



Agent Bankers and Customer Victimization in Ado City, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Criminal victimization against agent bankers and their customers has recently been on the increase, and the multiplier effect is a major socio-economic problem that could cause a downturn in the economy. This study examines the exposure of agent bankers and their customers to criminal victimization in Ado city, Nigeria. Specifically, the study explores the forms of criminal victimization against agent bankers and their customers, examines the consequences of criminal victimization, looks into the cases of agent bankers and customer victimization, and determines the preventive measures adopted by agent bankers and their customers against victimization. Lifestyle-routine activity theory was deployed as the conceptual framework. An exploratory research design and snowball and purposive sampling with key informant and in-depth interviews were used to interview 12 victimized and non-victimized agent bankers and their customers. Interviews were conducted in Fayose market, King market, Bisi market, and Irona market. Findings reveal that agents' bankers and their customers were being targeted by criminals who use non-violent tactics. The eagerness of the agent bankers to transact business brings a measure of carelessness to their business dealings. This carelessness and lack of security measures exposes them to motivated offenders. Victimization through fake alert, fraudulent transfer, withdrawal under false pretense, fraudulent alteration, intentional criminal patronage, fake identity, and urgent withdrawal under duress represent the themes found. It is imperative for agent bankers and their customers to set up security measures that could protect them against being victimized.

Key Words Agent bankers' customers; lifestyle-exposure theory; crime.

INTRODUCTION

The quest for financial inclusion and cashless policy has brought about the popularity of agent banking in Nigeria, and this has made it easier for individuals and businesses to have affordable, appropriate, and timely access to financial products and services. Agent banking services are geared to those who are unbanked and underbanked by directing and making available to them sustainable financial services. Through the provision of financial services to the unbanked, agent banking has positioned the economy of Nigeria for sustainable growth by reducing the exposure to financial risk among a significant number of women and poor people residing in rural areas and semi-urban centres, who face discrimination and are vulnerable or marginalized due to their exclusion from financial institutions. Agent banking has solved the barrier of supply and demand of financial services. The supply barrier stems from financial institutions and includes lack of nearby financial institutions and

documentation requirement while the demand barrier includes individuals seeking quick access to financial services, poor financial literacy, and lack of financial capability ("Financial Inclusion," n.d.).

Agent banking delivers limited and essential banking services to customers through a third-party agent who makes use of their own resources (Buchi, 2020). Third-party agents are non-traditional bankers who sign a mutual agreement with the financial institution that licenses them to provide services such as account opening, issuance of mini-statements, account balance enquires, cheque book requests, bill payments, collection of bank mails, cash deposits, withdrawals, fund transfers, and payment of salaries among many others (Business Highlights, 2020). Agent banking activities in Nigeria include third-party financial services such as cash transfers, money deposits, and cash withdrawals to customers through Point of Sale (PoS) terminals. These agent bankers, who are referred to as PoS agents, together with their customers, form the main focus of this study.

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Agent banking came into prominence in Nigeria in 2013, following the release of guidelines by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), on its operation and management. In 2015, CBN documented and acknowledged the role played by agent banking, which includes, in addition to financial inclusion, a reduction in the level of unemployment. As posited by Ayegbeni (2020), agent bankers have taken advantage of existing assets to reduce customers' transaction costs by ensuring a one-on-one relationship with customers. This has assisted in achieving the expansion of the customer base goals of domestic banks from 2013 to 2018.

