

Assessing Community Perceptions about Mob Action in Response to Suspected Crime in Mbarara City, Rwizi Region

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Abstract

Introduction: This study was about Assessing Community Perceptions about Mob Action In Response to Suspected Crime in Mbarara City, Rwizi Region. The objectives of the study were; (1) To examine the factors facilitating mob action (2) To assess the effect of mob action (3) To examine ways of preventing of mob action in Rwizi subregion with specific reference to Mbarara city. The study was guided by The Deterrence Theory (DT) propounded by Cesare Beccaria in 1764.

Methods: The study adopted a phenomenological qualitative study design where a total of 54 people participated in the study (48 in the Focus Group Discussions and 6 in the Key informants Interviews). Purposive sampling was adopted for this study and data were collected up to the point of saturation. Approval to conduct the study was sought from the Bishop Stuart University research ethics committee. Data were collected using interview guides. Data was transcribed verbatim by researcher and compared with the audio recordings to verify fidelity of the transcription. Thematic analysis was adopted for this study.

Findings: On the factors that are responsible for mob action in the community the main finding included; perpetual criminality, weak or lenient laws, corruption, lack of trust in the justice system, drug influence and poverty. Loss of lives and property, massive arrests by police, desertion of community, bad social modelling, revengefulness, lawlessness, insecurity and deterrence of further criminality were the major effects of mob action were the main effects of mob action in the community. Findings showed that community sensitization, community policing, employment creation and building of public trust in the legal and justice system would help in undermining the occurrence of mob action in the community.

Conclusions: It was concluded that the seriocomic characteristics of the society played a significant role in the occurrence of mob action ne can conclude that the social. Therefore, it is recommended that interventions that improve the socioeconomic characteristics of the society be designed and implemented such as income generating ventures. Also, interventions that boost the confidence and trust of the public in the law and justice system be designed and implemented.

Keywords: Community Perceptions, Mob Action, Suspected Crime.

Background

Mob action is a form of extrajudicial punishment or retribution in which a person suspected of wrongdoing

is typically humiliated, beaten, and in many cases killed by vigilantes or a crowd (Uganda Human Rights Commission, 2021). The practice of mob action has a long and troubling history and has been observed in various forms and contexts globally Anderson, C., & Tverdova, Y. (2023). While this practice is more commonly reported in developing countries, it is not entirely absent in developed countries. Historical instances in the United States, such as the lynching of George Hughes in Texas in 1930, highlight the racial dimensions of mob action, where black individuals were often the targets of white mobs seeking vigilante justice, leading to brutal killings and widespread violence (Crabb, 2020).

In Europe, the historical tradition of rioting particularly in Britain, suggests a cultural precedent for collective direct action in response to perceived injustices (Fitzgibbon, 2017). However, the emergence of a European judicial space, as seen through initiatives like the Corpus Juris project and the establishment of Eurojust, indicates a concerted effort to formalize and strengthen legal frameworks to combat organized crime and ensure judicial cooperation across member states (Snacken, 2010). Despite these efforts, instances of mob action have been occurring over the past few decades, often as a reaction to perceived failures in the European legal system (Fitzgibbon, 2017).

In developing countries, mob action is often seen as a symptom of poor governance and the failure of social institutions, where citizens prefer to punish criminals using items like iron rods, sticks, stones, and flammable materials resulting in severe medico-legal, social, and public health challenges (Aborode et al., 2023; Chalya et al., 2015). For instance, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, it is referred to as "justice populaire," where citizens collectively kill alleged perpetrators of crimes or witchcraft, often through brutal means such as beating, stoning, or burning them alive (Verweijen, 2013). In Nigeria, mob action has emerged as a response to the perceived failures of the criminal justice system, where public distrust in institutional efficacy and socioeconomic disparities drive individuals to adopt this unlawful approach, violating fundamental human rights such as the right to life and a fair hearing (Shodunke et al., 2023). Ethnographic research in Nairobi's slum areas reveals that mob action functions as a local institution reflecting community norms and collective agency, rather than merely a crime deterrent (Aborode et al., 2023).

