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POLICE RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING: ASSESSING THE IMPACT ON OFFICER BEHAVIOR AND CITIZEN COMPLAINTS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of police recruitment and training practices on officer behavior and citizen complaints in Nigeria, identifying significant deficiencies that contribute to misconduct and public distrust. The research explores how inadequate recruitment standards, political interference, and insufficient training on ethics and community policing have undermined the professionalism of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF). Using an exploratory approach, the study analyzes literature reviews and secondary data from academic and governmental sources, comparing Nigeria's practices with successful reforms in other African nations. Research indicates that the lack of a centralized background check system and inadequate training contribute to pervasive police misbehavior, as seen during the "End SARS" protests. Comparative analysis highlights best practices from countries like South Africa and Rwanda, where community-oriented policing and rigorous recruitment standards have improved public trust. The study concludes that reforming recruitment and training processes is crucial to promoting accountability and restoring public confidence in law enforcement. Key recommendations include establishing a centralized recruitment database, revamping training programs, and strengthening oversight mechanisms.

Keywords Police, recruitment, training, practices, public, policing.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the conduct and behavior of law enforcement officers have increasingly been scrutinized by the public, policymakers, and scholars, particularly in Nigeria. The relationship

between police recruitment and training practices and their impact on officer behavior, particularly in relation to citizen complaints, has emerged as a significant concern within the field of law

enforcement studies (Oromareghake et al., 2018). Nigerian law enforcement agencies bear the critical responsibility of upholding justice, maintaining public safety, and protecting individual rights. However, persistent reports of police misconduct, excessive use of force, and violations of civil liberties have raised questions about the effectiveness of existing recruitment and training mechanisms in cultivating professionalism and a respect for the rule of law (Ulo, 2021).

The recruitment and training processes of police officers play a fundamental role in shaping the capacity of law enforcement agencies to perform their duties effectively, ethically, and within legal boundaries (Kasumu, 2017). Recent instances of police brutality and misconduct in Nigeria have sparked public debates about the adequacy of these processes. Misconduct undermines public trust in law enforcement institutions, diminishing their ability to maintain order and serve communities effectively (Temitope et al., 2020). These developments underscore the pressing need for a comprehensive assessment of how police recruitment and training practices influence officer behavior, particularly with respect to the rising number of citizen complaints.

Recruitment serves as the foundational step in constructing a responsible and law-abiding police force, selecting candidates who meet the requisite qualifications and demonstrate ethical character and integrity (Ofekeze, 2023). Training programs are equally vital, as they equip officers with the tools, knowledge, and skills necessary to navigate complex and potentially volatile situations while adhering to legal and ethical standards. Effective training emphasizes legal compliance, cultural sensitivity, de-escalation techniques, and the appropriate use of force, all of which are essential for fostering professionalism and minimizing instances of misconduct (Balogun et al., 2021).

Nonetheless, deficiencies in these areas may contribute to a rise in excessive force, biased behavior, and violations of citizens' rights, thereby eroding public confidence in the police. Understanding the nexus between recruitment, training, and police

behavior is crucial for developing policies that aim to reduce misconduct and enhance police community relations in Nigeria.

A key issue at the heart of this study is the apparent disconnect between the objectives of police recruitment and training programs and the actual behaviors exhibited by officers in the field. Despite efforts to select qualified candidates, numerous reports of misconduct, excessive force, and the violation of citizens' rights raise questions about the adequacy of current recruitment protocols (Ojedokun, 2021). Furthermore, despite the design of training programs to equip officers for ethical and effective service, there seems to be a discrepancy between the offered training and its practical implementation, as demonstrated by persistent issues of biased behavior and power abuse. These concerns bring into question the overall effectiveness of recruitment and training methods in fostering a lasting respect for the law among Nigerian police officers.

The lack of comprehensive research that systematically examines the links between recruitment, training, and officer behavior, particularly within the Nigerian context, further compounds this problem. Existing studies often focus on isolated aspects of police misconduct or training without thoroughly investigating the ways in which recruitment and training practices intersect and influence each other in shaping officer conduct and contributing to citizen complaints (Akindejoye & Ayenakin, 2022). This gap in the literature highlights the necessity for a comprehensive investigation into refining

recruitment strategies and training methodologies to strengthen adherence to legal and ethical standards among Nigerian law enforcement officers.