Since the advent of agent banking in Nigeria, there has been a rise in the number of agent bankers. The 2019 report of the National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS) confirmed that the number of agent bankers across the country has consistently been on the increase since 2017. This is despite the low capital requirement and the high level of unemployment in the country coupled with the present economic condition of the nation, which is grievous. Agent banking has been a lucrative form of entrepreneurial activity that solves some societal problems by creating value for Nigerians (Aruleba et al., 2022), both those who are looking for extra work to supplement their income and the unemployed whose main source of income is agent banking. The severe situation of the Nigerian economy has given rise to different forms of criminal activities, some of which have exposed agent bankers and their customers to an increased variety of criminal victimization. These victimizations include becoming a target for thieves, fraudsters and armed robbers, agents robbing agents, agent bankers defrauding their customers, agent employees defrauding agents, and customers defrauding agent bankers. Compounding this, Mudiri (2013) explains that agents can criminally victimize their customers through unauthorized access to customers' transaction PINs, unauthorized use of customer transaction codes, unauthorized withdrawals, and imposing unauthorized customer charges. A customer can defraud an agent through scam and fake transfers, while an agent employee can defraud agents through theft of funds, underreporting of cash balances, copycat fraud, and instant commission fraud. For instance, Okon and Ayodele (2021) describe the case of an agent who reported being a victim of fake transactions through another PoS agent, another who reported that he escaped a robbery attack twice at the Ikorodu Allison market, while yet another said that he lost 50,000 naira to a fake alert.

In 2021, Yekini reported on the police arrest of two PoS fraudsters in Kogi. The fraudsters, who specialize in attacking PoS attendants, robbed a PoS agent by deceiving the victim under the guise of performing a delivery. Likewise, Nwokoji (2021) stated that the residents of Lekki, Ajah and environs, Ogombo, Akasha, along the Lekki-Epe Express way, and Sangotedo and environs, reported cases of robbers raiding their communities using PoS machines in 2016. In 2019, Johnson tells the tale of a 28-year-old PoS service banker who was murdered in Akure, Ondo State, over the refusal by the bank she worked with to issue a PoS machine to a big business woman due to her location. Furthermore, Asabor (2021) reported on the arraignment of a suspect who worked alongside three other suspects arrested by the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) who defrauded PoS customers under false pretense of over 900 million naira using the PoS terminal allocated to him.

A new scheme of victimization went viral on social media on January 15, 2022, where a customer visits an agent banker and claims to have transferred 1000 naira to the agent's account. After about ten minutes with no alert, the agent's employees tell the customer that an alert has not been received regarding the claimed transfer. The employee then calls the agent in order to enquire about the claimed transfer. During this time, the customer asks to place a call to the PoS agent using the employee's phone while the employee attends to other customers. Unbeknownst to the employee, the customer who has claimed to transfer 1000 naira deletes the agent's number from the employee's phone and replaces it with his own phone number, saving it with the agent's name. After about ten minutes, the customer leaves the agent's shop, the employee receives a message from the agent stating that he had seen an alert of 1,500 naira and also instructs the employee to transfer a sum of 200,000 naira to three different accounts. The employee, unaware of the operation that had earlier been performed on his phone, follows the instruction. This kind of criminal victimization has been on the increase in Nigeria since the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown, with a rise in different innovative schemes of victimization.

The ongoing criminal attacks on agent bankers and their customers lead to diverse socio-economic consequences, such as possible loss of life and reversal of the cashless policy and financial inclusion achieved by CBN through agent banking. Some victims might be pressured to relinquish their business due to the loss of their equity while others might quit out of fear. Moreover, potential customers might see the constant victimization as a red flag and decide to stop patronizing agent bankers, which this can negatively impact the turnover of agent bankers or totally put an end to PoS agent economic activities in Nigeria. The overall consequences of criminal victimization are the multiplier effect it has on the economy in such a way that people who achieve their livelihood through agent banking might go jobless, thereby further increasing unemployment and also leading to other forms of criminal activities in the country.

Generally, businesses that are most likely to experience high rates of criminal victimization are those that engage the public directly, are small, and lack resources to protect themselves against criminal activities (Alvazzi del Frate, 2004; Mawby, 2003). As submitted by Truman and Langton (2013), criminal attacks against such businesses often represent a natural consequence of profit generation. Due to their inability to protect themselves, attacks against these businesses are often repeated. Despite the increasing criminal attacks on agent bankers and their customers in Nigeria and the new cases reported daily, there is paucity of empirical research focused in this area. Previous studies have focused on agent banking and financial inclusion in relation to economic growth (Ayegbeni, 2020; Kingangai et al., 2016; Okoye et al., 2016; Ogbenor, 2015; Waihenya, 2012), the challenges agent banking face in Kenya (Atandi, 2013), agent banking and customer retention in Kenya (Muoria & Moronge, 2018), factors militating against agent banking services and customers in rural areas in Kenya (Githae et al., 2018), and the impact of violence on business activities (Fe & Sanfelice, 2022; Greenbaum & Tita, 2004; Taylor & Mayhew, 2002). Only Ojedokun and Ilori (2022) conducted a study on the victimization of the agent banking business, focusing on Ibadan. It is against this backdrop that

