

# **Victims' experiences of crime, police behaviour and complaint avenues for reporting police misconduct in Nigeria: An interpretative phenomenological analysis**

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## **Abstract**

Police-public relations and accountability are issues of global concern. This study makes an original and significant contribution to police policy, practice and programs designed to encourage confidence in the police by exploring victims' experiences of crime, police responses and avenues for channelling complaints following police misconduct. An interpretative phenomenological analysis and semi-structured interview were adopted to collate data from 24 male and female participants comprising both victims of crime and non-crime but with direct experiences of perceived police misconduct from Delta state, Nigeria. The analysis finds perceived fear, lack of trust and limited awareness of redress avenues following police misconduct. The study recommends a legal education-informed cognitive behavioural therapy on the available complaints channel to improve public confidence in the Nigerian police.

Keywords: Policing; confidence; trust; Nigeria; victims

## **Introduction**

The police's role in ensuring accountability by addressing victims' complaints to maintain law and order is crucial to trust building and effective policing. In the UK, issues of poor police conduct following the murder of Sarah Everard by a police officer sparked public outcry and reinforced the need for accountability against police misconduct (Basu, 2022). Disproportionate stop and search of the police from people of the Black and Minority Ethnic Communities (BAME) compared to the white counterpart have further exacerbated trust and

question of accountability within the UK. According to the UK Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS, 2021), between 2019 and 2020, BAME people were 4.1 times more likely to be stopped and searched than White people. For Blacks, specifically, the figure stands at 8.9. In the USA, widespread police brutality and deaths of Blacks under their custody have further sparked distrust and the call for accountability, as demonstrated in the George Floyd death and the "Black live matters movement. As a recent study show, black Americans are 3.23 times more likely than their white American counterpart to be killed by police (Schwartz, 2020). The preceding issues of accountability impact police legitimacy and trust in the institution.

Even in Nigeria, considering the country's high level of insecurity, the police constitute an essential government agency in the country's effort to combat crime. This is because widespread insecurity, terrorism and banditry represent issues limiting the peace and safety of lives and properties in Nigeria (Ike et al., 2021; Akintayo, 2019). For instance, the Institute for Economics and Peace Global Terrorism Index Report (2020) ranks Boko Haram among the three deadly terrorist groups responsible for 1245 deaths between 2018 and 2019 alone, amounting to 9% of death from terrorism globally. Armed banditry and farmers' herder crises have led to the loss of lives in Nigeria. In states like Zamfara, in 2020 alone, there were approximately 495 killings due to violent death and banditry (Hassan, 2021). Sadly, the Nigerian Police Force faces a myriad of issues, including poor funding, and ill-equipped and poorly trained personnel, limiting its ability to effectively dispense its duties (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2003; Ike et al., 2021).

For instance, the United Nations' standard for the police ratio to population recommends one police officer for every 450 citizens. However, Nigeria's population of over 200 million people, coupled with 371,800 police officers, according to the Nigeria Police Force, suggest the police ratio to population figure at one police officer to 540 citizens. A ratio argued to fall below the United Nations' standard (Ike et al., 2021). To address the shortfall, Nigeria's former Inspector General of Police, Ibrahim Idris, reportedly highlighted in 2017 that 30,000 police need to be recruited annually for five years to meet the UN recommendation (Agency-Report, 2017).

While limited funding represents a significant challenge, perceived human rights abuses and alleged police brutality have led to widespread public alienation from the police and further deteriorating confidence in the latter (Akinlabi, 2022; Ayodele & Aderinto, 2014; Usman, 2019). Several arguments explain the public's growing discontent against the police. This includes the argument on public trust and police legitimacy (Ike et al., 2021; Imoudu, 2022),

poor police etiquette (Usman, 2019), and corruption (Akinlabi, 2022; Akintayo, 2019; Onwuama et al., 2019). Akinlabi (2022) contends that in Nigeria, the public perspective of the police often mirrors the notion that the police are corrupt, abuse their powers and are predatory in their approach to policing. Drawing on survey data from 600 respondents from Lagos who were victims of police brutality, Imoudu (2022) finds that respondents perceive the police as compromising officers. Thus, reflecting depleting trust and confidence in the police. Concerning public trust, Ojedokun (2014) further contends that police high-handedness constitutes a crucial problem in Nigeria which often takes-for-granted public complaints. The perceived lack of accountability held by the public has further undermined confidence in the police (Aniche & Iwuoha, 2022; Ike et al., 2021).

