

URBAN LIFE AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SAFETY IN PORT HARCOURT, NIGERIA

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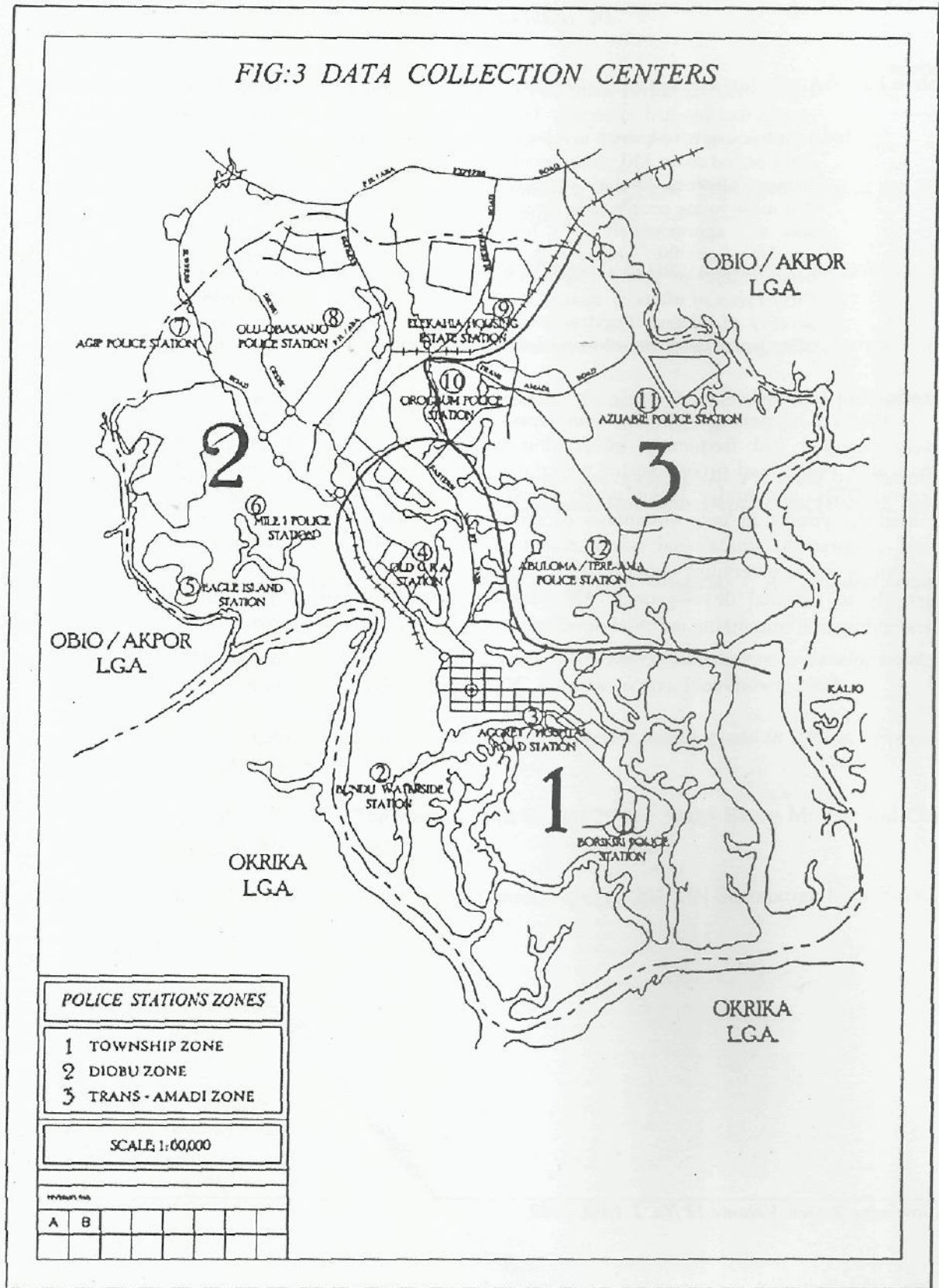
Abstract

Using arrest narratives written by young people, this study analyzes Police checks that resulted in arrests. These narratives describe 538 situations in which young people were involved in arrests. In a typical month during the study period about 350 young people were apprehended and/or charged with criminal offences. Analysis of resultant checks and arrest narratives reveals that most young people 66% received caution (warning) and went on their way. For approximately 33%, however, these resulted in detention. To conceptualize (he arrest data, this study generated estimates of demographics of young people in select planning zones in Port Harcourt City. Types of offences, against individuals were analyzed to highlight the severity of alleged [(.legal actions. It is suggested that the police charge offenders to court and allow justice to take its course.