In Uganda, historical context shows that mob action was particularly prevalent before even colonial rule Uganda Human Rights Commission. (2021). Mob action was often fueled by governmental and societal leadership provide timely interventions to suspected criminology (Allen & Reid, 2015). Today, mob actions are common in all parts of the country compounded by the societal response to crimes like rape, kidnapping, ritual sacrifices, sexual abuse, theft among others, which are prevalent in both rural and urban area (Kakumba, 2020). According to the Uganda Police Force's annual crime reports, there has been a steady increase in mob cases and death by mob from 426 in 2013 to 746 deaths in 2019 which further increased to 759 cases in 2021, 953 cases in 2022 and 1,039 cases in 2023 (Uganda Police Force, 2024). Homicides by mob action in Uganda occur mainly in response to thefts, robberies, killings, and reports of witchcraft (Kakumba, 2020; Uganda Police Force, 2024). In Mbarara city in particular, community members have adopted mob action as a form of extrajudicial punishment of thieves where groups of individuals use iron rods, sticks, stones, and flammable materials to punish alleged thieves resulting in severe injury or death of the accused without due legal process (Jappah, 2024; Kakumba, 2020; Tolossa et al., 2023).

Mob action is carried out by community members who administer ad hoc or instant justice by killing or severely beating offenders who have contravened the law (Chulec, 2019). Mob action is also referred to as vigilantism, which is an organised attempt by a group of ordinary citizens to enforce norms and maintain

law and order on behalf of their communities, often by resorting to violence (Abraham, 2002). In South Africa, mob action actions are referred to as community assaults, bundu or kangaroo courts, mob killings and vigilante justice and occur mainly in townships and rural areas (Medar, Keyes and Stuart, 2021). Mob action seeks to enforce instant policing measures on an ad hoc basis. This means that the main objective of mob action is to provide safety and security for the community members. To this end, policing is functional for mob action to assume its essence. Hence, without its policing nature, mob action is stripped of its objective and essence. Mob action becomes the vector through which community members enforce security and social order, thereby supplanting the police and or the courts. In this sense, mob action becomes an instrument of social control (Cooper-Knock, 2014). It signifies that offenders who are found on the wrong side of the law are considered enemies who disrupt social order (Chulec, 2019). The focus of mob action actions is to regulate crime or social control with emphasis on the provision of security to both participants and other members of a given established order (Johnston, 1996). Mob action is therefore a response to crime in which offenders are either leniently punished or not correctly held accountable by the state. As a result, the mob substitutes itself with the state's prerogative to enforce the law by dealing with matters themselves (Tei, 2021).

In Rwizi region, most of the mob actions occur in response to suspected theft of money, phones, cattle and motor vehicles. As of 2023, the region registered the highest number of theft cases totaling to 6,562 cases. Particularly, Rwizi region emerges as the leading region in terms of theft of cattle (946 cases) and the second leading region in term of theft of mobile phones with 902 cases compared to Kampala Metropolitan North with 939 cases (Uganda Police Force, 2024). Rwizi region also emerges as the top region in terms of motor vehicle theft cases (52 cases) compared to other regions with exception of central region.

In response to these theft cases, there has been a tendency among community members to use mob killing or community assault as a form of extrajudicial punishment of thieves where groups of individuals use iron rods, sticks, stones, and flammable materials to punish alleged criminals resulting in severe injury or death of the accused without due legal process (Jappah, 2024; Kakumba, 2020; Tolossa et al., 2023). While there have been some efforts to address the root causes of mob action, such as improving legal processes and supporting victims, the practice of mob actions in response to crimes still persists in Uganda in general and Mbarara city in particular (Uganda Police Force, 2024). According to the Uganda Police Force Annual Crime Report 2025, a total of 1,039 cases of Murder by Mob Action were recorded in Uganda in the year 2024, compared to 746 cases recorded in 2020, giving an increase of 39% in this crime category (Uganda Police Force, 2025).

Victims of Mob Action were mainly suspected to have committed theft, robbery or burglary thereby making community take law into their own hands when the suspects are caught. By close of 2023, Rwizi region had registered the highest number of theft cases totaling to 6,562 cases in the whole country with the highest cases being of cattle (946 cases), mobile phones (902 cases) and motor vehicles (52 cases). The region also registered 54 cases of murder by mob action emerging as the 5th highest region out of the 15 regions in the country in terms of murders by mob action (Uganda Police Force, 2024). The increasing cases of mob action are a precursor to community anarchy if not managed well in time (Uganda Human Rights Commission, 2021). It is against such a background that we set out to assess community perceptions about mob action in response to suspected crime in Rwizi region with specific reference to Mbarara city.

Methods

Research Design and settings

Research design refers to the overall plan, structure or strategy that guides research from its conception to the final data analysis (Ranjit, 2019). The researchers adopted a phenomenological study design to study the community perceptions about mob action in response to suspected crime in Mbarara city. Phenomenological design involves exploring the meaning of experiences and how they are perceived by individuals. This type of research design seeks to understand people's perspectives, emotions and behaviours in specific situations (Ranjit, 2019). The study was based on a qualitative approach. Qualitative research approach focuses on discovering and understanding the experiences, perspectives, and thoughts of participants (Harwell, 2017). Qualitative research methods are also described as inductive, in the sense that a researcher may construct theories or hypotheses, explanations, and conceptualizations from details provided by a participant (Harwell, 2017). The study was conducted in Mbarara city southwestern Uganda. Mbarara is an important transport hub, lying west of Masaka on the road to Kabale, near Lake Mburo National Park.

