

DETERMINANTS OF ARMED ROBBERY AMONG RESIDENTS OF KENEMA MUNICIPALITY, SIERRA LEONE

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ABSTRACT

Armed robbery remains a serious threat to personal security, community stability and local economic development, particularly in urban communities where unemployment, poverty, substance abuse and weaknesses in formal security structures intersect. This study examined the determinants of armed robbery among residents of Kenema Municipality, Sierra Leone. Specifically, it investigated the major socioeconomic and social factors associated with armed robbery, examined the role of substance abuse and peer influence, assessed residents' perceptions of security measures and policing strategies, and explored the effects of armed robbery on residents and communities. The study adopted a descriptive research design. The study population comprised community residents, law-enforcement officers, traders and business owners, and community leaders within Kenema Municipality. A sample of 60 respondents was selected through a combination of simple random and purposive sampling techniques. Primary data were collected mainly through a structured questionnaire, while documentary sources were used to support the analysis. Quantitative data were analysed using frequencies and percentages.

The findings showed that unemployment and poverty were perceived as the leading causes of armed robbery, with 53% of respondents identifying them as the principal factors. Furthermore, 89.6% either agreed or strongly agreed that poverty and limited economic opportunities encourage youth involvement in armed robbery. Substance abuse and peer influence also emerged strongly: 66% reported that substance abuse contributes greatly or very greatly to armed robbery, while 95% agreed or strongly agreed that peer pressure encourages youth involvement. Regarding policing, 41.6% had never heard of the Local Needs Policing framework, while corruption within the police force was identified by 33.3% as the leading obstacle to effective policing. Armed robbery also had important social and economic consequences: 85% agreed or strongly agreed that it negatively affects business activity, while fear and anxiety emerged as the most commonly reported psychological effect. The study concludes that armed robbery in Kenema Municipality cannot be explained by a single factor. Rather, it reflects the interaction of economic deprivation, substance abuse, peer influence, weaknesses in family supervision and limitations in community-security relations. The study recommends expanded youth employment and skills programmes, substance-abuse prevention and rehabilitation, strengthened police accountability and community policing, and properly regulated neighbourhood-watch initiatives.

Keywords: Armed robbery; unemployment; substance abuse; peer influence; policing; community security; Kenema Municipality; Sierra Leone

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Armed robbery is one of the most disturbing forms of violent crime because it combines the unlawful taking of property with the use or threat of violence. Its consequences extend beyond the immediate loss of money and property to physical injury, psychological trauma, fear, declining community trust and disruption of economic activities. Understanding armed robbery therefore requires attention not only to individual offenders but also to the economic, social and environmental conditions within which violent crime occurs.

At the global level, criminological research has consistently shown that crime is shaped by an interaction between structural pressures, social relationships and opportunities for offending. Merton's (1938) strain perspective argues that crime can become more attractive when socially valued goals are emphasized but legitimate means of achieving them are unequally available. Agnew (1992) subsequently broadened this explanation by showing that different forms of strain and negative experiences may create pressures that increase the likelihood of delinquent or criminal coping responses. These perspectives are especially relevant in communities where unemployment, economic hardship and limited opportunities affect large numbers of young people.

Crime is also influenced by the social environment in which people live and interact. Family supervision, peer relationships and exposure to delinquent networks can shape behaviour. Hoeve et al. (2009), in a meta-analysis of research on parenting and delinquency, established a relationship between parenting practices and delinquent behaviour, with parental monitoring among the particularly important dimensions. This suggests that economic pressures may become more serious when they operate alongside weak family supervision and strong exposure to delinquent peers.

The physical and security environment also matters. Cohen and Felson's (1979) Routine Activity Theory proposes that predatory crime becomes more likely when a motivated offender and a suitable target come together in the absence of capable guardianship. From this perspective, inadequate security presence, poor surveillance, weak community vigilance and predictable movement of potential victims can create opportunities for robbery. Contemporary evidence on policing similarly demonstrates that concentrating police resources in crime hotspots can produce reductions in crime when such interventions are properly implemented (Braga et al., 2019).

Within sub-Saharan African cities, these theoretical concerns are particularly important because rapid urban growth frequently occurs alongside youth unemployment, informal employment, inequality, pressure on social services and limited policing resources. Although these conditions do not automatically produce crime, their interaction may create environments in which vulnerable young people are more easily exposed to criminal networks while residents and businesses face increased security risks.

