

COMMUNITY - BASED POLICING AS A STRATEGY FOR REDUCING ARMED ROBBERY CASES IN URBAN AREAS

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Abstract

This research on community - based policing as a strategy for reducing armed robbery cases in urban areas, was conducted because armed robbery cases have been on the rise. So far, little attempt has been done to reduce armed robbery. This study was aimed at finding strategies that can be used for reducing armed robbery cases. The researcher utilized a qualitative research strategy during the course of this study. The target population from which the sample of participants was selected was 20 police officers in Harare. In this study it was established that most urban police stations are lacking a befitting community based model to reduce armed robbery cases. Police should undertake activities aimed at reducing crime in the country. The police organization should implement crime prevention strategies such as police patrols, community-based policing and criminal surveillance among others to reduce armed robberies.

Keywords: Community, Crime, Police Station, Armed Robbery.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ugwuoke et al (2021) pointed out that, the crime of armed robbery is a global problem affecting people across the world. People are losing lives and property as a consequence to this serious crime. According to Zikhali (2019) urban and urbanizing areas world over are experiencing an emergence of new crimes including but not limited to, terrorism, money laundering, human trafficking, human smuggling, burglary, house breakings, trafficking in narcotics, computer crimes, corruption, tax evasion, robberies and allied offences among other sophisticated crimes.

This has been attributed to fast technological advancement (Yesufu & Gariseb, 2023). Armed robbery refers to a procedure that involves the unlawful and coercive removal of lawful belongings from a number of innocent individuals by an armed individual or group of individuals without recourse to the legal system. This action, in and of itself, constitutes a violation of the fundamental human rights of the victim as well as the criminal law of Zimbabwe, which carries with it the potential for severe punishments.

In the present day, it is one of the components of crime that is on the rise in the country. It is mind-boggling that it continues to occur despite the fact that it is officially considered illegal. Given this, the authorities and all stakeholders in the management of peace and security should be extremely concerned about the situation. In most cases, victims of armed robbery are subjected to a considerable number of extremely detrimental social and economic consequences (Ugwuoke et al., 2021).

It is currently normal for armed robbery to occur in every region of the country; nevertheless, in most urban areas (Yesufu & Gariseb, 2023). Every social class has the potential to be a target, despite the fact that those who are in higher social positions are more susceptible to being targeted (Shaw, 2019). The problem has contributed to the establishment of a culture and climate in the country that is characterized by fear, mistrust, and violence. On the other hand, in the northern region of Zimbabwe, it is more common in rural areas than in urban areas (Nyamunda, 2021).

This is especially true in regions where high breed market centres were located, which are places where cash transactions are extremely common. According to Nyamunda (2021) successive administrations in Zimbabwe have not paid the attention that is necessary to the issue of armed robbery, as they have done with many other crimes. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, law-abiding Zimbabweans have been subjected to unending suffering at the hands of armed bandits. On the other hand, the persistent instances of armed robbery have a negative impact on both the growth and the security of the nation, which presents a number of significant issues.

The purpose of this study was to analyse the problem of persistent incidences of armed robbery in Zimbabwe by utilising secondary data. The main objective of this analysis was to gain knowledge of the causes and effects of the problem, as well as to offer some possible remedies for reducing or potentially eliminating the problem in the country. It is argued that armed robbery and other crimes can be linked to some significant imbalances in the existing social system of the society.

It is also argued that until certain measures were taken, the problem will not only continue to permeate the society, but its dire consequences may seriously be catastrophic to national peace, unity, and development. Until certain measures were taken, the problem will continue to permeate the society. For the purpose of providing the context for this paper, which highlights some of the most pressing issues addressing the causes and effects of armed robbery and insecurity in Zimbabwe, this presented the background information.