Introduction

What is happening with the young people in our cities in the Niger Delta region? Once actively engaged and frequently influencing development, their influence today has lessened dramatically. Public and private sector undertakings alike once fell the sling of this engagement. In the early 1970s, and mid - 1990s newly created states and Local Government Councils (LGCs) beckoned on youths to take advantage of employment opportunities, skills, socio-economic and cultural integration, educational advancement and high manpower development programmes 'in Polytechnics and Universities specifically designed for state indigenes. They did, and contributed immensely to national development. Ad were not successful but they facilitated new ways of understanding and organizing national development. (Okowa. 2005, Awoioye, 2006).

Fig: 1 Data Collection Centres



The tale about the weakness of our youths in development c(Torts neglects spatiality as a constituting force. As geographers now widely acknowledge, social processes like globalization, post-industrialism, social organizing, and political involvement are deeply spatial. Space is at the center of the richness (or otherwise) of such social processes in complex or nuanced ways. The failure of youths in recent times to contribute to notional development in the Niger Delta region is detailed but largely fails to "let space out of the bottle" (Myers, 2002). Investigations in Port Harcourt city (See Fig. !) spatiality suggests that space made and employed by humans is an essential ingredient for building social processes in diverse ways (Aprioku, 2007; Short, 2003; Wilson and Grammenos, 2,000). When urban geographers analyze disputes over the use of geographic space, they have more on their plate than controversies over land-use alternatives. Myers (2002) characterises urban space as a social product; its uses are the result of a mix. of legal, political, social and economic practices, and a common outcome of this mix is conflict over who has what right to occupy which space. The specific conflict of interest in this study involves youths in urban spaces, and a resultant set of conflicts about who belongs where and about who is out of place (Farley ct at, 2000; Rnmircv. et al. 2002; Magnusson, 2002; Fured, 2004)

This paper^r examines how Police enforcement mechanisms in Port Harcourt demonstrate the frequently overlooked connections between space and young people's safety. The paper is important because it shifts analysis from things in space to the actual production of space. It demonstrates with modification that space and young people's safety are mutually constitutive elements of urban life in multiple ways.

Youth Profiling in Port Harcourt

On Wednesday January 11, 2006 an alleged Ijaw armed Youth group took hostage, four expatriates - a Briton, an American and two Hungarians working for Tidex Nigeria Limited a haulage firm attached to Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) in Bkerenior Local Government of Bayelsa state. The furore generated by the action was yet, to die down, when on Tuesday January 24, 2006 militants adorned with military uniforms launched a bloody attack on the operational base of an Italian Oil firm, Agip in Port Harcourt; killing nine people (Nigerian Police, 2006; The Source, 2006). The security situation in Port Harcourt, and indeed the Niger Delta region, took a turn for the worst as restive youths resorted to hostage taking and armed banditry.

To safeguard city wide life and property, the State police command instituted a mechanism to apprehend persons suspected to be involved in these dastardly acts. The Swift Operation Squad (SOS) was initiated by the Mobile Police (MOPOL) and later in collaboration with other security agencies the SOS was renamed "Fire for Fire" to tame this new menace in Port Harcourt. In its bid to rid the city of these armed bandits and kidnappers/hostage takers, the youths were specifically targeted for stop, search and arrest. Young people between the ages of 13-40 years became victims of Police harassment, intimidation and sometimes extra-judicial murders. The end product is youth profiling resulting to the unwarranted restriction of youths from transversing the urban space for leisure and pleasure, engaging in the social process of urban life and hindering opportunities to open up new spaces for social interaction.

Profiling is a police initiated action that relies on race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sect(cult), age group or gender rather than the behaviour of an individual (Ramirez et al,2002; Fured, 2004; Magnusson, 2002). In the context of Port Harcourt it is related to the complex social and political relations which affect young people and to the reality that their lives are lived out in spaces largely designed and controlled by the Police. Profiling limits young people's autonomous spaces and freedom away from home. Young people are constrained on the use of public spaces due to police fears. To some extent, profiling is ameliorating fear of crime and other dangers associated with being outdoors, and helping young people to self-empowerment in their use of public spaces.

Analysis of Youth Profiling in Port Harcourt

Data for this present study come largely from another larger study, and the analysis in this paper relates to the intra-urban security sub-module of the questionnaire used for the larger study. In all 538 arrest narratives were obtained through a multi-stage sampling procedure. Because of the research focus of the larger study we had to combine a purposive sampling method with systematic sampling.