Sierra Leone provides an important post-conflict setting for examining these relationships. The country continues to confront challenges associated with youth livelihoods, substance abuse, urban poverty and the capacity of institutions responsible for community security. In such a context, understanding armed robbery requires moving beyond the assumption that criminal

behaviour is simply the result of individual moral failure. It is equally necessary to investigate the social and economic pressures surrounding young people, their peer networks, substance use, community structures and residents' relationships with security institutions.

Kenema Municipality is an important commercial and administrative centre in eastern Sierra Leone. Its expanding residential areas, commercial activities, transportation networks and youthful population make community security an important development concern. The original study was motivated by residents' concerns about armed robbery and its implications for traders, households and communities. Yet localized empirical evidence explaining how residents themselves understand the causes and consequences of armed robbery remains limited. This study therefore examines armed robbery from the perspectives of community residents, traders, law-enforcement personnel and community leaders, thereby providing locally grounded evidence for crime prevention and community-safety interventions.

2.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Armed robbery has become an important security concern for residents, businesses and communities in Kenema Municipality. Its significance lies not only in the immediate threat of violence but also in its broader consequences for livelihoods, community confidence and local development. Residents who fear violent attacks may restrict their movements, traders may reduce operating hours, households may spend additional resources on security, and distrust may develop between community members and institutions responsible for their protection.

Efforts to address armed robbery commonly emphasize arrests, patrols and other law-enforcement responses. Although such measures are necessary, they may have limited long-term effect when the social and economic conditions associated with crime remain unaddressed. Unemployment, poverty, limited economic opportunities, substance abuse, peer influence, weak parental supervision and access to illegal weapons may interact in ways that increase vulnerability to criminal involvement.

There are also concerns surrounding the effectiveness of community-security arrangements. Crime prevention depends partly on public willingness to report suspicious activities and cooperate with law-enforcement institutions. Research on procedural justice and police legitimacy shows that perceptions of fair treatment and institutional legitimacy are associated with greater public willingness to cooperate with police (Bolger & Walters, 2019). Where trust is weak, intelligence sharing and community participation in crime prevention may consequently suffer.

Despite these concerns, much of the available discussion of crime in Sierra Leone operates at a broad national level. There remains limited municipality-specific empirical research examining how socioeconomic pressures, substance abuse, peer relationships, policing challenges and community impacts interact in Kenema. Without such localized evidence, interventions may concentrate on the visible manifestations of armed robbery while overlooking its underlying drivers.

The problem addressed by this study is therefore the inadequate localized understanding of the multiple factors associated with armed robbery in Kenema Municipality. The study responds to this gap by examining the problem from four connected dimensions: its perceived causes,

the influence of substances and peers, the effectiveness of security and policing arrangements, and its consequences for residents and communities.

3.0 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study has practical and academic significance. For government and policymakers, it provides locally generated evidence on socioeconomic and social factors that residents associate with armed robbery. Such evidence can contribute to policies that combine crime control with employment creation, skills development, drug prevention and community development.

For the Sierra Leone Police and other security institutions, the study highlights community perceptions of policing, public awareness of community-policing structures, police-community cooperation and perceived obstacles to effective security provision. These findings can contribute to more responsive community-security strategies.

Community leaders and civil-society organisations may also use the findings to strengthen youth engagement, parental support, neighbourhood vigilance and substance-abuse awareness programmes. Traders and business owners can benefit from a better understanding of community-level security risks and the importance of collective crime-prevention arrangements.

Academically, the study contributes municipality-level evidence to the literature on crime, youth vulnerability, community security and policing in Sierra Leone. It also provides a basis for future comparative research in other municipalities such as Bo, Makeni and Freetown.

4.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is anchored in three complementary criminological perspectives: Strain Theory, Social Learning Theory and Routine Activity Theory.

4.1 Strain Theory

Merton (1938) argued that social structures can create pressure when societies strongly emphasize culturally valued goals such as economic success while access to legitimate means of achieving those goals remains unequal. Under such conditions, some individuals may adapt through illegitimate means. Agnew (1992) expanded strain theory by explaining that strain may arise from failure to achieve desired goals, the loss of valued conditions or exposure to negative experiences.