Addressing this issue is critical for several reasons. First, the behavior of law enforcement officers significantly impacts public trust in police institutions. Instances of misconduct erode community confidence in the police, undermining cooperation and weakening the legitimacy of law enforcement efforts (Martins, 2023). Second, officers who fail to respect legal and ethical boundaries perpetuate cycles of misconduct, contributing to strained police-community relations and a rise in citizen complaints (Marvellous, 2019). Finally, this issue has broader societal implications, as it relates to matters of accountability, transparency, and the equitable application of justice in Nigeria (Hazen & Brank, 2023). Given the evident disconnect between recruitment, training, and officer behavior, a critical reassessment of these components is essential to enhancing the integrity and effectiveness of law enforcement in Nigeria.

In light of these concerns, this study seeks to explore the nuanced relationship between police recruitment, training, and officer behavior in Nigeria, with particular attention to how these factors influence citizen complaints. By examining recruitment criteria, training methodologies, and their alignment with real-world policing, this study aims to identify best practices and areas for improvement that could help foster a culture of respect for the law among Nigerian police officers. The study also aims to explore strategies for bridging the gap between recruitment, training, and on-the-ground behavior, with the ultimate goal of reducing citizen complaints and promoting ethical, accountable policing. We expect the findings from this study to contribute to ongoing discussions on police reform in Nigeria, offering

crucial insights into optimizing recruitment and training to enhance police-community relations curb misconduct, and guarantee that officers uphold and respect the law in their interactions with citizens.

Literature Review

Historical Influences on Police Conduct and Citizen Complaints in Nigeria

The historical evolution of police recruitment and training in Nigeria provides critical context for understanding its impact on officer behavior and the rise in citizen complaints. Law enforcement in Nigeria traces its roots to colonial rule, where the primary function of the police was to maintain control and suppress dissent (Oromareghake et al., 2018). During this period, the British colonial authorities established a police force whose primary role was not to serve or protect the public but to reinforce colonial authority. As a result, early police recruitment and training focused on fostering compliance with the state rather than respect for the law and human rights. This colonial legacy has continued to influence the structure and behavior of Nigerian police forces, often reflected in the strained relationship between law enforcement officers and the public.

The Police Act, which laid the foundation for modern policing in Nigeria, aimed to formalize the responsibilities and powers of law enforcement agencies. However, critics often point out that the framework it established is outdated and misaligned with the contemporary needs of a democratic society. Recruitment and training under this system have often failed to evolve in ways that promote community-oriented policing, leading to concerns about the effectiveness of these processes in curbing officer misconduct. Over time, the inability to adapt recruitment

standards and training programs to modern ethical expectations has contributed to the rise in citizen complaints, as officers frequently engage in behaviors that violate citizens' rights (Aborisade, 2021).

Nigeria's history of military rule has significantly exacerbated challenges within its police force. The military has traditionally undermined the police by appropriating its functions during various regimes, which has contributed to a culture of underfunding and neglect of law enforcement agencies (Omole, 2020). Even in the democratic era, the police have struggled to adopt the principle of "policing by consent," failing to establish legitimacy and trust with the public. Multiple military regimes entrenched a militaristic approach to policing, positioning law enforcement officers primarily as agents of state control rather than as public servants (Kasumu, 2017). The emphasis during these periods was on maintaining regime stability rather than fostering community engagement. Consequently, recruitment processes often prioritized obedience and discipline over civic responsibility and respect for human rights. Similarly, training programs during and after military rule focused on control and compliance, leaving officers ill-equipped to navigate complex community dynamics or manage situations with the empathy and professionalism essential for effective democratic policing.

Furthermore, Nigeria's diverse cultural landscape, with its multitude of ethnic groups and languages, presents unique challenges for police. Law enforcement officers often face difficulties when dealing with communities whose social and cultural norms differ from their own. Yet, police training programs have historically failed to incorporate cultural sensitivity training, exacerbating the tension between officers and the communities they serve. This lack of cultural competence has often resulted in

misunderstandings and has contributed to biased behaviors, further escalating citizen complaints (Temitope et al., 2020).