this study examines the exposure of agent bankers and their customers to criminal victimization in Ado city.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The central objective of this study is to examine the exposure of agent bankers and their customers to criminal victimization in Ado. The specific objectives are to:

- i. explore the forms of criminal victimization against agent bankers and their customers in Ado.
- ii. examine the consequences of criminal victimization against agent bankers and their customers in Ado.
- iii. look into the cases of agent bankers and customer victimization in Ado.
- iv. determine the preventive measures of criminal victimization against agent bankers and their customers in Ado.

Lifestyle-Routine Activity Theory, Agent Bankers and Customers

The lifestyles of business owners generally make them prime targets by criminals due to the ways in which they are perceived. Agent bankers and their customers maintain a routine lifestyle pertaining to other business owners. This lifestyle, which entails daily money transactions, lacks a capable guardian. Agent banking businesses in Nigeria are often small businesses that transact money on a daily basis. Agent bankers, who are also PoS agents, borrow different amounts of money as their trading capital, transfer money to their customers in exchange for cash, give customers cash in exchange for a transfer, and transfer to a third party on behalf of their customers at a profitable rate. Agent bankers' inability to protect themselves against exposure to criminal victimization, coupled with a routine lifestyle and activities, forms the central premise of lifestyle-routine activity theory put forward by Hindelang et al. in 1978 and Cohen and Felson in 1979. The theory essentially posits that criminal activities hinge around the routine lifestyle of a population and that crime is likely to occur with the interplay of a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian. The absence of a capable guardian often motivates an offender when he meets with a suitable target, creating an opportunity for crime. Engstrom (2021) views a motivated offender as someone who has criminal inclinations. He explains further that qualities such as values, accessibility, and capability to resist make a target suitable, while a capable guardian refers to a third party with the capacity to intervene and could either be formal or informal.

Exposure and association with a victim's lifestyle and activities also make the victim a suitable target. The financial values held by agent bankers and their customers, coupled with their physical accessibility, visibility, and inability to afford a capable guardian, expose them as suitable targets to motivated offenders. Motivated offenders do not often constitute a representative sample of the general population and are often those who might have observed or been in contact with the agent bankers and their customers and might have observed their high-risk places and schedules. The exposure of agent bankers and their customers (suitable target) occurs across different places and times and is a direct consequence of their lifestyles and activities, which, according to Alvazzi

del Frate (2004), position them for criminal attack because of their direct dealings with members of the public.

Agent bankers and their customers often experience common forms of customer-driven fraud such as fake message alerts, fraudulent perpetration, unauthorized possession of customers' card PIN, unauthorized withdrawal on behalf of customers, impersonating law enforcement officials, etc. (Ojedokun & Ilori, 2022; Ojedokun, 2020; Mudiri, 2013). Such fraud results in a direct and indirect burden on agent bankers (who are small business owners) and their customers, often increasing the cost of conducting business. In addition, such attacks often result in business and financial setback and psychological repercussions (Fe & Sanfelice, 2022; Greenbaum & Tita, 2004; Taylor & Mayhew, 2002). Fisher and Looye (2000) posit that crime psychologically impairs business owners in diverse ways and compels them to take measures to protect themselves. Such measures may be extreme and may result in closing down the business. It is therefore important for agent bankers and their customers to exercise some caution while transacting business.

