

The Influence of Occupational Stress and Mental Health on Nigerian Police Officers' Aggression

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Abstract. The study investigated the influence of occupational stress and mental health on Nigeria Police Officers' aggressivity. Aggressivity by the police is widespread, consistent, persistent and multidimensional in Nigeria. The study is a descriptive survey research in which occupational stress and mental health were the independent variables and police aggressivity as the dependent variable. The participants responded to three valid and standardized instruments which were: The Aggression Questionnaire (TAQ), Operational Police Stress Questionnaire (PSQ-OP), and Mental Health Inventory (MHI-18). Multiple regression statistics was used to analyse the data collected. The results obtained indicated that occupational stress and mental health jointly and relatively contributed significantly to the Prediction of Nigerian Police aggressivity ($F = 2.456$, $R^2 = .623$ $P < 0.05$). On the basis of this finding, it is concluded that there is a need to develop intervention to reduce aggressivity among Nigerian police officers. It is recommended that the Police Serve Commission and Police Authority should be more proactive by identifying police officers with potentials for aggressivity through diagnoses by Counseling/Correctional Psychologists who could assist such police officers deal with their aggression problems. The current reactive measures (punitive) meted out by Police

Authority to culpable police officers guilty of aggressivity that has not reduced the menace should be revised, and or reviewed, particularly in the current democratic dispensation.

Keywords: Police Officers' Aggressivity, Occupational Stress, Mental Health

1. Introduction

With the return to democracy in Nigeria in 1999, there was high hope that the Police will be more friendly and acceptable in the public eyes. Sadly, twenty years after, this has not turned out to be so. Police officers are still derided because of their increasing fatal and non-fatal aggressivity towards the public which is now more reported almost on daily basis because of the citizens' video accounts on social media, thus making aggressivity by Nigerian Police, a major public health concern of the Federal Government and Police Authority.

Nigeria currently has a centralized police – The Nigeria Police Force whose officers are derided for several reasons but much more for their physical, verbal, psychological and relational aggressivity towards the public. Aggressivity by the police in this study refers to aggression beyond the limits permissible by law (Salami, 2011).

In Nigeria, police aggressivity is widespread, consistent, persistent and multi-dimensional. It includes but not limited to: unprovoked offensive and brutalization of the civil populace; inappropriate use of maximum degree of physical force which is not necessary on many occasions; torture and or killing the perceived guilty sometimes; allegations of illegal arrest and custody; creating false evidence; falsifying statements and documents, and use of third degree methods.

Other aggressivity by the Nigerian police are; remaining passive or even collusive spectators in the face of deadly communal violence; accidental discharge of guns leading to death of innocent citizens; unnecessary use of restraints on citizens such as handcuffs and leg chains; extra-judicial execution of suspects; unprovoked verbal threats commands/harsh language at check points/road blocks; extorting money forcefully from motorists and accused, and lying in courts (Alalade, 2011; Aremu, Pakes & Johnston, 2011; Jefferis, Butcher & Hanley, 2011; Salami, 2011).

The report of a national study of the Nigerian Criminal Justice system provided an insight into the endemic pattern of police aggression in the country:

“Nearly half of the accused persons interviewed (48.7%) stated that their arrest involved insult or abuse by the police; 35.9% were roughly handled or slapped; 7.4% were beaten with a baton; and 3% were threatened with a gun. As to why police aggression behaviour towards them, 24.2% said they did nothing to warrant the use of force; 5.2% were assaulted because they questioned police behaviour, and 22.5% were assaulted because they either refused to admit the offence or make a statement (Ajomo and Okagbue, 1991).

In short, aggressivity by the Nigerian police occurs on a daily basis, it is common place and it is one of the major reinforcer of negative public perception of the police. Interestingly, police aggressivity in Nigeria goes against the police Act which requires officer to have courtesy, patience, tolerance and control of his temper in his dealings with members of the public (Section

341, Police Act CAP 359 of the laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 1990).

