Strategic intelligence in the management of narcotics: A case study of Nigeria

Thesis aiming to investigate and contribute to the existing theoretical knowledge of strategic intelligence by evaluating a specific organised crime, narcotics.

Key details

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Research context

In August 2019, the UK's National Crime Agency (NCA) seized £40 million worth of heroin following an international law enforcement operation. The NCA publicly stated that 'the seizure of such a large quantity of heroin is the result of a targeted, intelligence-led investigation, carried out by the NCA with international and UK partners.' Similarly, on 26 November 2025, Nigeria's National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) arrested a drug baron and five associates, seizing drugs valued at ?6.7 billion after uncovering a large opioid warehouse in the Isolo area of Lagos. The NDLEA described the operation as intelligence-led.

Between 2019 and 2025, law enforcement agencies worldwide increasingly characterised successful seizures, arrests and prosecutions as the outcomes of 'intelligence-led' operations.

While these agencies are mandated to disrupt drug supply chains and reduce demand, the routine invocation of intelligence-led policing does not necessarily indicate the effective application of strategic intelligence within law enforcement organisations.

Ratcliffe's (2003) theoretical contribution has been instrumental in helping law enforcement transition from reactive to proactive policing and in the global diffusion of intelligence-led policing. The model has primarily focused on tactical and operational intelligence to support enforcement outcomes, often at the expense of strategic intelligence. Strategic intelligence is an intelligence product intended to provide long-term insight, foresight and guidance for decision-making and policy development. Cross-national research by Coyne and Bell (2011) demonstrates that strategic intelligence has developed slowly and frequently struggles to demonstrate practical value in policing, prompting agencies to rely more heavily on community- and intelligence-led approaches.

Against this backdrop, this PhD thesis examines the role of strategic intelligence in law enforcement by analysing drug-related organised crime in Nigeria.

Research methodology

This thesis adopts a qualitative research methodology to examine how drug law enforcement intelligence personnel collect, manage and interpret intelligence data, and how such data informs policymakers' efforts to address the proliferation of narcotics in Nigeria. Drawing on positivist and interpretivist paradigms, the study recognises that individuals regardless of role, status, or personality hold single and multiple interpretations of lived experiences, which shape their actions in real-world contexts (O'Donoghue 2006; Bergman and others 2012; Teherani and others 2015).

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants, and open-ended interview questions were used to elicit in-depth, conversational responses. The study focused on intelligence and security officers within the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) to explore perceptions of the value of intelligence data for narcotics control and management in Nigeria.

Following the data collection, audio recordings were transcribed and analysed thematically, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). NVivo v2.0 facilitated the six-stage analytical process, enabling the creation, evaluation and refinement of codes and themes, as well as the identification of exemplars that address the research questions. Immersion in the data facilitated rigorous

interpretation and ensured that salient issues were not overlooked. Participant anonymity was maintained in accordance with ethical approval granted by the University of Hull.

Given the sensitivity of the research, ethical approval was obtained from the University of Hull, and informed consent was secured from all participants. According to the Data Protection Act (1998, 2018), participants were fully informed of the study's purpose, possible benefits and risks.

The use of the past tense reflects that the research is in its fourth year and has completed the primary phases of data collection and analysis.

References

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