Police accountability is crucial, and there appears to be a growing global demand for transparent and accountable police practice, which is significant to achieving police agencies' goals of legitimacy and an effective police-public relationship (Auerbach, 2003; Walker, 2007). O'Neil (2004) contends that enhancing police accountability is crucial to building public trust and rebuilding police legitimacy, as these are essential for effective policing. The US Agency for International Development (2018) reckons that police accountability entails ensuring that the police services, including their personnel, respect human rights, uphold the law, and avoid misconduct or corrupt behaviour. Auerbach (2003) stresses that enhancing police accountability needs to be informed by the societal and institutional problems leading to police misconduct in the first place. While these debates highlight the significance of police accountability in Nigeria, there appears to be a significant gap in the literature. The gap relates to exploring from an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) perspective underpinned by police legitimacy theory, victims' experiences of crime, police responses and avenues for channelling complaints – all of which impact their perceptions of police legitimacy. Its legitimacy has historically been marred by its negative use by the colonialists for coercion, in incidents, including the Aba women's riot (Alemika, 1999).

Even in recent times, studies have consistently highlighted a growing public resentment towards the police, including the former's involvement in physical violence (Aborisade & Oni, 2021), torture, bribe (Nwandozie, 2021) and corruption (Khan, Ahmed & Ahmed, 2021). However, there remains a gap in victims' experiences of crime and complaint channels for police misconduct in Nigeria. This is also partly informed by poor perceptions of the police as legitimate crime interventionists or confidence in the complaint channels, as evidenced in the mass #EndSARS protest, where issues of limited accountability spurred discontent and demands for justice, including protests against police brutality, corruption and misconduct. As

McCoy (1984) argues, for the public to review police behaviour and employ the aid of powerful institutions such as the courts and media, citizens must be well-informed on the potentialities and limits of police departments and how police officers are reasonably expected to dispense their duties.

Our study thus contributes to the literature from the following main perspectives delineating its originality, significance, and rigour. The study's originality lies in its empirical findings using IPA to shed light on a taken-for-granted issue concerning a joint processual account of how victims experience crime, police responses to crime complaints and the avenue for redress following misconduct. Hence the research question:

What are victims' experiences of crime, including non-victims' experiences of police misconduct and avenues for reporting the misconduct in Nigeria?

For the study purpose, victims here refer to both crime victims' reporting experiences with the police and any citizen that encounters the police who experience perceived police misconduct and, as such, are victims. Thus, in addressing the research question, the study makes a significant contribution which seeks to recommend solutions based on victims' lived experiences to improve police policy and public trust.

Adopting the interpretative phenomenological analysis highlights the study's methodological rigour and analytical power in providing new interpretative lens in analysing victims' experiences. For this study, police misconduct relates to unacceptable, improper or inappropriate behaviour that runs contrary to the rules and regulations regulating police practices and conduct. Thus, the paper engages with the victims' complaint literature and a review of the historical context of the Nigerian police. This is followed by their response to crime and their role in addressing perceived anomalies. The next section addresses the methodology and the findings from the analysed data. The paper discusses the findings and their implications for police policies and concludes with recommendations.

