interval			
	Odds Ratio Value	Lower	Upper	p
History of gun shot injury (reference: availability of firearms in the neighbourhood)	1.70	1.18	2.44	.004*
Availability of firearms in the neighbourhood (reference: previous arrest history)	1.58	1.16	2.15	.004*
History of gun shot injury (reference: access to a gun)	2.21	1.55	3.17	.000*
Previous shot at someone (reference: access to a gun)	11.07	7.11	17.24	.000*

Notes: * indicates statistically significant effect at the 0.05 level

Logistic regression analysis

Where criminal offending index was the dependent variable, the regression model (adjusted $R^2 = 0.338$, $F_{1,379} = 3.511$, $p < 0.05$) was predicted by weapon availability ($t = 2.444$, $p < 0.015$, $\beta = 0.124$) which indicates that accessibility to weapon could motivate offending among the participants.

Discussion of major findings

The current study focussed on the role of weapon availability as potential risk factor in criminal offending among prison inmates in Nigeria. The participants were recruited from ten prisons across five states in Nigeria, including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The respondents represent various ethnic groups (e.g. Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, Fulani, Urohobo, and Edo) with different religious affiliations (i.e., Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion). The majority of the participants are also awaiting trial, which suggests that they have pending cases to be determined in the law courts, and most of the participants have been in custody for between three and ten years. The current research findings replicate the findings of Adesanya et al. (1997) on prison inmates' conditions in Nigeria. Adesanya and colleagues findings indicates that approximately 65 per cent of the Nigerian inmates are awaiting trial, most for up to ten years.

The descriptive analysis of the firearms availability, possession and use by the participants suggest that almost half of them (49.7%) admitted to the accessibility of firearms in their neighbourhood; and a third (34.8%) admitted that they had access to a gun, and other weapons. Although the majority of the participants who admitted to gun possession or the availability of firearms in their neighbourhood justified them under the pretence that an increased fear of personal harm and consequent need for protection was the major motivating factor, the reality is that it may be difficult to obtain information on the sources of past weapons used by the participants, since revealing such information may pose a risk that these sources may be blocked by the law enforcement agents subsequently. Nevertheless, the presence of small arms proliferates in Nigeria cannot be ruled out, as it appears very easy to purchase locally-made guns and other weapons (Igbo, 2001; John, Mohammed, Pinto & Nkanta, 2007). There is also a possibility that criminals may seize weapons belonging to the police when they attack the latter, as this sometimes occur in Nigeria.

A small proportion of those who admitted to having access to a gun have a history of gun shot injuries. The reasons given for previous gunshot injuries vary, but two major facts can be deduced from the responses. Firstly, some admitted that they were shot by the police to force a confession during interrogation. While the police authority in Nigeria consistently denies the existence and use of lethal arms and torture to extract statements from suspects, evidence abounds from the records of suspects and prison inmates of the extensive use of lethal firearms against suspects, beating and kicking, and the unnecessary use of restraints, such as handcuffs and leg chains (Etanibi & Chukwuma, 2000). In research conducted by Etanibi and Chukwuma (2000) on police community violence in Nigeria, the findings revealed that 81%, 73.2% and 77.5% of the inmate respondents, respectively, reported having been beaten up by the police, threatened with weapons and tortured in police cells. Further, 39.7% reported having been burnt with hot objects, 33.3% receiving electric shocks and 50.8% being pierced by needles or sharp objects.

The other major reason for a previous gunshot injury reported by the participants in the current study was that they were victims of the O'odua People's Congress (OPC) and community vigilante groups. This may also be true because the members of these groups have cashed in on the growing sense of disenfranchisement among the Nigerian population in the face of the soaring armed robbery rate and ineffective policing (Akinyele, 2001; Guichaoua, 2006). Although the use of ethnic militia, like OPC and vigilante groups, to enforce law and order has no basis in the Nigerian judicial system and constitution, their operations are only an attempt to complement the police efforts to combat crime, but they inadvertently undermine the effectiveness of the police. The available evidence shows that members of the OPC, among other vigilante groups in Nigeria, are involved in extra-judicial killings, torture, unlawful detention and serious abuses of the rights of alleged criminals (Akinyele, 2001; Guichaoua, 2006; Human Rights Watch, 2003). To further complement the unlawful activities of these vigilante organisations, some powerful politicians and top government officials are known to have hijacked some of these organisations and used them to threaten, intimidate and even kill their political opponents (International Crisis Africa Report, 2007).

