

PEOPLE'S PERCEPTION OF POLICE BEHAVIOUR IN NIGERIA

Benedict Chidi Ugwuanyi^{2,A-F}, Zbigniew Szczepan Formella^{1,A-F}

¹ Istituto di Psicologia, Università Pontificia Salesiana, Italy

² Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Nigeria

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A. Study design /
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B. Data collection /
Zebranie danych
C. Data analysis /
Dane – analiza
i statystyki
D. Data interpretation /
Interpretacja danych
E. Preparation of manuscript /
Przygotowanie artykułu
F. Literature analysis /
Wyszukiwanie i analiza
literatury
G. Funds collection /
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Summary: The police in different parts of the world and especially in Nigeria play a vital role in enforcing laws and have the passion to serve their citizens. Police is your friend is the motto of the Nigerian Police. The problem of this research is the perception of the people's about the police behavior.

Material and methods: The target of the research was Nigerian adults from 20 years and above (227 were males and 219 females). Quantitative research methods are used to collect and analyze numerical data.

Results: The result shows that most of the people do not perceive the police as a friend. This makes them develop some feelings of anxiety, panic attack and hypervigilance.

Conclusions: It is important for the police to know that some individuals see and perceive them as an institution that assumes full force added to power and constitutes itself as an instrument of intimidation and harassment.

Keywords: perception, social cognitive theory, police behavior

Introduction

At the mention of the word *police*, certain terms flash through the minds of the people. Expressions like: maintenance of public order, security, protection of lives and property, investigation of crimes, detection of crimes, enforcing law, protection of human rights, arrest of offenders, regulation traffic on roads and highways, protection of public properties, etc. In addition, the motto of police force in different parts of the world shows that they are ready to help their citizens. For example, Ghanaian Police Service has her motto as *Service with Integrity*. Sierra Leone Police motto is *A Force for Good*. Egyptian National Police has her motto as *Police in the service of the people*, etc. All these point to the fact that, police officers in different parts of the world and especially in Nigeria play a vital role in enforcing laws and have the passion to serve their citizens.

With regards to Nigeria Police, their motto is *Police is Your Friend*. A friend is a person one is willing to hang out and engage with, invite to one's place of residence, or someone you trust and enjoy being around. In 1964, the Nigeria police in response to the public negative image of the force created a public relations unit to rebrand the police. The axiom of the rebranding was Police is your Friend (Ugwuegbu, 2011). The slogan sounds good but individual's relationship with the police force will determine if they are truly friendly. In fact, the recent demonstrations of Nigerians are due to allegations

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Address for correspondence: Zbigniew Szczepan Formella, Istituto di Psicologia, Università Pontificia Salesiana, Piazza Ateneo Salesiano, 1, 00139, Roma, Italy; email: formella@unisal.it ORCID: 0000-0003-2846-0992

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of human rights abuses by the police officers. The manifestation shows that the slogan is not practised on the streets of the country. Instead of protecting her citizens, some resort to threat, extortion, mass arrest, collecting of bribe and physical harm. Due to this ugly phenomenon, many people see them as predators instead of defenders of her people.

Therefore, the purpose of this research work is to see the link between police behavior, protection of citizens and people's perception. Different disciplines have tried to study this very problem. For instance, sociologists, political scientists, psychologists, and others but in this very work, we will like to study this particular problem using social learning theory, proposed by Albert Bandura. This theory exists because Albert Bandura felt that that behavioural theory could not explain everything about learning. Bandura was influenced into developing this theory after observing children's behaviour as an adult acts aggressively. In 1978, he stated that "people are not born with preformed repertoires of aggressive behaviour; they must learn them. Most aggressive activities-whether duelling, military combat, or vengeful ridicule-entail intricate skills that require extensive learning. Virtually all learning resulting from direct experience can also occur on a vicarious basis by observing the behavior of others and its consequences" (Bandura, 1978).

So, in general "the social cognitive theory of Albert Bandura focuses on questions as to how human beings learn behavioural patterns and how they interact among themselves and with their environment. Hereby not only the reaction of the individual to his environment plays a pivotal role, but also the thought processes, that is cognitive operations resulting from human interaction with the environment" (Kołodziej, 2015). In fact, the theory sustains the idea that "learners observe behaviors by others in order to start the learning process. After observing the behavior of others, people assimilate and imitate that behavior, especially if their observational experiences are positive ones or include rewards related to the observed behavior. Imitation involves the actual reproduction of observed motor activities" (Smith, Berge, 2009).

