

Police Brutality and Human Rights in Shagamu Ogun State, Nigeria

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.57233/gujos.v5i1.05>

Abstract

Police brutality is a global phenomenon. The practice has dire consequences for fundamental human rights. It has far and remote implications for loss of lives and property. The limited literature on the police brutality and human rights prompted this research. The study assessed police brutality and human rights in Shagamu, Ogun State, Nigeria. It adopted mixed research methods and it is descriptive and cross-sectional in nature. It is anchored strain and routine activity theories. Primary data were obtained through the administration of questionnaire on 108 respondents in Shagamu, Ogun State. The Yamane Taro formula was adopted to determine the sample size. Simple and stratified sampling methods were employed. The study hypothesis tested on the significant relationship between police brutality and security of lives and property. The P-value of 0.292 exceeded the level of significance at 0.05, meaning that police brutality leads to loss of lives and property. The study recommends an established criminal justice system for trial and punishment of erring police officers while members of the public should be well-educated on their fundamental human rights as well as limits of police officers.

Keywords: Crimes, criminal justice, human rights, police brutality, punishment, security, violence,

Introduction

The earliest use of the term ‘police brutality’ was in Britain in the mid-19th century. *The Puppet-Show* complaining in September of 1848 that barely a week passes without the police committing disgusting offence (Aborishade and Abileye, 2019). Boys are bruised, women insulted by their ruffianism; and police brutality is becoming one of the most recognized human right violation. The above scenario captures the steep contrast that is in direct violation of contemporary policing, whose origin can be traced back to the 18th century in France (Sylvie, 2020).

Members of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) adopted the same pattern when they beat an African American suspect, Rodney King, during his arrest for drunk driving (Chaney, 2013). Unknown to them, a white civilian videotaped the assault leading to broad media coverage and criminal charges against some of the officers involved. One year and one month after this incident, in April 1992, few hours after the four police officers involved were acquitted at trial, the Los Angeles riots of 1992 commenced and resulted in fifty-three (53) deaths, two thousand, three hundred and eighty-three (2,383) injuries, more than seven thousand (7,000) fires, damage to three thousand, one hundred (3,100) businesses, and nearly one billion dollars (\$1, 000, 000, 000) in financial losses. After facing a federal trial, two of the four police officers were convicted and received 32 months prison sentences (US Census, 2019).

Data released by the US Bureau of Justice Statistics (Census of jails, 2011) revealed that from 2003 to 2009 at least four thousand, eight hundred and thirteen (4,813) people died while being arrested by local police. Unfortunately, not much has changed since then as in the summer of 2014 a young, unarmed, black male named Freddie Gray was shot and killed by a police officer. This event sparked national outrage over police brutality and begged the question as to the depths police brutality was willing to drag the nation. However, that proved to only be a preview of what was to come, considering in 2020 there were serious protests tagged *BlackLivesMatter* representing a decentralized political and social movement protesting against incidents of police brutality (Aborishade and Abileye, 2019).

Police are constitutionally empowered to protect the lives and property of citizens although a police officer is allowed to use minimal force when the situation arises. The Nigeria Police discharges its roles through able men and women. They protect the lives and property of the citizens. This normal order, is the replica of policing in other parts of the world. However,

sometimes, Nigerian police uses excessive and inappropriate force. Police brutality has resulted in loss of lives and property of innocent citizens. In some cases, it sparks off violent protests against police institutions. It has also weakened the cooperation between Nigerian citizens and the police which undermines intelligence gathering in Nigeria. Police brutality in whatever form leads to violation of fundamental human rights.

To arrest police brutality, various measures such as setting up panels of enquiry to probe defaulting officers or suspension or dismissal of guilty officers have been adopted. Despite these measures police brutality has continues unabated. It reached a climax in 2020 when the Special Anti-robbery Squad (SARs) was dismantled. The disbandment of SARs was in response to mass protests against the Unit. There is a need for further academic inquest into police brutality in Nigeria. Therefore, this study investigates police brutality in Shagamu, Ogun State Nigeria and its effect on human rights. Specifically, the study aims to identify acts that constitute police brutality, and the social economic factors responsible for police brutality in Shagamu.

Literature Review and Conceptual Clarification

Meaning of Human Rights

Human rights constitute a set of norms governing the treatment of individuals and groups by state and non-state actor on the basis of ethical principles regarding what society considers fundamental to a decent life. These norms are incorporated into national and international legal systems, which specify mechanisms and procedures to hold the duty-bearers accountable and provide remedy for alleged victims of human rights violations (Waldron, 2018).

According to the United Nations (2013), human rights are good standards or principles that portray certain principles of human conduct, and are regularly secured as lawful rights in a country and globally. These universal rights are inherent in everyone, regardless of sex, nationality, ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or any other status (Agyeman, and Adwoa, 2020).