### **Avenues for channelling complaints against police misconduct and victims' experiences**

Avenues to channel complaints against police misconduct have often constituted a means of ensuring transparency whilst building public confidence and trust in the police. This is mainly related to the growing concerns about police professionalism as seen in the Black Lives Matter movement in the USA, the allegation of disproportionate stop and search of black and minority ethnic groups in the UK and alleged police brutality, including corruption in Nigeria (Ike et al., 2021). In the USA, citizens could file formal complaints against police officers perceived to have treated them inappropriately or unfairly (Mrozla, Huynh & Archbold, 2021). In the UK,

police accountability and complaint mechanisms are also available using channels such as the Independent Office for Police Conduct.

Within Nigeria, several complaint channels exist to ensure police accountability. For example, section 131 of the Nigeria Police (Establishment) Act 2020 provides for establishing the Police Complaints Response Unit, whilst section 132 to 134, respectively, provides for the Unit's composition and functions alongside steps to be taken after an investigation. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria also provides for the Police Service Commission, whose mandate is to exercise disciplinary control over the police, including dismissing police officials. The Nigerian Police Service Commission comprises a chairperson and seven to nine community members, including a senior police officer, a retired judge, representatives from the chamber of industry and commerce, women and human rights organisations, and the media. The aim is to ensure the transparent exercise of disciplinary control. However, there appears to be a vital gap relating to victims' experiences of complaint avenue against perceived police misconduct.

Previous literature has often focused on the barriers to the complaint and not the victims' experiences. Walker and Archbold (2020) argue that several barriers limit victims' ability to report police misconduct incidents. These barriers span from a lack of available information about the process of filing complaints; to dealing with demanding requirements when filing complaints, such as having to fill out complaints at police headquarters in person (as opposed to an online option or access to forms in other locations, such as public libraries) (Walker & Archbold, 2020). It also includes ensuring complaint forms are notarised before submitting them to the police department (Walker & Archbold, 2020). Drawing on the extra-legal model of formal action, Brownmiller (1975) contends that police systematically discriminate between cases based on victims' behaviour or attributes. Other factors also limit complaints against the police. These include feeling embarrassed of the negative interaction with the police, with examples including illegal body searches in public (Dahl, 2017); being victims of sexual assault by a police officer (Jackman, 2018); a victim of domestic violence with an officer-involved (Bjorhus & Webster, 2017); and being a victim of police officer stalking (Kirchner, 2014).

However, in Nigeria, previous literature demonstrates a widespread lack of public confidence in the police (Aborisade, 2021; Akinlabi, 2017; Alemika & Chukwuma, 2003; Ike et al., 2021). However, there appear to be no known studies that have focused on victims' experiences of crime complaints and avenues for seeking police accountability, drawing on an interpretative phenomenological analytical lens. A previous study relates to the willingness and knowledge

of graduate students to seek redress against police misconduct in Nigeria (Ojedokun and Badmus, 2022). Their survey found that 55.2% of the student respondents were unaware of the available channels through which they could seek redress (Ojedokun and Badmus, 2022). However, the research appears not to involve victims with direct experience, nor does it adopt interpretative phenomenological analysis as the lens to examine the participants' experiences. In addition, the study focused on only students when police misconduct could be suffered by anyone regardless of their educational attainment (Ojedokun and Badmus, 2022). The preceding gap represents an original and significant contribution of the present study designed to improve police practice and policy to improve public confidence in the police. To address the gap, the paper will draw on an overview of Nigerian policing history and complaint avenues underpinned by police legitimacy theory before analysing empirical data collected from victims of perceived police misconduct.

### **Police Legitimacy: Nigerian Police historical overview and its role in addressing misconduct**

Police legitimacy as a theoretical lens emphasises the formation of individuals' perceptions and outlooks and their effects on behaviour. At its core, police legitimacy could impact public cooperation with the police. At another level, police legitimacy could link with organisational institutionalism. While addressing legitimacy from the organisational context, Suchman (1995, p. 574) defines it as "a generalised perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions". Meyer and Scott (1983, p. 201) argue that "organisational legitimacy determines the degree of cultural support for an organisation including the level to which established cultural accounts provide explanations for its existence, functioning, and jurisdiction, and lack or deny alternatives. Worden and McLean (2017) argue that legitimacy could be a passive acquiescence to the existence of an organisation, such that an organisation is legitimate when its goals, practices, and structure are not challenged or questioned. Historically, issues of legitimacy have often undermined confidence in the police within Nigeria.