We will not be wrong to state that some policemen in Nigeria learned these misconducts from their partners or officers who have higher status than themselves. Newly recruited police officers who are exposed to a lot of violence and brutal acts are more likely to acquire behavioural concepts that contain aggression and violence. An aggressive concept can become chronically accessible through repeated rehearsal (Paludi, 2011). For instance, when new officers receive accolades from their colleagues or top officers for beating up a civilian, they have witnessed the reinforcement of aggressive behaviour. Therefore, the theory explains the acquisition of aggressive behaviours via observational learning processes, and provides concepts for understanding and describing the beliefs and expectations that guide social behaviour (Hornsveld, et al., 2019). Having explained our theory of reference and other key concepts, let us approach the methodology of our research.

Method

The main objective of our research was to explore people's perception of police behavior to the Nigerian citizens. This will help us to know if the citizens still uphold the belief that the work of the police is to respect, protect human dignity, maintain and uphold the human rights of all.

The target of the research was Nigerian adults from 20 years and above. The adults were chosen because they are the ones who understand the police conduct and behavior. Again, they are the victims of police misconduct, torture, inhumane and degrading treatment. Their perception of Nigeria police will let us know if they are involved in corruption and violent acts. With regards to our topic, some authors are of the opinion that when the police officers engage in conducts that intends to hurt the citizens, their actions often conflict with their moral beliefs and how they think of themselves. They morally disengage in a variety of ways. Sometimes they decide their abusive actions are morally justified and use euphemistic language to obscure the real consequences of their actions. In other cases, they put the responsibility for their actions on the targeted citizens (Routt, Anderson, 2015). However, to ascertain

if these points are correct, approved questionnaires were used to accomplish and realize our subject matter.

Measures and procedure

Our research instrument was composed of two different tools; the first is the socio-demographic profile. The second includes the questionnaire that studied the people's perception of police behavior. The questionnaires were distributed in Nigeria through computer assisted techniques. Unfortunately, we did not distribute the hard copy. Having a paper copy is another good method of reaching out to people and people will not complain of not being able to download the document. However, we decided to use the computer assisted technique because it is easier to reach a lot of people. Basically, we distributed the questionnaires with the help of four other Nigerian professors teaching in different universities. The respondents were asked to fill the questionnaires once they receive the questionnaire on their phones or computers. They were expected to submit it online after answering all the questions. In fact, they responded within a short period of time. It took majority of the respondents 10 minutes to complete the questionnaires but they were others that took up to 15 minutes to complete.

Subjects

Our sample was composed of 446 individuals: 227 were males (50.9%) while 219 were females (49.1%). The age group in our questionnaire was distributed according to the following ages: 20-30 years (25.8%), 31-40 years (45.5 %), 41-50 years (22.2%) and those over 51 years (6.5%). Nigeria is made up of different tribes and they include the following: Hausa: (0.2%), Igbo (88.3%), Yoruba (2.7%), others (8.7%). The religion of the individuals that filled the questionnaire: African Traditional Religions (0.2%), Atheism/Agnosticism (0.2%), Christianity (97.8%), Islam (1.1%), others (0.7%). The educational levels of the participants are: Bachelor degrees (55.2%), Masters (33.4%), Nursery (0.2%), PhD (10.5%), Primary (0.2%), Secondary (2.5%). Those who filled the questionnaires comprised of the following: Those living in Nigeria (80.3%), Nigerians living abroad (19.7%). Marital status of the individuals are: Cohabit (0.2%), Divorced (0.7%), Married (39.7%), Separated (0.5%), Single (57.9%), Widowed (1.1%).

Results

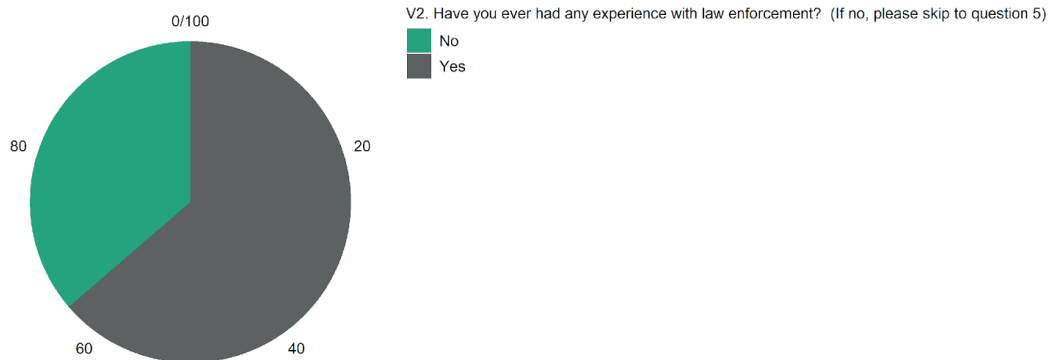
Different questions were asked in the questionnaires to ascertain people's perception of police behaviour and the results are shown below.