Study Population and sample size

The study population was comprised of 48 local council one (LC1) leaders, from six cells 3 police officers and 3 boda-boda stage chairpersons within in Mbarara city. The LC1 leaders were preferred for the study because they are the main opinion leaders and representatives of the local community. On the other hand, the police officers and the boda-boda stage chairmen were selected because they were either responsible for crime investigations and administration of criminal justice within Mbarara city or they were considered influential facilitating and managing mob action in their various communities. The sample size was determined at saturation level where participants were interviewed until when no new information could be obtained from any additional participants. In this study data was collected from 54 participants in general.

Data Collection Methods

The study used Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to collect data from the local council one (LC1) leaders from the selected cells within the city. Focus Group Discussions are facilitated discussions, held with a small group of people to find out their perceptions and attitudes about a particular topic. In this study, six (6) focus groups discussions were conducted. Each of the FGDs was composed of eight (8) members mixed both males and females. Eight participants were considered manageable number to facilitate meaningful interactions in the FGDs besides 8 participants is the scientifically recommended minimum number of a focus group (Amin, M, 2005; Ranjit, 2019).

Data Management and Analysis

After data collection, data was transcribed verbatim and compared with the audio recordings to verify fidelity of the transcription. If there were any transcripts in the local language of any particular participant, these were translated into English by an independent translator. Any discrepancies in the translation were discussed and amended accordingly. All the research team members independently read through the transcripts. Coding of data was done by a single researcher and thereafter the codes were discussed by the researcher and the supervisors for consensus based on the themes that will have emerged from the data. Thematic analysis was adopted for this study, because it allows the researchers to fully reveal the

meanings emerging from the data while conceptualizing narrative reports as per significant units (Morgan, 2011). The researcher selected quotations from both In-depth interviews and KIIs in support of the results.

Results

The study main theme was community perceptions about mob action in response to suspected crime in Rwizi region. Three subthemes were generated from the findings these included (1) factors facilitating mob action evidenced in terms of perpetual criminality, weak or lenient laws, corruption, lack of trust in the justice system, drug influence and poverty. (2) the effect of mob action evidenced by loss of lives and property, massive arrests by police, desertion of community, bad social modelling, revengefulness, lawlessness, insecurity and deterrence of further criminality were the major effects of mob action. (3) ways of preventing of mob action which included community sensitization, community policing, employment creation and building of public trust in the legal and justice system. Relevant quotations were obtained from each subtheme and the most relevant as well as compelling quotations were presented.

Factors facilitating mob action in Mbarara city, Rwizi subregion

In the first place before delving into the actual content of the study, participants were asked about their knowledge and understanding of mob action. The participants defined it as a situation where some of the community members after suspecting that crime has been committed, they choose to take the law into their hands and punish the suspected offender by themselves without considering the justice procedure. Indeed, one of the participants in the FGD commented that.

“Mob action is taking the law into your own hands. For example, suspecting someone for stealing, defilement or murder and us the community members because of anger we decide to punish the suspect by stoning, beating or sometimes burning this person without first of all making proper investigation or involving the police” FGD1, Participant 7.

Almost all the participants in the various FGDs their definition and understanding of mob action hinged around the definition above. From the definition above, one could tell that the participants were aware of what they were being asked, and were the best people to respond to take part in the study. It is from this point that the participants were asked about the factors that facilitated mob action in their communities and their responses and summarised as follows;

Perpetual criminality; participants argued that sometimes mob action was done as a last resort to someone or group of people who are known within the community as thugs. They explained that sometimes community chooses to keep forgiving some criminals because they are may be prominent children of some people within the community. However, at some point members get tired and choose to deal with them due to the constant and perpetual injury and pain they cause to their fellow community members. To make this more explicit one of the participants in the FGD commented that

“Mob justice some of it maybe caused by a person. You might be having like a person/child whom you have been living within the community but you get tired of him or her. Has been stealing this and that. So people get fed up of him or her, when get him or her red handed committing another crime, people just gather and even invite even that one that was not part of it that was passing by so any one who comes with a hoe, hoe handle all beat him up yet he belongs to that community” FGD 3, Participant 4

One would argue that perpetual criminality especially by some of the community members, tests the patience of the community and when they can no longer tolerate such individuals, the community is left with no any other option apart from punishing the criminals themselves through mob action.