RESEARCH SETTING AND METHODOLOGY

Ado Ekiti, in southwest Nigeria, was selected as the study area. Ado Ekiti is the capital of Ekiti State. According to the world Gazetteer, the population of the city was 423,430 in 2012. The city comprises mostly civil servants who own other forms of business to supplement their income, farmers, and entrepreneurs. For the most part, agent banking is a popular and lucrative business in the city, undertaken mostly by entrepreneurs and civil servants, for whom agent banking is the main source of income along with other occupations. The choice of Ado city was informed by the fact that it hosts people who are struggling to meet their expenses due to the expensive state of the city and the economic recession, and if criminal victimization persists against agent banking and their customers in the city, it might trigger other forms of criminal activity by citizens who are already stressed financially. Also, Ado city consists of people who engage in one line of business with stiff competition. The markets covered in this study include Fayose market, King market, Bisi market, and Irona market, chosen for their high patronage.

This study is exploratory and cross-sectional in design. It is exploratory because it covers an area not previously studied in agent banking and cross-sectional because it does not check the trend of events. Purposive sampling techniques and in-depth interviews were used to interview five agent bankers who had experienced criminal victimization and five of their customers who had not experienced victimization, while a snowball sampling technique and key-informant interviews were employed to interview two agent bankers who had not experienced any form of victimization. The choice of this method hinges on the fact that during the interview, it was discovered that agent bankers are commonly prone to victimization while their customers are generally not prone to victimization. Agent bankers who have not experienced any form of victimization are rare. The study made use of 12 interview participants because a saturation point was reached with this number while gathering the data. Besides, the participants possess a homogenous characteristic to the extent that their responses were consistent with one another during

the interviews. Townsend (2013) and Cresswell (2007) encourage researchers to go above the saturation point only in the case where participants possess heterogeneous characteristics, because they believe data run-offs would be useful in such a situation. The study made use of open-ended questions in order to enable the interview participants to freely express themselves and to avoid any form of manipulation. Interview times were not scheduled with the participants. Rather, the researcher visited the markets during normal business hours and approached the participants. The elicited data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The data was collected in accordance with the international ethical standard guiding the conduct of social research. The consent of agent bankers and their customers was sought and obtained, and they were informed of their right to voluntarily participate in the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the course of the interviews, it was discovered that the majority of the agent bankers had been victimized at different points in their business while the majority of their customers had never been victimized. Therefore, we analyzed five responses from agent bankers who had been victimized, and two responses from agent bankers and five responses from their customer who had not been victimized. The number of agent bankers who had not been victimized was limited to two because of the repetition in their responses.

Forms of Criminal Victimization Against Agent Bankers and their Customers

In exploring the extent of the problem, information was sought from respondents on the forms of victimization they often experienced. Findings reveal that agent bankers suffered different forms of victimization. A participant at King's market responded thus:

There are some people that will intentionally come in the evening just to victimize you. Such people often come in the evening whenever we are balancing our account. They often operate at this time because they know everybody is in haste to get home and they have at least 50% chance of not being caught. They will come requesting a cash withdrawal. Most of the time, they send a fake credit or debit alert and because of the hour, there might not be enough time to verify the alert sent and you give them the money. There are also times people will make a transfer and their transfer will be declined without your knowledge after you have given them the amount they requested. Notwithstanding the situation, what I used to experience is fake transfers and alerts from customers. I have never experienced armed robbers pointing a gun at me or people trailing me. (IDI/Agent Banker/Victim/Male/King's Market).

Another interviewee described the situation thus:

This business is challenging for several reasons. [...] For instance, some will come for an urgent withdrawal simply because they want to send fake debit and credit alerts. Some will ask you to help them send money to a third party. After you have sent the money, they will

deny it by claiming that they never asked you to send money to anybody or they will say that they don't know the person they earlier requested the transfer for. Some will even deny the earlier agreed amount they requested you to transfer to a third party. Most of the time, those requesting you to send money to a third party on their behalf do not request a small amount. It often ranges between ₦30,000 (\$72.30) and ₦100,000 (\$241) and at times it goes beyond that. Some will request money under duress while some will stay on a bike and request an urgent cash withdrawal claiming that someone close to them is at the point of death and needs urgent attention. After you have given them the money, they will zoom off without transferring the money you gave them. The most common of all is fake transfers and I have fallen victim of that severally. (IDI/Agent Banker/Victim/Female/Fayose Market).

