



PREDISPOSING FACTORS OF POLICE BRUTALITY IN LOKOJA, KOGI STATE – NIGERIA

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Abstract

Police brutality is pervasive. It threatens the police main purpose of ensuring the security of lives and properties as well as maintaining law and order. This study was conducted in Lokoja, the Kogi State capital. The study examined the nature of police brutality, and identified the factors influencing police brutality in the study area. The study was anchored on the rational choice theory. The total sample size for the study was two hundred and eighty-eight respondents. The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods for data collection and analysis. The findings of the study revealed that the police do brutalize citizens while performing their duty. The study also revealed that the brutality of citizens by the police comes in different forms or nature including torture (physically and emotionally), assault, verbal abuse, and intimidation, among others. The study recommended, among others that the police, especially those in lower ranks, should be well trained in the area of human rights, the Constitution, Police Act and other related Acts as well as statutory documents as they relate to human rights. Thus, the police should adhere to human rights provisions as enshrined in the Nigeria 1999 Constitution and other documents while discharging their responsibilities and those who violate citizens' rights should be punished in accordance with the law.

Keywords: Policing, Nigeria Police Force, Corruption, Law and Order

Introduction

The main concern of the police all over the world is to protect lives and properties of the citizenry. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 states that the purpose of Nigeria Police Force is to maintain law and order. Thus, the privileges to use the "non- negotiable force" to ensure the control of citizens' behaviour and maintenance of social order have been granted to the police (Reid, 1996 and Bartollas and Dinitz, 1989). The proper application of such privilege remains one of the central problems confronting the act of effective policing in contemporary Nigerian society. Police brutality exists in many countries across the world. However, it is widespread in Nigeria. Police brutality is one of the several forms of police misconducts and broadly includes the range of police abusive practices or misconducts that dehumanize and degrade the human dignity. Though, this is often physical, it also includes verbal attacks and psychological intimidation by the police officers and men. In contemporary Nigeria, brutalization of citizens by the police has thus become the routine act of policing (NOPRIN, 2007). Therefore, complaints against the police use of excessive force; brutality and dehumanization of citizens

are very common as it has become an integral part of policing in Nigeria. Thus, the integrity of the police is being eroded with widespread brutality of citizens they are meant to protect.

It is sympathetic to note the bitter experiences of Nigerians daily in terms of police brutality over the years thus pose serious threat to the law and order the police supposed to maintain. Members of Nigerian Police Force continue to be widely accused of unjustified severe beating, torture (both physical and emotional) or manhandling criminal suspects while effecting arrest, detention, interrogation to extract confessional statement, crime control and prevention, resulting in serious injuries to victims. The use of intimidation, assault, verbal abuse, arbitrary arrest, denial of the basic needs of detainees, and extra-judicial killings of the citizens are some of the acts of brutality associated with the Nigerian Police. This situation does not only pose dire consequences for the stability of the Nigerian polity and security but it undermines the act of professional policing and crime prevention.

Statement of the Problem

The police are supposed 'friends' of the public for safety and protection of lives and properties. Myhill and Bradford (2011) posit that the encounters between the police and members of the public to a larger extent have the potential to affect wider public confidence in the police. However, police brutality poses a major obstacle to the prospects of the Nigerian Police in ensuring the security of lives and properties as well as preventing and controlling crime in the Nigeria. Police brutality of citizens is apparent in form of killing of the innocent people, detaining persons arbitrary and with impunity, unwarranted search and violation of privacy, extra-judicial killing, bodily injury and intimidation, harassment and loss of personal liberty.

In recent times, intelligence-led policing is the global modern trend in investigation and prosecution. Despite this development, the Nigeria Police relies heavily on torture to extract confession from criminal suspects leading to the various degrees of injuries and in some cases death of many criminal suspects against the national and international laws prohibiting the use of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatments. It is in view of the spate of police brutality across Nigeria and Kogi state in particular that necessitates this study. However, the study specifically examines the nature of police brutality and identifies the factors influencing police brutality in the study area.