Weak or lenient laws; also, participants opined that on many occasions the laws in their community are never enforced or are too weak to prevent criminality. They based their argument on the fact that some gruesome criminals are given bail by police even when there is glaring evidence against them. The community therefore gets frustrated and decide to take the law in their own hand as one of the participants commented that,

“After arresting a criminal, we are tired of taking people to police. Because you look for what you are doing you can’t get it. Because you involve in your personal transport, take the person to police but by the time you are back home they are also already home, you keep wondering what you have done whether it has sense or not? This kind of situation makes us to ignore reporting or taking criminals to police, the laws are very weak so in such a situation what can we do to prevent criminality? We simply take the law in our hands and deal with the criminals by ourselves directly” FGD 3, Participant 6

It should be noted that lenient and weak laws do not deter criminality a more robust law responding to suspected crime needed to be put in place. However, even if laws are in place and they are not enforced they serve no any purpose. One would therefore argue the law enforcers to implement the existing laws in order to curtail criminality and reduce cases of mob action in the society.

Corruption; another facilitating factor to mob action the community members point at was corruption. They argued that corruption stood in the way of justice on a number of occasions. For example, many of the suspected criminals that were taken to the police were immediately granted bail by the police officers even without doing any investigations or ignoring the evidences brought to them by the community.

“After reaching police, because of the other people the criminals work with have enough money to bribe the police officers, by the time you reach home, you find the suspect already out of police cells and is back home. So, this causes people in the community to get tired. So now when we arrest him again even though he has stolen like a mango or an orange, they don’t wait but rather do mob justice and kill him. Because of the other issue, someone not taking long in jail as he is serving. But they instead bail him out every now and again. He has been in jail nine times as he is being bailed out and people get tired of it”. FGD 4, participant 3

The foregoing comment from participants clearly shows how corruption in the justice system fuels mob action in the community.

Lack of trust in the justice system; related to corruption is the lack of trust in the justice system, participants argued that the courts of law are infiltrated with scrupulous individuals who do not care about the poor and the community at large. To make matters worse, the magistrates and judges are not always available in court, the perpetual absence of the magistrates frustrates the community and they choose to take the law in their hands. For example, one of the participants commented that;

“Now that courts no longer do their job, instead it’s just a joke. The magistrate isn’t there, the judge isn’t around, they are in court sessions, or they are somewhere, now you find that someone is back in the community, and has brought back the same habits just because court and police have failed their job. But does he even reach the court level? They actually bail him out from police level, by paying some little money of kitu kidogo. When they release him, he still finds the people around. So that frustrates people, due to the other courts not working. So, in this what the community does is to simply take the law in their hands” FGD 2, Participant 6.

Influence of drugs, participants also argued that sometimes people who get involved in mob action are normally under the influence of drugs especially marijuana. These h=guys done fear anything and take pride in committing crime. Therefore, in case they suspect anyone for doing a wrong thing they also raise

up in the full force of energy to deal with criminality and mobilize their fellows to do mob justice. One of the participants argued that;

“Actually, the most done thing in Uganda now is under influence of drugs. All the children doing those wrong things. Even though a small thing happens like oh someone is innocent but they claim that he has stolen something, they lynch him or her. Those people under the influence of drugs are the ones who normally do a lot of issues because someone who reasons can’t rush to beat someone that they have committed a crime . . . but children under the influence of drug, they are the ones who are normally involved in mob action” FGD 5, Participant 8.

There are a number of factors that are responsible for mob action in the community, as presented in the section above. The most profound ones as mentioned by the community were, weak laws, corruption, mistrust in the justice system, perpetual criminality and drug abuse.

Effect of mob action in Mbarara city, Rwizi subregion

Participants were again asked to discuss the effect of mob action in their community and various responses were obtained as presented hereunder.

Loss of property and lives, findings revealed that mob action led to massive loss of property and sometimes lives would also be lost. They argued that mob action was characterized by people destroying property of the suspects for example people would displace their anger on the cattle, goats or even buildings and plantations of the suspects. Their property would be raised down in the processes of mob action.

“People have died. People have died in such things. You find that a person is killed innocently yet is not the one who has done it. so death rates have increased due to people dying innocently. Another one, most people are in custodies, they didn’t commit any crime but were taken as suspects and have ended their lives in custodies”. FGD 3, Participant 1.

In agreement with this participant another FGD participant argued that mob action normally involves destroying of property out of anger.

“Many people especially those who are suspected of ritual sacrifices, murder and land grabbing, these ones normally their property e.g. houses, farms, vehicles are destroyed by the community members” FGD1, Participant 6.

