

The Role of Police Media Platforms to Crime Prevention in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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Abstract

In the modern information society, people should have as much information as possible on public institutions to ensure that democratic values are upheld. In this connection, the provision of information on the activities of police forces and the Public Prosecutor in the fight against crime could be essential. The main objective of this study is to examine the role of police media (Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation's Television and Addis Lisan FM 96.3 Radio 'Addis Police programs') to crime prevention. The study was developed in terms of qualitative inquiry with a descriptive purpose. This qualitative study used unstructured interview questions to guide data collection. Before proceeding to the collection of data from residents, interview was conducted with media and communications affairs office of Addis Ababa police commission and Mennen area police crime prevention, security and law enforcement directorate. The interview was freely structured conversations. Additional point of interview with residents was made to grasp the relationship between 'Addis police program' consumption and crime prevention as well as to examine the public's construction of crime, criminals, punishment and justice. To protect the confidentiality of participants Pseudonyms are used. The results of interview have been analyzed qualitatively and presentation of data is made according to their alignment with the research objectives. Verbatim presentation of data is made where it is found appropriate and presentation of the themes central to the interviews is made in a form of summary. As a major outcome of the study: There have been a contradictory ideas on the degree to which media coverage of crime-related events influences public opinion which suggest that the media exerts both negative and positive influences on public opinion of crime and crime prevention. the role of the existing police media as main providers of information about crime and crime investigations must be seen in the onset and evolution of crime prevention strategies, and in shaping public perceptions about crime and its response. However, it is important to note that the impact or "effects" of the existing police media on the development of feelings of injustice, and politicization remains difficult to accurately assess.

Keywords: Police media, Media consumption, Crime, Crime prevention

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1. Introduction

Media have the potential to play a large role in correcting or preventing social ills, including crime. They are in a position to investigate corruption, challenge the legitimacy of laws, institutions and authorities, and participate or indeed act as a catalyst, in the movement toward a healthier society. Their role as an antagonist to government and authority does not, however, mean that they cannot cooperate with political institutions in crime prevention and education programs. The media may also, by providing background information to enable audiences to consider significant event in context, contribute to greater understanding among people (United Nations Congress on the prevention and the Treatment of offenders, 1995).

There are many ways in which media can help promote crime prevention programs. For instance, national and international media spokes persons could be named as advocates for crime prevention. By lending their names and efforts and the power of their institutions to cause, such spokes persons could make vital contribution to public awareness of crime. The media can also be a strong partner in community- based crime prevention programs, working with families, employers, housing and social service officials and people involved in planning leisure activities (International Center for the Prevention of crime, 2008).

There is ample evidence that violence in the media may have a negative influence on children and the socially valuable. On the other hand, the positive impact can have on behavior and social responsibility is considerable, and can be felt in the following ways: (a) the media can play a direct role in mobilizing public opinion and action. For example, the media possess the power to cause an unsafe product to be removed from the market by reporting on it and publicizing its dangers; (b) they can provide not only a cultural framework within which people can make moral sense of their experiences, but also a basis on which people can assess moral authorities; (c) they are pivotal in the articulation of the tastes, distinctions, and sensibilities of a culture; (d) they are a powerful agency of justice which can address unjust practices and often redress personal victimization. (United Nations Congress on the prevention and the Treatment of offenders, 1995).

According to media and communication affairs officer of Addis Ababa Police commission, beginning from 2005 EC, 'Addis Police', as a police program, is broadcasted in the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation's television 2 for a one hour program (broadcasted twice) a week. This program is a report about police crime

detections along with raising awareness in the community about crime prevention techniques, police and community relations, and current issues which need police attention. In addition, 30 minutes of program (broadcasted twice a week) is broadcasted on the same media about traffic reports and cautions.

In 2007 EC, a one hour program (broadcasted twice a week) has started to be broadcasted in radio ‘Addis Lisan FM 96.3’. The program includes public discussions (for instance, security and order in Addis Ababa city, ‘Why crime?’, and soon) by letting police officers, listeners and academicians to participate in the discussion.

This study attempts to examine the role of police media (in particular emphasis on Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation’s television 2 and Addis Lisan FM 96.3 Radio ‘Addis Police programs’) to crime prevention.

2. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the role of police media (Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation’s television 2 and Addis Lisan FM 96.3 Radio ‘Addis Police programs’) to crime prevention. To achieve this general objective, the following specific objectives are formulated.

1. What is the contribution or role of police media (Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation’s television 2 and FM 96.3 radio ‘Addis Police program’) to crime prevention?
2. What is the correlation between police media consumption (Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation’s television 2 and radio FM 96.3 ‘Addis Police program’) and crime prevention?
3. What is the impact of ‘Addis police Program’ in shaping public constructions of crime and criminality and justice?

3. Significances of the Study

Public knowledge of crime and justice is largely derived from the media. Studies on this area is vital for understanding the role of media to crime prevention. The media in general and ‘police media programs’ in particular could be used as a prime source of information on crime and safety for a significant proportion of the population. In this study attempts through has been made to examine the contribution or the role of media (EBC’s television 2 and FM96.3 Radio ‘Addis Police programs’) to crime prevention.

4. Research Methods

4.1. Research Design

The study was developed in terms of qualitative inquiry with a descriptive purpose. This inquiry is important when we need an understanding of the situation of the issue and this detail can only be established by taking directly with people and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what is expected to be found (Creswell, 2007). Thus, the appropriate research approach to achieve the goal of this study is qualitative study. The researcher employed qualitative approach for collecting data. The study used cross-sectional study design. Data was collected within three days (from June 01/ 2015 to June 03/2015) through direct encounter of the researcher with data sources.

4.2. Data Collection and Processing

This qualitative study used unstructured interview questions to guide data collection. Before proceeding to the collection of data from residents, interview was conducted with media and communications affairs office of Addis Ababa police commission and Mennen area police crime prevention, security and law enforcement directorate. The interview was freely structured conversations. The objective of the interview was to get insight about the existing ‘Addis police program’ coverage and their conceived role of it to crime prevention.

Additional point of interview with residents was made to grasp the relationship between ‘Addis police program’ consumption and crime prevention as well as to examine the public’s construction of crime, criminals, punishment and justice. To protect the confidentiality of participants Pseudonyms are used.

The results of interview have been analyzed qualitatively and presentation of data is made according to their alignment with the research objectives. Verbatim presentation of data is made where it is found appropriate and presentation of the themes central to the interviews is made in a form of summary.

4.3. Limitations of the study

The appropriate research design for conducting the role of media to crime prevention is the blend of qualitative and quantitative approaches. However, due to the challenges related with inadequate time, the researcher could not benefit from the offers of quantitative approach. To compare levels of crime prevention knowledge and behavior before and after the commencement of the media crime prevention program (‘Addis Police program’) and to see changes in the amount of crime news coverage and relationship to variations in the actual volume of crime between places or over time is most plausible through the use of survey method of quantitative approach.

Nevertheless, the researcher used reports of media and communications affairs office of Addis Ababa police commission and Mennen area police crime prevention, security and law enforcement directorate and with very

few residents' opinion to view the role of media to crime prevention. Due to the "dark figure" problems associated with police information, assuming significant finding might be problematic.

5. Findings of the Study

5.1. The association between and contribution of 'Addis Police program' consumption to crime prevention

Media organizations have a central role to play in publicizing the long-term benefits of crime prevention activities and in communicating the messages of public education programs designed to alert citizens to new and evolving crime risks (United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, 2015).

As Inspector Thomas Tagel (media and communication affairs officer of Addis police) narrated;

"There are various elements of crime prevention, and among this we believe media takes the lions hare. And we recognize the power of the media as the public's source of information on a variety of topics. Media is close to the society. That's why the police media is centrally working to enhance people's awareness of fighting crime, we use it to focus attention on community-based crime prevention projects. By highlighting such efforts, the police media strengthens the community's standard in opposition to all types of crime and helps build crime prevention awareness among the public."

There have been a contradictory ideas on the degree to which media coverage of crime-related events influences public opinion which suggest that the media exerts both negative and positive influences on public opinion of crime and crime prevention.