Our analysis relied primarily upon arrest narratives generated by arrested youths over a six months period beginning mid-September 2006 - mid-March, 2007. These arrest narratives arose from routine traffic stops and neighbourhood searches by the Police and were written on individual basis regardless of the number of charges involved or the number of persons arrested.

To obtain the narratives from persons arrested three police stations were visited at random. An average of two visits were made every week to the three stations. Port Harcourt was for this purpose divided into three zones namely: Township Diobu and Trans Amadi Industrial Area. Data were obtained from those arrested and detained at the police stations in Fig 3,

Socio-economic Characteristics of the Study Population

Port Harcourt, capital of Rivers State, Nigeria, has experienced extremely rapid population growth increasing from a population of 450,000 in 1991 To 906,770 in 2006 (NPC 2007). Although part of this growth is absorbed through in-filling, the metropolitan area now sprawls over 43,000 ha. Besides being the administrative headquarters of Rivers State, it remains the oil and gas industry's main hub in Nigeria and West Africa. Table I, the study population's average age is 22 years

AGE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
13-18	150	27.8
19-24	138	25.5
25-30	104	19.2
31-34	61	11.3
35-39	47	8.7
40+	38	7.0
TOTAL	538	99.5*

Source: Fieldwork, 2007. Below 100% due to rounding errors.

Table 2: Level of Education of Respondents

LEVEL OF SCHOOLING	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
No Schooling		
Primary School	64	11.8
Secondary School	284	52.5
Tertiary Skill Acquisition	83	15.4
	107	19.8
TOTAL	538	99.5*

Source: Fieldwork, 2007, Below 100% due to rounding errors.

Young people arrested (64.4%) are in the schooling age group. 53.3% are below 25 years and about a third 32.5% below 20 years, 39.2% are 25-39 years old while 7.0% are 40 years and more. Most of the 40 years olds were arrested during Police searches in the neighbourhoods. Majority (66.1%) of the respondents are self-employed young men, 66.7% are attending tertiary institutions or acquiring skills at the skills development centres,

The most commonly reported highest level of educational attainment (Table 2) is secondary school education (WAEC/NECO SSCE or GCE). A sizeable proportion (23.4%) has self-employment status-reported largely to be irregular, unstable and at a subsistence level. The reported occupations of these self employed are usually marginal, petty trading (15.3%), service jobs (28.5%) and other associated informal sector jobs - barbing, bus conductors, job men, Okada men (commercial motorcyclists), hawkers, motor mechanics, apprentices and hotel attendants. Most respondents (63%) are still under their parents/guardians living with and sharing same catering facilities with them.

Table 3: Charges filed Against Arrested persons

CHARGES		AGE GRO 13-18	JPS 19-30	31 +	TOTAL (%)
A	SERIOUS CHARGES				
1	Arms possession	8	5	3	16(3%)
2	Cultist	26	22	6	54(10%)
3	Armed Robbery	15	9	5	29(5.4%)
4	Informant of cultists	12	8	2	22(4.1%)
5	Monitoring Oil workers	19	12	3	34(6.3%)
6	Hindering arrest	-	18	4	22(4.1%)
	Total Common Serious Offences	80(14.9%)	74(13.8%)	23(4.3%)	177(32.9%)
IT	OTHER CHARGES				
7	Wandering	28	33	-	61(11.3%)
8	Hiding arms	-	16	27	43(8%)

9	Hindering police search	-	22	15	37(6.8%)
10	Hostage group suspect	15	19	21	55(10.2%)
11	Hiding suspects	-	18	19	37(6.8%)
12	Speeding car offence	-	19	24	43(8%)
13	Possession of drugs	27	23	13	63(11.6%)
14	Intoxication offences	-	18	4	22(4.1%)
	<i>Total of most common other offences</i>	70(13%)	168(32.2%)	123(22.9%)	361(67.1%)

Source: Fieldwork, 2007.

Charges filed Against Respondents

The charges most often described in the 538 arrest narratives are listed in three age categories - 13-18(Adolescents), 19-30years (Young Adults) and 31 years and more (Mature Adults) in Table 3.

Table 3 describes six serious charges, These are the offences that usually warrant detention and prosecution, Arrests resulting from serious offences account for 33%. The most occurring major charge is suspected cultist (10%), other serious charges include monitoring oil workers (6.3%), armed robbery (5.4%), informant of cultist and hindering arrest (4.1%) for each and possession of arms (3%).

Eight other charges regarded as less serious constitute 67% of the charges listed in Table 3. Wandering (11.3%). Possession of drugs (11.6%), hostage group suspect (10.2%) and hiding guns (8%) are the most common charges in this section of the narratives in (see Table 3).

