

Criminological Analysis of Social Values Influence in Crime Prevention and Development Planning in Enugu State, Nigeria

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Abstract: This study explores the criminological analysis of how social values influence crime prevention and development planning in Enugu State, Nigeria. Social values, norms, customs, beliefs, and moral standards shared within a society serves as informal mechanisms of social control that regulate behaviors and maintain social order. This study aims to address the gap of under representing social values as effective informal crime control tools which should be leveraged on to strengthen crime prevention and development planning. Three research questions were raised to guide the study. A sample size of 105 respondents was statistically determined using Chall-Dale Readability Score, drawn from population of 1,012 people comprising the three local government areas that make up Enugu metropolis, the respondents include community elders, traditional leaders, security agents, religious leaders, youth leaders and government officials. Adopted a qualitative approach, simple random and purposive sampling techniques for the study. This study draws its primary data from in-depth interviews, secondary data was got from scholarly articles, policy documents, crime and government reports. Findings reveal that communities with strong adherence to shared values tend to experience lower rates of violent crime especially among the youths. Moreover, social values should be embedded into planning through value reorientation programs, civic education, moral education, youth empowerment, and community policing, to help decline crime rates among societies. This paper concludes by recommending a thorough integration of social values into development planning frameworks through value-based education, participatory governance, and culturally rooted crime prevention strategies.

Key words: Social values, Crime prevention, Informal social control, Criminology, Development planning

Introduction

Social values refer to culturally shared ideas about what is considered right, desirable, and morally acceptable within a society (William & McShane, 2024). Social values could also be perceived to be the bedrock of every society which shapes behaviors, attitudes, relationships and decision making among individuals. These shared ethical norms, moral standards and cultural beliefs such as justice, respect, responsibility, integrity, honesty, communality and solidarity guide how individuals conduct themselves in an acceptable way to promote social cohesion (Ferraro, 2023). Social values serve as informal social controls that influence how people act, even in the absence of legal or institutional surveillance (Nnam, 2024). These values act as a buffer against deviance in the society. Through early socialization, individuals learn to conform not because of external punishment, but due to a sense of moral obligation (Ferraro, 2023). This act of moral obligation serves as a deterrence and crime prevention strategy within societies.

Crime prevention is perceived to be those strategies, policies, and programs aimed at stopping crimes before they occur. It focuses on eliminating the causes, reducing opportunities, and discouraging potential offenders through social, economic, and environmental interventions. Crime prevention focuses on proactive efforts to address the

root causes of criminal behavior before they manifest as actual crimes. When social values like honesty, respect for others, and communal responsibility are emphasized in families, schools, and communities, they serve as moral guides that discourage, prevent, regulate and control behaviors (Alemika, 2023).

Informal social control is perceived to be the unofficial mechanisms through which society regulates individual and group behaviors to conform to accepted norms and values. Unlike formal control such as the police and courts, informal control is exercised through social institutions like family, religion, peer groups, and community networks. Today, strong social values have facilitated control on members of family and society generally by limiting them from getting involved in crime and criminal behaviours (Nnam, 2024).

Criminology refers to the scientific study of crime, criminal behavior, causes, consequences, prevention, and the social reactions to crime. Criminologists acknowledge that crime is not only a legal problem but also a social problem where social institutions (family, religion, community, and schools) play significant roles in shaping behaviors (Oyesoji, 2020). In criminology, the absence and distortion of social values has been identified as a key factor influencing deviant behavior and criminality (Williams & McShane, 2024).

Development planning focuses on the strategic formulation and implementation of policies to promote economic growth, social welfare, and national stability. Development planning should involve great benefits from value-oriented approaches that could reduce crime and enhance social harmony. Social values serve as a bridge between crime prevention and development planning because failure to integrate social values into crime prevention and development planning hampers the effectiveness of policy measures and contributes to a cycle of underdevelopment and insecurity (Williams & McShane, 2024). The researcher observes that strong social values enable limitations of individuals at different levels of the society, starting from the family, this holds members down from indulging in crime.

In many parts of Nigeria, traditional social values such as respect for elders, communal responsibility, and fear of spiritual retribution have historically deterred crimes such as theft, rape and assault among societies. When these values are upheld, youths are mentored by elders and parents alike but when these values erode, crime rises such as cultism and kidnapping, as a result of this, development suffers due to insecurity and lack of cooperation (Nnam, 2024). The gap of under representing social values as effective informal crime control tools which should be leveraged on to strengthen crime prevention and development planning is what this research intends to fill.