Zimbabwe Republic Police is not fully implementing the community based policing model in reducing armed robbery cases within the country. Armed robbery cases are not only increasing but are increasing at an increasing rate during the period 2019 to 2023. Police stations in urban areas need a community based model for use to reduce armed robbery cases. This study is going to develop a community based policing model for reducing armed robbery cases in urban areas.

2. THEORETICAL LITERATURE

2.1 Situation crime prevention theory

Clarke (2003) developed the situation crime prevention theory with the aim of minimizing criminal behaviors. The concept of situational crime prevention is based on the idea that individuals make decisions in a logical manner, and it takes into account both contextual elements and a cost-benefit analysis (Cornish & Clarke, 2003; Farrington et al., 1993). Furthermore, the concept of situational crime prevention is predicated on the assumption that a criminal is logical and will evaluate the environmental hazards that are associated with committing a crime (Clarke, 1997).

The traditional research technique supports the implementation of situational crime prevention is based on collecting data regarding the nature of a particular type of crime, analyzing the situational conditions that facilitate this crime, investigating possible methods to block opportunities for crime, implementing the measures that are the most effective, feasible, and economically viable; and monitoring the results and spread the knowledge which have been gained. Clarke (2003) suggests a preventative model which comprise of two stages. It is important to note that that certain criminal activity can be avoided by acting at the precipitation stage, which is the stage before the offender experiences any inclination to commit a crime.

This has specific consequences for understanding why crime displacement does not frequently take place. In the second place, the model suggests the existence of a feedback loop, which is a mechanism that, under certain conditions, might cause an excessive constraint to become a situational precipitator. Techniques from the field of data sciences are essential to the completion of many of these processes (Sichula, 2023). In order to make the most of their benefits, it is necessary to collect data using techniques that are accurate, fair, and consistent. Randomization during the selection of cases is the most effective method for controlling external situational aspects for the best results.

Social learning theory

The social learning theory, was developed by Albert Bandura (1970) with the aim of finding out the factors that determine human behavior. One of the most important aspects of this theory is known as reciprocal determinism, which asserts that human behavior is dictated by the functional relationships that exist between three components namely personal factors, the external environment, and the behavior itself (Williams, McMahon & Goodman, 2015). Using this theory, it is possible to understand crimes as the outcome of the functional linkages that exist between an individual's personal traits, the social context in which they live, and behaviors that are specifically focused on drugs. To put it another way, addiction can be understood as a biopsychosocial condition that is characterized by a chronic progression and encompasses aspects that are both internal and external to the individual (Tsonchev, 2018). According to the social learning theory, individuals learn their behavior not only from direct experiences but also from seeing the behavior of other individuals, which serves as modelling (Bandura & Walters, 1977).

2.2 Factors leading to an increase in armed robbery cases

According to Khadka (2022) poor equipment and lack of proper technology for law enforcement agents is the major causes of failure to curb increasing criminal activities. Police Deputy Commissioner-General Learn Ncube revealed that 8 542 robberies were reported in 2022 with 4 609 being armed robberies. Andzenge (2020) carried out research which aimed to take a comprehensive approach to the topic of robbery. Andzenge (2020) identifies a number of major factors that are considered to be related with robbery, categorizes these factors, and makes an attempt to analyse the degree to which they are connected to one another. It was the major objective of the Andzenge (2020) study to investigate the manner in which these components can be investigated more successfully in order to make an attempt at offering an explanation for the crime. According to the findings of Kiroyo & Odongo (2020) there are four categories of elements that are associated with robbery. These elements include (a) social variables, (b) individual offender characteristics, (c) situational elements, and (d) push factors, which are also known as motivational factors. These are the qualities that are included in this category.

2.3 Strategies the police can adopt to reduce armed robbery cases

In a simulated borough of a city, Weisburd, Braga, Groff & Wooditch (2019) evaluated two distinct implementations of hot areas policing, each of which represents a different amount of resource allocation. Weisburd, Braga, Groff & Wooditch (2019) then compared these implementations to two control circumstances, one of which represents a model with constant random patrol, and the other of which represents a model with no police officers. Weisburd, Braga, Groff & Wooditch (2019) models provided an assessment of the short-term and long-term effects that these various strategies of policing resources have on the levels of robbery that occur in big areas.