Charges summarized in Table 3 exhibit a broad pattern of adolescent over-representation in serious offences and under-representation in lesser offences. Exactly why adolescent youths were alleged to be involved in serious offences (14.9%) and arrested is not immediately apparent. The arrest narratives under consideration permit straight forward age comparisons of arrests and detention of young-men in Port Harcourt.

Police Arrest, Investigation and Detention

Table 4 reveals that of the 150 adolescents (13-18years olds) arrested 76(51%) were detained. For the young adults (19-30years) out of the 242 arrested only 58 (23.9%) were detained while the 146 adults had 45(30.8%) detainees.

In terms of ratios, one out of every two adolescents arrested is likely to be detained. For the young adults (19-30years) and adults 31 years and more, it is 1:5 and 1:3 respectively. This means that adolescents were 2.5 times more likely to be detained as against 1.6 times of young adults (19-30 years) than mature adults (31 years plus) arrested.

Table 4 Police Arrests, and Detained Youths

AGE GROUP	NO. OF ARRESTS	NO. CAUTIONED/ RELEASED (%)	NO. DETAINED (%)
13- 18	150	74(49%)	76(51%)
19-30	242	184(76.1%)	58(23.9%)
31+	146	101(69.2%)	45(30.8%)
TOTAL	538	359(66%)	179(33%)

SOURCE: Fieldwork, 2007.

On a more disaggregated level of the 179 detainees adolescents (13-18yrs) were 76 (42.5%), young adults (19-34yrs), 58(32.4%) and mature adults (31 years plus) were 45(25.1%). In essence, 2 out of 5 detainees is likely to be an adolescent (13-18years). Recall the definition of profiling as discrimination against a particular group or set. Discriminatory detention of a group characterised in this data indicates Police discriminatory treatment of adolescents. Despite the above findings, with subsequent inferences, it is argued that Police simply had a preference for arresting adolescents (13-18 years). This same preference extends to detained arrested adolescents (13-18years) according to the findings given below.

Arrested Youths who get Detained

The Police Officer after an investigation that takes place at the site of the search or traffic stop evaluates the sobriety of the persons under investigation. At the end of this investigation which may also explore possible issues concerning vehicle registration, missing vehicle records, missing persons records, possession of drugs/arms, wanted persons records, license plates of vehicle used, validity of drivers license and workers'/students' identity (ID) cards, the police officer makes a decision to arrest or not to arrest the person.

in cases of arrest, the police may or may not handcuff the arrested persons. The 179 detained arrestee narratives analyzed in this study describe investigations of 76 adolescents, 58 young adults and 45 mature adults in which the routine steps of police narrative checks were hardly carried out as is described above. The police patrol team handcuffed and arrested youths at its discretion in the various neighbourhoods of the city.

. Table 5 presents a logistic regression analysis delineating arrested respondents cautioned and released from those detained by the police allegedly after investigation at the police station. Explanatory variables of two types are employed in this statistical analysis: (1) Detainees demographic traits, and (2) measures of the results of the police investigation identifying alleged detainees offences.

Findings from Table 5 indicate that the Police in Port Harcourt had a preference for detaining adolescent youths (13-18 years old) even though investigations reveal their innocence in the severity of offences alleged to be committed by youths.

Positive regression coefficients, in the logistic regression exercise indicate a greater probability that adolescent youths were detained. Regarding the fourteen types of allegations of illegal acts utilised as explanatory variables, only eight were listed as offences resulting to detention. The excluded categories were the least serious allegations arising from the on-the-scene investigations of the arresting officers. Note that six offences in Table 3 namely; hiding arms and suspects, speeding, intoxication offenses, hindering police search/arrest and monitoring oil workers did not attract detention of any youth. In all these excluded categories, adolescent youths have only been apprehended, cautioned and released for allegedly monitoring oil workers. Adolescents (13-18years olds) were not involved in the other less serious offences.

Table

Dependent variables (detained)	Regression coefficient	Standard Error	Variables menu
Constant	0.5773	0.026	
Adolescents (13-18]	0.9345	0.078	0.482
Young Adults (19-30)	0.6667	0.099	0.784
Mature Adults (31+)	0.5459*	0.094	0.666
Allegations			
Arms possession	0.336*	0.188	0.355
Cultists	0.585	0.201	0.077
Armed robbery	1.109	0.236	0.031
Cult informant	0.213*	0.211	0.099
Wandering	0.684	0.264	0.143
Possession of drugs	0.218	0.302	0.060
Hiding suspects	0.194*	0.237	0.046
Hostage group suspect	0.158	0.358	0.028
NUMBER	179		
-2LogL	237.7		
Chi-Square	37.5		

*Statistically significant at 5% significance level

The analyses presented in the Table 5 were statistically verified, applying the Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient to each of the three youth groups and their detention relationships (Table 5). An (r) coefficient of -1-0.9345 significant at 0.1 level was obtained for the association

between the pattern of police arrests and the detention of arrested adolescents. The table nisei shows that a correlation of +0.6667 was obtained for the association between police arrests and the detention of arrested young adults at 0.01 level. Also a correlation of -1-0.5459, significant at 0.05 level was-obtained for the association between police arrests patterns and the detention of mature adults arrested.