Another victim had this to say,

Since I have been working with my boss for the past two years, I have seen different kinds of victimization, ranging from fake credit or debit alert, request for withdrawal under duress and urgent withdrawal. The most shocking form I have ever seen is fake identity. Someone has come to us for a cash withdrawal before wearing a soldier uniform. He even showed us his identity card so that we could trust him. We gave a sum of ₦60,000 (\$144.40) only for the alert he sent to bounce back after he left. (IDI/Agent Banker/Victim/Male/Bisi Market).

The narratives above reveal that the common forms of business-related victimization experienced by agent bankers in Ado city were fake credit and debit alerts, collection of money under duress, fraudulent third-party transfers, fraudulent alteration of mutually agreed transaction amounts to a third party, urgent withdrawals under false pretense, and intentional criminal patronage. However, all the respondents interviewed identified victimization through fake alert and fraudulent urgent withdrawal as the most common form of victimization. It is clear from these findings that the criminal attacks on agent bankers are purely financially motivated and the victimization through fake alert and fraudulent urgent withdrawal, which has been identified as the most common form of victimization, stems from the fact that it is the easiest to perpetrate and also the most difficult to detect. The implication of this finding is that victimization through fake credit and debit alert has the tendency to negatively impact on the cashless policy and financial inclusion already achieved by CBN, as the essence of commercial banks' online money transfer services is increasingly being jeopardized by criminals using it for fraudulent purpose. This result corroborates the findings of Ojedokun and Ilori (2022) and Mudiri (2013), who identified fake SMS debit and credit alerts and fraudulent perpetration as the most common forms of customer-driven fraud. It is also inconsistent with the study of Alvazzi del Frate (2004) which found that businesses that deal directly with the public are most likely to experience high rates of criminal victimization. Furthermore, the exposure of agent bankers to different forms of criminal victimization confirms their status as a suitable target by motivated offenders (criminals) because

of their lifestyle and their inability to protect themselves (lack of a capable guardian) against the motivated offenders.

Consequences of Criminal Victimization Against Agent Bankers and Their Customers

Respondents were also probed on the consequences of victimization on their businesses. The answers reveal considerable psychological, as well as financial, impacts. One respondent at Irona market stated:

The effect of victimization I have experienced is the psychological effect on me due to the setback my business often experiences. At times, I often feel like ending the business, but there is nothing I can do because this is my only means of survival. Besides, I often incur debt because I borrow from people and credit companies (LAPO) so that my business can bounce back. Also, bouncing back takes time but it often depends on the amount I borrowed to invest back in the business. (IDI/Agent Banker/Victim/Male/Irona Market)

The sales representative of an agent banker interviewed echoes some of these sentiments:

I often experience sleepless nights whenever I experience criminal victimization. This is because I often pay back with my salary and this can cut across months, depending on the amount involved. At times, my boss will deduct the money at once from my salary if the amount is small, and if it is larger, I might have to pay it twice or three times. I am a student, and there is nothing I can do and paying back with my salary is the way the business bounces back. Therefore, I am the one feeling the negative consequence of the victimization. (IDI/Agent Banker/Victim/Female/Fayose Market)

Another participant has this to say: “The effect of this victimization on my business has been costly. I often work hard again to get back on track and at times I borrow money in order to keep the business moving” (IDI/Agent Banker/Victim/Male/Bisi Market).