The question is why should aggressivity still thrives among Nigerian police officers in a democratic political clime? In democratic settings globally, police are required to secure, preserve and fortify citizens’ human rights. Police behaviour is expected to be civil and friendly. Some of the reasons adduced for police aggressivity are; alcohol and drug ingestion; poor governmental and Institutional Management (for example, denial of police aggressivity against the public except when such is captured on social media); and indiscriminate possession cum use of weapons beyond official hours by special Task forces (Mobile Police Force; and Special Anti-Robbery Squad) assigned to the patrol of highways and cities to curb armed robbery but who prefers the city and goes about pursuant of perceived internet fraudsters Yahoo Boys or offenders they can extort money from (Alemika Chukwuma, 2000; Chukwuma, 2005).

Other factors in literature used to explain police aggressivity emphasize deficit in officers’ education, social relations skills, psychological and moral quality. Consequently, he is prone to react to public demand for politeness rather aggressively. Also, poor screening of police recruits which leads to the recruitment of psychologically and socially unstable persons into the Nigerian Police Force, who are prone to aggressivity in the course of law enforcement; poor conditions of service; and reactive police internal control system (Alemika and Chukwuma, 2000).

The aforementioned factors predisposing the Nigerian Police to aggressivity are by no means exhaustive, therefore, researchers have to continue to explore other relevant factors that could serve as determinants of police aggressivity with a view to address them.

This study is hinged on the Cognitive Neo-association Theory (CNT) propounded by Berkowitz (1993). The theory assumed that aversive events such as frustrations, provocations, loud noises, uncomfortable temperatures, and unpleasant odour produce

negative affect which give rise to rudimentary feelings of anger. In CNT, aggressive thoughts, emotions and behavioural tendencies are linked together in memory.

The first independent variable of this study is occupational stress. It is defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities and resources of the worker (Palmer, 2015). Little dispute exist in literature that exhausted policemen are more prone to aggressive acts than those sufficiently rested (Aremu, 2009; Senjo, 2011). This is perhaps because of their operational duties (Patrol activities, traffic control, criminal investigations and crime prevention), and their organizational tasks such as training of new recruits, public information and bureaucratic procedures (Maran, Zadda & Varetto, 2018; Setti & Argentero, 2013). For example, rotating-shift often lead to inadequate sleep for police officers which lowers physiological resistance to stress (Baughman, et al., 2014).

Law enforcement is seen as one of the most stressful occupation in the world (Anshel, 2000). The Police being the only statutory law enforcement profession with the widest contact with the public, experience so much stress. Aggression is one of the symptoms of stress among the police, and it is more associated with junior cadre police (Aremu, 2009).

The other independent variable in this study is Mental health. This is described as a level of psychological wellbeing or absence of mental illness. It is the psychological state of someone who is functioning at a satisfactory level of emotional behaviour adjustment. Research had found that aggressive policing is significantly associated with occurrence of mood and anxiety disorders, and with greater odds of psychological distress (Devyllder, et al., 2017; Geller, Fagan, Tyler, & Hink, 2014).

The Nigerian Police need the public support and acceptance for effective policing and crime control. Therefore, the current cynical perception of the police by the public demands adequate analysis and research such that

appropriate measures can be developed to address the issue of police aggression and ultimately improve public-police interactions. This study therefore examined occupational and stress and mental health as correlates of Nigerian Police aggressivity towards the public.

2. Hypotheses

Two hypotheses are proposed and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- There is no significant combined influence of occupational stress and mental health on Nigerian Police Officers' aggressivity.
- There is no significant relative influence of occupational stress and mental health on Nigerian Police Officers' aggressivity.

3. Method

3.1 Design and Participants

The descriptive survey research design of the ex-post facto type is adopted in this study. Participants of the study were 500 Junior cadre Nigerian Police (Costable to Inspector) personnel purposively sampled from three State Police Commands (Ogun, Oyo and Osun). The Nigeria police has 37 state police commands (including the Federal Capital Police command, Abuja). The participants were recruited through a letter of intent of study to the affected State Commissioners of Police (CP). Approval of the letter of intent lasted an average of five weeks. Participants age range was between 21 & 53 years with mean age of 3.612 and standard deviation of 1.051.