According to Cohen and Felson (1979), there is hardly any government today that does not, at least, profess human rights. The protection and promotion of human rights have become the fundamental purpose of government. The level of a state's development can be determined by the level at which its citizens enjoy human rights in all ramifications. Peace,

progress and stability are predicated at both national and international levels with respect to human rights.

Human rights have become key apparatuses of peacekeeping to which has been added democracy. The concern for human rights does not, however, dissolve the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs. Rather, breaches of human rights, especially nasty breaches are taken out of domestic jurisdiction (Hayden, 2001).

Cases of Human Right Violation

There are many cases of human right violation in Nigeria. According to McCulley (2013) cases of human rights violations are described as becoming a culture of impunity in the country. These include extra-judicial killings, illegal detention, and destruction of property by security forces etc. Studies by researchers Damiani (2020), established the consequences of extra-judicial killings of Mohammed Yusuf and other Boko Haram leaders for escalating the sectarian violence that nearly consumed the whole of North Eastern Nigeria. Kidnapping for ransom and rituals are also alarming Other forms of human rights abuses in Nigeria include motorists' harassment and extortion by security personnel, political assassinations, undemocratic imposition of candidates in leadership and intimidation of political opponents (Chaney, Cassandra and Ray-Robertson 2013), rape, child abuse, education denial and domestic violence It is against these backgrounds that this paper examined the challenges of human rights abuses in Nigerian democratic governance and suggested the ways out of the menace

Human Rights Situation in Nigeria

The following are some of the human rights situations in Nigeria.

Press Freedom: The concept of press freedom has become widely accepted by journalists in developing countries. In Nigeria, for instance, press freedom is the constitutional guarantee that 'every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including the freedom to express opinions, to receive and impart ideas and information without undue interference (Gardner, Mary, 2014). However, studies over the years have shown that there is an array of political restraints and pressure which have crippling effects on the press in many African countries (Damiani, (2020).).

Aside from brutality and massacre of the citizens by security personnel, denial of press freedom in South-West, Nigeria is widespread. Despite the transition from military to civilian

rule in 1999, clampdowns, assault, beatings, unfair arrests and police raid of staff and management of print media have continued unabated (Sunday, 2006:115).

Between June 2002 and September 2003 alone Media Rights' Agenda (MRA), a Lagos-based- Non-Governmental Organization that promotes, press freedom and freedom of expression recorded more than fifty cases of reported abuse of journalists' rights and other violations of freedom of expression. The Media Watchdog Reporters without borders listed the Nigerian Police as the leading 'violation of Journalists' rights, On Sunday, April 24, 2010, Ed-Ugbagwu, a judicial correspondent of The Nation newspaper was murdered in Lagos. All these killings have further raised the question of press freedom in Nigerian democracy. The assault on press' freedom is a fundamental breach of democratic norms (Emesowum, 2016).

Proponents of the free press believe it is uncalled for and reminds Nigerians of the dark days of impunity during the military era. With Nigeria operating a democratic system of government, freedom of expression, including the freedom to hold opinions receive, and impart ideas without interference should be a fundamental right guaranteed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the African Charter 'on People's Rights, (ACHPR), the Constitution .of the Federal Republic 'of Nigeria 1999 and other regional and international treaties to which Nigeria is a party. Moreover Section 39 (1) of the 1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) provides that every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference (Damiani, 2020).

Media owners say that if politics is about development and the ultimate goal of any 'political system is to ensure the improvement of the security and welfare of the citizenry, then the resort to the assault on the media negates fundamental rights and the rule of law. It merely demonstrates impunity and intolerance to alternative views, (1986) Providing the balance between the duty of law enforcement to uphold the laws and the rights, of individuals to be free from security services misconduct, the few circumstances stated above are clear instances of infringement or violation of rights to freedom of expression, human dignity, and freedom from inhuman rights to freedom of expression, human dignity, and freedom 'from inhuman and degrading treatment. Other human right violation includes rape, torture, unwarranted shooting, and invasion, etc.

Meaning of Police Brutality

Police brutality is defined as the intentional use of unwarranted coercion by police, which can take the form of physical attacks, verbal assaults, or psychological intimidation, and is considered abuse and official misconduct. Police brutality is a particularly heinous sort of crime committed by officers who were hired to prevent the crime from occurring in the first place Earl, (Kandiyali, 2014).

According to Kandiyali (2014) police brutality refers to unmerited excessive, and aggressive physical, mental, and emotional abuse, above and beyond the law, including repetitive and unmerited contact upon by an individual or groups of individuals in law enforcement. This definition is critical due to its incorporation of not just physical but also mental and emotional abuse that is often unaccounted for. Police physical abuse can have serious detrimental effects. While police brutality can come in various physical forms, Mitchell (2000) notes that physical injuries may develop from police actions as serious as shootings and baton beatings to something as simple as restraint holds.

