

NAME : OINU GRACE ENE
MATRIC NUMBER: 19/LAW01/183
DEPARTMENT : LAW
COURSE CODE : GST122

POLICE BRUTALITY IN NIGERIA

By: Oinu Grace Ene

ABSTRACT

This essay is an introduction to police brutality in Nigeria. It discusses how serious this problem is, the factors that contribute to police brutality, how it affects society and how police brutality can be reduced in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Police officers were once called peacekeepers; however, they seem to be nothing more than law enforcement officers. Most still do their jobs but they are more worried about quotas and being violent and making arrests on innocent people than keeping the peace. Police brutality is one of the several forms of police misconduct which involves undue violence by police officers on the people. Widespread police brutality exists in many countries and territories and Nigeria is not an exception. Although it is illegal, it can be performed under the colour of law. It is a big problem, and it seems law enforcement officers are abusing their power.

WHAT IS POLICE BRUTALITY?

Brutality contradicts police service values because a police officer is supposed to protect citizens and not harm them. Police brutality or police violence is legally defined as a civil rights violation where officers exercise undue or excessive force against a subject (citizen). This includes but is not limited to physical or verbal harassment, physical or mental injury, property damage and sometimes death. Nigeria has discovered a shocking level of violence and abuse by the police. People are dying in the hands of police officers. Torture routinely takes the place of proper investigation, and rape seems to be commonplace when the police arrest vulnerable women. Overall, the police in Nigeria are more likely to commit crimes than to prevent them.

While the killing of George Floyd by Minnesota police officer, Derek Chauvin has become one of the world's biggest headlines, Nigeria also continues its battle against police brutality. The latest case, the killing of 16-year-old Tina Ezekwe in Lagos was captured on video and has inspired Justice for Tina protests across the internet. According to BBC, Ezekwe was hit by a bullet on Tuesday, 26th May at about 10:45pm when a reportedly drunk police officer shot to disperse a crowd that had gathered after he opened fire on a bus driver who refused to give him a bribe. Ezekwe was then rushed to the hospital where she received first aid and eventually passed on two days later. According to Bala Elkana, the Public Relations Officer of the Lagos State Police Force, the policemen ASP Theophilus Otobo and Inspector Oguntoba Olamigoke have been arrested and internal disciplinary proceedings have been launched. If they are found guilty, they will be charged to court. The response to this case is quite positive but it does not change the fact that there are other citizens in Nigeria and even other countries of the world who need protection and justice from police brutality.

Nigeria's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) denounced that the victims of police brutality outnumber those killed by COVID-19 in FCT, Abuja, as the Nigerian police are suspected of carrying out 18 extra-judicial killings between March 30th and April 13th while coronavirus killed eleven patients. The NHRC head, Tony Ojukwu, added that his organization received 105 complaints about human rights violation in the country. Cases of police abuse have been recorded in 24 out of 36 states in Nigeria, including Lagos, Ogun and Abuja where physical isolation measures were extended for another two weeks. According to members of the security forces, problems with citizens arose because people violated quarantine. However, the NHRC explained that many Nigerians can not stay at home because they must go out to work to earn their daily livelihood.

CAUSE OF POLICE BRUTALITY IN NIGERIA

One new survey that came from NOIPolls revealed that 77% of Nigerians believe that police brutality is high and is a serious matter in the country. This research came out after the death of Remo Stars Football Club player, Tiyanu Kazeem, who people claim was shot and killed by a policeman in Sagamu. The head of Corporation Communication for NOIPoll, Adedoyin Betiku, tells BBC on the sample opinions of 1000 Nigerians from different geopolitical zones, aspect of life and age group on the cause of police brutality in Nigeria. Statistics show that 40% of those interviewed said they had experienced police brutality or knows someone who has. The study finds out that large proportion of Nigerians (34%) suggests poor police welfare is the cause of police brutality in Nigeria. 17% mentioned inadequate (poor) training of Nigerian police personnel, 11% said lack of contentment and greed, another 11% said lack of experience in the job, 7% believe it is because of corruption within the Nigerian Police Force, another 7% said police officers are power drunk, 5% said it is because of poor morals and discipline, 4% said it is because police officers involve themselves in drug abuse while on duty which makes them treat citizens anyhow, 2% said it is because of poor monitoring of the policing system and personnel and another 2% said it is because of poor recruitment process of police officers into the police force. The study also shows that Nigerians who stay in the South-South and South-West zone (87%) account for the biggest proportion of those who say police brutality is high and is a serious matter in Nigeria.

WHAT CAN BE DONE

The government need to take reform seriously if they are going to improve safety and restore confidence in the police. A critical change that needs to be made is to ensure that the Nigerian Police Force is free from presidential and political interference; only an independent police force can foster professionalism. It is also essential to ensure that the police do not monopolize or interfere with investigations of crime and misconduct by their officers. Currently, many cases of police misconduct are overlooked because of political interference or the expectation of it. These measures need to be complemented by more robust external oversight. The Police Service Commission, the Human Rights Commission, the federal attorney general's office, the courts, and other state and federal officials must take shared responsibility for making the police more accountable and more effective. For instance, we call for establishment of a federal prosecutorial unit to take on cases of police corruption and violence. The government needs to ensure that complaints are followed up and abuse is punished in order to change the culture of impunity.

Donor countries can also step up by responding to some of the material and infrastructural needs of the police, so they have the basic capacity to conduct proper investigations. But this will not have any effect if assistance is liable to be plundered or misappropriated. The police need a new culture of more transparent and accountable institutional management. So that aid is not wasted, and we see real improvement, donor countries ought to insist on, and help develop, management and accountability mechanisms like the ones suggested in Criminal Force.

CONCLUSION

Police brutality is an issue that can affect the lives of those innocent people who were taken advantage of. It also affects the lives of the officers just trying to do their own jobs. However, steps should be taken in order to give the good name back to police officers in Nigeria.

REFERENCES

1. www.shineyoureya.org/blog/incessant
2. www.justiceinitiative.org/voices/story
3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/police_brutality
4. <https://www.bbc.com/tori-51632121>
5. www.telesurenglish.net/news/nigeria
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa>