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ASSESSING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLICE BRUTALITY AND PUBLIC LEGAL COMPLIANCE IN EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA

Ukatu James Omaji^{1*}, Blessing Onghaji Ukatu²

¹ Department of Criminology and security studies, faculty of social sciences Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

² Department of Chemical Engineering, Universidade Federal de Viçosa, Brazil

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***Corresponding author:** Ukatu James Omaji

Department of Criminology and security studies, faculty of social sciences Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

Abstract

Nigeria continues to grapple with persistent allegations of police misconduct and widespread human rights violations by security personnel, often igniting strong public reactions. Despite repeated denials by top officials within the Nigerian Police Force regarding the use of torture during interrogations, numerous academic and investigative reports reveal that coercive methods remain a core aspect of police investigative practices. This study critically examined the recurring issue of police brutality and human rights abuses in Nigeria, with a specific focus on the operations within Abakaliki and Ikwo local government areas. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach—primarily through the administration of structured questionnaires to 400 selected residents—the research uncovered that torture remains a prevalent tool used by the police to extract confessions from suspects. Accounts from former detainees detailed harrowing experiences, such as being tied and suspended in agonizing positions, as well as being subjected to beatings using boots, fists, gun butts, electrical cables, animal hides, and other makeshift weapons. The study identified a major contributing factor to this pattern: a lack of adequate investigative training and resources within the police force, which fosters dependency on physical coercion as an investigative shortcut.

The findings underscore an urgent need for the Nigerian government to enhance the operational capacity of its police personnel by investing in proper training and modern investigative techniques. Furthermore, there is a pressing necessity to instill a culture of professionalism and accountability within the force to curb these systemic abuses.

Keywords: police, police brutality, public, compliance, law

Introduction

The term *police brutality*, often used interchangeably with *excessive use of force*, describes actions by law enforcement officers that infringe on the dignity, freedom, or physical safety of civilians (Reiss, 1971). Reiss further characterizes police brutality as any conduct by officers that unnecessarily degrades, restricts, or harasses citizens. Police officers are legally empowered to use what Bittner (1970, p. 238) calls “non-negotiable coercive force” to ensure compliance and uphold order. However, the misuse of this sanctioned force—rather than its mere existence—has emerged as a central issue in modern policing (Kerstetter, 1985).

Despite growing public concern, empirical studies examining police misconduct, particularly at the institutional level, remain limited. Most existing research has focused on individual cases or been confined to specific jurisdictions, often employing inconsistent measurement approaches (Dugan & Breda, 1991; Kerstetter, 1985; Littlejohn, 1981; Pate & Hamilton, 1991; Toch, 1995; Wagner, 1980; Wagner & Decker, 1993; Worden, 1995). Drawing from Reiss’s work, Decker and Wagner (1982) conceptualized police brutality as a public perception that officers have failed to respect the rights and dignity of individuals, especially within democratic societies.

The present study adopts this understanding to explore two primary categories of complaints against the police: the use of excessive physical force and the abuse of authority. While documented cases of police brutality may not be overwhelmingly frequent (Fyfe, 1995; Klockars, 1996; Worden, 1995), their consequences are far-reaching. Misuse of force has historically sparked major civil unrest, such as the 1919 Chicago riots and the 1992 Los Angeles riots following the Rodney King incident. These events underscore how police violence erodes public trust, lowers officer morale, and strains police-community relations (Langworthy & Travis, 1994).

The conduct of police officers significantly influences the public image of law enforcement agencies (Son et al., 1997). As Johnson (1981) argues, perceived police misconduct is a major factor fueling public distrust. The Christopher Commission (1991) found that excessive force reflects broader tensions between law enforcement agencies and the communities they are intended to serve.

According to the National Institute of Justice (2012), use of force refers to the level of effort police apply to ensure compliance by an unwilling individual. Ideally, officers should deploy only the minimal amount of force necessary to maintain safety, effect an arrest, or manage a volatile situation. Several situational factors—including location, suspect behavior, mental health, and the influence of substances—impact these decisions (Taylor & Woods, 2010, p. 268). Law enforcement agencies often provide internal guidelines known as the “use of force continuum,” which outlines appropriate responses ranging from verbal persuasion to lethal force (Terrill & Paoline, 2012, p. 8; NIJ, 2012).