The theory is relevant to the present study because unemployment, poverty and limited economic opportunities were central concerns in the original research. Strain Theory does not suggest that poor or unemployed people automatically become criminals. Rather, it provides a framework for understanding how prolonged economic exclusion can create pressures that, when combined with other risk factors, may increase vulnerability to criminal behaviour.

4.2 Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory explains criminal behaviour as behaviour that can be learned and reinforced through social interaction. Individuals who regularly associate with peers who approve of offending may be exposed to attitudes, justifications and techniques that make criminal conduct more acceptable.

This perspective is particularly relevant to the study's examination of peer influence and substance abuse. Youths who become integrated into delinquent peer groups may experience pressure to participate in risky behaviour, while criminal conduct may be reinforced through financial rewards, group acceptance or status. The theory therefore helps explain why individual economic vulnerability may develop into criminal participation within particular social networks.

4.3 Routine Activity Theory

Routine Activity Theory, developed by Cohen and Felson (1979), argues that predatory crime is more likely when three conditions converge: a motivated offender, a suitable target and the absence of capable guardianship. Armed robbery is therefore influenced not only by offender motivation but also by the circumstances that create opportunities for offending.

The theory is relevant to Kenema because community surveillance, police presence, business-security practices and police-community cooperation can affect opportunities for robbery. Together, the three theories provide an integrated explanation: Strain Theory addresses structural pressure, Social Learning Theory explains peer-based transmission and reinforcement of criminal behaviour, and Routine Activity Theory explains the opportunity conditions under which robbery may occur.

5.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

5.1 Objective One: Socioeconomic and Social Causes of Armed Robbery

Economic deprivation has long occupied an important place in explanations of crime. Merton (1938) linked offending to structural inequalities between culturally valued aspirations and legitimate opportunities, while Agnew (1992) demonstrated that strain can generate negative emotions and increase the possibility of criminal coping under certain circumstances.

However, unemployment and poverty should not be treated as automatic causes of crime. Most economically disadvantaged individuals do not become offenders. Their importance lies in the pressures they may generate when combined with social exclusion, weak support structures, criminal opportunities and association with offending networks.

Family processes are another important component. Hoeve et al. (2009), drawing on 161 published and unpublished studies, found a relationship between parenting and delinquency and identified parental monitoring among the important parenting dimensions associated with delinquent behaviour. Weak supervision can therefore increase young people's exposure to risky environments and delinquent peers.

Routine Activity Theory further demonstrates that opportunity matters. Cohen and Felson (1979) argue that crime becomes possible when motivated offenders encounter suitable targets

without effective guardianship. This suggests that socioeconomic pressures alone cannot explain armed robbery; the local security environment and opportunities available to offenders must also be considered.

5.2 Objective Two: Substance Abuse and Peer Influence

Substance abuse and peer networks are frequently interconnected with youth offending. Substance use can impair judgement, reduce inhibition and expose young people to social networks in which risky or illegal behaviour is more common. However, the relationship is complex, and substance use should not be interpreted as proof that an individual will become violent or engage in robbery.

Peer influence provides another pathway. Criminal conduct can become normalized when young people spend significant time in groups where offending is accepted or rewarded. Within such groups, individuals may acquire criminal attitudes, learn techniques and receive social reinforcement for behaviour that would otherwise be discouraged.

Family supervision may moderate these influences. The findings of Hoeve et al. (2009) show that parental monitoring has an important relationship with delinquency. This is relevant to communities where young people face simultaneous pressures from unemployment, substance use and delinquent peer networks.

The present study therefore treats substance abuse and peer influence as interacting risk factors rather than isolated explanations. This approach allows the analysis to examine how social relationships can reinforce behaviour arising within wider socioeconomic conditions.

5.3 Objective Three: Security Measures and Policing Strategies

Effective policing requires more than arrests. Crime prevention depends on appropriate deployment of police resources, community cooperation, intelligence and institutional legitimacy. Braga et al. (2019), in a systematic review of hotspot policing, found that focused police interventions in high-crime places were associated with small but meaningful reductions in crime. This provides evidence for strategically concentrating limited security resources in areas where crime is concentrated.

Police-community relations are equally important. Bolger and Walters (2019), in a meta-analysis of research on procedural justice, police legitimacy and public cooperation, found positive relationships between perceptions of procedural justice, legitimacy and willingness to cooperate with law enforcement. When residents consider police institutions legitimate and fair, they may be more willing to report crime and share information.