1. Do you believe violent police behavior exist in Nigeria today?

Do you believe violent police behavior exist in Nigeria today?	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	6	1.345	1.345	1.345
Unsure	4	0.897	0.897	2.242
Yes	436	97.758	97.758	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	446	100.000		

Source: Own study

2. Have you ever had any experience with law enforcement?



Source: Own study

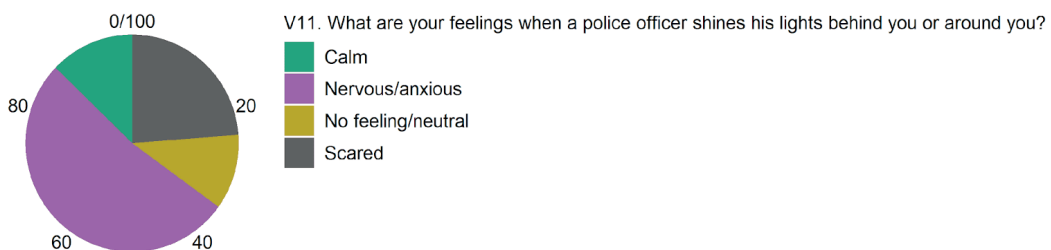
The results show that individuals who answered NO have 36.3%, whereas those who answered YES have 63.7%.

3. Would you consider your experience good?

Would you consider your experience good?	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	279	62.556	90.879	90.879
Yes	28	6.278	9.121	100.000
Missing	139	31.166		
Total	446	100.000		

Source: Own study

4. What are your feelings when a police officer shines his lights behind you or around you?



Source: Own study

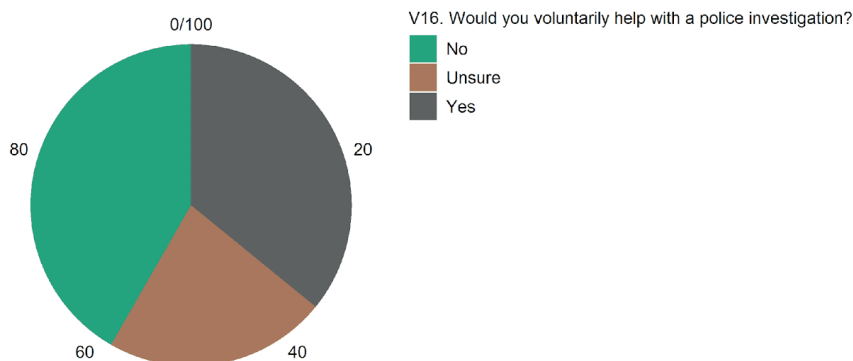
When a police officer shines lights behind on an individual, it evokes different feelings like: Calmness (12.8%), Nervous/anxious (52.2%), No feeling/neutral (11.2%), Scared (23.8%).

5. Do you feel comfortable complying with police?

Do you feel comfortable complying with police?	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	259	58.072	58.072	58.072
Unsure	72	16.143	16.143	74.215
Yes	115	25.785	25.785	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	446	100.000		

Source: Own study

6. Would you voluntarily help with a police investigation?



There were three responses for this particular question and those who said No have 41.7%, Unsure 22.4% and YES 35.9%.

Perception of abuse: Psychological effects on the citizen

The participants demonstrated that they have a sound level of understanding of abuse. Majority of them are of the view that it has an effect on the individual. Reports show that most of the citizen's responses indicate that they exhibit some negative feelings at the mention of the police force.

a. Anxiety

There are a lot of things that can make one to feel nervous or worry so much. Obviously, anxiety is a part of human reaction to stressful situations. But for the individuals who have had an unpleasant experience with the police force, their fears and worries seem not to be temporal. At this point, we need to ask an important question. What is anxiety? "Anxiety is a state of uneasiness, accompanied by dysphoria and somatic signs and symptoms of tension, focused on apprehension of possible failure, misfortune, or danger" (Colman, 2009). Anxiety makes it hard for some individuals to leave their houses and go to other places. They feel afraid or nervous that they will come in contact with a police man or woman. Occasionally, some individuals use these words in describing their feeling of anxiety; stress, worry, fear, panic, nervous, uneasiness, agitation, jittery, etc.

