VICTIMIZATION OF PRIVATE SECURITY GUARDS IN ABIDJAN

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to understand the reasons for the victimization of private security guards which invites an open reflection on the reasons for their victimization. To explain victimization as pertains to private security guards, two factors were highlighted: socio-economic and working conditions. Victimization of guards has consequences for both staff and society. Hence the need to take measures to combat violence against private security forces.

Keywords: Victimization, Security Guards, Socioeconomic Conditions, Working Conditions, Frustration.

1. INTRODUCTION

Thomas Hobbes (1871) and Max Weber (2014) note that violence is the monopoly of a supreme authority capable of preserving the peace and security of individuals while preventing the implosion of society. Thus, on a territory, power belongs to the sovereign authority and its institutions, the police, and the army, to maintain tranquility and ensure the internal and external security of the state.

While security on the Ivorian territory remains the exclusive responsibility of the State, the rise in crime (fraud, vandalism, theft, incivility, public disorder, etc.) has shown the limits of the public police force. This situation prompted the political authorities to privatize police tasks, hence giving birth to the private security sector. These private security agents are employed in households, administrative services, and businesses, as security has become a major issue and an integral part of the criteria defining the quality of life.

In Côte d'Ivoire, according to a study by the Center for Security, Development, and the Rule of Law (DCAF, 2016), "in 2005, there were 35,000 agents for 100 private security companies. Rising to 50,000 in 2009 for a total of 300 private security companies and from 2011 - 2012 to 70,000 agents including 69,000 security agents employed by 400 companies". This is corroborated by Tanin (2017) who notes growth in this sector, employing more than 60,000 agents for a turnover of 90 billion CFA francs. Is this development that we now have in Côte d'Ivoire, one police officer for every three private security agents (DCAF, 2016). This is corroborated by Tanin (2017) who notes growth in this sector, employing more than 60,000 agents for a turnover of 90 billion CFA francs. Is this development that we now have in Côte d'Ivoire, one police officer for three private security

agents (DCAF, 2016). This number greatly exceeds that of the public order forces combined (police and gendarmerie) (DCAF, 2020). Despite the ever-increasing number of private security agents in Côte d'Ivoire, there were, however, approximately 1,200 private security and cash transport companies in 2021; and of this number, only 173 have approval according to the list published on December 31, 2020, by the Ministry of the Interior and Security. The survey carried out by the National Human Rights Council (CNDH, 2021) finds that out of 50 security companies only 33 have approval, i.e. 66% compared to 17, i.e. 34% practice their profession illegally. Regarding the identification of agents, this survey shows that out of a sample of 130 agents, 32 people claimed to have a professional card against 98, i.e. 75.38% do not have any identification element linked to the profession. As for social security, 11 agents claim to be declared to the Social Insurance Institution-Caisse Nationale de Prévoyance Sociale (IPS-CNPS) against 119, i.e. 91.53%. And even if they are not declared, some agents claim to be deducted for CNPS contributions. Regarding the salaries of private security agents in Côte d'Ivoire, it should always be noted, according to the CNDH, that they are lower than the minimum wage, which is 75,000 CFA francs. In addition to being low, salaries are irregularly paid to agents, resulting in salary arrears. The situation is not very good in Senegal, salaries vary between 25,000 and 50,000 CFA francs, far from the minimum wage which is 63,435 CFA francs (Guèye, 2014). In Burkina Faso, according to the study by the Center for Security Sector Governance (2020), it appears that the salary of security employees is very low and disparate. 80% of respondents say they have a monthly salary less than or equal to 40,000 CFA francs. Despite their considerable participation in the fight against insecurity, security officers in the exercise of their mission are subject to victimization of all kinds. Tanin (2017) notes that although this sector is booming, there are abuses and low blows to the detriment of security guards forced to live on meagre wages. Pauron (2021) takes a similar view, noting that private security personnel are underpaid. Beyond the anecdotal and journalistic accounts of the victimization of private security guards, we ask: why are they victimized, and what are the consequences?

This paper will hence aim at understanding the reasons for the victimization of security guards. The hypothesis put forward is that security guards are exposed to victimization because of their socio-economic and working conditions.