These findings are relevant to community policing in Kenema. Limited awareness of policing frameworks, perceived corruption or weak cooperation can undermine the flow of information necessary for crime prevention. Security strategies should therefore combine operational policing with accountability, communication and trust-building.

5.4 Objective Four: Effects of Armed Robbery on Residents and Communities

Armed robbery affects victims and communities through economic, psychological and social pathways. Direct victims may lose property or income and experience physical injury. Businesses may incur additional security expenses, reduce operating hours or become reluctant to invest in locations considered unsafe.

Psychologically, violent victimization can generate fear, anxiety and persistent feelings of insecurity. These effects may extend beyond direct victims because reports of robbery can alter how other residents perceive their neighbourhoods and organize their daily activities.

Community-level consequences can also include mistrust, declining participation in public life and weakened confidence in security institutions. These outcomes are particularly important because strong community relationships are themselves valuable resources for crime prevention.

The effects of armed robbery should therefore be understood as developmental as well as security concerns. When businesses, households and communities alter economic and social behaviour because of insecurity, the consequences can affect livelihoods and community development beyond the immediate criminal incident.

6.0 METHODOLOGY

6.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive research design to examine the determinants and consequences of armed robbery in Kenema Municipality. The design was appropriate because the study sought to document respondents' perceptions and experiences without manipulating the conditions under investigation.

6.2 Target Population

The target population consisted of individuals and stakeholder groups within Kenema Municipality with direct or indirect knowledge of armed robbery. These included community residents, law-enforcement personnel, traders and business owners, and community leaders. Their inclusion provided community, economic and institutional perspectives on the problem.

6.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A sample of 60 respondents was used. It comprised 30 community residents, 10 law-enforcement officers, 10 traders/business owners and 10 community leaders. Community residents were selected using simple random sampling, while law-enforcement personnel, traders/business owners and community leaders were purposively selected because of their knowledge and roles relating to community security.

6.4 Data Collection

Primary quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire containing closed-ended questions organised according to the study objectives. Items addressed the causes of armed robbery, substance abuse and peer influence, security measures and policing strategies,

effects on residents and communities, and possible interventions. Secondary materials, including academic publications and relevant institutional documents, were used to contextualize the findings.

6.5 Data Analysis

Questionnaire data were analysed descriptively using frequencies and percentages. Findings were organised according to the four substantive objectives of the study and presented in tables. Interpretation focused on the dominant response patterns and their relationship with relevant criminological literature.

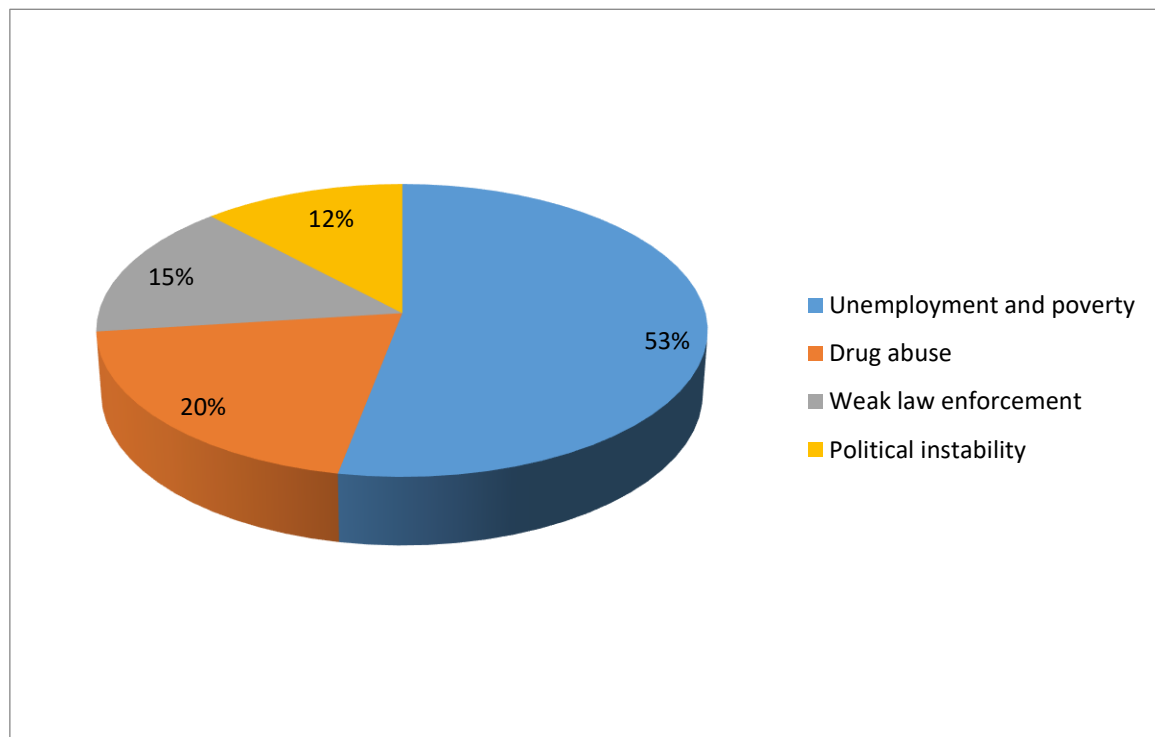
6.6 Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, particularly because armed robbery and perceptions of policing are sensitive issues. Respondents were not required to disclose identifying information, and the researcher sought to avoid questions or procedures that could expose participants to unnecessary risk. The study also emphasized faithful reporting of the information obtained and proper acknowledgement of scholarly sources.