According to Weisburd et al., (2019) both a random patrol model and a landscape devoid of police officers are not sufficient to explain the statistically significant effects that these studies have revealed for hot spot policing. Based on the results of these simulations, it appears that expanding the use of hot spot policing could potentially have a considerable impact on the overall degree of criminal activity in metropolitan areas. Munzenze (2022) pointed out that, armed robberies have of late become worrisome in Windhoek, Namibia as they are being reported in various forms. They are reports of car jackings, robberies of cash in transit vehicles, bank robberies, robberies on farms and also at shopping centres. It is the finding of Yesufu and Gariseb (2022) that, Windhoek City Police has increased its surveillance through patrols, installed Closed- Circuit Television (CCTV) and is conducting crime awareness campaign to members of the community.

Yusufu and Gariseb (2022) pointed out that despite the aforementioned strategies armed robbery cases are on the increase in Windhoek. According to Dawud and Abdulkadir (2021), Zambian police in Lusaka had a shootout with suspected foreign national armed robbers and resultantly seven armed robbers were shot dead. The police managed to recover three pistols and a revolver with ammunition at the place of scene. Lubinda and Mwewa (2022) pointed out that, the Zambian government aims to reduce the number of

armed robberies to less than one thousand nine hundred per year. As a strategic move the government established the Robbery Task Force mandated with the duty of reducing armed robbery cases and increase detection and arrest of armed robbers.

2.4 How police can reduce armed robberies

Sherman and Eck (2022) conducted a study on the effectiveness of visible police patrol in United States of America. It has been demonstrated that random or reactive patrols, in which officers patrol places regardless of the crime rate or pass an area on their way to responding to a call from the public, do not have any effect on reducing the amount of crime that occurs (Sherman and Eck, 2022). On the other hand, visible police patrol has the potential to reduce crime, but only if it is directed towards the specific geographic areas, often known as hot spots, where the majority of criminal activity occurs (Sherman and Eck, 2022). According to the findings of a comprehensive study conducted by Braga and colleagues (2019) in Chicago hot spot policing has the potential to be helpful in lowering crime overall.

In point of fact, 62 out of the 78 studies that were included in the analysis found that the number of crimes committed decreased in the areas that were targeted for police presence and activity in comparison to other areas that were not targeted. In a research conducted by Ratcliffe (2020) in Australia it was discovered that the rate of property crime decreased by 31% in hot places that were monitored by marked police cars in comparison to hot spots where business as usual was maintained. Property crime did not occur in areas that were patrolled by unmarked police cars, which highlights the significance of the police providing a visible disincentive to discourage criminal activity. There is evidence from other studies that suggests that visible patrol in high-crime areas might only be successful in areas where a certain threshold of criminal activity already exists (Ratcliffe, 2020). There is a possibility that the effect of targeted patrol on reducing crime will be rather short-lived.

2.5 How the police can employ the community-based policing initiative to reduce armed robbery cases

In its most basic form, community policing is a partnership between the police and the community that aims to identify and offer solutions to issues that are prevalent within the community (Dawud & Abdulkadir, 2021). All members of the community become active allies in the endeavour to improve the safety and quality of neighbourhoods as a result of the fact that the police are no longer the only law enforcement agency responsible for maintaining law and order.

According to Machakanja & Manuel (2021) the community policing approach has implications that are far-reaching. The police organisation needs to undergo significant transformations in order to accommodate the broadened perspective on crime control and prevention, the increased emphasis on making community members' active participants in the process of issue solving, and the crucial role that patrol officers play in community policing (Kivoi & Mbae, 2020).