The persistence of human rights violations in law enforcement, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and torture, has fueled calls for reform. These abuses underscore a significant disconnect between the recruitment and training procedures and the upholding of legal and ethical standards by officers. As such, critics often point out that recruitment fails to adequately assess candidates' commitment to justice, and training fails to instill the importance of lawfulness and respect for human rights. This has, in turn, fostered a culture of impunity and misconduct among officers, resulting in a pattern of citizen complaints and deteriorating trust between law

enforcement and the public (Ulo et al., 2021). Civil society organizations and international human rights advocates have increasingly called for a restructuring of recruitment and training to ensure that officers are better equipped to serve in a democratic context. Reform efforts have emphasized the need for greater accountability in the recruitment process and more comprehensive, human rights-focused training programs. The goal is to bridge the historical gap between law enforcement practices and the ethical standards required to restore public trust and reduce citizen complaints.

Police Recruitment Practices and Challenges in Nigeria

In Nigeria, police recruitment focuses on candidates' educational qualifications, physical fitness, and technical skills, assessed through exams, fitness tests, and interviews (Adagbasa et al., 2022). However, a key challenge is the limited assessment of candidates' intrinsic values, such as ethics and commitment to the law. Traditional recruitment methods do not adequately measure

these qualities, which are essential for ethical law enforcement (Solangi et al., 2021). As a result, officers selected through these processes may lack the integrity and empathy needed for responsible policing, contributing to misconduct and citizen complaints (Blumberg et al., 2020).

While recent improvements, such as psychological assessments and background checks, have aimed to address these issues (Helfgott et al., 2023), recruitment still prioritizes technical skills over candidates' alignment with values of respect for the law. Profiling and thorough background checks are essential to ensure that recruits are motivated by a genuine desire to uphold the law rather than by economic necessity (Solangi et al., 2021). Without these measures, unfit individuals may join the force, leading to behaviors such as police brutality and abuse of power, further eroding public trust (Oromareghake et al., 2018).

The consequences of inadequate recruitment processes are evident in the growing reports of misconduct, which strain community-police relations (Omogbiya, 2023). Officers who lack a strong ethical foundation may misuse their authority, leading to excessive force and corruption, undermining public trust, and increasing citizen complaints (Ojedokun et al., 2021). This misalignment between recruitment and the need for ethical values limits the effectiveness of community-oriented policing, which relies on mutual trust and cooperation (Ofekeze, 2023). We need to shift towards a procedural justice approach in recruitment, which emphasizes

transparency, fairness, and respect for citizens' rights, to address these challenges. Implementing more rigorous selection criteria and ongoing ethics training can improve police behavior and public trust (Omogbiya, 2023; Addah & Omogbiya, 2023; Afolabi et al., 2021). This approach is essential for

fostering a professional and accountable police force in Nigeria.

Police Training and Its Challenges in Nigeria

Training programs for law enforcement officers in Nigeria typically comprise classroom instruction, practical exercises, and simulations aimed at equipping officers with the necessary skills and knowledge for effective policing. These programs emphasize ethical principles and values that guide officers' behavior, providing strategies to defuse tense situations and avoid unnecessary use of force (Burton et al., 2022). Comprehensive training instills a deep understanding of the legal framework, promotes de-escalation techniques, and encourages cultural sensitivity, emphasizing the importance of unbiased and respectful interactions with the public. However, inadequate or outdated training can perpetuate harmful behaviors, contribute to biased attitudes, and erode community trust in law enforcement.

A significant challenge arises when training fails to translate into real-world behavior. Instances where officers engage in behaviors that deviate from classroom principles highlight a gap between training and practice (Balogun et al., 2021). This gap may stem from factors such as organizational culture, peer influence, and insufficient reinforcement of training principles. Officers lacking practical de-escalation skills may resort to excessive force during encounters, leading to harm or fatalities. The Nigerian Police receive training in professional studies (covering police duties and ethics), legal studies (including the rule of law and fundamental human rights), and liberal studies (focusing on communication, public relations, and crime prevention psychology). The challenge lies not in the training itself but in its enforcement (Yunusa & Usman, 2022). For example, inadequate enforcement of ethics and legal compliance can lead to abuses of authority, violations of citizens'

rights, and corrupt practices, thereby eroding public trust and damaging police-community relations. Cultural insensitivity and poor communication skills can escalate tensions, undermining community cooperation and crime prevention efforts.