7.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

7.1 Causes of Armed Robbery

Figure 1: Major perceived causes of armed robbery



Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The first major finding is that unemployment and poverty dominated respondents' explanations of armed robbery. More than half (53%) identified these factors as the main causes, compared with drug abuse (20%), weak law enforcement (15%) and political instability (12%).

Table 1: Poverty and limited economic opportunities as drivers of youth involvement

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	29	48.0%
Agree	25	41.6%
Neutral	4	7.0%
Disagree	1	1.6%
Strongly disagree	1	1.6%
Total	60	≈100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The pattern becomes stronger when respondents were specifically asked about poverty and economic opportunity. A combined 89.6% agreed or strongly agreed that poverty and lack of economic opportunities encourage youth involvement in armed robbery.

These findings are consistent with the logic of Strain Theory. Merton (1938) argued that blocked access to legitimate opportunities can create pressure toward alternative means of achieving culturally valued goals. Agnew (1992) similarly demonstrated how different forms of strain may increase the possibility of criminal coping. The Kenema findings should not be interpreted as evidence that unemployment or poverty inevitably causes armed robbery. Rather, they suggest that respondents perceive economic deprivation as an important structural condition that can increase vulnerability when combined with other social and opportunity factors.

7.2 Substance Abuse and Peer Influence

Table 2: Perceived contribution of substance abuse to armed robbery

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Not at all	2	3%
Slightly	6	10%
Moderately	12	20%
Greatly	29	48%
Very greatly	11	18%
Total	60	99%*

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Substance abuse was widely perceived as an important contributing factor. Forty-eight per cent stated that it contributes greatly and another 18% said very greatly. Taken together, approximately two-thirds of respondents associated substance abuse strongly with armed robbery.

Table 3: Peer pressure and youth involvement in armed robbery

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	31	52%
Agree	26	43%
Neutral	2	3%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly disagree	1	2%
Total	60	100%