2.6 Agencies that the police can work with to reduce armed robberies.

Vingir (2020) conducted a study on the lived experiences of reformed armed robbers in Nigeria. In 2019, there were 13,278 occurrences of armed robbery that were reported, and 15,719 people were apprehended. Armed robbery has been a problem in Nigeria for years, and it is becoming worse. The goal of this phenomenological study, which was influenced by the theories of deterrence and anomie, was to investigate the lived experiences of reformed young adult armed robbers who had committed crimes between the ages of 18 and 25 in Lagos, Nigeria, and who had been members of street gangs. For the objective of this study, a sample of ten reformed armed robbers and ten rehabilitated members of street gangs were selected for research purposes. For the purpose of data gathering, semi-structured interviews were conducted.

Vingir (2020) study established that the police have been working together with agencies such as businesses and government institutions in reducing armed robberies. It is possible that the findings of the study and the recommendations it makes will contribute to positive social change. For example, the government will be better informed about measures to reduce crimes, communities will be safer, unemployment will be reduced in Nigeria, and the government may adopt new policy initiatives to address the threat posed by armed robbery.

2.7 How police can reduce armed robberies through visible policing

In a research conducted by Ratcliffe (2020) in Australia it was discovered that the rate of property crime decreased by 31% in hot places that were monitored by marked police cars in comparison to hot spots where business as usual was maintained. Property crime did not occur in areas that were patrolled by unmarked police cars, which highlights the significance of the police providing a visible disincentive to discourage criminal activity. There is evidence from other studies that suggests that visible patrol in high-crime areas might only be successful in areas where a certain threshold of criminal activity already exists (Ratcliffe, 2020).

There is a possibility that the effect of targeted patrol on reducing crime will be rather short-lived. Novak and colleagues (2016) discovered that an increase in foot patrol reduced the amount of violence in designated hot spots in comparison to control regions in United States of America. However, this reduction was only observed for the first thirty days of the intervention phase, which lasted for three months. The conventional viewpoint that targeting hot locations will simply result in criminal activity shifting around the corner or being displaced elsewhere has been one of the obstacles that has been encountered in the past when attempting to adopt targeted patrol.

It is critically important to note that thorough evaluations have demonstrated that concentrated police effort in high-crime areas does not typically result in the displacement of criminals. According to Braga and others (2019), Santos (2014), and Ariel and others (2016), the benefits of crime reduction may even begin to expand to the communities that are directly surrounding the locations that are being targeted. What should law enforcement officers do when they are in a high-crime area, given that patrols that are

targeted on areas where there is a high concentration of criminal activity are most likely to be effective? It has been demonstrated in the systematic research that was conducted by Braga and others (2019) that the resolution of issues in high-crime areas has a tendency to have a greater influence on crime than additional patrol or law enforcement has. Law enforcement agencies should utilise social media platforms in order to track down fugitives and spread information regarding public safety.

Criminal activities can be reduced through the use of technology adoption. In the way that crimes are committed and investigated, social media has had a huge impact on both of these processes. The use of social media by criminals to target potential victims and organise illicit actions is becoming increasingly common.

2.8 Empirical Literature and Research Hypothesis Development

Xinhua (2021) on Zimbabwe police appeal for high-tech equipment noted that Zimbabwe police has faced rampant cases of armed robbery and they are appealing for high-tech equipment which enables the force to root out the vice. Also Matanga (2023) noted that lack of appropriate vehicles and modern equipment is inhibiting the police from curbing various crimes. Majoni (2023) also noted that Zimbabwe police systems are crumbling. Majoni (2023) mentioned that if Zimbabwe Republic police are given proper equipment they can curb crimes such as armed robbery. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that proper equipment can positively reduce armed robbery cases in urban areas.

H₁: Proper equipment has a positive on armed robbery reduction

Mavaza (2022) noted that armed robbery has continued to permeate the society despite every concerted effort made by both the people and the state to combat it. Thus, this social milieu poses serious security and development challenges to the state and the society at large. According to Mavaza (2022) most unemployed young men are resorting to armed robbery to make ends meet. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that employment can positively reduce armed robbery cases in urban areas.