Literature Review: Conceptualizing the Major Variables of the Study

Police is government agency charged with the responsibility of maintaining law and order in the society (Udefuna, Maduka, Akalefu and Jumare, 2014). According to NOPRIN(2007), police brutality is police use of excessive force; unjustified severe beating, torture (both physical and emotional) or manhandling members of the public or criminal suspects while carrying out their duties, such as effecting arrest, detention, interrogation to extract confessional statement, crime control and prevention, resulting to injuries or death. Thus, it is police use of intimidation, assault, verbal abuse, arbitrary arrest, denial of the basic needs of detainees, and extra-judicial killings of the citizens while carrying out their duty. In other words, it is a means of coercing individuals to surrender to police requests for bribes and at times a punishment for not accepting police request for gratification (Alemika, 2003). Ndifon (2012) asserts that dehumanizing custodial conditions and corporal torture are two basic forms of torture used by the Nigeria Police and are discriminately and selectively applied against the poor and the powerless citizens. The male members of the public, above 30 years of age and low income earners suffer most from police brutality (Okeshola, 2011).

There are many factors influencing police brutality in Nigeria. Alemika and Chukwuma (2000) highlight twelve (12) reasons why police brutality thrives in Nigerian society. Thus, they identified undemocratic political structure and the use of police to coerce or repress citizens, lack of political accountability, unfair economic structure, protracted military rule, the use of the police to suppress socio-economic discontent among workers, students, activists, and disempowered groups; inadequate training of police officials and the use of arms; lack of accountability and inadequate supervision of junior personnel, hostile police-public relations, stress, frustration by police officers in response to crime control, poor screening of police recruits, leading to the recruitment of psychologically and socially unstable persons, structural and resource limitation and inadequate, lack of respect for the police due to the unjust enforcement of the law as the major factors influencing police brutality. Corruption on the part of the police explains why sometimes, members of the public are threatened, harassed, intimidated and assaulted by policemen (Akuul, 2011). Unfortunately, the police who are often charged with the responsibility of checking corruption have been found to be deeply involved in corrupt practices. Various attempts

have been made both by the government and the police authorities to curb the problem of extortion, but all efforts have not yielded the needed positive results.

Inyany and Abraham (2003) argue that for refusing to part with twenty Naira (N20.00) gratifications on a daily basis, policemen harassed and brutalized law abiding citizens on their legal business and even sent many commercial drivers to their early graves for their failure and confrontation with police corrupt practices. Innocent (1997), in his submission links predisposing factors for brutality of citizens by members of Nigeria Police Force to include citizens lack of awareness of their rights and duties, poor training and inadequate educational background of the police, poor knowledge of the police powers and duties, and inadequate facilities available to members of the police force for effective policing. Amao (2002:3), a legal practitioner, while sharing his experiences of police assault, identifies certain factors that influence police brutality in Nigeria, thus:

Honestly, I am not bitter against the men of the Nigeria Police Force that assaulted me in the course of a purely professional duty. But I am angry with the system that has thrown up these half educated, ill-trained, uncivilized and incompetent men and women as the protector of the populace.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC: News Magazine, 2010) in an interview with the Programme Coordinator for Network on Police Reform in Nigeria (NOPRIN), while tracing the origin of Police torture to the colonial legacy of brutality, further attributes the predisposing factors for brutality to prevalent mass ignorance, lack of human rights consciousness among members of the Nigeria Police Force and the masses, corruption, lack of respect for rule of law and poor training of the Police. He further observes that:

Police training curriculum in Police colleges lacks human rights content. There is generally but the erroneous public notion that torture is acceptable. Many Police officers justify torture as a necessary and primary means of investigation and extracting evidence (NHRC, 2010:14).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Rational Choice Theory. The theory has its roots in the classical school of criminology developed by Cesare Beccaria (Siegel, 2009). It assumes that the decisions to engage in deviant or criminal behaviours, such as police brutality is conscious one, informed by both the costs and benefits associated with the act. The two principal branches of classicism are the deterrence principle and the econometrics paradigm. The deterrence principle states that the law is intended to protect the rights of both society and the citizens and its chief purpose is to deter criminal behaviour. Therefore, by extension, governments should enact laws requiring all police officers to purchase and maintain personal liability insurance as a conscious and unconscious deterrence mechanism against brutality. Punishment according to Bentham (1948) should be used only to avoid some greater evil. The idea of requiring liability insurance for individual police officers and men is intended to apply just enough pain/accountability to offset the amount of 'pleasure' derived from the offence. The economic perspective views the decision to commit the act of corruption and engage in brutality as essentially similar to any other decision. It is made on the basis of analysis of the costs and benefits of the crime. Both the deterrence and the economic perspective agree that punishment should not be inflicted if it is groundless, ineffective, unprofitable, or needless.