In this research, we will take Cohen and Felson's (1979) lifestyle theory and symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1986) as our theoretical framework. Lifestyle theory accounts for disparities between victimization rates and lifestyle, i.e. daily habits. Thus, the probability of being a victim is linked to what one does during one's daily life, and to the places one frequents. Lifestyle also reflects the individual's opinion of his or her place in life, and the way in which he or she values him- or herself, and thus compensates for real or imagined weaknesses.

Blumer's (1986) symbolic interactionism shows that individuals can act individually, collectively or on behalf of an organization. Activities are the responsibility of individuals, and individuals are integrated into relational situations. Violence against security guards is linked to the environment and the time of day. Violence against security guards is related to the work situation. For Goffman (1969), in interactions, the interest of individuals is to control the behavior of others and, in turn, the way in which others treat them. Actions will influence what Goffman calls "situation definition", which in turn is defined by the actions of the participants.

Following the introduction, it is appropriate to explain the methodology that will be used to collect the data.

2. METHODOLOGY

Because of its importance to the country's economy and to the sub-region, Abidjan was chosen as the setting for the survey. This state is the true hub of activities in Côte d'Ivoire. For this research, we limited the investigation to the city of Cocody, considered affluent.

To carry out this study, we relied on the diversification of the population, which allows us to hope for the most accurate portrait of a given problem (Pires, 1997). The surveyed population was made up of 30 private security guards, 10 security company managers and 10 managers of households, sites, and businesses. In all, 50 people were interviewed. Diversification is important in that it highlights the divergences in the points of view of those involved. To gather data, we used documentary research, interviews, and observations. In the first phase of the research, the documentary study was used to gather information and data on the subject. Semi-structured interviews were preferred and were conducted with all respondents. Neutral observation was adopted and carried out over a six-month period. It consisted of presenting and reconstructing the facts observed during the investigation. The data collected was analyzed qualitatively.

In this part, the aim was to present the methodological orientations in which this research was carried out. The goal pursued in this research work is to observe private security agents and analyze their victimization.

After having presented the methodology adopted as part of this study, we now present the results of the survey.

3. RESULTS

Several variables explain the victimization of private security guards. Some are linked to socio-economic conditions, while others relate to working conditions, which in turn have consequences.

3.1 Explanatory factors

3.1.1 Socio-economic conditions of security guards

In the context of this work, socio-economic conditions are understood as a lack of education or poor education, a lack of financial means, which we could describe as endogenous factors in the sense that they are inherent to the agents. These factors are linked to victimization, as they make individuals vulnerable and subject to abuse. Indeed, the illiteracy and low level of education of some private security guards means that they are not eligible for certain jobs that require qualifications. As a result, they are forced to go for what they can get.

What's more, traditional African solidarity is a distant memory. Today's populations are increasingly individualistic. In these conditions, work or crime are the only means of survival. Without support or qualifications, these people are forced to work to survive.

As K. A, an agent, puts it: "*I have no choice because of my social situation. Who am I going to turn to? I have no one to help me, so I do this job to avoid begging*". Another agent agrees: "*Life is hard and my parents' conditions aren't any better. I must do what I can find to at least get food and lodging. I know what I'm given is viewed with no respect, but what can I do? I have no choice. Do this or steal, which is better*?

All the agents interviewed recognize that their difficult socio-economic conditions constituting their social handicap are exploited by security contractors who hide behind economic difficulties in order not to respect the national law on the Guaranteed Minimum Interpersonal Salary (SMIG). This highlights the risks of victimization of these contractors. As one security company manager

put it: *"It's difficult for us to pay our agents' salaries properly, because we have to pay taxes and other social charges for the company. It's the best way for the company to keep running than to hope for more".* To the question of whether this is not a violation of their rights, he replies: *"On the contrary, we help them to have something to live on, and the State also benefits from this to enhance its image by showing a low unemployment rate".*

The socio-economic situation is very important in explaining the violation of the rights of private security guards. Indeed, the lack of alternatives makes them targets. As one agent put it: *"Our lack of education and our poverty are our Achilles heel. We have very few opportunities, so we are forced to accept modest sums".* This leads us to assert that socio-economic conditions are factors in victimization.