The physical abuse of is a proof that occurs in so many places. However, specifically, police brutality is not a strange experience in Nigeria; there are established cases of police brutality in Nigeria. This cumulated into End-SARs Protests (Aborishade and Abileye, 2019). The situation in the country has escalated to the point where a former Inspector-General of Police, Ibrahim Coomasie accused members of the Force of ‘barbaric treatment of Nigerians’ (Reported, 2018). Along the same lines, there were reports from some female ex-detainees of sexual abuse by police officers.

Theoretical Framework

Social Disorganization Theory

The social disorganization theory by Edwin Sutherland states that when social agencies such as police fails to enforce social control, deviance such as police brutality will be on the increase. Therefore, police that was constitutionally empowered to protect and defend citizens it is the one that abuse the rights of citizens. When this act continues, it may lead to breakdown of law and order in Nigeria.

Broken Windows Theory

The Broken Windows Theory by George Kelly: According to George Kelly, if a minor act of deviance is not controlled in a society it may graduate into major crime that might consume

the whole society. Police brutality is a crime security that might consume the whole society if not properly controlled.

Methodology

The research applied mixed methods which were quantitative and qualitative in nature. A set of questionnaire was used to obtain information from respondents while textbooks, edited journals constituted the secondary data.

Results

Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

S/N	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
1.	Gender		
	Male	31	28.7
	Female	77	71.3
	Total	108	100
2.	Age		
	Below 25 years	71	65.7
	25-30 years	27	25.0
	31-40 years	10	9.3
	Total	108	100
3.	Marital Status		
	Single	49	87.0
	Married	14	13.0
	Other(s)	45	42.6
	Total	108	100
4.	Educational Qualification		
	SSCE	35	32.4
	NCE/DIPLOMA/	15	13.9
	HND/ Bachelor	42	38.9
	MSc/MBA	16	14.8
	Total	108	100
5.	Work Experience		
	1 – 5 years	97	89.8
	6 – 10 years	5	4.6
	11 – 15 years	6	5.6
	Total	108	100

Source: Field Study, 2025

In table 4.1, one hundred and eight (108) respondents participated in the study. 28.7% of the respondents were male, while 71.3% was female. 65.7% of the respondents were “Below 25 years”, 25.0% were “25-30 years”, and 9.3% of the respondents were “31-40 years”. 87.0% were “single”, 13.0% were “married”. For educational qualification, 32.4% of the respondents were holders of “SSCE”, 13.9% were “NCE/DIPLOMA”, holders 38.9% of the respondents had “HND/Bachelor”, and 14.8% of the respondents were “M.Sc.”. For work

experience, 89.8% of the respondents had working experiences of “1 – 5 years”, 4.6%; “6 – 10 years”; 5.6% of the respondents were “11 – 15 years”.

Discussion of Findings

The study explored police brutality and human rights abuse in Shagamu Ogun State, Nigeria. The study established police brutality undermined human rights in Nigeria. This was in line with finding of Aborishade and Abileye (2019). The Nigeria police force is one of the institutions that enforce human right in Nigerian. The study also established that some members of Nigerian Police Force engage in brutality as a mean of attaining personal interest. The study found out that obstruction of free press was one of the actions that constituted police brutality. This was in line with the study conducted by Idowu (2013).

The study found out different human rights conditions in Nigeria. Freedom of press was the human rights being abused by the Nigeria Police. This was in tandem with the study conducted by Kandiyali (2014). The police do engage in the violation of freedom of expression as a cover-up for the brutality. The study found out that police different dimensions of police brutality. The obstruction of human rights through police brutality could be physical abuse in forms of beating, hitting with objects, killing and denial of access to judicial processes. Emotional brutality were manifested in the areas of raping suspects, subjecting suspects to indelible emotional trauma.

Conclusion

The study found that human equality, public hearing, freedom of expression among many others, has being tremendously violated by the police in the course of ensuring citizen’s right and performing their core duty of crime control and prevention in Shagamu and its environs. The study also found that police brutality has little impact on citizen’s freedom but violated their trust and loyalty to the police. The study discovered that brutality, violence, torture, degradation of arrest in custody have no importance on human right. It cannot be perceived as a predisposing factor of denial or violation of human right of people in the country.

Recommendations

- i. The police authority should control or show emphasize on their personnel and bring those police that violated human right to justice. Also, as an important and strategic policy aimed at increasing citizens trust and loyal in the force should be formulated.

- ii. We recommended that there is an urgent need by the police authority and government to review their existing public policy mainly on violence, brutality, public hearing, human equality and others so that diver's approaches could be used in a cost-effective manner to ensure the citizens enjoy their constitutional rights.

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