From the submission above, it can be argued that mob action does not only stop at destruction of property and lives but has an economic implication to the larger community. Again, one can argue that mob action undermines the economic development of society.

Massive police arrests; basing on the previous argument findings revealed that after destruction of property and sometimes loss of lives, the long arm of government through security operatives do carry out massive arrests of all suspects relating to the staged mob action. This results in arrests of innocent people sometimes, and this has an implication on family wellbeing as one of the participants in the FGD commented

“Another issue, some families are suffering because like those head of families, you might find now like my family, they arrest me and put me in prison, now you find that my kids who would be in school, schooling stops from there. If I have a wife, my woman who would have remained in her home, ends up going away. So that’s one of the things among which we see are bad on mob action. Some families are suffering not that they wish, only it happened and they said that your father killed a person, he was taken and is to be arrested for 20 years, if a child was joining nursery won’t go there, the one who was joining primary will drop from there. So there is a way some families have been affected”. FGD 3, Participant 2.

It can be argued that the effect of mob action is more felt by the family members, as they soon or later start to suffer consequences of a family member getting involved in mob action. As findings showed, family members suffer from dearth lack of essential needs. However, there could also be psychological distresses suffered by family members e.g. depression.

Desertion of community, this was mentioned by some participants who argued that whenever mob action would take place, it would be followed by police arrests. These police arrests would again lead to some people running away from community in fear of being arrested for getting involved in unlawful activities. This is well explained in the following verbatim,

“It again also causes a person who used to stay that particular community, causing that person to escape from that community. Sometimes if they have done that act of mob justice, you find that you all vacate, you find yourself leaving the family alone, when you go, you will never come back in that place because you know when you come back, they will arrest you”. FGD 2, Participant 7

From the above verbatim, it is quite evident that mob action compromised some people's social positions in the society and they had no any options left around them apart from going into some kind of involuntary relocation to other places. Some in fact went in to hiding.

Setting bad examples to the young generation, research findings also revealed that mob action led to setting of bad examples to the young generation through modeling, children learn to appreciate that conflict is managed through mob action. They only wait for such a time when they are also big to also implement mob action against any suspected crime. This is evidenced in one of the verbatims expressed by one of the research participants where they were quoted saying,

“Just because when you do mob, it's not that when the older people do mob action, that the young ones aren't watching, so you find that a young child has seen how they are crushing another person suspected of wrong doing, so they get that heart of knowing that its possible. Killing a person or destroying property is inevitable” FGD3, Participant 4

One would argue that there would be in the end a vicious cycle of mob action since it is spread from one generation to another.

Revengefulness and suspicion, similarly participants argued that mob action led to feelings of desire for revenge. If a family lost a dear one or lost property due to mob action, there would be a desire for the victims of mob action to crave for opportunities of revenge. This is clearly explained in the following verbatim;

“Another thing, it has caused, when such a person is killed through mob justice, this causes some families to keep holding onto this such as when their child is killed, they remain suspicious in that it grows within them the family where the child was killed. They say that now, they killed our child who was innocent. So it makes that thing remaining in the community. They continue to saying that also us they killed our person, so also them you find one time they do kill their person” FGD 4, Participant 2

One would argue that mob action acts as a breeding ground for hatred within the community as once friendly community members keep holding grudges and feelings of revenge as well as suspicion of one another.

Lawlessness and insecurity, also research findings revealed that mob action led to lawlessness and insecurities within the community. This they argued that due to mob action, many people get anxious and be under tension wondering whether government is in control of the security of the community or not. For instance, a participant was quoted saying;

“Now like us LC's, the issues of security, we be so alert without sleeping. All attention is put on looking for people who have done mob justice. Some for us we even loose our own moneys, and time and jobs, looking for those who do such things. So, when mob justice takes place in a community, it affects most things”. FGD 6, Participant 5

With insecurity and lawlessness coming as a result of mob action, this implies that no one is safe. Anyone can be suspected of criminality but also very innocent people can be targeted by hooliganism under the guise of mob action against criminology

Prevention of further criminality, however, on the positive note, participants underscored the importance of mob action prevention of criminality. They argued that mob action inculcated a sense of fear for people to get involved in criminology. This they said mob action would not give them chance to be heard or benefit from police bonds and courts bails so society appreciated that bit of mob action as a deterrent measure for criminality.

“Yes, me I support mob action because, I might give you an example of Biafra, that cell has a lot of mob action, most people fear going to steal in Biafra cell. Because they know that if you're caught whether suspect or not, as long as you're caught, you will be killed immediately. So in a community when there is mob justice, that's where people will fear more, that if I do anything in that area, they will do this and that” FGD 1 Participant 5

From the findings above one would conclude that mob action has more negative side effects and it does a lot of harm to society both directly and indirectly. This is very true due to the various dangers associated with mob action even when some people tend to appreciate its assumed deterrent role in criminality.