In recent years, the use of less-lethal options such as Conductive Energy Devices (e.g., Tasers) has become more widespread. Though not without controversy, Tasers have been shown to effectively subdue suspects in situations where deadly force may have been justified (White & Ready, 2007, p. 171).

Historically, the term “police brutality” was first recorded in the British publication *The Puppet-Show* in 1848 and later appeared in American media in 1872 through the *Chicago Tribune*, which

reported on the abuse of a detainee at a local police station. The development of modern policing as a state-controlled institution dates back to 18th-century France, with most countries forming structured police departments by the 19th and early 20th centuries. In the United States, incidents of police violence were frequently linked to labor disputes, such as the Great Railroad Strike (1877), the Pullman Strike (1894), and the Ludlow Massacre (1914).

In the Nigerian context, systemic police abuse—including torture and human rights violations—has continued to draw significant public criticism and global condemnation (Amnesty International, 2015; Ogunode, 2015). Torture, considered one of the gravest forms of violence, leads to severe physical and psychological harm. Although some argue that it can yield valuable intelligence (Costanzo & Gerrity, 2009; Makwerere et al., 2012), empirical research consistently demonstrates its ineffectiveness and the lasting trauma it inflicts (Egede, 2007; Costanzo & Gerrity, 2009).

Despite national and international laws aimed at curbing torture—including provisions within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights—abusive practices remain widespread in Nigerian police custody. These acts have been linked to unexplained deaths in detention and persistent custodial misconduct (Amnesty International, 2014, 2015). Reports by the Network on Police Reform in Nigeria (NOPRIN, 2010) highlight numerous instances of extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, routine extortion, and the continued reliance on torture as a standard investigative method.

Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria, incidents of police misconduct and violations of fundamental human rights by security agencies frequently provoke widespread public discourse. Despite persistent denials by top officials of the Nigerian Police regarding the use of torture to obtain information from suspects, existing studies suggest that torture remains a central method employed in criminal investigations. Since its inception in 1930, the Nigeria Police Force has been marred by a reputation for unprofessionalism, systemic corruption, and criminal behavior. Even after more than eight decades, the public perception of the police leans more toward viewing them as threats rather than protectors. The force has come to symbolize unchecked corruption, operational inefficiency, and a culture of abuse.

Police corruption in Nigeria violates the human rights of citizens in two fundamental ways. First, the most immediate harm comes from abuses committed during extortion efforts. These include arbitrary arrests, illegal detention, verbal threats, beatings, torture, sexual violence, and even unlawful killings. Extortion is commonplace in everyday public spaces such as bus stops, markets, and especially at police roadblocks—initially designed as anti-crime measures but now functioning as profit-generating operations. At these checkpoints, officers regularly demand bribes from motorists and passengers. Failure to comply often results in intimidation, prolonged detention, or physical harm, with family members pressured into paying for a victim’s release.

These extortion encounters can quickly escalate into more violent and egregious abuses. There have been numerous cases where individuals who resisted payment were subjected to beatings, sexual assaults, or even fatally shot. Officers frequently engage in mass arrests of innocent citizens in public venues like bus terminals, markets, and restaurants. In extreme cases, undercover

police pose as commercial vehicle drivers, lure unsuspecting passengers into their vehicles, and transport them to police stations at gunpoint where bribes are then demanded for their release.

The level of impunity with which these acts are carried out is alarming. Police often make no effort to conceal their demands, brazenly soliciting bribes within police premises and often without even pretending to investigate alleged offenses. Individuals unable to pay are threatened, unlawfully detained, and sometimes subjected to torture or sexual violence—all in pursuit of extortion.

Secondly, these actions gravely erode the rule of law and public trust in law enforcement. Victims of crimes are often forced to pay the police to initiate or pursue an investigation. Those who cannot afford to pay are denied justice, while wealthier suspects can easily manipulate outcomes by bribing officers to evade arrest, distort investigations, or even incriminate the victim. These practices have created a distorted justice system where access and outcomes are heavily influenced by personal financial capacity.

It is within this context of entrenched abuse and corruption that this study investigates the issue of police brutality and the degree of public compliance with the law in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The study is driven by the following objectives:

1. To explore the root causes of police brutality;
2. To assess how the historical legacy of the Nigerian Police contributes to ongoing brutality; and
3. To identify practical solutions to mitigate the problem of police brutality.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Professionalism Theory, initially advanced by Wilson (1968). The professional model emphasizes that effective control of police misconduct begins with the recruitment and retention of well-trained, ethically sound, and competent individuals in law enforcement. The underlying premise is that when policing is carried out by individuals who are true professionals, incidents of police brutality and misconduct are significantly reduced.

Professionalism Theory posits that excessive use of force in efforts to secure compliance with the law often stems from a lack of adequate professional training and ethical grounding. Therefore, ensuring that police officers possess the requisite qualifications, skills, and values can curb the widespread violation of citizens' fundamental rights. A core element of professionalism is the accumulation and application of specialized knowledge that is both practical and ethically sound in a given field.

The concept of professionalism itself is not new; it traces back to as early as 400 BC with the Hippocratic Oath, a foundational document in the medical field emphasizing ethical practice. According to Frederic Hafferty of the Mayo Clinic's Program for Professionalism and Ethics, professionalism has evolved through various historical stages and continues to shape standards of practice across fields. Within the context of policing, the theory assumes that officers who are knowledgeable, skilled, altruistic, committed to continuous improvement, and responsive to the needs of society—above personal gain—can uphold law and order with minimal recourse to violence or human rights abuse.

However, this theory has not gone without criticism. Scholars like Delese Wear and Mark G. Kuczewski (2004) argue that the notion

of professionalism is often laden with abstract, ambiguous ideals that are difficult to implement practically. They suggest that the discourse lacks the clarity needed for real-world application, especially in high-pressure fields like policing.

Lundman (1980) also critiques this model for its narrow focus on individual officers while neglecting the broader institutional and structural factors that contribute to police misconduct. He asserts that police deviance is more accurately understood as an organizational problem, rather than simply a matter of individual failings. In his view, misconduct often stems from departmental cultures and systemic norms rather than from a lack of personal professionalism alone.

Furthermore, the professional model can act as a barrier to public oversight. By defining professionals as individuals possessing exclusive knowledge and skills not available to the general population, it limits citizen involvement and accountability. Lundman maintains that addressing police misconduct effectively requires not only professionalizing individual officers but also reforming the organizational environments in which they operate. Differences in rates of citizen complaints across various police departments, for instance, are often linked to internal departmental characteristics rather than individual behavior alone.

In summary, while the professionalism theory offers a valuable lens for understanding and potentially reducing police brutality through higher standards of training and ethics, it must be integrated with a broader organizational reform approach to address the structural enablers of misconduct.

Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional survey research design to collect empirical data on the relationship between police brutality and public compliance with the law in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Data collection was carried out during a single time frame spanning from June 2021 to November 2021. In line with the principles of cross-sectional design, participants were selected based on predefined inclusion criteria relevant to the research objectives.

The choice of a cross-sectional approach was informed by its practicality—it allows for data to be gathered within a relatively short period and at a lower cost compared to longitudinal studies. This design is particularly suitable for examining prevailing attitudes, behaviors, and experiences at a specific point in time, making it ideal for assessing public perceptions and experiences with police conduct and compliance with legal norms.

Participants and Sampling Techniques

This study utilized a multistage sampling technique to select participants from Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The state was initially divided into local government areas, followed by further stratification into towns and rural communities. The two selected local government areas—Abakaliki and Ikwo—served as the study sites and were stratified along socio-cultural lines to ensure representation across different community contexts.

A sampling frame consisting of rural communities within the selected LGAs was developed. Using the Taro Yamane formula, a total sample size of 400 respondents was determined. Out of this, 380 valid questionnaires were successfully completed and used for the final analysis.