The police service is an honourable field in which any act of dishonor would bring shame to the individuals and organization. The emotion of shame brings forth a negative feeling about oneself and this causes the shamed individuals to feel dehumanized into persons of less dignity. Finding police officers and men guilty of brutality in competent court is by itself shameful, not even including the involvement, awareness and participation of an in-group audience (other police officers and men). It is assumed that would-be abusers are sensitive to the same shame and would be likewise deterred. Shame or the potential of it has an emotional bearing on the policemen's life, whereas financial liability remains a conscious and unconscious reminder to them that brutalizing citizens is a costly event. The police subculture could be described as a 'blue fraternity' or 'brotherhood' that consists of informal rules and regulations, tactics and folklore passed on from one generation of officers to the next, hence the conscious and unconscious cost associated with brutalizing citizens will also be passed on from one generation of officers to the next. According to Westley (1970), police subculture is a crucial concept

in the explanation of police behaviour and attitudes. This is one of the many reasons why there is need for a mechanism of accountability and punishment that fits the police culture-personal financial liability and publicity of the offence and the punishment (Kwon, 2012).

Materials and Methods

The population of this study comprises of KotonKarfe prison inmates, Nigeria Police Force, court officials, prison personnel, members of National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), Students and members of professional bodies, such as Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) and Nigeria Bar Association (NBA) to cover the victims of police brutality and those officials involved in the administration of criminal justice. A total sample size of two hundred and eighty-eight (288) anchored on Araoye (2004) simplified formula for determining a minimum sample sizes for a study was used, thus:

$$n = \frac{2^2 \alpha}{2pq}$$

$$q^2$$

Where, n = minimum sample size

p = probability of success

q = probability of failure

d = degree of accuracy

$$\alpha = 0.05$$

$$p = 0.025$$

$$q = \frac{0.75}{1}$$

$$1$$

Therefore, the sample size of the study is computed as follows:

$$n = \frac{(2^2 \cdot 0.05 / 2) (0.2 \times 0.8)}{0.05^2}$$

$$0.05^2$$

$$n = \frac{1.96 \times 0.2 \times 0.8}{0.05^2}$$

$$0.05^2$$

$$n = 288.$$

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design with both primary and secondary sources of data collections. Two instruments were adopted for the collection of the primary data. These include questionnaires which were administered to two hundred (200) Koton Karfe prison inmates based on accessibility, ability and willingness after the approval was granted by the Controller General of Nigerian Prison Services and forty (40) members of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) and forty (40) students, sampled from various institutions of higher learning in Lokoja Metropolis of Kogi State to generate the quantitative data, and in-depth interviews (IDI); eight (8) Key informants that include one (1) police officer and two (2) policemen, two (2) senior prison officers, one (1) court official (Judge) and one (1) each from Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) and one (1) member of Nigeria Bar Association (NBA) to obtain the qualitative data.

The questionnaires were drafted in English Language and comprised of both open-ended and close-ended questions administered by the researchers and assistants consist of five prison officials at Koton-karfe prison. The in-depth interviews were also conducted among the police personnel, judges and members of NBA and NUJ in a place deemed fit by the informants. Tape recorder was used to record the responses of the respondents based on their permission and in cases where the tape recorder was not allowed, notes were taken. The secondary data were gathered from textbooks, journals and other publications relevant to the topic under study. The quantitative data generated were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 computer software to obtain the frequencies and percentages presented in tables. The qualitative data generated from the used of in-depth interviews were transcribed and appropriately utilized to complement and support the quantitative data.