Ways of preventing of mob action in Mbarara city, Rwizi subregion

Lastly participants were again asked to discuss the ways through which mob action would be prevented in their community and various responses were obtained as presented below.

Community sensitization; research findings revealed that, the community needed to be sensitized about the dangers of mob action to the rest of the community members not only to the suspects. This they mentioned because sometimes community members do not exactly know the repercussions of their direct or passive involvement into mob action. To make this more explicit one of the participants in the FGD was submitted that;

“So, me I think on those things, we are lacking sensitization. If people knew very well, they would be getting that person, they take him or her either to the local council or even themselves working out among themselves that a procedure of first of all listening to the suspect and the handing him over to the authorities other than just beating up the person randomly”. FGD 1, participant 1

Sensitization of community members was re-echoed by another FGD participant who argued that workshops and seminars for Local Council 1 members and the entire community would be very helpful in combating mob action in the society.

“I was thinking that the ones concerned or even government, should open up for workshops. Those people should work hand in hand with local councils. They should train people, educate them, open up workshops and teach them cell by cell about the dangers of mob justice in the society” FGD 4, participant 1

From the above submission of the participants, it is quite obvious that the community members lacked awareness of the dangers of mob action and therefore workshops, sensitizations and seminars would be very helpful in the prevention of mob actions in the society.

Community policing, participants also suggested that enforcing and funding of community policing activities would lessen the incidences of mob action in the society. They argued that community policing would create a clear link between the community and the law enforcement authorities thus inculcating trust and an easy reporting system of any criminality in the society. Indeed, one of the participants in the FGDs commented that;

“Like now we have our community liaison officer of the Uganda police, those are the people supposed to come here in the community, mingle with us, teach us, befriend the community and help us to understanding a number of laws and how community should be handling those who violate laws. This kind of working together without fearing police would help so much in reducing crime but also people would be feeling comfortable reporting cases without taking the law in their hands” FGD5, participant3

However, on community policing participants observed that there was need for government to properly budget and put money aside to facilitate the processes and activities of community policing.

“The thing of community policing is good because it helps us not to fear the police however it is not very well funded. The liaison officers are not facilitated to come in the community very well. If you ask them to come in your community, you must again give them money for fuel and sometimes some small lunch. This is very hard to be done by the LCI. So, government needs to consider community policing in the budget” FGD 2, participant 8

Whereas community policing was underscored as an effective way of managing mob action, the participants also expressed reservation if the policy was not being funded well. Thereby rendering the policy not very helpful in connecting a common person on the ground with the law enforcement authorities.

Employment; Participants also noted that the people who mostly participated in mob action were those who didn't have a clear source of income and therefore they were idle. They argued that unemployment would lure many young and energetic colleagues in the community to take part in mob action whenever necessary. They urged government to provide a conducive environment for job creation and where possible government its self should create jobs for young people;

“But another thing the government has to do is also create jobs that can keep the youth busy because most youth who carry get into acts of mob justice, they are always around 18 years to 20 or 30. So if those youth are found busy, they have the government initiating for them something to be doing, they can't be engaged in mob justice so much, so that they don't disturb the peace of the community” FGD 1. Participant 4

Participants also urged parents to guide their children very well by involving them in their farms, businesses and finding ways of making them busy with some sort of economic activity. They suggested that parents should equally get involved in continuous sensitization of their children and all other young people around them the dangers of mob action.

Revamp and revitalize the justice system, participants also suggested that the justice system should be vigilant in handling and settling cases of criminality in time so that they can build the trust and the confidence of the public. Participants had earlier noted that mob justice was rampant in Mbarara city due to the fact that the public had lost trust and confidence in the police and other law enforcement agencies as well as the judiciary.

“Me I would say that, if the police and courts were doing their things in time . . . Honestly speaking now like the mob justice we have if it is at 70%, it would be running down up to like less than 20% or even get done completely. But what causes issue is like I said, court and police have not managed to do their things

in time, there is a lot corruption, prolonged and unnecessary court procedures, delayed justice etc. if these things are worked on, I tell you we shall not have any cases of mob justice in Mbarara” FGD 6, Participant 4

Participant argued that revamping the law-and-order system would involve recruitment of more magistrates and judges, fight corruption and provide timely trials and fair judgements.