As Judith Dubois recalls O'Connell's study, 1999 as cited in International Center for the Prevention of crime, 2008 in Ireland, whereby he directly blames the media for its misrepresentation of crime. The way the news media represents crime often includes 'sensationalistic' aspects of crime events, whereby 'newsworthy' stories act on emotion more than on fact, and focus on negative images of crime in communities

James C. Hackler, in his Canadian Criminology: Strategies and Perspectives, 2007 as cited in International Center for the Prevention of crime, 2008 refers to examples of crimes that are often overlooked by the media, such as 'white collar' and environmental crimes. He relates the intentional absence of these crimes to the hyper-publicized and over-politicization of crime, security and crime prevention and the harmful control of the private sector in lobbying politicians. The result can be inaccurate perceptions on crime and inappropriate policy decisions, which hinder effective and sustainable crime prevention strategies.

This study has found some common ground with what the above scholars have mentioned. The researcher has gained very vital ideas from the participants which were important to attain objectives of the study. There are two opposed information provided by the subjects, one which suggests as the existing police media is important and is working properly to prevent crime while others doubt its proper usage. For instance as Hagere stated;

"I don't think 'Addis police program' is used properly to crime prevention rather I would say it is the dissemination of the police champion efforts to catchup criminals 'የ ፖሊስ ሠራዊታችን ባደረገው እልህ አሰጨራሽ ክትትል..' they also took much time in telling stories about the graduation of police officers. But this shouldn't have to be the case, it should be used to raise public awareness and encourage the public participation in crime prevention."

The above explanation indicates that there is under-utilization of the existing police media. As she stated the police media appeared to create impression among the public. But it is possible to use it for raising public awareness and encourage the public participation in crime prevention.

However, there are participants who positively suggests as, police media exposure to crime and crime-related events can be an effective crime prevention strategy, and useful tool for sensitizing and educating the public on underestimated or overlooked social problems. In an interview with Muluaem and Biruktawit; they believe that the existing 'Addis police program' is important and it's working properly in creating awareness toward crime prevention. They explained their opinion as follows; for instance Muluaem explained;

"It's obvious that media and crime prevention had a positive relations. It helps to increase knowledge of the public about crime and crime prevention. For example, it helps to aware people about the law, sometimes people may not know about some illegal acts. It is the job of the police to catch up a criminal and it's not a sin to disseminate their effort through media."

Buruktawit added;

"I like 'Addis police program' crime investigation reports. And of course I took a lesson from them, for instance I avoided using a taxi at night (especially after 4 pm) because I heard a police report saying people have been beaten and robbed at night when using a taxi"

There are also other participants which leis in the middle. They suggested that the existing police media holds an important position for communication, and information sharing and dissemination in society. However,

due to ineffective utilization its contribution remains minimum or out-of-focus. Thus, to increase its contribution it's important to revise the disseminations of the current police media content. As one of the interviewee stated;

"In my opinion, there is a blurred correlation between the existing police media and crime prevention. Because, when we see the police media content, mostly it's a report of extreme criminal acts such as murder. However, there are many criminal acts which are not reported and which I believe it may teach the public about crime and crime prevention. After all, I think the existing police media has partially contributed in creating awareness about crime and crime prevention".

The contribution of 'Addis police program' in crime prevention was stressed by all participants of the study. However; they were also revealing their opinion towards crime, criminality and criminal justice system. It is discussed in the next section as follows.

5.2. 'Addis police program' consumption and participant's construction of crime ,criminals, punishment and justice

Media play an important role in the construction of criminality and the criminal justice system. The public's perception of victims, criminals, deviants, and law enforcement officials is largely determined by their portrayal in the media. Research indicates that the majority of public knowledge about crime and justice is derived from the media (Roberts and Doob, 1990; Surette, 1998 as cited in Kenneth Dowler, 2003).

Therefore, it is imperative to examine the effects that the existing police media have on conception toward crime, criminals, punishment and justice. This study has explored participant's perception of crime, criminals, punishment and justice from their content based explanation of the broadcastings of 'Addis police program'. They have mentioned encounters in relation to their follow-ups of 'Addis police program'. As Mulualem stated;

"Sometimes the police media works out of the media ethics, for instance they display criminals face on the screen, especially those who commit a murder, in my view this may aggravate people for a revenge and should be taken in to considerations. Perhaps, I think it is violation of human right too and may lead to the commitment of another crime plus prejudice against the criminal"

As cultivation theorists advocate, television is a primary source of values, agendas and perspectives and helps to shape the meaning of crime and criminality for the public. It may cultivate a view of the world as a mean and scary place. Media reporting often highlights random and unexpected crimes, with the consequence that individuals readily identify themselves as potential victims. (The Australian psychological society, 2000). As Hagere explained

"In the program I heard a person committing a rape to an eight years child and was sentenced 15 years. I believe this sometimes encourage people to see the crime as if it is simple and may reinforce it. Victims and others may also perceive all men as if they are sexual offenders. Some people may perceive the legal system as a retribution than restitution. In addition it stigmatizes certain groups like the youth and rural people".