Findings

The study was conducted in Lokoja Metropolis and focused on exploring the predisposing factors of police brutality. The results of the study are presented below:

Table 1: Respondents’ Opinions on the Common Form of Police Brutality

Common Nature	Frequency	Percent
Torture	31	11.1
Assault	17	6.1
Verbal Abuse	16	5.7
Intimidation	15	5.3
All of the above	201	71.8
Total	280	100

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Table 1 shows the respondents’ opinions on the common form of police brutality. It indicates that 71.8 percent of the respondents all opined that torture, assault, verbal abuse and intimidation are the common form of police brutality. However, 11.1 percent, 6.1percent, 5.7percent and 5.3percent of the respondents identify torture, assault, verbal abuse and intimidation, respectively as the common form of police brutality. A police officer during the in-depth interview (IDI), who agreed that Nigeria Police brutalize citizens, categorizesthe common forms of police brutality into physical brutality and psychological brutality. According to him:

We have physical brutality and emotional or psychological brutality, but to me, the common form of police brutality is more of emotional or psychological brutality, such as verbal intimidation, verbal abuse and so on. This kind of brutality is more common than physical brutality, such as torture and assault, etc. But this act is mostly committed by junior officers.

A key informant, who does not totally blame the police for the brutalization of citizens, claims that police lack basic infrastructural facility for investigation, interrogation and effective policing. According to him:

Well, based on my experience as a policeman, during the course of investigation and interrogation of criminal suspects, some police use threat to ensure co-operation and confession. To me, the use of threat is one common but it is a form of brutality of citizen. Secondly, some police used torture to extract confessional statements from suspects but I personally know it is wrong but what will police do when they lack basic infrastructural facility for investigation, interrogation and effective policing. In fact, I don’t totally blame the police but the entire system.

Similarly, another key informant said:

The common form of police brutality or abuse while carrying out their duties and interaction with inmates based on my experience as a prison officer include torture, both emotionally and physically, hanging and indiscriminate use of handcuffs, among others.

A jurist and human rights activist, interviewed during the IDI has this to say on the common form of police brutality:

It is multi-dimensional, as it depends on the officers, that is, a particular officer conducting whatever investigation so to say. It depends on the nature of the training of that officer undergo. There are some officers that if they are going to investigate a matter, they are trained as much as possible to be civil in their investigation. Some because of their training, they can torture you, they can harass you. In fact, they don’t care whether they are brutalizing physically. It is not only physical torture, but emotionally. I don’t know where they got that from, if you enter every security office in Nigeria, in fact, let me restrict myself to Lokoja, there is one electric shock they had, my God, if they put it on your skin, whatever you don’t want to say before, you will say it, you know electric shock, you know the pains, you will be hearing wait, yes, yes, yes, whatever you said is true, yes I did it. So emotionally, you are tortured, physically, you are tortured.

Table 2: Respondents’ Opinions on the Factors influencing Police Brutality

Factors	Frequency	Percent
Threat and Hostility towards the Police	18	6.4
Citizens’ Disrespect and Resistance to Arrest	11	3.9
Police Disrespect to the Rules of Law	56	20.0
Lack of Human Rights Education	21	7.5
Poor Screening in Recruitment and Training	24	8.6
Lack of Professionalism	39	13.9
Corruption	89	31.8
Frustration	17	6.1
Others	5	1.8
Total	280	100

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Table 2 shows the respondents’ opinions on the factors influencing police brutality. It indicates that 31.8percent (majority) of the respondents claimed corruption as the factor influencing police brutality. Also, 20percent of the respondents claimed police disrespect to the rules of law, 13.9percent lack of professionalism, 8.6 percent poor screening in recruitment and training, and 7.5percent lack of human rights education as the factor influencing police brutality, respectively. A participant during the IDI takes a long time to explain some of the factors responsible for police brutality. He said:

You see, people have lost confidence in the Nigeria Police Force and as a result there is serious hostility and confrontation. To be honest with you, police in Nigeria are frustrated, without proper motivation to carry out their legitimate duties. Secondly, the orientation is another factor; police are not properly oriented on issues involving human rights, especially on the part of the citizen. However, what do you expect when people threaten the police and violently attack the police on his legitimate duty. Police in turn who lack professionalism to handle such situation will violently attack back, as a result brutalizing the citizen and violating the basic right of the people.

Similarly, a key informant opined that:

The orientation of the police is so bad. I don’t know what is happening in Nigeria Police Training School but, seriously, you discover that when you go to different police division, the same brutality will still be manifested.