It is also interesting to note that few respondents admitted that they had been shot during an armed robbery by their victims. This may be allowed as a last resort for self defence by wealthy individuals with a license to hold firearms in Nigeria. But the other reasons mentioned for a previous gunshot injury, such as "an unknown hunter", "shot by armed robbers", "during the secret cult clashes", "during the Biafra war", etc., need to be treated with caution, since the respondents may not be being completely honest in this regard. As mentioned earlier, most of them are awaiting

trail, and an admittance to firearms possession and use may implicate them and further compound their case in the law court. Nevertheless, the computed outcomes from the odds ratio and regression analyses predicted that the availability of firearms in the neighbourhood are a potential risk factor and predictor of criminal offending among the participants who were detained or convicted for violent and property offences. This finding can be interpreted from the perspectives of weapon availability or possession could induce a psychological inclination to attack or the psychological strength in offenders to exert control over their victims by using the threat of harm or actual harm. This position is supported by Wells and Horney (2002) with regard to gun possession; more than any other weapon, guns increase the possibility of attack because they empower offenders or their users to inflict damage from a distance, without endangering themselves.

As a last word, it should be acknowledged that the present study suffers from some limitations that must be addressed in future work. Firstly, the participants selected for the present study were male prison inmates. Although it is possible that male participants can be more easily approached, because the researcher who distributed the questionnaire was of the same sex, the domination of the male sample may limit the extent to which we can make an inference about weapon accessibility and use among female prison inmates. It would therefore be better if the future studies recruited an adequate number of female participants in order for such findings to be replicated to the entire prison population of Nigeria. Similarly, it would have been better if the participants recruited for the present study were mainly those arrested and detained for interpersonal crime or veterans of the 1967-70 civil war but, as noted earlier, the pragmatic reality of the circumstances during the data collection process does not allow this because the researcher was constrained to comply with certain regulations in order not to jeopardise his security and that of inmates who participated in the study. It would therefore be better if the future studies recruited a greater depth of subsamples among these groups for the better replication of the findings. The uncorroborated self report method of data collection and the extent to which the respondents underreported or over reported their involvement in various activities and behaviours may as well not be truly determined. Although the researcher assured confidentiality of the participants' response, the research topic is sensitive and the admissions of the participants to previous weapon use are potentially compromising. In this sense, social desirability factors cannot be ruled out, as participants may want to conceal certain information in order to prevent themselves from being implicated. All of the appropriate caveats notwithstanding, the findings of the current study have contributed to research knowledge that will be relevant to researchers, practitioners, and policy makers in the criminal justice system in Nigeria to have a basic

understanding of the impact of weapon availability and use in the neighbourhood as probable risk factors to criminal offending among prison inmates in the country.

Concluding thoughts

The findings of the current study have established the relative contributions of weapon availability as a potential risk factor to criminal offending among prison inmates in Nigeria. To mediate the effects of weapon availability as a risk factor for criminal offending, there needs to be a stringent law and enforcement of the law controlling weapon (firearms) possession and use in the country. While it is appreciated that some local dangerous weapons, such as machetes, cutlasses, and axes, may be difficult to control because of their proliferation in the country, in addition to the fact that firearms are mostly obtained through various means such as theft from armouries and seizures from security officials during robberies, the government should intensify its efforts in tracking the license, possession, and use of small arms, which are largely concentrated in the hands of armed groups, criminal gangs, and elites. Any law enforcement agents, be they serving or retired, who lend out firearms to offenders for them to perpetrate criminal activities should be adequately sanctioned according to the law. The law guarding or protecting unlawful firearms possession and collaboration to possess should make no exception for anyone, if crime induced by weapon availability has to be reduced in the country. It may as well be mentioned that a clearly conceived welfare policy should be put in place by the Nigerian government for demobilised soldiers, militia men, as well as disadvantaged populations. This must be the central feature of crime control policy necessitated by risk of weapon availability. Without this, the prospect of ensuring crime free society aimed at promoting the safety of everyone in the community in a meaningful and sustainable fashion will remain an illusion.