Finally, another interviewee explains the problem of trying to pass on the cost:

Factually, it has not been easy. The effect of the victimization on my business has been a great loss. My capital has been reduced and it often takes a lot of time before I recover from the loss. I often bounce back by drawing on my inner strength by hustling more in order to keep the business going. Also, I increase my charges in order to bounce back but due to the nature of the city and business, some customers might agree to the charges while others might reject them. In addition, I neglect my personal needs and well-being by injecting the money I ought to use for myself into the business. (IDI/Agent Banker/Victim/Female/King Market)

It can be inferred from the responses above that psychological effects, such as sleepless nights, struggling, debts, increased costs, and setbacks have been the consequences of criminal victimization on agent bankers. This could be

partly attributed to the hardship currently experienced in Nigeria as a result of the recession. The recession has led to an increase in criminal activities, which has been felt mostly by agent bankers due to their line of business, and if care is not taken, the multiplier effect could be more hardship, increased social vices and a reverse in the financial inclusion achieved by CBN through agent bankers. The finding is in tandem with that of Fe and Sanfelice (2022), who asserted that crimes can cause both direct and indirect burdens on business owners. Also, Greenbaum and Tita (2004) and Taylor and Mayhew (2002) explicitly stated that crime increases the cost of conducting business in a locality, which often hampers development and causes psychological effects.

Cases of Agent Bankers and Customer Victimization

Due to the increased nationwide cases of victimization against agent bankers and their customers aired daily in the newspapers, on television and on radio, it was considered important to inquire into the cases of criminal victimization experienced in Ado city. Responding to the cases, one interviewee has this to say:

I can remember this case that happened sometime back. A customer walked up to me and told me to assist him to make a deposit to the tune of ₦50,000 (\$120.30) to a third party. He also wanted to withdraw cash from me at the same time. He brought out his phone for me to speak to the person to whom he wanted to make the deposit. After I made the transaction and requested my money, the customer said the person I spoke with would be the one to pay me. In the long run, I was able to collect half of the money and I paid the other half from my personal money. (IDI/Agent Banker/Victim/Female/King Market)

Similarly, another participant at Irona market expressed the following:

About a month ago, I lost a sum of ₦40,000 (\$96.24) to victimization. The customer involved came in to do a transfer. I saw the debit alert on their phone but couldn't see the credit alert. We both waited for the credit alert and they promised to drop their phone and come for it the following day. I never knew that the phone that was dropped did not have a sim card and that it was only a picture showing the debit alert. Until now I have yet to see them. Also, about two weeks ago, I fell victim of ₦10,000 (\$24.06) to a woman who came for an urgent withdrawal stating that her baby was sick and in the hospital. Due to the risk of life involved, I gave her the money but I didn't see the alert. I told her but she insisted that she had done the transfer. (IDI/Agent Banker/Victim/Female/Irona Market)

Furthermore, another participant gave a shocking case, saying,

On a Monday morning, a customer walked up to me and requested a sum of ₦1,000,000 (\$2,406.07) and promised to do a transfer. I did the transfer directly to Opay, a fintech company where I got the PoS terminal. About three months later, I got a call from civil defense that a fraudulent transaction was done to my account. Prior

to the call, our PoS terminal had been blocked. I had to visit the civil defense office to settle the matter by paying the money back. It was there that I discovered that the transfer had been fraudulent. I informed the fintech where I got my PoS terminal and explained to them before the terminal was re-opened for business transactions. I also experienced another case where I lost the sum of ₦60,000 (\$144.55) to a soldier on a Sunday afternoon. He came with his uniform on, showed me his ID and requested a cash withdrawal. After he left, the transfer he did bounced back. (IDI/Agent Banker/Victim/Male/Bisi Market)

A case similar to this recorded by Sunday (2021) involved a naval officer who was apprehended by Nigeria Police Force personnel for defrauding an agent banker in Nasarawa State in July. This supports Ojedokun's (2020) observation that the rate at which criminals are impersonating law enforcement officials for criminal activities has been on the increase in Nigeria.

The above examples reveal some of the common themes in criminal attacks against agent bankers in Ado city, such as the transfer to a third party, a fake alert using personal property as collateral in order to prove innocence, urgent withdrawal with the claim of a life being at risk, and the use of a military uniform to lend authenticity. A major inference that can be made from these findings is that agent bankers in Ado city are being targeted by lone criminals due to their lifestyle, which constitutes a motivation for the attack because the criminals (motivated offenders) are certain that agent bankers and their customers (suitable targets) are always in possession of financial valuables. This reveals how dire the situation has become.