To identify eligible participants, the researcher and two trained research assistants (RAs) conducted a household listing within the

selected communities. Each household with eligible individuals was marked using chalk and a researcher-assigned code. In every marked household, all qualifying individuals were invited to participate. This process continued systematically until the desired sample size was attained.

Due to poor road infrastructure in some of the selected communities, commercial motorcyclists were engaged to facilitate access for the research team.

The following inclusion criteria were applied to determine eligibility for participation:

1. Individuals who have personally witnessed or experienced police brutality within the last three years or more.
2. Residents who have lived in the area for at least one year.
3. Adults aged 18 years and above.
4. Willingness to voluntarily participate in the study.

Data Collection Techniques and Instrument

The primary instrument used for data collection in this study was a structured questionnaire, designed to gather both demographic data and responses relevant to the research objectives. The questionnaire was divided into two sections:

- Section A captured the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (e.g., age, gender, education level, occupation, and length of residence).
- Section B addressed the specific research questions and objectives, with items framed in a modified closed-ended format, offering response options such as Yes, No, Don't know, and Undecided.

Prior to data collection, an official letter outlining the purpose and objectives of the research was submitted to the chairpersons of the selected local government areas as well as traditional leaders of the involved communities. Their formal approval was secured before fieldwork commenced.

Informed consent was also obtained from each participant. The voluntary nature of the study was explained, and only individuals who expressed willingness to participate were included.

Two research assistants (RAs) were carefully selected and underwent a two-day training session, focusing on the research objectives, ethical considerations, and proper administration of the instrument.

The questionnaire was administered using a face-to-face, hand-delivery method, allowing for immediate collection after completion. This approach facilitated high response accuracy and allowed clarification of items where necessary. Community members were sensitized in advance to the purpose of the research, which helped foster cooperation and ease of access.

The instrument was written in English, but explanations were offered in Pidgin English and Igbo where necessary, to accommodate semi-literate respondents and ensure comprehension.

Out of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 388 were returned, of which 8 were excluded due to incomplete or inconsistent responses. Consequently, 380 properly completed questionnaires were used in the final analysis.

Methods of Data Analysis

In analyzing the data collected, descriptive statistics method was adopted. Specifically, the data were organized in table and analysis made using simple percentage and frequency distribution.

Results

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	287	74.7
Female	97	25.3
Age		
18yrs - 22yrs	150	39.1
23yrs - 27yrs	234	60.9
Educational qualification		
Completed post-primary school	153	39.8
Completed highest education	231	60.2
Occupation		
Student	287	74.7
Unemployed	80	20.8
Business	17	4.4
Marital status		
Single	384	100
Religious affiliation		
African traditional religion	20	5.2
Christianity	344	89.6
Muslims	20	5.2
Period of residence		
1-5 years	325	84.6
5-10 years	59	15.4

Source: Fieldwork 2024 (N=384)

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the respondents

The table 1 above explain that 287 respondents representing 74.7% are male, 97 respondents representing 25.3% are female, which implies that majority of the respondents are male. From the table we can conclude that majority of the respondents are in between the age bracket 23yrs to 27yrs which 234 respondents representing 60.9%. it also shows that majority of the respondents have completed highest education qualification, which is 231 respondents representing 60.2%. We can as well conclude that majority of the respondents are students, which is 287 respondents representing 74.7%. From the table we observe that all the respondents are single, which is 384 respondents representing

100%. It also portrays that majority of the respondents are Christians, which is 344 respondents representing 89.6%. Finally, the table above, we can conclude that majority of the respondents have lived in their areas between 1-5 years, which is 325 respondents representing are single, which is 384 respondents representing 100%. It also portrays that majority of the respondents are Christians, which is 344 respondents representing 89.6%. Finally, the table above, we can conclude that majority of the respondents have lived in their areas between 1-5 years, which is 325 respondents representing 84.6%.