References

Adesanya, A., Ohaeri, J.U., Ogunlesi, A.O., Adamson, T.A., & Odejide, O.A. (1997). Psychoactive substance abuse among inmates of a Nigeria prison population. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 47, 39-44.

Akinyele, R.T. (2001). Ethnic militancy and national stability in Nigeria. A case study of the O'odua People's Congress. *African Affairs*, 100, 623-640.

Bennet, T. (1998). Drugs and crime: the results of research on drug testing and interviewing arrestees. *Home Office Research and Statistics Report 183*.

Brennan, I.R. & Moore, S.C. (2009). Weapons and violence: a review of theory and research. *Aggression and violent Behaviour*, 14, 215-225.

Etanibi, A.E.O., & Chukwuma, I.C. (2000). *Police community violence in Nigeria*. Centre for Law Enforcement Education, Lagos, Nigeria.

Ginifer, J., & Ismail, O. (2005). *Armed violence and poverty in Nigeria. Mini case study for armed violence and poverty initiative*. Centre for International Cooperation and Security, University of Bradford.

Guichaoua, Y. (2007). *Who joins ethnic militias? A survey of the Oodua People's Congress in South-western Nigeria*. CRISE Working Paper No 44, Department of International Development, University of Oxford.

Hagan, J., & Dinovitzer, R. (1999). Collateral consequence of imprisonment for children, communities, and prisoners. *Crime & Justice*, 26, 121-162.

Igbo, E.U.M. (2001). Nigeria's armed robbery problem. In Rwomire, A. *Social problem in Africa: new visions*. Greenwood Publishing Group, pp 173- 189.

International Crisis Africa Report (2007). *Nigeria's election: avoiding a political crisis*. Africa Report No123, 28 March 2007.

John, I. A., Mohammed, A.Z., Pinto, A.D., & Nkanta, C.A. (2007). Gun violence in Nigeria: a focus on ethno-religious conflict in Kano. *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 28, 420-431.

Kleck, G. & Hogan, M. (1999). National case control study of homicide offending and gun ownership. *Social Problems*, 46 (2), 275-293.

Kroner, D., & Loza, W. (2001). Evidence for the efficacy of self-report in predicting violent and nonviolent criminal recidivism. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 16, 168-177.

Mills, J.F., Loza, W., & Kroner, D.G. (2003). Predictive validity despite social desirability: evidence for the robustness of self report among offenders. *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health*, 13 (2), 140-150.

Mrazek, P.J., & Haggerty, R.J. (1994). *Reducing risks for mental disorders: frontiers for preventative intervention research*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Turner, C. W., Simons, L.S., Berkowitz, L., & Frodi, A. (1977). The stimulating and inhibiting effects of weapons on aggressive behaviour. *Aggressive Behaviour*, 3, 355-378.

Wells, W. & Horney, J. (2002). Weapon effects and individual intent to do harm: influences on the escalation of violence. *Criminology*, 40 (2), 265–296.

Wish, E.D. & Gropper, B.A. (1990). Drug testing by the criminal justice system: methods, research and applications. In M. Tonry and J.Q. Wilson, *Drugs and Crime*: London: The University of Chicago Press.

About the Author

Abeeb Olufemi Salaam (PhD.) is a graduating Commonwealth Scholar in the Department of Psychology, University of Surrey, Guildford, United Kingdom. He studied for a PhD on the exploration of the risk factors to substance misuse in the trajectory of criminal offending at the same university.

Address for correspondence: Abeeb Olufemi Salaam, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences, AD Building, University of Surrey, Guildford, Surrey, GU2 7XH, UK

E mail: femisalaam@gmail.com; moolikah@yahoo.com