Preventive Measures Against Victimization for Agent Bankers and Their Customers

The agent bankers interviewed clearly know that their line of business is increasingly targeted for criminal victimization. Thus, it seemed pertinent to examine the preventive measures agent bankers and their customers set up to protect themselves. The responses from victimized and non-victimized agent bankers and their customers are presented below. One participant stated:

I don't have any security measures to protect myself. If I report at the police station, all I often get is advice to be careful and not stay long outside. All I do is to be careful whenever I transact business with people. Another thing is that I don't hold huge amounts at the same time. I often keep some somewhere and hold a small amount just to protect myself from victimization. I don't make huge transactions at once, and if people come to make a transfer, I make sure I scrutinize it carefully and also make sure that they are not in a hurry. (IDI/Agent Banker/Victim/Male/Fayose Market)

Corroborating this, another participant expressed the following:

I don't have any security measure set up. As a matter of fact, I believe none of us in this line of business in this

vicinity has the ability to set up a security measure. However, I believe that carefulness will work. What I do now is that, whenever I don't see the alert, I don't give my money out. That is all I can do for now. I also use SMS and an app to confirm the money customers transfer. If you show me your debit alert, I will not release my money to you until I have personally confirmed it and I don't give room for customer familiarization. (IDI/Agent Banker/Victim/Female/Bisi Market)

In addition, another participant had this to say:

After the issue of the ₦1,000,000 (\$2,406.07), I employed personal security. Before we do transactions of ₦50,000 (\$120.68) and above, I often collect the person's phone number, ID card, and picture, but I don't take such measure on any money under ₦40,000 (\$96.54). (IDI/Agent Banker/Victim/King Market).

Continuing with the inquiry into security measures put in place by the agent bankers, non-victimized agent bankers stated that they were not aware of being a target for victimization. However, they had set up some security measures which prevented them from being victimized. One non-victimized agent banker stated,

The security measures I take are proper record of the customer before a business transaction, taking their phone number and pictures without their knowledge. This has enabled me to trace any customer whenever there is an error. (IDI/Agent Banker/Non-Victim/Male/Bisi Market)

Likewise, another expressed the following:

I have been smart, and that is the security measure I have been taking. I check my balance before and after transacting business, and I don't release my terminal to customers. (IDI/Agent Banker/Non-Victim/Female/Irona market)

Customers of agent bankers are totally unaware of the possibility of being victimized. However, they have been taking security measures in transacting business with the agent bankers. One participant had this to say:

I have been patronizing PoS agents for the past five years. Whenever I come to Ado, I often transact with the agent I trust. Agent bankers have deposited different large amounts of money into my account on several occasions and I have not been victimized. I am not aware that PoS agents and their customers are a target for different kinds of victimization, but I protect myself by transacting with people I trust and I make use of a single PoS agent. (KII/Customer/Non-Victim/Male/Fayose Market)

On a similar note, another interviewee stipulated:

I am aware that PoS agents have been a target for victimization, but I am unaware of that of their customers. I believe it is not my responsibility to take protective measures, but that the bank should protect their customers by

making sure that all the PoS agents are registered with the bank or under a traceable platform. This is because if you asked other customers that have been victimized and who have taken the case to the bank, the banks often tell them that the PoS agents are not registered with them and there is no way they can trace them. If they are all registered with the banks, it will be easier for them to be traced through their details. (KII/Customer/Non-Victim/Male/King Market)