The regression analysis finding of interest (Table 5) is that adolescents, other things being equal, were significantly more likely than young and/or mature adults to be detained by the police in Port Harcourt. In all offence categories in the study, 87.3% of adolescents were arrested and detained while 44.4% and 29.8% of young and mature adults received the same police treatment. Mature adults, controlling for other factors, were more likely than adolescents to be detained, hut this relationship was shy of the 5% cutoff of statistical significance. The substantive regression analysis findings indicate discriminatory treatment of adolescents (13-18years olds), and highlights the high degree of police subjectivity in the decision to detain arrestees.

Implications for Everyday Urban Life

The observed pattern of discriminatory adolescent (13-18year olds) arrest and subsequent detention permeates all through the offences listed in this study. Findings discussed above indicate that adolescents were detained even when their offences were listed as less serious. As a result, (see Table 5), 87.3% of all adolescent arrested were detained, while 44.4% of young adults and 29.8% of mature adults were arrested and also detained. This rather strong relationship obtained in the logistic regression as shown in Table 5 is also in accordance with the police profiling analytical framework, because the police enforcement mechanisms of profiling is limiting urban space for adolescents.

A number of implications can be adduced from this analysis. First, the active spaces identified in this paper obstruct the movement of adolescents in Port Harcourt. Social activities, political organisations and business connections proceed with minimal participatory criticalness from the disadvantaged (Cuff, 2002). Law enforcement agents and city government officials seem to neglect and oversimplify space's role in muffling the voices of youths by failing to distinguish b silencing, disempowering and taming of voices. The youths often do mobilize despite tough and find a voice to express their concerns. The point made here is that the scrutiny of space by the Police should go beyond the silencing of urban youths. The police, it is argued, should between space as a force inhibiting the social interaction processes thereby producing an ambiguous map of the city for youths in the city versus a force undermining the effectiveness of their duty in enforcing law and order.

Second, and following from the first, the police is manufacturing disadvantaged identities and circulating urban youths as dubious political entities. In current socio-spatial discourses, youths, in particular adolescent youths, are rendered aberrant and pathological. They are described as ominous carriers of destructive subcultures. This is rather harsh as most of these adolescents detained are students in secondary and tertiary schools. A realm of pathological spectacle of the city is being created for our adolescent youths; theaters of decline, places of unseemly and incendiary presence, and seething and discordant social milieus. The urban space is becoming less favoured for social interaction.

Third, and most importantly, the police is presenting our adolescent youths as free-wheeling youths, who are in essence, bodies without heads, kids propelled along impulsive paths of violence and destruction. Adolescent youths are portrayed as not thinking or reflecting on their way of life, navigating the city terrain through a brute physicality. This is the scariest kind of physicality (impulsive, whimsical, deadly) that makes them fearless and feared. Under this guess, the police in enforcing the law have dealt with adolescent youths as cognitively primitive and morally remorseless creatures. They deal with them using the aperture of the perceived subculture of constructive engagement of force, brute strength and decisive retaliation. Adolescent youths are constrained to explore the city's social and political terrain and this portends evil for the city's economic life as well. Prizing the youths out of public space will produce a sense of futile socio-economic possibilities and ambiguous mapping of Port Harcourt's urban locations.

Conclusion

This paper has examined some of the salient relations between police law enforcement mechanisms and youth security in Port Harcourt's urban space. It is argued that police constructed space has immense ramifications for adolescent youth movement in the city. As an innocuous lived-in domain police created space in Port Harcourt has separated and severed adolescent youths connections to politics, business, knowledge and opportunities to explore their capabilities in the city. This paper has espoused these forces imbedded in the police law enforcement mechanisms that hindered and constrained spatiality and the enrichment of the social process by adolescent youths in Port Harcourt. It is suggested that arrested youths be charged to court rather than being detained. Parents and guardians will be saved the trauma of searching for their wards from one detention police station to the other. It is not true that all adolescent youths in Port Harcourt are potential offenders. The paper suggests a radical overhauling of the present system of police law enforcement mechanisms in Port-Harcourt.

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