The above encounter will remind us cultivation theory and Jeffrey's differential reinforcement theory which advocates, a criminal act may lead to reinforcement, but it may also lead to punishment. Punishment is an important variable in Jeffery's theory because, essentially, he argues that crime occurs because criminal acts in the past, for a particular actor, have not been punished enough.

The participant has gave a due emphasis to punishment in that, it is the perceived certainty of punishment, not its severity, is what deters people from criminal acts. She also advocates for as it controls the way they are identified in public. Others do not consider their other statuses -- that of spouse, parent, or worker -- only that they are first and foremost a criminal. Sometimes this public inspection might scare or shame a person into conformity, but most likely it has the effect of pushing the person to the point where they loss all further attempts at conformity.

The researcher had also depicted participant's perception of the feature of existing justice system (such as the police, court and court decisions) through their content based explanations of the existing police media. A possible explanation is that there is little agreement on the role that the justice system play on television crime investigations and news reports. Some participants suggests that the justice system are positively portrayed while others show that they are exaggerated. For instance, Dereje explained;

"Now a days, people are trying to defend themselves either through their strength or with the help of others. Once my brother was stolen his mobile phone, it holds very important documents and phone numbers. He really wants his phone back...he reported to the police however, the police told him to call to the thief and make a bargain. People will also told him as if he can do nothing".

After all; the researcher has come across with two distinct ideas, that is, there happened a difference between the police information about the role and contribution of 'Addis police program' to crime prevention

and the public's perception of the 'program' and security and the criminal justice system.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Police media can play crucial role to crime prevention. This study revealed that there exist an important positive and perhaps negative correlations between police media and crime prevention. Participants affirmed that the existing police media representations of crime, criminality, and justice have been focal source of concern.

Two competing ideas can be discerned in the participant's debate, and both however, are also reflected in a large research literatures. On the one hand the existing police media or 'Addis police program' are seen as fundamentally limited or is one sided, on the other as a more or less subtle form of social control or crime prevention.

Those who see the existing 'Addis police program' as limited or as one sided see representations of crime them- selves as a significant cause of offending. It is politicization of crime indicating the champion of police efforts to catchup criminals. The existing police media content does not much serve for the fight against crime. They advocated that sometimes the existing police media works out of the media ethics. They present criminals face and the criminals are seen explaining their accusations, according to the participants such presentations might reinforce the commitment of another crime than serving to prevent crime.

While a different concern about the existing police media representations of crime has satisfied some of the participants. To them the police media are more contributing in the fight against crime or in creating a crime hate society. They advocated that the existing police media is helping the society as an alarm in that creating awareness about crime and crime prevention.

This study to some extent, underpins issues related to the research objective, which centers on the question of popular opinion. What is the role of the media in shaping popular opinion, and to what extent does the media simply reflect societal views?

Media provides, for most people, their primary source of information about, and analysis of, crime, punishment and the criminal justice system. In so doing, it constructs a framework through which the general public understands crime and punishment. It helps us, in short, 'to define what we think about, what we see as problems and the solutions that we consider' (Cavendar, 2004: 336 as cited in Commission on English Prison, 2002).

The study has sightsaw participant's perception of crime, criminals, punishment and justice from their content based explanation of the broadcastings of 'Addis police program'.

Some of the research participants stated that crime stories are central to the existing police media, most particularly to the news in tell. They added as almost always, those crimes that are depicted are exceptional. They also stated as existing police media cover only the most serious, violent offences like rape, murder, organized crime and, of course, increasingly, terrorism. Such is the unrepresentative (i.e. exceptional) nature of much of the crime.

In conclusion, the role of the existing police media as main providers of information about crime and crime investigations must be seen in the onset and evolution of crime prevention strategies, and in shaping public perceptions about crime and its response. However, it is important to note that the impact or "effects" of the existing police media on the development of feelings of injustice, and politicization remains difficult to accurately assess.

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