Additionally, poor training facilities and resources hinder effective training, particularly in tactical and intelligence operations. While some training occurs, it often lacks adequacy and funding to benefit all recruits (Ismail, 2020). With Nigeria's poor police-population ratio, the need for well-equipped training facilities is critical to improve tactical and intelligence training and reduce incidents of gun misfire (Akinyetun, 2022). Despite initiatives promoting community policing that show promise in improving police-community relations and reducing crime (Ibrahim-Olesin et al., 2024; Ernest et al., 2022), significant weaknesses persist. Inadequate training on the use of force continues to contribute to issues of excessive force and human rights violations (Aborisade, 2023; Uguru & Umobong, 2022). Furthermore, the prevalence of corruption and unethical behavior among officers undermines public trust and effective policing (Afolabi et al., 2021). Therefore, the Nigerian police force urgently needs comprehensive reforms and enhanced training to address these systemic issues.

The Relevance of Police Recruitment and Training to Public Safety in Nigeria

It is impossible to overstate the importance of police recruitment and training in Nigeria, as it directly influences officer behavior, public safety, and the relationship between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve (Tepelena, 2022). Recruitment processes and training shape the quality of officers, determining the effectiveness and credibility of law enforcement agencies (Kasumu, 2017). Law

enforcement agencies are responsible for upholding the rule of law and protecting citizens' rights (Audu et al., 2023). Officers wield significant authority, making decisions that can affect individuals and communities. Therefore, effective recruitment and comprehensive training are essential for preparing officers to handle complex situations while adhering to ethical standards (Staller, 2021).

The interplay between recruitment, training, and respect for the law is critical. A strong recruitment process ensures that candidates with a commitment to ethical conduct and respect for the law enter the profession. Conversely, deficiencies in recruitment necessitate extensive training efforts to address these gaps (Williams & Sondhi, 2022). However, recruitment and training alone are insufficient; organizational culture, leadership, and peer influences also significantly affect officers' behavior. All organizational levels must reinforce ethical conduct to ensure that training translates into respectful and lawful behavior (Koslicki, 2021; Nguindip et al., 2021).

Research shows a strong correlation between police recruitment, training practices, and citizen complaints. Procedural justice training, which emphasizes respect, neutrality, and transparency, has been effective in reducing complaints and instances of excessive force (Wood et al., 2020). Skill-building programs, such as "Verbal Judo," further enhance officer interactions and mitigate complaints (Terrill et al., 2018). Interestingly, studies have indicated that the type of policing—whether community-oriented or traditional—may be less influential on complaint rates than the quality of training and support provided to officers (Wood et al., 2021). Coercive actions, such as stop-and-frisk, can escalate citizen complaints, highlighting the complex relationship between police conduct, community perceptions, and resulting grievances (Martin, 2024). Thus, while

effective training is essential, the context in which police actions occur significantly influences public perception and the frequency of citizen complaints, necessitating ongoing assessment and reform in Nigeria's police recruitment and training practices.

Citizens' Perception of Police Behavior and the Effectiveness of Police Training in Nigeria

Due to widespread reports of abuse and misconduct within the police force, Nigerian citizens view law enforcement with significant distrust (Akinlabi, 2022). Citizens' encounters with the police, often characterized by violence and predatory behavior, deeply root this negative perception. Such experiences not only undermine public confidence in law enforcement but also create substantial barriers to cooperation between the police and the communities they serve (Ike et al., 2021). Critics have criticized current police training programs in Nigeria for their insufficient emphasis on community engagement and ethical conduct. Instead, these programs often prioritize counter-terrorism measures at the expense of fundamental policing principles that promote accountability and respect for citizens' rights (Nwobueze et al., 2018). This narrow focus contributes to the disconnect between the police and the community, as officers may lack the necessary skills and knowledge to engage positively with the public.

Experts suggest that enhancing police training to include regular modules on community relations and ethical policing could help bridge the trust deficit between citizens and law enforcement (Okeke, 2020). Such training should focus on fostering empathy, improving communication skills, and emphasizing the importance of treating citizens with respect. However, the implementation of these reforms faces challenges, as victims of police misconduct

often feel apprehensive about reporting their experiences. The fear of retaliation or further victimization discourages individuals from seeking justice and exacerbates the existing mistrust in the police (Ike & Jidong, 2022).