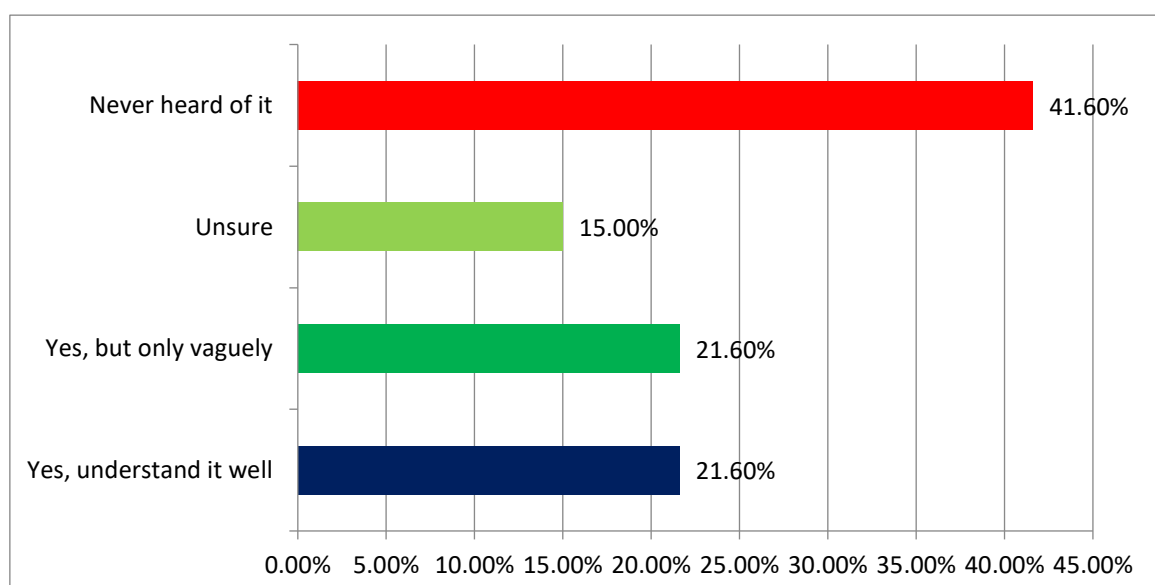
Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Peer influence produced an even stronger response: 95% agreed or strongly agreed that peer pressure pushes young people towards involvement in armed robbery.

The findings support a social-learning interpretation of criminal involvement. Young people do not experience economic pressures in isolation. Their responses can be influenced by the behaviour and expectations of people with whom they associate. Where delinquent peers normalize drug use, violence or illegal income generation, criminal behaviour can become socially reinforced.

The original study also found that 77% agreed or strongly agreed that inadequate parental supervision increases vulnerability to crime. This finding is broadly consistent with Hoeve et al. (2009), whose meta-analysis established a relationship between parenting and delinquency and identified parental monitoring as an important dimension. The findings therefore point towards an interaction between family supervision, peer networks, substance use and wider socioeconomic conditions.

7.3 Security Measures and Policing Strategies

Figure 2: Awareness of the Local Needs Policing framework


Source: Field Survey, 2026. A major finding was the limited public awareness of the Local Needs Policing framework. About 41.6% had never heard of it, while a further 15% were unsure. Only 21.6% reported understanding the framework well.

Table 4: Perceived obstacles to effective policing

Obstacle	Frequency	Percentage
Inadequate police resources/manpower	11	18.3%
Corruption within the police force	20	33.3%
Lack of community trust/cooperation	17	28.0%
Poor intelligence/information sharing	12	20.0%
Total	60	≈100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Corruption was the most frequently identified obstacle to effective policing (33.3%), followed by lack of community trust and cooperation (28%), poor intelligence and information sharing (20%), and inadequate resources and manpower (18.3%).

These findings underline the importance of institutional legitimacy and police-community relationships. Bolger and Walters (2019) found that procedural justice and police legitimacy are positively associated with willingness to cooperate with law enforcement. Where citizens have limited confidence in security institutions, reporting and intelligence sharing may consequently be weakened.

At the operational level, the results also have implications for targeted policing. Braga et al. (2019) found that concentrating police interventions in crime hotspots can produce meaningful reductions in crime. For Kenema, this suggests that strengthening police accountability and community trust should occur alongside evidence-informed deployment of limited policing resources.