Table 2: Causes of police brutality

Variables	Yes	No	Undecided	Don't know
Heard of police brutality	364 (94.8%)	20 (5.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Police brutality is fueled by the government	214 (55.7%)	151 (39.3%)	19 (4.9%)	0 (0%)
Strategy to ensure public compliance to law	77 (20.1%)	268 (69.8%)	20 (5.2%)	19 (4.9%)
Police brutality is done to protect elites	116 (30.2%)	268 (69.8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Corruption is a cause of police brutality	291 (75.8%)	93 (24.2%)	19 (4.8%)	54 (13.7%)
Police brutality is fueled by race, color, religion, ethnicity, sex, age	117 (30.5%)	247 (64.3%)	0 (0%)	20 (5.2%)
Police is more likely to brutalize uneducated persons	213 (55.5%)	154 (40.1%)	17 (4.4%)	0 (0%)

Source: Fieldwork 2024 (N=384)

CAUSES OF POLICE BRUTALITY

From the table above, we can conclude that most of our respondents as 364 respondents constituting (94.8%) of the total respondents agreed they have heard of police brutality. Again, the table shows that most of our respondents as 214 respondents constituting (55.7%) of the total respondents agreed police brutality is fueled by the government in power. From the table we can conclude that most of our respondents as 268 respondents constituting (69.8%) of the total respondents disagreed police brutality is a working strategy to ensure public compliance to law. The table displayed that most of our respondents as 268 respondents constituting (69.8%) of the total respondents disagreed that police brutality is as result or attempt to protect elites in the society". We can conclude from the that most of our respondents as 291 respondents constituting (75.8%) of the total respondents agreed that corruption is the cause of police brutality. Again, the table above presented that most of our respondents as 247 respondents constituting (64.3%) of the total respondents disagreed

police brutality is fueled by race, colour, religion, ethnicity, sex, age, in Nigeria. Finally, the table concluded that most of our respondents as 213 respondents constituting (55.5%) of the total respondents agreed that police is more likely to brutalize uneducated persons to educated persons.

Table 3: Historical existence of police and police brutality

Variables	Yes	No	Undecided	Don't know
Police brutality is rooted in the history of the Nigeria police	113 (29.4%)	251 (64.5%)	0 (0%)	20 (5.2%)
Police brutality and corruption originated from the creation of Nigeria police	173 (45.1%)	171 (44.5%)	0 (0%)	40 (10.4%)
Police brutality resulted from the actions of the first set of policemen	150 (39.1%)	194 (50.1%)	0 (0%)	40 (10.4%)
Police brutality is an international history	140 (36.5%)	148 (38.5%)	17 (4.4%)	79 (20.6%)

Source: Fieldwork 2024 (N=384)

HISTORICAL EXISTENCE OF POLICE AND POLICE BRUTALITY

From the table 3 above, we can observed that most of our respondents as 251 respondents constituting (65.4%) of the total respondents disagreed police brutality has its root in the historical antecedence of the Nigeria police". The table also shows that most of our respondents as 173 respondents constituting (45.1%) of the total respondents agreed that police brutality and corruption has its origin from the creation of Nigeria police (colonial era)". It also portrayed that most of our respondents as 194 respondents constituting (50.5%) of the total respondents disagreed that police brutality today is as a result of the behaviours of the first set of men in police uniform as influence by the colonial masters". Finally the table concluded that most of our respondents as 148 respondents constituting (38.5%) of the total respondents disagreed that police brutality is an international history".

Table 4: Solutions to the problem of Police Brutality

Variables	Yes	No	Undecided	Don't know
Total reformation of police would solve the problem of police brutality.	208 (54.2%)	140 (36.5%)	0 (0%)	36 (9.4%)
Creating mutual relationship with the public would help resolve the issues of police	250 (65.1%)	117 (30.5%)	0 (0%)	17 (4.4%)

brutality.				
Independence of police institution can resolve the issue of police brutality.	131 (34.1%)	217 (56.5%)	0 (0%)	36 (9.4%)
Public segregation can solve the issue of police brutality.	71 (18.5%)	236 (61.5%)	0 (0%)	77 (20.1%)
Adopting international best practices can help resolve the issue of police brutality.	310 (80.1%)	54 (14.1%)	0 (0%)	20 (5.2%)
Intellectual training over physical training during recruitment can resolve the issue of police brutality.	327 (85.2%)	20 (5.2%)	17 (4.4%)	20 (5.2%)
Reformation of police would solve the problem of police brutality	288 (75.0%)	57 (14.8%)	0 (0%)	39 (10.2%)