Police Service Commission: Oversight of the Nigeria Police Force

The Police Service Commission (PSC) is the primary oversight body for the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), established under the Nigerian Constitution to promote transparency, fairness, and professionalism in policing (Amusan & Saka, 2018). The PSC governs critical aspects of police personnel management, including recruitment, promotion, transfer, discipline, and the general welfare of officers. As part of its mandate, the PSC conducts recruitment exercises to select qualified individuals based on merit, thereby maintaining integrity within the force (Ibekwe & Subai, 2020). It also approves promotions according to established criteria, oversees transfers to prevent undue influence, and investigates allegations of misconduct or corruption, recommending disciplinary actions when necessary (Saxena, 2023).

Furthermore, the PSC advocates for improved welfare and working conditions for police officers, addressing issues such as salary, housing, and healthcare (Minhas & Shah, 2019). The PSC has the authority to suggest policies and strategies to the federal government that aim to improve policing in Nigeria. Therefore, the Police Service Commission's establishment aimed to address issues of nepotism, favoritism, and corruption within the police force by establishing an independent body to oversee personnel matters. The aim is to build a more professional and accountable police force that can effectively serve and protect the citizens of Nigeria (Ahmed & Yashe, 2022).

Human Rights Protection Agency: The Nigerian National Human Rights Commission

The National Human Rights Act of 1995, amended in 2010, established the Nigerian National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to promote and safeguard human rights as outlined in the Nigerian Constitution and international treaties, such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Okene & Akani, 2019). The NHRC has quasi-judicial powers, enabling it to summon witnesses, gather evidence, award

compensation, and enforce its findings, as well as inspect custodial facilities to protect prisoners' rights.

As Nigeria's foremost institution for human rights, the NHRC implements a variety of initiatives to promote and protect human rights through public education, training, mediation, and policy-oriented research (Jegede, 2023). Its focus areas include fostering democracy and beneficial governance, addressing the rights of vulnerable populations, and resolving conflicts, along with tackling issues such as extrajudicial killings, torture, and violence. The NHRC collaborates with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) to enhance human rights awareness through sensitization and educational initiatives. Section 5 of the National Human Rights Commission Act delineates its powers and responsibilities, enabling the Commission to assist victims of human rights violations and seek appropriate remedies on their behalf (Anushiem et al., 2021).

Comparative Analysis of Police Recruitment and Training Practices in Nigeria and Other African Countries

Police recruitment and training practices play a crucial role in shaping officer behavior and, consequently, influencing the frequency of citizen

complaints. A comparative analysis of Nigeria alongside other African nations reveals significant insights into the implications of these practices. In Nigeria, inadequate recruitment standards often lead to the selection of unqualified personnel, contributing to unprofessional conduct within the police force (Omogbiya, 2023; Addah & Omogbiya, 2023). The recruitment process is particularly problematic, with reports indicating that individuals can finish a prison term for armed robbery in one city and then join the police force in another the very next day, owing to a lack of a central database of convicts (Omole, 2020). This inefficient recruitment system compromises the integrity of the police force and further exacerbates public distrust. Additionally, heads of police training colleges have reported experiencing "instruction from above," where powerful individuals in government can mandate the passing of even those who fail the recruitment course or examination, thereby undermining the selection process (Omole, 2020).

Insufficient training on ethical conduct and the appropriate use of force exacerbates these issues, leading to human rights abuses and eroding public trust in law enforcement (Afolabi et al., 2021;

Aborisade, 2023). Furthermore, the lack of emphasis on community policing undermines the establishment of positive police-community relationships and perpetuates public distrust (Nwobueze et al., 2018). The 2020 "End SARS" protests in Nigeria serve as a poignant illustration of the consequences stemming from these deficiencies. These protests, ignited by pervasive police brutality and extortion, underscored the public's deep-seated grievances against law enforcement, with lack of accountability and inadequate training emerging as significant contributing factors (Amnesty International, 2020).