7.4 Effects of Armed Robbery on Residents and Communities

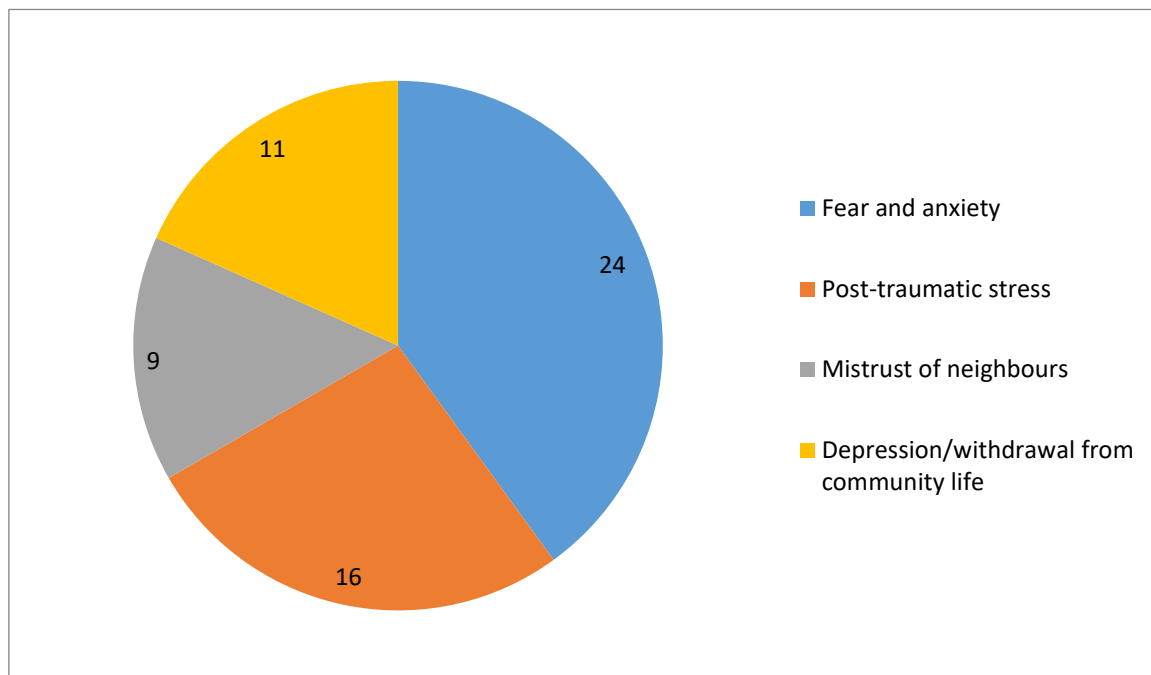
Table 5: Perceived effect of armed robbery on business activities

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	27	45%
Agree	24	40%
Neutral	4	7%
Disagree	3	5%
Strongly disagree	2	3%
Total	60	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The economic consequences of armed robbery were strongly recognized. Eighty-five per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that armed robbery negatively affects business activities. This suggests that insecurity has consequences beyond individual victimization because it can influence trading behaviour, operating hours and willingness to conduct business in perceived high-risk environments.

Figure 3: Reported psychological and social effects of armed robbery



Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Fear and anxiety were the most frequently identified psychological effects, reported by 40% of respondents, followed by post-traumatic stress (27%), depression or withdrawal from community life (18%), and mistrust of neighbours (15%). In a separate item, insecurity was identified by 43% as the most serious overall impact.

These results demonstrate that armed robbery is not merely a property crime. Its effects extend to residents' sense of safety, psychological well-being and social relationships. Persistent fear can alter routine activities as residents avoid certain places or times of movement. Such behavioural changes can weaken community interaction and reduce the social cohesion required for collective crime prevention.

The business findings similarly demonstrate a connection between security and development. When insecurity changes business behaviour, increases security expenditure or reduces commercial activity, armed robbery becomes a local-development concern rather than solely a criminal-justice issue.

8.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings show that armed robbery in Kenema Municipality is influenced by a combination of socioeconomic, social and institutional factors. Unemployment and poverty emerged as the leading perceived causes, with 53% of respondents identifying them as the major factors, while 89.6% agreed or strongly agreed that poverty and limited economic opportunities encourage youth involvement in armed robbery. This finding supports Merton's (1938) Strain Theory and Agnew's (1992) General Strain Theory, which explain that limited access to legitimate opportunities can create pressures that may increase vulnerability to criminal behaviour. The result suggests that addressing armed robbery requires attention to the economic conditions affecting young people rather than relying exclusively on law-enforcement responses.

Substance abuse and peer influence were also identified as important contributing factors. About 66% of respondents indicated that substance abuse contributes greatly or very greatly to armed robbery, while 95% agreed or strongly agreed that peer pressure encourages youth involvement. In addition, 77% believed that inadequate parental supervision increases vulnerability to crime. These findings are consistent with Social Learning Theory, which explains that criminal behaviour may be learned and reinforced through interaction with peers. They also correspond with Hoeve et al. (2009), who established an association between parenting practices, particularly parental monitoring, and delinquent behaviour. The findings therefore indicate that youth involvement in armed robbery may be shaped by the interaction of substance use, peer networks, family supervision and wider socioeconomic pressures.