Discussion

Participants described mob action as a situation where some of the community members after suspecting that crime has been committed, they choose to take the law in to their hands and punish the suspected offender by themselves without considering the justice procedure. This description is in agreement with the definition put forth by the Uganda human Rights commission (2021) which describes Mob action a form of extrajudicial punishment or retribution in which a person suspected of wrongdoing is typically humiliated, beaten, and in many cases killed by vigilantes or a crowd (Uganda Human Rights Commission, 2021). From the definition above, one could tell that the participants were aware of what they were being asked, and were the best people to respond to take part in the study.

Findings also revealed that sometimes mob action was done as a last resort to someone or group of people who are known within the community as thugs. They explained that sometimes community chooses to keep forgiving some criminals because they are may be prominent children of some people within the community. However, at some point members get tired and choose to deal with them due to the constant and perpetual injury and pain they cause to their fellow community members. One would argue that perpetual criminality especially by some of the community members, tests the patience of the community and when they can no longer tolerate such individuals, the community is left with no any other option apart from punishing the criminals themselves through mob action. This argument is in line with some scholars who argue that Mob action is a response to crime in which offenders are either leniently punished or not correctly held accountable by the state. As a result, the mob substitutes itself with the state's prerogative to enforce the law by dealing with matters themselves (Tei, 2021).

Also, participants opined that on many occasions the laws in their community are never enforced or are too weak to prevent criminality. They based their argument on the fact that some gruesome criminals are given bail by police even when there is glaring evidence against them. The community therefore gets frustrated and decide to take the law in their own hands. Such argument is in line with Prasetyo et al. (2024) who contends that weak law enforcement, and a lack of legal awareness as key factors driving the use of mob action over normal legal procedures in response to suspected theft among community members. It should be noted that lenient and weak laws do not deter criminality a more robust law responding to suspected crime needed to be put in put. Mob action is therefore a response to crime in which offenders are either leniently punished or not correctly held accountable by the state. As a result, the mob substitutes itself with the state's prerogative to enforce the law by dealing with matters themselves (Tei, 2021).

Community members point at was corruption; they argued that corruption stood in the way of justice on a number of occasions. For example, many of the suspected criminals that were taken to the police were immediately granted bail by the police officers even without doing any investigations or ignoring the evidences brought to them by the community. In line with the findings, Katabalwa (2024) argues that the major cause of mob action in Kampala to include the tendency of criminals to bribe their way out of police custody and thereon prosecution in courts of law.

Similarly, lack of trust in the justice system was significantly pointed out as a facilitator of mob action in Mbarara city. Participants argued that the courts of law are infiltrated with scrupulous individuals who do not care about the poor and the community at large. To make matters worse, the magistrates and judges are not always available in court, the perpetual absence of the magistrates frustrates the community and they choose to take the law in their hands. This is in agreement with Lestari et al. (2023) who highlights that public unrest and a lack of trust in law enforcement officials lead community members to resort to vigilantism, such as mob action, in response to suspected criminality.

Findings revealed that mob action led to massive loss of property and sometimes lives would also be lost. They argued that mob action was characterized by people destroying property of the suspects for example people would displace their anger on the cattle, goats or even buildings and plantations of the suspects. Their property would be raised down in the processes of mob action. This is in agreement with the findings of Nussio (2024) in Mexico, who found that mob action was characterised by killings and destruction of property especially for the suspects.

Massive police arrests; basing on the previous argument findings revealed that after destruction of property and sometimes loss of lives, the long arm of government through security operatives do carry out massive arrests of all suspects relating to the staged mob action. This results in arrests of innocent people sometimes, and this has an implication on family wellbeing. It can be argued that the effect of mob action is more felt by the family members, as they soon or later start to suffer consequences of a family member getting involved in mob action. As findings showed, family members suffer from dearth lack of essential needs. However, there could also be psychological distresses suffered by family members e.g. depression. Mob justice creates a sudden disintegration in the investigation process and the impenetrability or impracticality of arresting other accomplices of the suspected crime. Mob justice at all times offers penalty which is extremely ruthless and brutal, compared to the crime committed (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014).

Research findings also revealed that mob action led to setting of bad examples to the young generation through modeling, children learn to appreciate that conflict is managed through mob action. They only wait for such a time when they are also big to also implement mob action against any suspected crime. Such findings are in agreement with some scholars who argue that mob actions a breeding ground for continuous humiliation, lynching of suspects and lawlessness within the community as young people keep emulating the vice from their seniors within the community (Bekele, 2022; Ikejiaku & Osabutey, 2024). Findings revealed that mob action led to lawlessness and insecurities within the community. This they argued that due to mob action, many people get anxious and be under tension wondering whether government is in control of the security of the community or not. With insecurity and lawlessness coming as a result of mob action, this implies that no one is safe. Anyone can be suspected of criminality but also very innocent people can be targeted by hooliganism under the guise of mob action against criminology. Mob justice provides a stern intimidation to national and global security, peace and stability. On the global front, Mob justice practice clearly depicts people as primitive and uncivilized. There are many situations where innocent victims have been brutalized and killed as mistaken identity incident owing to the fact that it is also possible that an innocent person fleeing from a scene to avoid a probable suspicious link with a crime committed may be securitized and brutalized (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014).