Source: Fieldwork 2024 (N=384)

Solutions to the problem of Police Brutality

From the table 4 above, we can see that most of our respondents as 173 respondents constituting (52.2%) of the total respondents agreed that total reformation of police would solve the problem of police brutality. The table also shows that most of our respondents as 250 respondents constituting (65.1%) of the total respondents agreed that police creating a friendly or mutual relationship with the public would help resolve the issues of police brutality". The table indicated that most of our respondents as 217 respondents constituting (56.5%) of the total respondents disagreed that if police institution is totally independent, the issues of police brutality can be resolved". It also displayed that most of our respondents as 236 respondents constituting (61.5%) of the total respondents disagreed that if the public segregate themselves from police, police will not brutalize them". From the table we can understand that most of our respondents as 310 respondents constituting (54.0%) of the total respondents agreed that police adopt international best practices while dealing with an offender/public it will address the problem of police brutality". The table also portrayed that most of our respondents as 327 respondents constituting (85.2%) of the total respondents agreed that police recruitment emphasizes more on intellectual training rather than physical training programme would address issues of police brutality". Finally, the table concluded that most of our respondents as 288 respondents constituting (75.0%) of the total respondents agreed that total reformation of police would solve the problem of police brutality.

Test of hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

H0: There is no significant relationship between police brutality and public compliance to law

H1: There is a significant relationship between police brutality and public compliance to law

Table 5: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.132 ^a	3	.028
Likelihood Ratio	14.857	3	.002
Linear-by-Linear Association	.101	1	.750
N of Valid Cases	384		

a. 3 cells (37.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .99.

The table above displays the result of the Chi-Square analysis to test the claim that there is no significant relationship between police brutality and public compliance to law. From the result obtained, the p-value (0.002) is found to be higher than the level of significance (0.05), thus we accept the null hypothesis and conclude by rejecting the alternate hypothesis (H_1) that there is a significant relationship between police brutality and public compliance to law.

Hypothesis 2

H0: There is no significant relationship between historical existence of police and police brutality.

H1: There is a significant relationship between historical existence of police and police brutality.

Decision rule: accept null hypothesis if $X^2=9.132$, $DF=3$ and p-value (0.002) is greater than 0.05; we then conclude that there is no significant relationship between police brutality and public compliance to law.

Table 6: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	40.307 ^a	3	.000
Likelihood Ratio	41.290	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	12.433	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	384		

a. 1 cells (12.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.12.

The table above displays the result of the Chi-Square analysis to test the claim that there is no significant relationship between historical existence of police and police brutality. From the result obtained, the p-value (0.000) is found to be lesser than the level of significance (0.05), thus we reject the null hypothesis and conclude by accepting the alternate hypothesis (H_1) that there is a significant relationship between historical existence of police and police brutality.

Decision rule: reject null hypothesis if $X^2=40.307$, $DF=3$ and p -value (0.000) is lesser than 0.05; we then conclude that there is a significant relationship between historical existence of police and police brutality.

Discussion of Findings

Although the use of force by law enforcement is often seen as a necessary element of policing, its effectiveness in compelling long-term compliance among citizens is limited. This view is supported by the National Institute of Justice (2012), which states that officers should apply no more force than is required to manage a situation, effect an arrest, or safeguard themselves and the public from immediate threats.

In line with this, findings from the current study suggest that several situational factors can prompt the use of force by police. These observations align with those of Taylor and Woods (2010, p. 268), who identified key determinants in officers' decisions to employ force. Such determinants include the setting of the encounter, the characteristics and behavior of the individuals involved, their mental state, and the presence of substances such as drugs or alcohol. Although the application of force varies across regions, many police departments rely on institutional guidelines that define the appropriate levels and types of force.