In contrast, several other African nations have adopted promising practices to address similar challenges. For instance, South Africa initiated substantial police reforms following the apartheid era, including revised recruitment standards that emphasize diversity and human rights, alongside the implementation of community-oriented policing strategies (South African Police Service, 2016). While challenges persist, these reforms have led to a more professional police service. Similarly, Ghana has prioritized community policing and developed training programs focusing on human rights and ethical conduct (Ghana Police Service, 2018), which have fostered improved police-community relations and a reduction in citizen complaints in specific regions. Rwanda has also instituted rigorous recruitment standards, including psychological evaluations and integrity testing, resulting in a more disciplined and professional police force characterized by lower corruption rates (Rwanda National Police, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

This study employs an exploratory methodology, focusing on a literature review and comparative analysis of police recruitment and training practices in Nigeria and other African countries. By analyzing secondary data from academic journals, government publications, and NGO reports, the study aims to uncover the relationship between these practices and their impact on officer behavior and citizen complaints, ultimately contributing to enhanced security in Nigeria.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The study explores the significant impact of police recruitment and training practices on officer behavior and citizen complaints in Nigeria. Inadequate standards severely compromise the recruitment process, allowing unqualified individuals, including those with criminal backgrounds, to join the police force in the

absence of a centralized database for background checks. This undermines the integrity of the police force and erodes public trust. Furthermore, political interference exacerbates these challenges, with external pressures leading to the promotion of candidates who fail to meet the required standards. This diminishes the professionalism and overall effectiveness of the police.

The study also reveals that police training programs are insufficient, particularly in areas related to ethical conduct and the appropriate use of force. This gap in training contributes to human rights violations and a decline in public confidence. Additionally, the absence of comprehensive training in community policing strategies hinders the development of positive police-community relations. The 2020 "End SARS" protests starkly highlighted the consequences of these deficiencies, as public outcry over police brutality and lack of accountability underscored the urgent need for reform.

In comparison, other African nations have implemented successful reforms that Nigeria could learn from. Countries like South Africa and Ghana have improved police-community relations by focusing on community-oriented policing, establishing higher recruitment standards, and incorporating human rights into police training. Rwanda's rigorous recruitment standards have produced a more disciplined and less corrupt police force, further illustrating the benefits of adopting such reforms.

The study also examines oversight mechanisms, focusing on the Police Service Commission (PSC), responsible for promoting transparency and accountability in police personnel management. The PSC's efforts in overseeing recruitment, promotion, and disciplinary actions are crucial for combating nepotism and corruption within the police. Similarly, we emphasize the role of the

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in safeguarding human rights, addressing violations, and collaborating with civil society to enhance awareness and accountability within the police force. These oversight bodies are crucial in fostering ethical behavior and holding police officers responsible for their misconduct.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings from this study expose significant deficiencies in the recruitment and training practices of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), shedding light on their profound implications for

officer behavior and citizen trust. The study's conclusions align with broader literature on policing in developing countries, particularly regarding the critical role of recruitment standards in shaping police integrity. Omole (2020) has emphasized that in Nigeria, the absence of a comprehensive database for criminal records enables individuals with violent histories to infiltrate the police force, a problem that this study confirms. Failure to properly vet recruits severely undermines the integrity of the NPF, eroding public trust and exacerbating the already fragile relationship between law enforcement and the communities they serve. The public's perception of the police as untrustworthy or compromised weakens the foundational principle of law enforcement as a public safety institution. This study's findings are consistent with other research that highlights the detrimental impact of poor recruitment standards on public perceptions of police efficacy and trustworthiness (Alemika, 2013; Obi, 2019).

The study highlights the widespread issue of political interference in the recruitment process, a concern that previous scholars have also expressed. The phenomenon of "instructions from above," whereby influential political figures ensure the passing of unsuitable candidates, reflects the

broader issue of political patronage within the NPF. Omole's (2020) findings, which demonstrate that political interference disrupts the meritocratic recruitment process by prioritizing loyalty to political elites over competence and ethical conduct, align with this observation. Such interference compromises the professional integrity of the police force, fostering a perception among citizens that the police serve political interests rather than public safety. This study adds to the growing body of literature that calls for depoliticizing law enforcement agencies to ensure that recruitment and promotion are based on merit rather than political connections (Osaghae & Suberu, 2021). The consistency between the current study's findings and earlier works highlights the systemic nature of these issues within the NPF.