Statement of the Problem

The researcher observes that nowadays, many societies face growing challenges in crime prevention and sustainable development due to the decline in traditional social values, this becomes a huge problem facing families, communities and nations at large. The rise in youth delinquency, corruption, cybercrime, gender-based violence, and organized crime is not merely a function of weak legal systems or poverty but also reflects the erosion of ethical and moral standards that once served as powerful deterrents to criminal behavior (Nnam, 2024). There is an observable disconnect between formal crime control mechanisms and the informal social control that stems from shared community values. As a result of this, development initiatives are often undermined by crime-related challenges such as insecurity, social unrest, and lack of public trust. The failure to integrate social values into crime prevention and development planning hampers the effectiveness of policy measures and contributes to a cycle of underdevelopment and insecurity (Williams & McShane, 2024). This study aims to address the gap by critically analyzing how social values can be leveraged on, to strengthen crime prevention and development planning, using insights from criminological theories.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are to:

- 1) Examine the roles of social value as informal mechanisms of crime prevention in Enugu Metropolis.

- 2) Analyze the relationships between the decline of social values and rise in crime in Enugu Metropolis.
- 3) Suggest ways to integrate social values into crime prevention and development policies in Enugu Metropolis.

Research Questions

- 1) What is the role of social value as informal mechanisms of crime prevention in Enugu Metropolis?
- 2) How does the decline of social values contribute to the rise in crime in Enugu Metropolis?
- 3) What strategies could effectively integrate social values into crime prevention and development policies in Enugu Metropolis?

Conceptual Review

Social values act as standards that provide moral guidelines towards individual behaviors and group interactions, shaping what people consider to be good or bad, important or unimportant, acceptable or unacceptable and appropriate or inappropriate. According to Ferraro (2023), social values are collective conceptions of what is considered worthwhile or meaningful in a society, forming the basis for social norms, institutions, and practices. Social values are largely transmitted through socialization agents such as the family, religion, education and the media (Durkheim, 2022). Social values are not personal beliefs but are collectively shared by members of society. These values could be relatively stable but can evolve as a result of changes within cultures, technology and socio-political structures. They also create cohesion and shared identity among members of society which helps to minimize conflicts by providing common moral grounds (Siegelar & Ballard, 2023). These moral grounds serve as crime prevention measures which limit individuals' criminal behaviors across societies.

Crime prevention refers to strategies and measures that seek to reduce the risk of crimes occurring and their potential harmful effects on individuals and society (Afolayan, 2023). In this study, crime prevention is analyzed through the lens of **social values**, how societal norms and value systems act as a deterrent to crime. For instance, communities that emphasize moral upbringing, respect for elders, and integrity tend to have lower crime rates than their counterparts. These communities that embrace morality among her members often have better development plans which would attract good infrastructures that create jobs within the environment to help improve the standard of living of the people (Okafor, 2015).

Development planning involves the formulation and implementation of long-term strategies to improve the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the society, this includes setting goals, allocating resources, and creating policies that promote sustainable development. There is a strong link between underdevelopment and crime. When people lack access to jobs, education, and basic amenities, they may turn to crime as a means of survival (Siegelar & Ballard, 2023). This act deters any effective development plan within the society. In this study, social value is a necessity and needs to be integrated into development planning to ensure a more holistic approach to national development and crime prevention, the significant of social values within communities are enormous and this is why it is perceived to be the informal social control mechanism within societies.

Informal social control refers to those tools and measures through which societies control and limit the behaviours of their members. These mechanisms are applied to help the people conform to the norms and values of their societies. Informal social control is often more effective than formal control because it operates through internalized norms and continuous social interactions among people (Ferraro, 2023). It creates a moral conscience and sense of accountability that discourages deviant behavior. This study highlights the **role of social values** embedded in **informal social control** mechanisms in preventing crime. In many traditional African societies, for example, crime was minimal due to strong communal ties, moral upbringing, and the influence of elders and religious leaders that bond people together and limits them from indulging in crime and criminal activities.

Criminology is the body of knowledge regarding crime as a social phenomenon, which includes within its scope the processes of making laws, breaking laws, and reacting to the breaking of laws (Durkheim (2022).