This study also revealed multiple root causes of police brutality. Notably, brutality is sometimes influenced by the interests of the ruling government, efforts to ensure law compliance, protection of privileged individuals, or by systemic corruption. These abuses are further aggravated by discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, or social status. These findings resonate with the International Association of Chiefs of Police, which defines the use of force as the degree of effort required to compel an unwilling person to comply (NIJ, 2012).

In addition, the study uncovered historical underpinnings of police brutality in Nigeria. Respondents linked current abuses to the behavior of early police officers during the colonial era, international patterns of colonial policing, and long-standing institutional practices within the Nigerian Police Force. This finding aligns with Amnesty International (2014), which highlights that since its establishment in 1930, the Nigeria Police has been plagued by unprofessionalism, corruption, and abuse. The report notes that the Force has evolved into an institution often associated with extortion, rights violations, and mismanagement, thereby undermining its legitimacy in the eyes of the public.

Furthermore, the study identified practical recommendations for addressing police brutality. Among these are: reforming the police institution, fostering positive police-community relations, ensuring operational autonomy, adopting global best practices, and promoting consistent and intellectual training of officers. Regular capacity-building programs were also noted as essential. These findings are consistent with those of Grennan (1987), who observed that police departments with a greater presence of women and African-American officers, higher educational levels among personnel, and longer average service durations tend to have lower rates of citizen complaints. Additionally, data suggest that female officers are less likely to be involved in violent altercations with civilians, indicating that inclusive recruitment and training strategies may contribute to more peaceful police-citizen interactions.

In sum, the findings from this research reaffirm the complex and multifaceted nature of police brutality in Nigeria, pointing to both historical and structural causes, while also offering practical solutions rooted in reform, professionalism, and ethical policing.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that police brutality constitutes an unethical and unprofessional practice by certain members of the Nigerian Police Force, often resulting in the degradation of citizens and the violation of their fundamental human rights. As Bittner has observed, empirical research into the issue of police brutality remains limited, with most existing studies focused narrowly on individual cases within a small number of jurisdictions and lacking consistency in methodology.

Siegel emphasizes that the initial contact between most offenders and the criminal justice system typically begins with police intervention. In Ebonyi State, Nigeria, the police not only initiate the justice process—through arrest, detention, bail, and charges—but also often serve as prosecuting officers in magistrate courts, giving them vast discretionary powers. Unfortunately, these powers are frequently abused, leading to widespread incidents of brutality and rights violations.

Importantly, this study also concludes that the use of force by the police has not succeeded in fostering public compliance with the law in Ebonyi State. Rather than promoting order and trust, the misuse of force has contributed to public fear, resentment, and further alienation from law enforcement institutions.

Recommendations:

Drawing from the findings of this research, the following recommendations are proposed as strategic steps to address police brutality in Ebonyi State and beyond:

Establishment of Oversight Committees

A dedicated disciplinary and advisory committee should be established at every level of the police structure—ranging from national headquarters to local police posts. This body should include members from diverse sectors and should be tasked with monitoring, reviewing, and addressing police misconduct, while also advocating for the welfare of officers.

Comprehensive Training and Retraining Programs

The government should institute regular and mandatory training and capacity-building initiatives aimed at aligning police conduct with international best practices and human rights standards. These programs should focus on ethics, conflict de-escalation, investigative procedures, and professional conduct.

Internal Monitoring Mechanism

A peer-review or internal monitoring team should be developed within the police force. This unit would be responsible for tracking the handling of cases by individual officers to ensure transparency, accountability, and optimal outcomes in investigations and law enforcement activities.

Provision of Modern Equipment and Technology

The government should ensure that police units are adequately equipped with modern tools and technology, such as computers, surveillance devices, communication gadgets, and forensic equipment. Access to such resources will enhance the efficiency and integrity of criminal investigations.

Improved Salary and Welfare Package

A sustainable and attractive salary structure should be implemented for police personnel. Adequate compensation can help reduce the temptation for bribery and corrupt practices, which are key drivers of police brutality. Enhanced welfare will also boost morale and professionalism within the force.

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