Participants underscored the importance of mob action prevention of criminality. They argued that mob action inculcated a sense of fear for people to get involved in criminology. This they said mob action would not give them chance to be heard or benefit from police bonds and courts bails so society appreciated that bit of mob action as a deterrent measure for criminality. Note that Yeboah-Assiamah &

Kyeremeh (2014) revealed that perceived benefits of applying mob action among community members in Ghana include a sense of immediate justice and deterrence against potential criminals. Respondents in the study indicated that mob action is seen as a necessary response to the perceived inadequacies of the police and legal systems, which are viewed as slow and unresponsive. This form of action is believed to instill fear in wrongdoers and provide a quicker resolution to grievances, thereby addressing community safety concerns effectively.

Research findings revealed that, the community needed to be sensitized about the dangers of mob action to the rest of the community members not only to the suspects. This they mentioned because sometimes community members do not exactly know the repercussions of their direct or passive involvement into mob action. This is in agreement with scholars who opine that civic education on legal processes for handling crimes may reduce people's willingness to participate in mob justice. For the population to access justice, they must understand their rights and the means for claiming them (Kakumba, 2020).

Participants also suggested that enforcing and funding of community policing activities would lessen the incidences of mob action in the society. They argued that community policing would create a clear link between the community and the law enforcement authorities thus inculcating trust and an easy reporting system of any criminality in the society. Strengthening the relationship between police and the public through community policing programs can also help restore public confidence in the police (Glad et al., 2020). Strengthening Police and Community Partnerships (SPCP) is a one-day, in-person facilitated program, which engages local law enforcement and community leaders in a dialogue to identify issues and collaboratively develop solutions that improve police-community partnerships (Gaffigan, 2018).

Participants also noted that the people who mostly participated in mob action were those who didn't have a clear source of income and therefore they were idle. They argued that unemployment would lure many young and energetic colleagues in the community to take part in mob action whenever necessary. This is in agreement with scholars who advocate for socioeconomic transformation of communities in the fight against its occurrence. Poverty, discrimination, lack of education, and lack of employment opportunities have been reported to be other important risk factors for mob-justice, therefore improving the social economic wellbeing of citizens significantly undermines the occurrence of mob actions in the society (Chalya et al., 2015).

Participants also suggested that the justice system should be vigilant in handling and settling cases of criminality in time so that they can build the trust and the confidence of the public. Participants had earlier noted that mob justice was rampant in Mbarara city due to the fact that the public had lost trust and confidence in the police and other law enforcement agencies as well as the judiciary. Participant argued that revamping the law-and-order system would involve recruitment of more magistrates and judges, fight corruption and provide timely trials and fair judgements. This is in agreement, with studies that argue that to increase public trust in the police and courts, efforts must be made to fight corruption and improve transparency in the handling of reported crimes (Kakumba Ronald, 2020).

Conclusions and Recommendations

There a number of factors that are responsible for mob action in the community which include; perpetual criminality, weak or lenient laws, corruption, lack of trust in the justice system, drug influence and poverty. Therefore, it was concluded that the seriocomic characteristics of the society played a significant role in the occurrence of mob action ne can conclude that the social. It was recommended that interventions that

improve the socioeconomic characteristics of the society be designed and implemented such as income generating ventures.

Findings revealed that loss of lives and property, massive arrests by police, desertion of community, bad social modelling, revengefulness, lawlessness, insecurity and deterrence of further criminality were the major effects of mob action. One can conclude that whereas there was mob action did more harm than good to the general welfare of the community. It was therefore recommended that interventions that increase community awareness of the debilitating repercussions of mob action to the community be designed and implemented such as community sensitization.

Lastly, findings showed that community sensitization, community policing, employment creation and building of public trust in the legal and justice system would help in undermining the occurrence of mob action in the community. In general terms interventions that boost the confidence and trust of the public in the law and justice system be designed. Such as fighting corruption and general community engagement with law enforcing officers.

Ethical approval and consent to participate

Approval to conduct the study was obtained from Mbarara University of Science and Technology Research and Ethics Committee (BSU-REC-2025-500). Moreover Informed consent was also obtained from all study participants before commencement of data collection.

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