Criminology helps to explain why people commit crimes, how society reacts to crime through sanctions and policies, how crime can be prevented and how justice can be achieved through criminal justice system and development. For this study, criminology provides the theoretical foundation to analyze how social values shape behavior, deter crime and inform communities and institutions on responses to crime prevention and development planning.

Social Values as Informal Social Control Mechanisms

Social values are foundational to informal mechanisms of crime control. Where legal enforcement is weak or corrupt, social values often act as primary deterrents to crime. For instance, communities that uphold communal responsibility and reputation tend to report lower crime rates because deviation results in shame, exclusion and spiritual sanctions (Okafor, 2015). In sociological and criminological discourse, social values serve as the foundation for informal social control by shaping attitudes, behaviors, and expectations across families, peer groups, religious institutions, and communities (Ibrahim, 2019). These mechanisms play a critical role in maintaining social order and preventing deviance in both traditional and modern societies.

Informal social control is perceived to be the ways through which social groups enforce norms and expectations without formal rules or sanctions. Informal social control operates through socialization by teaching norms and values, sanctions through ridicule or punishment, cultural practices through rituals or storytelling and moral expectations through ethical obligations upheld by the community. These mechanisms are embedded in institutions such as the family being the primary agent of socialization, religious bodies through doctrines and moral teachings, peer groups through peer pressure and traditional authorities through the elders, chiefs and cultural leaders (Alemika, 2023).

In many societies, elders act as moral guides and custodians of culture, using wisdom and mediation to address deviance. Upholding truth and integrity are seen as moral obligation where individuals are taught to value reputation. Through proverbs and stories, individuals learn the importance of diligence and contribution to communal welfare. The well-being of the individual is tied to the well-being of the group, collective responsibility deters crime where wrongdoing is seen as bringing shame to the entire family or community (Nnam, 2024).

Decline of Social Values and Rising Crime

Historically, African communities maintain order through a strong value system rooted in communal living, respect for elders, integrity, moral upbringing, and religious adherence (Oyesoji, 2020). These values were transmitted through the family, traditional institutions, religious bodies, and peer interactions. However, in contemporary times, these informal control mechanisms are gradually being replaced by individualism, materialism, and western cultural influences that prioritize personal gain over communal welfare (Okafor, 2015). The breakdown of extended family structures, loss of moral authority by religious institutions, and weakened traditional leadership has created a vacuum in the regulation of behavior (Ibrahim, 2019).

Over the past few decades, societies, especially in developing nations like Nigeria, Enugu metropolis particularly, have witnessed a significant transformation in their value systems. Traditional African social values, which once played a critical role in informal social control, are increasingly being eroded by modernization, globalization, urbanization and the weakening of community institutions (Siegelar & Ballard, 2023). This erosion has had profound implications for social behavior, particularly in the increasing rates of crime and deviant behavior. The decline of social values such as honesty, integrity, respect, and accountability is strongly linked to the rise in criminal activities such as cybercrime, cultism, armed robbery, kidnapping, and drug abuse. Youths, in particular are vulnerable to deviant behavior due to poor moral upbringing, peer influence, and limited access to employment and education, factors which exacerbated the erosion of communal values of the society (Ibrahim,

2019). In the absence of strong moral guidance, many young people turn to alternative subcultures that glorify crime and violence.

Furthermore, urbanization and technological advancements have led to the breakdown of close-knit community structures, reducing the effectiveness of social monitoring and peer regulation (Ibrahim, 2019). In many urban centers, anonymity and social disconnection make it easier for individuals to commit crimes without fear of communal sanction or stigmatization. In conclusion, the weakening of social values has contributed significantly to the increase in crime rates in many parts of the developing world. Reviving traditional moral standards and strengthening the institutions that promote these values are essential strategies for effective crime prevention and social development (Okafor, 2015).

Integration of Social Values into Crime Prevention and Development Planning

The integration of social values into crime prevention and development planning is crucial for building sustainable and peaceful societies. Social values, such as respect for life and property, honesty, community solidarity, and responsibility serve as ethical foundations for guiding human behavior and decision-making (Ajayi, 2018). When these values are intentionally embedded into crime prevention strategies and national development plans, they contribute significantly to reducing deviance, promoting law-abiding behavior, and ensuring inclusive growth. Social values act as internalized mechanisms of social control that guides individuals toward socially acceptable behavior, even in the absence of formal sanctions. Incorporating social values into crime prevention efforts, such as value-based education, moral reorientation programs, and youth empowerment initiatives, helps to reinforce informal social control mechanisms. These values also promote trust, social cohesion, and cooperation between citizens and security agencies, making crime prevention more effective and sustainable (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2021).