Regarding security measures and policing strategies, the study revealed important gaps in public awareness, trust and cooperation. About 41.6% of respondents had never heard of the Local Needs Policing framework, while corruption within the police force was identified by 33.3% as the leading obstacle to effective policing. Lack of community trust and cooperation was also identified by 28% of respondents. These findings are consistent with Bolger and Walters (2019), who found that police legitimacy and procedural justice are associated with public willingness to cooperate with law-enforcement institutions. The results suggest that improving policing in Kenema requires not only adequate personnel and resources but also stronger accountability, public engagement, intelligence sharing and police-community trust.

Finally, the findings demonstrate that armed robbery has serious economic, psychological and social consequences for residents and communities. Eighty-five per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that armed robbery negatively affects business activities, while fear and anxiety emerged as the most frequently reported psychological effect. The findings indicate that armed robbery goes beyond the immediate loss of money and property; it creates insecurity, affects psychological well-being, disrupts business activities and weakens community confidence. Overall, the study demonstrates that armed robbery in Kenema Municipality is a multidimensional problem requiring an integrated response involving employment creation, substance-abuse prevention, family and youth support, effective policing and stronger community participation in crime prevention.

9.0 CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that armed robbery in Kenema Municipality is perceived as a multidimensional problem shaped by economic, social and institutional conditions. The most prominent finding is the importance respondents attached to unemployment, poverty and

limited economic opportunities. These structural pressures, however, operate alongside substance abuse, peer influence, family supervision and the availability of opportunities for criminal behaviour.

Substance abuse and peer influence emerged particularly strongly. The high proportion of respondents associating peer pressure with youth involvement suggests that interventions directed only at individual offenders may overlook the social networks through which risky and criminal behaviour can be reinforced.

The policing findings further show that effective crime prevention depends on relationships between security institutions and communities. Limited awareness of Local Needs Policing, perceptions of corruption and concerns about community trust indicate that policing effectiveness involves legitimacy and cooperation as well as manpower and patrols.

Finally, the consequences of armed robbery extend well beyond the loss of property. Respondents associated it with fear, anxiety, insecurity and negative effects on business activity. Armed robbery should therefore be treated simultaneously as a criminal-justice, social-welfare, public-safety and local-development concern.

Given the cross-sectional and perception-based nature of the data, these findings demonstrate reported associations and community perceptions rather than establishing that unemployment, substance abuse or any other factor directly causes armed robbery. Nevertheless, the evidence provides a useful locally grounded basis for designing more integrated crime-prevention interventions in Kenema Municipality.

10.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the Government of Sierra Leone and local development actors should strengthen youth employment and livelihood programmes in Kenema Municipality. Skills training, apprenticeships, entrepreneurship support and realistic pathways into productive employment should particularly target economically vulnerable young people.

Substance-abuse prevention should be integrated into community crime-prevention programmes. Schools, families, health services, youth organisations and community leaders should cooperate in providing drug-awareness education, early intervention, counselling and appropriate rehabilitation services.

The Sierra Leone Police should strengthen community engagement and public education around Local Needs Policing. The finding that many respondents had never heard of the framework suggests a need for regular community meetings, accessible public information and clearly identified channels through which residents can communicate security concerns.

Police accountability should also receive attention. Since perceived corruption emerged as the leading obstacle to policing, transparent complaint mechanisms, professional standards, supervision and appropriate investigation of allegations of misconduct are important for strengthening public confidence.

Police deployment should increasingly make use of locally generated information to identify robbery hotspots and periods of elevated risk. Targeted patrols should be combined with community intelligence and preventive interventions rather than relying entirely on reactive arrests.

Community leaders should support properly organized neighbourhood-watch arrangements that work in cooperation with formal security institutions. Such structures should have clear rules and accountability mechanisms and should not be allowed to become vehicles for vigilantism, retaliation or abuse.

Parents, schools and community organisations should strengthen youth mentoring and positive peer-support programmes. Because peer influence was strongly associated with armed robbery in respondents' perceptions, positive peer networks can provide alternatives to delinquent groups and strengthen social support for vulnerable young people.

Finally, future research should include larger and more diverse samples and should incorporate qualitative interviews with victims, community residents, security personnel and, where ethically and legally feasible, offenders or former offenders. Longitudinal and comparative studies involving Kenema, Bo, Makeni and Freetown would also help determine whether the factors identified in this study are specific to Kenema or reflect broader urban crime patterns in Sierra Leone.

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