The American Psychiatric Association stated that "anxiety disorders include disorders that share features of excessive fear and anxiety and related behavioural disturbances. Fear is the emotional response to real or perceived imminent threat, whereas anxiety is anticipation of future threat. Obviously, these two states overlap, but they also differ, with fear more often associated with surges of autonomic arousal necessary for fight or flight, thoughts of immediate danger, and escape behaviours, and anxiety more often associated with muscle tension and vigilance in preparation for future danger and cautious or avoidant behaviours" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Anxiety can hinder a lot of things on the part of the citizens. Take for instance, reporting a case to the police force, collaborating with the police in investigating a case, calling the police when their help is needed in the community.

b. Hypervigilance

Hypervigilance is a state of heightened alertness accompanied by behaviour that aims to prevent danger (Foster, Marks, O'Brien, Raeburn, 2017). On the other hand, among the questions in the questionnaires are the following: would you consider your experience with the police force good? Do you think you were treated fairly? The responses of the participants were negative. Therefore, depending on the perception of abuse by the individual, hypervigilance can include some of the following emotions and behaviours: being edgy, being worried, a nervous feeling, feeling like someone is watching you,

feeling like something bad is about to happen, feeling like you do not know what to expect from other people, especially the abuser, needing to check over your shoulder or behind you frequently, needing to check that doors and windows are locked, needing to know where the people you care are at all the time, feeling very uncomfortable with certain behaviours, like police search, and having a difficult time sleeping; keeping one eye open (Krill, 2015).

Most people who have experienced some ugly encounters with the police force, most of the time remain hypervigilant or are always on alert in certain situations. They examine their surroundings carefully, scanning for anything that may pose a threat to them or their family. For example, when they go out for to dinner, they will always sit where they could see everything. This way they could check out every person in the restaurant to determine whether anyone poses a threat. Again, after series of encounters at the police check-point, some individuals stopped driving. Their reason is that they want to be aware of everything around them that moves. In fact, after having these experiences, they do not feel safe anywhere, so they are constantly looking around for any sign of danger. And when something sudden happens, they react more strongly than those around them (Zayfert, DeViva, 2011).

c. Panic attack

What is panic attack? "A panic attack is a sudden episode of intense fear that triggers severe physical reactions when there is no real danger or apparent cause. When panic attacks occur, you might think you are losing control, having a heart attack or even dying" (Kulkarni, 2021). In panic disorder, the individual experiences recurrent unexpected panic attacks and is persistently concerned or worried about having more panic attacks. Panic attacks are abrupt surges of intense fear or intense discomfort that reach a peak within minutes, accompanied by physical and or cognitive symptoms (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

An interaction with the police officer that goes the wrong way can severely impact on one's life for days, weeks, years to come. A combination of different things like traumatic experience with the police officers can cause panic attack. A panic attack is a very physical and unpleasant experience. The body responds as if it had a very severe fright, but without any obvious cause. A panic attack often occurs during a period of stress. It can also occur in response to memories of an unpleasant experience with the police officers. For some, panic attacks can be confused with flashback (Hall, Lloyd, 1993). The symptoms of a full-blown panic attack are similar for everyone, but vary in their combination and intensity. It is rare for anyone to experience all of the symptoms; some only get two or three of them, others more. The commonest are: intense fear or apprehension, palpitation, trembling, breathing difficulty, dizziness, sweating (Tubridy, 2003).

Conclusion

The Nigeria police slogan states that the police are your friend. It will be nice for the citizens to see and perceive the police as people responsible for maintaining peace and order in the country rather than as an institution looking for anyone to be their prey. The citizens will consider the police force a friend if they exhibit the characteristics of a friend. On the other hand, if they perceive that they are not their friends they will avoid any encounter with them. To this effect, people would rather leave an accident or armed robbery victim to his fate rather than go with such a victim to a police station, because the supposed Good Samaritan may just be branded the prime suspect and be clamped into detention (Ayakoroma, 2014).

It is important for the police to know that some individuals see and perceive them as an institution that assumes full force added to power and constitutes itself as an instrument of intimidation and harassment. The other side of the coin is that citizens cannot do without police for protection. Therefore, rather than invoking their might and use of force, they should respect the fundamental rights of the citizens (Nsima, 2011). This will help the people to regard the police as their friend.

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