Development planning that ignores the moral and ethical fabric of society is often incomplete and unsustainable. Long-term national development goals must incorporate ethical considerations and cultural values that resonate with the people (Ajayi, 2018). This includes planning education curricula that emphasize civic responsibility, honesty, accountability, respect for humanity and integrity, designing urban spaces that encourage community interaction, and implementing economic policies that promote equity and social justice (Nwankwo, 2017). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has emphasized the importance of integrating social values such as equity, inclusion, and accountability into sustainable development efforts (UNDP, 2020). When development planning is rooted in these values, it becomes more people-centered, addressing the root causes of crime such as poverty, marginalization, and social exclusion. In conclusion, the integration of social values into crime prevention and development planning is not merely an ethical imperative but a strategic necessity for building safe and resilient societies. By aligning crime prevention policies and development strategies with the values upheld by the community, governments and stakeholders can address the socio-cultural roots of crime while promoting inclusive and value-driven development.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts two relevant theories for analyzing the roles of social values in crime prevention and development planning. These theories are Social Control Theory (Travis Hirschi, 1969) and Strain Theory (Robert Merton, 1938).

Social Control theory was propounded by Travis Hirschi, in 1969. The core premise of Social control theory posits that individuals refrain from deviant or criminal acts due to their bonds with society. When these bonds weaken, the likelihood of engaging in criminal behavior increases. According to Social Control theory, there are four key elements of social bond associated with this theory, they include: (1) Attachment, which refers to the emotional ties to parents, teachers, and peers, (2) Commitment, an act of investing in societal goals and activities.

(3) Involvement, an act of participating in socially approved activities. (4) Belief, refers to the acceptance of moral values and societal norms. According to Social Control Theory, individuals who are closely bonded to society through attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief are less likely to engage in delinquent acts. These bonds are primarily strengthened through early socialization, where core societal values are transmitted through the family, religious institutions, schools, and community structures (Oladipo, 2019).

Another theory is Strain theory, propounded by Robert Merton in 1938. The core premise of Strain Theory states that there is a disconnection between societal goals such as wealth, success, good life etc and the legitimate means to achieve them such as education, employment etc. The strain and pressure that these societal means mount on individuals might lead them to use deviant or criminal means to achieving them. In the absence of strong social values such as patience, hard work, and moral conduct, individuals adopt criminal behaviors such as cybercrime, kidnapping, drug trafficking etc as alternative means of achieving success (Nwankwo, 2017). This theory focuses on the type of adaptation which an individual gives to himself that would enable him to either achieve the societal goals legitimately or illegitimately.

These adaptations include Conformity which means, accepting goals and its means as law-abiding citizens, Innovation which means accepting the goals but using illegitimate means to achieve them such as theft, robbery, embezzlement, fraud etc, Retreatism which means rejecting both the goals and the means to achieving them e.g., drug addicts and Rebellion, this means creating new goals and new means of achieving the goals, e.g., radical groups. Social values like patience, hard work, and communal support can moderate strain and guide people towards legitimate paths.

Methods

The study adopts qualitative approach which draws primary data from in-depth interview with community and religious leaders, security agents, government official, youth leaders and traditional leaders in Enugu Metropolis. Secondary data was got from scholarly articles, policy documents, government and crime reports. The research was conducted in Enugu Metropolis, Nigeria, which comprises three Local Government Areas (LGAs) namely, Enugu North, Enugu South, and Enugu East. Enugu metropolis is an urban center with a mix of traditional values and modern socio-economic challenges, including rising youth unemployment, urban crime, and policy implementation gaps. Simple random and purposive sampling techniques were employed using a sample size of 105 respondents from a population of 1,012 people which is a make-up of the three local government areas of Enugu metropolis. These respondents were selected because they possess relevant knowledge and dynamic experiences related to crime prevention and societal values. The composition of the respondents include 14 community leaders, 15 religious leaders, 16 security agents, 12 government officials, 20 traditional rulers, and 28 youth leaders. The respondents' age bracket is between 30 to 70 years, with a fairly balanced gender representation. Data was analyzed using thematic content analysis. Recorded interviews were transcribed, coded and organized into themes derived from the research questions.