3.2 Instrumentation

The Aggression Questionnaire (TAQ) – Aggressivity was assessed with TAQ by Buss and Perry (1992). The scale consists of twenty-nine (29) items divided into Physical Aggression (PA) (9 items): measuring a tendency towards using direct physical violence; Verbal Aggression (VA) (5 items): measuring a tendency towards direct verbal aggression and

argumentative; Anger (A) 7 items): assessing respondents perceived anger during aggression; Hostility(H) (5 items): assessing the level to which respondents view the world as hostile and threatening. TAQ has been found to have good internal consistency with coefficient alphas of the subscales between 0.72 and 0.85 (Tremblay & Ewart, 2005). Correlational Analysis revealed that anger is the bridge between both physical and verbal aggression and hostility. The scales showed internal consistency and stability over time. Men scored slightly higher on VA and H and Much higher on PA. there was no sex difference for A. the subscales correlated differently with various personality traits. These findings suggest the need to assess not only overall aggression but also its individual components. Operational Police Stress Questionnaire (PSQ-OP) developed by McCreary and Thompson (2006) was used to measure occupational stress. The PSQ-OP contains 20 items measured on a 7 point likert which ranges from “no stress at all” to a lot of stress. It is a psychometrically sound measure of

the operational stressors associated with policing. It has a coefficient alpha of .90; corrected item-total correlations between .40 and .60, and positively correlated ($r = .50$ or less) with the other general stress measures. Example of items on the scale is “Risk of being injured on the job”.

Mental Health Inventory (MHI-18)–Mental health was assessed with Mental Health Inventory by Veit and Ware (1983). The abbreviated version of the which has only 5 items was used, and has a reported cronbach alpha of .82. The test is well known and has been field tested in extensive populations. It showed a high correlation rating with multiple sclerosis. The MHI showed good convergent and discriminant validity.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using the Multiple Regression analysis based on the research hypotheses raised in the study.

4. Results

Hypothesis One

There is no significant combined influence of occupational stress and mental health on Nigerian Police Officers' aggressivity.

Table 1: Summary of Regression for Combined Influence of Independent Variables to the Prediction of Police Aggressivity

R = .716

R. Square = .623

Adjusted R Square = .616

Std. Error of Estimate = 2.79182

Analysis of Variance

Model	Sum of Square	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	16736.61	2	8368.305	61.376	.000
Residual	62173.18	456	136.344		
Total	78909.79	458	172.292		

Table 1 revealed significant combined influence of occupational stress and mental health on police aggressivity. The results yielded $F(2,456) = 61.396$, $P < 0.05$, $R^2 = .616$. This result suggests that the independent variables combined accounted for 61.6% of the variance in the prediction of police aggressivity while the other factors accounted for 38.4%

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relative influence of occupational stress and mental health on Nigerian Police Aggressivity.

Table 2: Relative Influence of Independent Variables on the Dependent Variable (Police Aggressivity).

Model	Unstandardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	Ratio	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	62.273	5.413		11.50	.000
Occupational Stress	.118	.058	.141	2.034	.000
Mental health	.155	.064	.256	2.421	.003

Table 2 reveals significant relative contribution of each of the independent variables to the prediction of Police aggressivity. The most potent of the predictors was Mental health followed by occupational stress.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of occupational stress and mental health as predictors of Nigerian Police aggressivity. The independent variables (occupational stress and mental health) when combined accounted for 61.6% of the total variance in police aggressivity which indicated a significant contribution. This results is in agreement with some authors' finding that occupational stress (Malach-Pines and Kevian, 2007) and Mental Health (Van der Meulen, et al., 2008) contributions to police aggressivity are significant. The finding to determine the relative contributions of the independent variables on Nigerian Police aggressivity showed that the two factors were significant predictors. This results support the findings of Van des Meulen, et al., (2018) who observed that mental health and mental strength of police offices impact negatively on the performances and behaviour of the individual officers. Aremu (2006a) also found that occupational stress affect police personnel in terms of their transfer of aggression on the public.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, findings from the present research indicate that occupational stress and mental health when combined are good predictors of Nigerian police aggressivity.

7. Implications of the findings

The findings from this study have implications for policing practice and management. Police service commission need to be more proactive than they are currently by identifying police officers that have the potentiality for high aggressivity through conducting quarterly or periodically psychological tests through the help of Counselling/Correctional psychologists. This will help those prone to aggressivity to be promptly identified and properly counselled. If this is done, it could significantly improve Nigerians' perception and approval of the police. Similarly, symposia, lectures, workshops and training on Emotional Intelligence and Interpersonal skills could be organized by Police Authorities for police officers since this study have confirmed the potency of E.I. and Interpersonal skills as strategies for reducing police aggressive behaviour.

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