H₂: Employment positively reduce armed robbery cases in urban areas

Ngwenya et al (2022) conducted a study on artificial Intelligence as a tool for improving policing in Zimbabwe. Ngwenya et al (2022) documented the historical developments of AI as well as the benefits that accrue from using AI and latest technologies in policing. According to Ngwenya et al (2022) police should adopt the use of Facial Recognition Systems, Gunfire Detection, DNA Analysis, AI Security Cameras, Pre-trial Release, Parole, and Public safety video and image analysis.

Meaningfully investing in Information Communication Technologies by governments in developing countries is the starting point for enhancing law enforcement through Artificial Intelligence (Buwirimwe, 2023). Therefore, it can be hypothesized that proper technology can positively reduce armed robbery cases in urban areas.

H₃: Proper technology can positively reduce armed robbery cases in urban areas

In its most basic form, community policing is a partnership between the police and the community that aims to identify and offer solutions to issues that are prevalent within the community (Dawud & Abdulkadir, 2021). All members of the community become active allies in the endeavour to improve the safety and quality of neighbourhoods as a result of the fact that the police are no longer the only law enforcement agency responsible for maintaining law and order. According to Machakanja & Manuel (2021) the community policing approach has implications that are far-reaching.

The police organisation needs to undergo significant transformations in order to accommodate the broadened perspective on crime control and prevention, the increased emphasis on making community members' active participants in the process of issue solving, and the crucial role that patrol officers play in community policing (Kivoi & Mbae, 2020).

Therefore, it can be hypothesized that proper equipment can positively reduce armed robbery cases in urban areas. By assisting community people in organising assistance and resources, the neighbourhood patrol officer, who is supported by the police organisation, assists community members in finding solutions to problems and improving their quality of life. Machakanja & Manuel (2021) also noted that the members of the community express their problems, offer their opinions, and get involved in the process of addressing these concerns. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that Community based policing influence reduced armed robbery cases in urban areas.

H4: Community based policing influence reduced armed robbery cases in urban areas

According to Machakanja & Manuel (2021) the community policing approach has implications that are far-reaching. The police organisation needs to undergo significant transformations in order to accommodate the broadened perspective on crime control and prevention, the increased emphasis on making community members' active participants in the process of issue solving, and the crucial role that patrol officers play in community policing (Kivoi & Mbae, 2020).

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The formation of a productive partnership will call for the participation of all parties involved, as well as their energy, creativity, understanding, and patience (Kivoi & Mbae, 2020). Therefore, it can be hypothesized that Good relationships play a mediating role in reducing armed robbery cases in urban areas.

H5: Good relationships play a mediating role in reducing armed robbery cases in urban areas