These findings clearly establish that only a few agent bankers and their customers who have never experienced any form of victimization are unaware of being targeted by criminals. The non-victimized agent bankers and their customers understand the possibility of being a victim, and in response, both victimized and non-victimized agent bankers and their customers have devised some preventive measures to protect themselves. The major preventive measures adopted by most respondents are carefulness, being vigilant, transacting business with a trusted agent banker, awareness, and smartness. Other special preventive measures taken include employing personal security, setting rules such as customer documentation for transactions of ₦50,000 (\$120.68) and above, limiting the cash held, not permitting customer familiarity, not engaging in huge transactions at once, and recording customers' documentation without their knowledge. Clearly, the fear of being victimized negatively impacts agent bankers, their customers, and their business, since agent bankers feel obliged to document their customers without their knowledge and customers feel they must only transact with agent bankers they trust. The measures taken by the customers could even limit the level of patronage of the agent bankers, thereby limiting their profit. Besides, Ado city is a city where people engage in one line of business and competition is always stiff. Competition already impacts the profit made and further reduction in the profit due to criminal attacks can be burdensome on the agent bankers. These findings conform with the study of Fisher and Looye (2000), which state that crime has the tendency to negatively impact businesses' operations in diverse ways as it compels business owners to take different measures to protect themselves. Another outcome of these findings is that, despite the lifestyle of agent bankers and their customers (suitable targets), they have been unable to invest in physical means of crime prevention, such as a security guards or crime-detering devices (capable guardians) which could protect them against criminals (motivated offenders). These findings conform to the lifestyle-routine activity theory, which posits that a lifestyle without a capable guardian is prone to motivate offenders when they meet with a suitable target.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the exposure of agent bankers and their customers to criminal victimization in Ado city. It was revealed that agent bankers and their customers are being targeted by criminals who use non-violent tactics. Forms and cases of criminal victimization against agent bankers and their customers include fake alerts, fraudulent transfers, withdrawals under false pretenses, withdrawals under duress, fraudulent alterations, intentional criminal patronage with fake collateral in order to look innocent, fake identity, and

urgent withdrawals using manipulative emotional appeals. Consequences of criminal victimization against agent bankers and their customers include psychological effects, financial setbacks, struggling to keep going, increased costs, and debts. Preventive measures include carefulness, being vigilant, transacting business with a trusted agent banker, awareness, smartness, employing personal security, setting rules such as customer's documentation for transactions of ₦50,000 (\$120.68) and above, limiting the cash held, not permitting customer familiarity, not engaging in huge transactions at once, and recording customers' documentation without their knowledge.

In addition, it was made known that laws and penalties that could aid in reducing crime of this nature do not exist in Nigeria. The only laws that guides business of this nature in Nigeria are to protect customers against agent bankers (Oduola, 2020) and CBN regulation to prevent money laundering through this type of business. This negligence and inability of the government to provide security measures to agent bankers has led to their increased victimization. The negligence could be excused as an oversight by the government in foreseeing any such victimization on agent bankers. It was concluded that agent bankers and their customers were exposed to criminal victimization as a result of their lifestyle, which leads lone criminals to perceive them as always having huge sums of money. In addition, agent bankers are always eager to transact business. This implies some measure of carelessness in their business dealings and, coupled with their lack of security measures, exposes them to criminal attacks.

Recommendations

The study recommends that financial institutions and financial technology companies, who often give agent bankers their PoS terminals and also license them for business, should properly document their details for security reasons and regularly organize training for them on strategies they could adopt to prevent criminal activities. Agent bankers in Ado city are often situated within close proximity to one another. This means they could jointly invest in physical security measures such as security alarm devices, security guards, CCTV surveillance systems, and protective barriers. Joint investment in these physical security measures would reduce the cost of individual investment and discourage motivated offenders from viewing them as a suitable target. It is equally important for CBN to collaborate with deposit banks, financial institutions, and financial technology companies in developing frameworks that could put an end to fraudulent practices associated with fake alerts. Furthermore, agent bankers could create an association or social media platforms where they could regularly discuss victimization cases, strategies adopted by the criminals, and safety tips. This could serve as an awareness platform which could enable them to always operate with a sense of alertness and also prevent further victimization. It would also create a form of awareness and carefulness amidst non-victimized agent bankers and their customers. In addition, there is an urgent need for Nigerian Law Enforcement Agencies to develop a solution to stop the use of their uniforms to perpetrate fraud.

Suggestion for Further Studies

Agent bankers and customer victimization is a new research area in Nigeria. Further studies can be conducted on the

same issue in other cities in Nigeria. Also, during the data gathering stage, it was discovered that the business is not as profitable as generally thought. Therefore, the profitability of agent bankers is another research area that could be explored.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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