In addition to socio-economic conditions unfavorable to agents, the precariousness of the job market is not to be overlooked in explaining the abuse or violation of people's rights. Many graduates are unemployed. In this context, what would be the fate of non-graduates? Unemployment and job insecurity accentuate and reinforce inequalities and social treatment. Unequal access to employment exposes people to victimization. Taking advantage of this situation, security companies adopt practices that show little regard for ethics and the law. Agents are subjected to undignified pay, unfair dismissal and violence by both contractors and employers. As one agent put it: *"We once got together to claim our back pay of over six months. But in response to our demand, management dismissed certain people considered to be strike leaders, without respecting their rights".*

In conclusion, we can note that security agents, due to their socio-economic fragilities, are exploited by security contractors. We are therefore entitled to wonder about the social working conditions of these workers.

3.1.2 Working conditions of security guards

In today's vital race for prevention, there is no shortage of obstacles. They may be economic, political, or social, but in most cases, one factor undermines this Sisyphean effort to achieve safe working conditions. In carrying out their mission, guards are exposed to enormous difficulties, which are sources of victimization.

First and foremost, when it comes to securing people and property, these officers are ill equipped to deal with criminals. As a major security to property access, they should have adequate equipment unfortunately, this is not the case, even though their job exposes them to attacks of all kinds. Agents are subjected to violence and aggression in the workplace. For some, the violence is due to a lack of protective equipment. *"We are victims of attacks that sometimes-cost lives because we have no means of protection. We're left to our own devices,"* says one agent.

Security company managers do not pay particular attention to the working and safety conditions of their staff, but rather to the nature of their commercial contracts, which are based on an obligation of result rather than of means. Security guards work in precarious conditions, without the proper equipment to put security back at the heart of Ivorians' concerns. Working conditions are inhuman. Security agencies are "sick" of their training and lack of material resources. And yet, agents are called upon to work outside normal working hours, often finding themselves isolated. This is one of the reasons for firearms assaults.

What's more, this profession is prone to aggression because it brings agents into constant contact with individuals. These staff are subject to threats, physical and verbal aggression. The fact that they are in direct and regular contact with people is a favorable condition for victimization. Private

security guards working in shops, administrative sites and households cannot avoid confrontation and contact with users. Agents must deal with hostile exchanges and face verbal aggression as the result of people's refusal to comply with the instructions of security personnel. This attitude empties the guard's job of substance, and seeing them as a thing, or an object. It should be pointed out, however, that some of the individuals flocking to the guarded areas are under the influence of alcohol and drugs. As one officer put it: *"We sometimes come across people who are under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs. When we're confronted with these people, it's a case of insults, blows and disrespect for the rules".*

Although exposed to various risks as part of the exercise of their security mission, agents are confronted with problems of logistics, materials, social dialogue and rest time. These difficulties negatively impact security agents as well as society.

3.2 Consequences of victimization of security guards

The harm caused by victimization is multi-faceted. However, for this work we will show the consequences for private security guards and the consequences for society.

3.2.1 Consequences for private security guards

If victimization gives a sense of duty, the most obvious consequences are financial loss, assault and even homicide, but there are also psychological consequences that are less talked about. It's this aspect that we're focusing on. While severe physical assaults are rare, psychological violence and personal attacks seem to be a daily occurrence for agents, as Lahm (2009) points out. From a psychological perspective, victimization causes psychological damage to victims. This can include various traumas and behavioral disorders. The rise in assaults thus leads to a feeling of insecurity. Victims of mistreatment and insults from employers and users alike, security personnel face vulnerability due to the accumulation of assaults. While physical violence is more easily observed, this is not the case for symbolic or verbal violence, which has repercussions on the victims' psychological health. They develop a feeling of insecurity, which is an indirect victimization characterized by anxiety crystallized around aggression (crime). Feelings of insecurity give rise to reactions such as withdrawal or isolation. In this context, agents are not fully involved in their work resulting in genuine non-involvement, or even abandonment. As Baril (1980) notes, these people develop a sense of fear and powerlessness. Fear is defined by Maupassant as *"something appalling, an atrocious sensation, a decomposition of the soul, a dreadful spasm of the mind and heart, the memory of which sends shivers down one's spine".*

Numerous agents expressed their feelings as:

"My friend thought the offenders were going to kill him when they tied him up. This job is scary. Since he was a victim, everything scares him. The slightest noise makes him jump".

"Insults from managers and incivilities all day long have changed the way I behave. As soon as I arrive at work, I'm no longer myself, I feel anxious. I'm afraid something will happen''.