2.9 Conceptual framework

This paper adopted the following conceptual framework

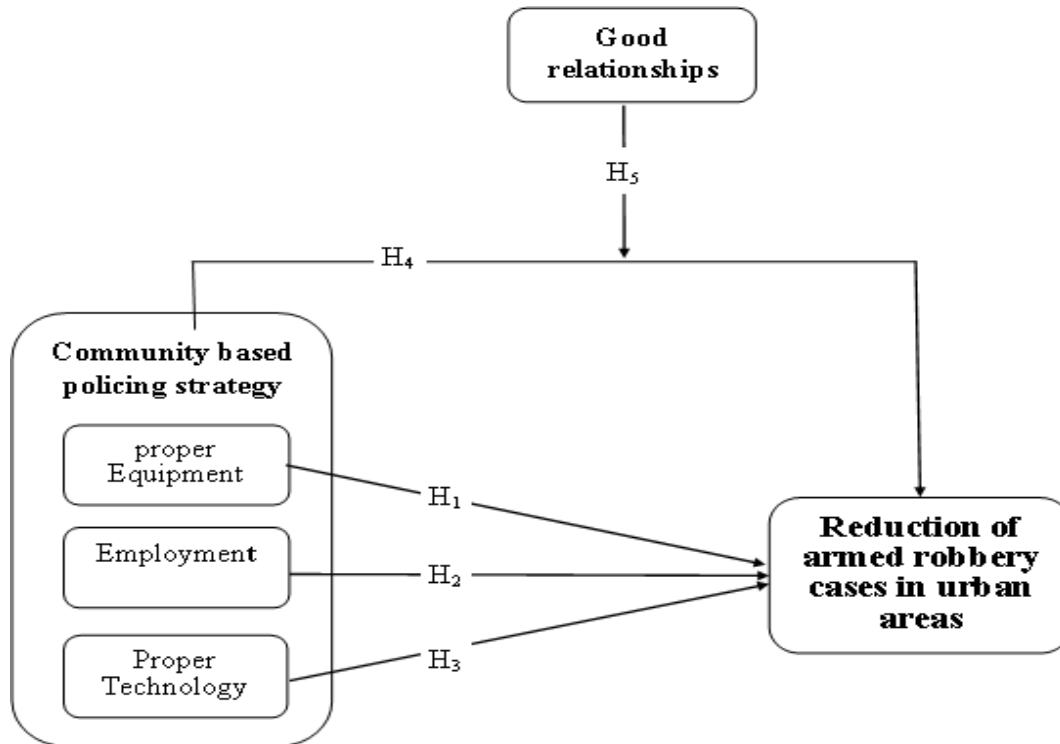


Figure 1.1: Conceptual framework

Source: Researcher (2024)

From the figure 1.1 above it can be seen that community based policing influence reduced armed robbery cases in urban areas, community based strategy influences proper equipment, proper technology and employment, proper equipment, proper technology and employment influence reduced armed robbery cases in urban areas and good relationships play a mediating role in reducing armed robbery cases in urban areas.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study the researcher adopted a quantitative research approach. Kothari (2004) defined research as a systematic, controlled, empirical and critical investigation of natural phenomena guided by theory and hypotheses. This approach is usually associated with recording, analysing and attempting to uncover the deeper meaning and significance of human behaviour and experience, including contradictory beliefs, behaviours and emotions. In this study, the researcher made use of an exploratory research design. The intention was to gain an understanding of community - based policing as a strategy for reducing armed robbery cases in urban areas.

The research was conducted in Greater Harare. A research setting is a place where data for a study is collected from. In this research, data were collected 30 police stations within Greater Harare covering areas such as Harare Central, Mbare, Mufakose, Highlands, Kuwadzana and Braeside among others. These police stations deal with cases of armed robberies within their tactical areas of responsibility.

3.1 Targeted population

The ZRP officers of the rank of Inspector and Chief Inspector from police stations in Greater Harare made up the research population. According to Babbie (2023), the targeted population is the group of people to whom the study's conclusions are meant to apply. It is crucial to ensuring that the research is applicable and useful in a larger setting. The target population consisted of 97 police officers.

3.2 Sampling

In the context of research, sample size refers to the number of participants or data points selected for a study from a larger targeted population (Barbie, 2023). Determining the appropriate sample size with precision is crucial to guaranteeing the validity of study findings and their generalizability to a wider population.

Purposive sampling technique was used to select information rich sources who were knowledgeable and experienced in using community based policing as a strategy for reducing armed robbery cases. Using the saturation principle, the researcher selected a sample of 43 officers out of the intended population of ninety-seven.

One of the core concepts in qualitative research is the saturation principle, which is applied particularly in the context of theme analysis (Eagle and Collin, 2022). Saturation refers to the point at which fresh subjects or information cannot be obtained from the data being collected. In other words, saturation happens when a person keeps collecting data without finding anything new or surprising.