A prison officer, while expressing his view on the factors influencing police brutality during the IDI, comprehensively said:

There are many factors that are responsible for police abuse and brutality of citizens but these factors are generally shared between the citizens and the law enforcement agencies; police inclusive. On the part of the police, the general orientation of the police personnel, the way and manner criminals get into the police force without merit and due process, inhuman and degrading training of the recruits. For examples I don’t know whether you follow the News of the Ikeja Police College mess where police are trained in an environment you cannot train a pig before the intervention of the Presidency. In short, police are not well trained to be more civil in their conduct generally. On the part of the general public, people are not well educated on issue of human rights. People should not attack the police while performing their legal duty or abusing the police. These among other factors are responsible for police abuse and brutality of citizens.

Similarly, another key informant, who shares the above view during the IDI, said:

What I can say regarding the factors influencing police brutality is that there is lack of proper orientation among the police relating to issues on human rights and brutality

of citizens. People threaten the police and resist peaceful arrest, lack of respect to the rule of law, frustration on the part of the police personnel in carrying out their legitimate duty among others account for police brutality of Nigerian citizens.

Discussion

The study was conducted in the Lokoja Metropolis of Kogi state and focused on police brutality. The findings of the study revealed that the police brutalize citizens while performing their duty. The brutality of citizens by the police comes in different forms, such as torture (physically or emotionally), assault, verbal abuse, and intimidation, among others. Thus, many have claimed having witnessed one form of police brutality or the other, such as verbal abuse, slapping, kicking, beating, and unlawful arrest and detention. Another finding of the study indicated that there are predisposing factors responsible for police brutality. These factors include threat and public hostility toward the police, lack of professionalism, citizens' disrespect and resistance to the arrest by the police, police disrespect to the rule of law, inadequate education and training. The findings of the revealed that some people are not really aware of their basic rights, as a result lack of human rights education, and even if they do, they cannot enforce these rights, especially when violated.

This is not surprising in a society with a high rate of illiteracy, especially among the rural and urban uneducated people, who are not well informed or educated about their basic rights and their enforcement. The findings revealed that corruption is still on the high side on the police and they lack the professional etiquette for effective policing. This is in line with Akuul (2011) finding that lack of professionalism and corruption influence the police brutality on members of the public. Thus, the law-abiding members of the public who refuse to cooperate with the police for extortion or N20 gratification end up being harassed and brutalized. From the findings above, it is evident that people with low social status, who are less educated, unemployed, poor and middle-aged in our society are those commonly brutalized by police. The reason could be that people with high social status can buy justice in Nigeria and are highly connected with the political, the economic and the legal class.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, one can infer that the brutality of citizens by the police is a menace to any society because of its consequences and is common in the Nigerian society. Many Nigerians tend to encounter with the police in their day-to-day activities and that the police, more often than not, do brutalize citizens. The magnitude of police brutalization of citizenry is on the high side based on certain factors that include lack of professionalism, police disrespect to the rule of law, lack of human rights education, frustration, citizens' disrespect and resistance to arrest by the Nigeria Police, poor screening in recruitment and training as well as corruption, etc.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered based on the study

The police, especially those in lower ranks, should be well trained in the area of human rights, the Constitution, Police Act and other related Acts as well as statutory documents as they relate to human rights. Thus, the police should adhere to human rights provisions as enshrined in the Nigeria 1999 Constitution and other documents while discharging their responsibilities and those who violate citizens' rights should be punished in accordance with the law.

The police should be made to understand during and after training that the brutality of citizens in both physical and psychological form (torture, verbal abuse, intimidation, assault, etc.) are punishable offences under the law and against many international human rights instruments for example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1976) and the Africa Charter on Human and People Rights (1981), which Nigeria is a party. Thus, the application or the enforcement of such laws to punishing the police who commit such offences should be done without bias to serve as deterrence to others. Police should be provided with modern security equipment for effective policing by the government and should be well motivated through increase in salary, allowances and other incentives to avoid being frustrated while carrying out their constitutional responsibility of ensuring the safety of lives and properties. The police, on the one hand, should be professional enough to be more polite, civil and friendly towards

the members of the public, while the citizens, especially the criminal suspects and their relations, on the other, should not be hostile to the police while carrying out their legitimate duties or disrespect the police as well as resist police arrest.

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