Faced with aggression of all kinds, agents seek to flee this profession for others, as some develop post-traumatic stress. For them, running away is a response to psychological distress. As one agent put it: "In addition to violence and aggression, we also have to put up with mistreatment from agency managers and employers. They treat us like sub-humans. It doesn't make you want to continue in this profession".

We can conclude that security agents work in difficult conditions and are subjected to violence of all kinds, leading to feelings of fear, stress and helplessness among these security actors to the point

that they modify their involvement in the profession. This state of affairs can only have repercussions on global society.

3.2.2. Consequences of the victimization of private security guards on society

Crime prevention and security issues are at the heart of the political arena because they affect community unity and development. The urgency of the security aspect should not lead us to forget the economic aspect. While it is difficult to measure the financial damage caused by victimization, it should be noted that violence and aggression (crime) create inconvenience. Indeed, it instills fear in potential foreign investors. This is likely to increase unemployment and the economic destitution of young jobseekers.

Insecurity contributes to economic and social crises which tends to lead to a general deterioration in social integration. Delinquency practically and symbolically threatens the unity of the community and raises questions of justice. Questions of security and delinquency appear as real challenges because they inevitably raise fear and insecurity.

Ultimately, it should be noted that the socio-economic development of a State necessarily requires a secure environment that guarantees investment of foreign capital.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this research is to understand the reasons for the victimization of private security guards. To verify the working hypothesis, which is: The victimization of private security guards can be explained by socio-economic and working conditions. To support this a direct immersion and survey of the realities of the field was needed. This made it possible to establish the existence of victimization. Given the size of the sample, this exploratory research revealed two explanatory factors that play an important role in the victimization of private security guards. The results reveal a link between victimization and socio-economic conditions. The image of a security guard is a function of the figurative image that society has of an individual, in this case the guard. And the social meanings associated with it, based on the interactions experienced by the victimized agents interviewed, can impose themselves on them as a form of stigmatization. Thus, the meaning attached to the word "guard" implies a negative connotation, a depreciation on the part of the population, the observation of a form of disrespect towards them, and the feeling that they are inferior people. Their social status gives them less access to the available community, police, and legal resources (Herek, 2004), and they consequently avoid calling on them. The same applies to the precariousness of the job market, which exerts an influence on cases of indirect victimization such as violations of rights, exploitation of working conditions, underlining the fact that victimization is made possible when lack of means, isolation and lack of training intersect in the workplace. Given their training, it's hardly surprising that security guards are victims.

Lusignan (1999) points out that security work combines elements conducive to victimization, since it involves: contact with potential offenders, circumstances in which responders may become targets, and the presence (or absence) of deterrents that are apt to inhibit the assailant's actions. However, Southgate (1987) notes that hostile exchanges are a matter for the behavior of security guards. Thus, citizens' verbal aggression towards security forces is the result of the latter's coercive measures.

What should be done about this situation? In view of the situation of private security guards, proposals are made to the executive branch, companies and customers. As for the executive power, it is up to it to enforce all legal provisions, to put in place mechanisms for the control and surveillance of private security companies, to close companies working illegally, namely those

without approval. At the company level, they must comply with the legislation in force, allow the establishment of associations for the defense of agents' rights, and establish continuing training centers for agents. As for the companies' customers, they must favor structures that comply with the legislation. To do this, they must refer to the supervisory authority to ensure the legality of the company's existence. Inquire with the agents about their salary and its regularity. This would allow the company to be challenged on the treatment of the security guard.

The work demonstrated the relevance of the theoretical framework. Indeed, this research confirms Cohen and Felson's (1979) life-style theory, as security work exposes officers to victimization because of what they do daily, and they are required to work in isolated locations. As for the theory of symbolic interactionism, we see with Goffman (1975) that, based on groups and individual categories, victimization can be explained through the perception of others and of oneself. In this work, we could have drawn on the theory of security action developed by Cusson (2010), which shows that a victimized security force leads to a loss of legitimacy and is ineffective in the fight against crime. This illustrates the consequences of victimization for officers. Although this study has made it possible to investigate the dynamics of victimization among private security guards, there are some limitations to be highlighted with regard to the sample. It should be noted that our survey population was composed exclusively of men. Further research would be necessary to show the extent of the agents' involvement or responsibility in their victimization.

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