When more data collection fails to yield any significant new insights or patterns, saturation is reached. The evidence firmly upholds the current themes, and no new classifications or viewpoints are presented.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study it was established that most urban police stations are lacking a befitting community based model to reduce armed robbery cases. Police should undertake activities aimed at reducing crime in the country. The police organization should implement crime prevention strategies such police patrols, community-based policing and criminal surveillance among others to reduce armed robberies.

4.1 H1: Proper equipment has a positive on armed robbery reduction

Proper equipment was found to have a positive on armed robbery reduction. Police should embrace use of proper equipment for surveillance and monitoring high-risk areas within the communities.

Such equipment includes cameras, communication radios and non-lethal weapons like tasers and paper spray for safer apprehensions among others. The community will come in handy in the mobilisation of funds to procure the equipment as well as in identification of areas to put devices like cameras.

4.2 H2: Employment positively reduce armed robbery cases in urban areas

Employment was found to reduce armed robbery cases in urban areas. The police should partner the community in coming up with initiatives that brings employment to the general populace especially the youth within the community. Together with the community the police should identify entrepreneurial opportunities and business ventures that can be adopted to give income to the populace. Such an initiative will remove idleness among the people thereby reducing chances of venturing into criminality such as armed robbery.

4.3 H3: Proper technology can positively reduce armed robbery cases in urban areas

Proper technology was discovered to positively reduce armed robbery cases in urban areas. Technology befitting the objective of reducing armed robberies should be adopted by police if their efforts to reduce armed robberies are anything to go by. Adoption of crime mapping software, motion sensors and intruder detection systems among others goes a long way in reducing armed robbery. Technology assists in preventing and detecting armed robbery cases. If the police work hand in glove with business organisations such equipment can be procured for use in reducing armed robbery cases in urban areas.

4.4 H4: Community based policing influence reduced armed robbery cases in urban areas

Community based policing was found to influence reduced armed robbery cases in urban areas. Community based policing should not come as a coincidence to police initiatives in fighting armed robbery but rather it should be a deliberate and planned effort by the police. Police should come with sustained initiative to partner the community through such initiatives like the Business against Crime, Home Officer scheme and Neighbourhood Watch Committees among others. Community based policing should be a key feature of the organisation's strategic, tactical and operational plans.

4.5 H5: Good relationships play a mediating role in reducing armed robbery cases in urban areas

Good relationships was found to play a mediating role in reducing armed robbery cases in urban areas. Community based policing as a strategy to reduce armed robbery can be fruitful if it is premised on sound relationship between the police and the community. There is need for a healthy relationship that involve honesty, trust, respect and open communication between the police and the community. Both parties should put effort and compromise for the strategy to bear fruits.

5. IMPLICATIONS

5.1.1 Practical Implications

In this study it was established that most urban police stations are lacking a befitting community based model to reduce armed robbery cases. Police should undertake activities aimed at reducing crime in the country. The police organization should implement crime prevention strategies such as police patrols, community-based policing and criminal surveillance among others to reduce armed robberies. Fighting crime should not be left out to the police alone but the community should take part by combining efforts with the police. The police should partner the community in mobilising resources for procurement of technological gadgets for use in fighting armed robberies. For community based police strategy to be effective strategy in reducing armed robbery cases, there is need for good working relationship between the police and the general public.

5.1.2 Theoretical Implications

The standard model of policing encompasses strategies that come to mind when the average person thinks about what police are supposed to do. The central element of the standard model involves enforcing the law in a broad and reactive way, primarily using police resources. Specifically, the strategies of the standard model of policing include increased number of police officers to increase the ability to detect crime and arrest offenders, unfocused, random motorized patrols to create a perception of a police omnipresence to deter crime in public places, rapid response to calls for service to increase the likelihood of catching offenders and follow-up investigations by detectives (to increase the solvability of the crimes).

5.1.3 Future Implications

Future studies should be conducted to examine how broken window policing and hotspot policing assist the police in curbing crime.

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