Results

Results for research question one demonstrates that social values, such as honesty, respect, discipline, responsibility, communality and integrity function as key informal mechanisms of social control, stating that communities that uphold these values witness lower levels of crime, especially among youths. *60% of youth leaders echoed that some traditional rulers and religious leaders are their custodians of moral values because they play key roles in their community mediation and dispute resolutions, as the police cannot help, the elders are the ones that calm situations and advise the youths* (Youth leaders, Enugu East, North & South).

Results for research question two reveal that there is clear evidence that where social values have declined, there is a rise in criminal activity, which includes cultism, drug abuse, internet fraud, and armed robbery. This decline

is often linked to a breakdown of family and community structures, excessive focus and desire for materialism, poor value orientation in educational systems and weak enforcement of moral standards. One of the respondent stated that, *the decline in social values are not far-fetched, it depends on the upbringing within the family institutions which has deteriorated in our today's society. Family is always seen as the foundation of every child, if these values are not instilled at this level, it becomes a problem at the society level* (Religious leader, Enugu North).

Results for research question three demonstrates that when social values are embedded into planning, such as through **value reorientation programs, civic education, moral education, youth empowerment, and community policing**, crime rates decline, and public trust in institutions increase. One of the participants has this to say, *we need developments that does not ignore moral and ethical values but reflects on societal values such as fairness, respect and all inclusive to help develop the character, attitude and behaviours of the people mostly the youths* (Traditional Leader, Enugu South).

Discussion of Findings

The findings in respect to research question one states that social values, such as honesty, respect, discipline, responsibility, communality and integrity, function as key informal mechanisms of social control, stating that communities that uphold these values witness lower levels of crime, especially among youths. Respondents emphasized that values such as honesty, respect for elders, accountability, and community solidarity significantly deter criminal behavior. One participant had this to say: *In our community, stealing is not just illegal, it is shameful and attracts some stigmatized sanctions. The family name matters, and this discourages youth from engaging in crime.* (Community Elder, Enugu South). This aligns with the view of Alemika (2023), who noted that social norms and values act, not only as informal control but as powerful systems that could help curb crime in African societies.

The findings in respect to research question two states that there is clear evidence that where social values have eroded, there is a rise in criminal activity, which includes cultism, drug abuse, internet fraud, and armed robbery. This decline is often linked to a breakdown of family and community structures, excessive focus and desire for materialism, poor value orientation in educational systems and weak enforcement of moral standards. Many participants linked the rising rate of crime to the decline of traditional and religious values due to modernization and weakened family structures. One of the participants had this to say: *We have abandoned our values. Now, everyone chases money without shame or regard for consequences. That's why crime is increasing.* (Religious Leader, Enugu North). This is explained in line with Siegelaar and Ballard (2023), who argue that a breakdown in social cohesion often correlates with an increase in crime and insecurity.

The findings in respect to research question three reveals that when social values are embedded into planning, such as through value reorientation programs, civic education, moral education, youth empowerment, and community policing, crime rates decline, and public trust in institutions increase. Respondents largely agreed that development plans often ignore moral and ethical dimensions. Development planners should advocate for policies that reflect societal values such as fairness, justice, and social inclusion. One of the respondents had this to say: *Most of our development strategies are focused on infrastructure. We need to develop people's minds and character too.*" (Development Officer, Enugu State Ministry). This is explained in line with Nwankwo (2017), who emphasizes the need for socially sustainable and value-oriented policy design to enable development at all levels.

Conclusion

The study concludes that social values are indispensable to effective crime prevention and sustainable development. While formal laws and policies are essential, they are often insufficient in contexts where moral

breakdown persists. Social values, particularly when upheld by families, religious institutions, traditional authorities, and educational systems, foster a culture of accountability, solidarity, and lawful behavior. Moreover, national development planning must go beyond infrastructure and economic indicators to embrace cultural and ethical dimensions. Development that ignores local value systems is more likely to face resistance, policy failure, or social instability. The criminological approach that incorporates social values, cultural context, and grassroots participation provides a more holistic pathway to tackling crime and achieving inclusive national growth.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following strategies are recommended for integrating social values into crime prevention and development planning:

- 1) There should be an integration of civic, moral, and ethical education into national curricula at all levels to shape future citizens with strong moral compasses.
- 2) Communities and individuals should be involved in the planning and monitoring of crime prevention and development programs to ensure cultural relevance and community ownership.
- 3) The use of mass media, local platforms, and cultural festivals should be encouraged in promoting values that discourage crime and support national unity, growth and progress.

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