The inadequacies in police training identified in this study further corroborate the findings of other scholars. Specifically, the lack of focus on ethical conduct and the appropriate use of force during police training has been a recurring concern. Afolabi et al. (2021) found that insufficient emphasis on human rights and ethical policing within training programs has contributed to a culture of impunity within the NPF. This study extends those findings by linking poor training practices to the rise of police brutality and public unrest, particularly as evidenced during the "End SARS" protests. These protests, driven by widespread grievances over police misconduct,

underscore the urgent need for reforms that prioritize human rights and community engagement. The findings of this study are in line with other research that underscores the connection between inadequate police training and increased public distrust (Ajayi & Akintayo, 2022).

In contrast to the deficiencies within the NPF, this

study identifies promising practices from other African nations that offer valuable lessons for Nigeria. For instance, South Africa's post-apartheid police reforms, which emphasize human rights and community-oriented policing, illustrate the potential for systemic change in improving police practices (South African Police Service, 2016). This aligns with the findings of this study, suggesting that adopting similar reforms could help address the deep-rooted issues within the NPF. Similarly, Ghana's focus on community policing and human rights-centered training has led to improved police-community relations, a point that is consistent with the current study's emphasis on the need for Nigeria to strengthen its training programs (Ghana Police Service, 2018). Rwanda's rigorous recruitment standards, which include psychological evaluations and integrity assessments, have successfully created a more disciplined and less corrupt police force (Rwanda National Police, 2021). These examples demonstrate that systematic and comprehensive reforms, when effectively implemented, can significantly improve police performance and public trust, further validating the findings of this study.

This study emphasizes the role of oversight mechanisms, such as the Police Service Commission (PSC) and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), in promoting accountability, echoing the findings of other scholars. Amusan and Saka (2018) argue that the PSC's mandate to oversee recruitment, promotion, and disciplinary actions is crucial for fostering accountability within the NPF. This study supports that view by highlighting the importance of oversight in curbing nepotism, favoritism, and corruption within the police force. Moreover, Okene & Akani (2019) opine that the NHRC's role in protecting human rights serves as a necessary counterbalance to police power, ensuring the resolution of violations

and the maintenance of accountability. This study concurs with existing literature that stresses the need for stronger collaboration between oversight bodies, civil society organizations, and the public to promote awareness of human rights and ensure accountability within the NPF.

We recommend several key reforms to address the deficiencies in police recruitment and training practices in Nigeria. To facilitate comprehensive background checks and select only qualified

candidates for the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), it is essential to establish a centralized recruitment database, thereby enhancing its integrity. We should reform recruitment standards to prioritize merit-based selection by implementing standardized criteria that focus on educational qualifications, physical fitness, psychological evaluations, and ethical conduct. We should also train recruitment officers to mitigate biases. Additionally, we need to revamp the NPF's training programs to incorporate a curriculum that focuses on ethical conduct, human rights, and community policing strategies. We should use realistic scenarios and collaborate with human rights organizations to enhance effectiveness. Strengthening oversight mechanisms, such as empowering the Police Service Commission to conduct independent investigations into police misconduct, will promote accountability and improve public trust. Prioritizing community engagement initiatives, including partnerships between the NPF and local organizations, is crucial for rebuilding trust and tailoring policing strategies to the unique needs of various neighborhoods. Lastly, we should institute regular assessments of recruitment and training practices, along with the implementation of key performance indicators and feedback mechanisms, to ensure continuous improvement and responsiveness to evolving community expectations.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study underscores the critical importance of effective police recruitment and training practices in shaping officer behavior and reducing citizen complaints in Nigeria. The findings reveal significant deficiencies within the current recruitment system, including inadequate standards and a lack of oversight, which contribute to unprofessional conduct and public distrust in law enforcement. Furthermore, insufficient training in ethical conduct and community policing exacerbates these issues, leading to human rights abuses and escalating tensions between the police and the communities they serve. By comparing Nigeria's practices with those of other African nations, the study highlights the potential for positive change through the implementation of standardized recruitment processes, enhanced training programs, and strengthened oversight mechanisms. The recommendations provided offer actionable pathways for reform, aimed at fostering a more professional and accountable police force. Ultimately, addressing these challenges is essential for restoring public trust, ensuring effective law enforcement, and promoting a safer and more just society for all Nigerians.

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