Historically, the Nigerian police force dates to 1861 during the British colonial era (Akull, 2011). Another development includes the establishment of the Niger Coast Constabulary with headquarters at Calabar in 1891. On 1st January 1896, the British colonialist created the Lagos Police Force. Like in Southern Nigeria, the country's northern region also had its policing institution. For instance, the Royal Niger Constabulary, with its main headquarter at Lokoja,

was established in 1886 to address the policing needs of the North. These culminated in two separate Police Forces in Nigeria until 1st April 1930, when both were unified and established as the Nigeria Police Force with its initial headquarter in Lagos (Aremu, Parkes & Johnston, 2009).

The history of the Nigerian police as an appendage of British colonialism speaks to the ongoing systemic corruption embedded in the police force (Aborisade, 2021; Alemika, 1988). As Alemika (1988) argues, Nigeria's police force has revealed a legacy of ruthlessness, arbitrariness, brutality, incivility, corruption, and a low public accountability level since colonialism. The argument could be further substantiated by the original motive behind the colonialist formation of the police. Historically, Ikime (1977) argues that the colonial police forces were set up and oriented to behave as occupation forces who were corrupt, ruthless, and prone to brutalising the colonised peoples and destroying their properties. Alemika (1988) further contends that the colonialist impact on policing is such that the precolonial police force was not preoccupied with promoting and enforcing the rule of law and security of Nigerians, as colonial officials and their post-colonial surrogates claimed. Instead, they were concerned and preoccupied with order maintenance and serving as personal servants and guards of the rulers (Alemika, 1988). This argument also resonates with the UK's historical origins of the police. Storch and Engels (1975) argue that the police in the UK were designed to serve the propertied class and not public protection.

Police pre-occupation during the colonial era was constructively aligned with the British political and imperialistic economic goals designed to serve the capitalist class's interests and objectives in Nigeria. These objectives were achieved and enforced through institutionalised violence and government channels serving as surveillance and coercive organs, including the police, military courts, and prisons (Ikime, 1978; Tamuno, 1970). Alemika (1988) argues that the poor attempt at law enforcement and order as orchestrated by the colonial police force was further achieved and sustained partly by its divide-and-rule strategy. Through such an approach, police officers were recruited and deployed to locations where they were detested and were aliens. Such reasoning was apparent in Denton's (1893) writing to the Colonial Authority in London that:

In our Hausa Force we have a body of men dissociated from the countries [Yoruba communities] immediately around Lagos both by birth and religion, and who are as a matter of fact the hereditary enemies of the Yorubas. This is such an enormous advantage in any interior complications.

Inter-ethnic suspicions were exploited to maintain and sustain the British colonialist culture of oppression, subjugating and exploiting resources for their gain and interest. These inter-ethnic suspicions also led to the police using their status to oppress their fellow citizens through intimidation and bribery. In Nigeria, colonial policing exhibits flux-like maintenance of law and order alongside the defence and security of the colonialists and some wealthy individuals who controlled the economic and political system through violence and force.

In a country historically challenged with economic, political, and social upheaval, including mass protest, the police have often been used as a channel of dispersing this through oppressive, violent strategies and intimidation. The Aba women's riot represents an instance where the police force was utilised as an avenue for oppression. As Alemika and Chukwuma (2003) argue, using the police to disperse protests and strike demonstrations has become the norm in Nigeria. The implication of such coercive measure is that it breeds resentment and resistance toward the police. Pilavin and Briar (1964) argue that when there are negative views toward the police, there tends to be hostility towards their work. The same tremendous continuity of historical coercive and intimidating measures adopted by colonial policing resonates with contemporary policing in Nigeria. Alemika (1988) contends that imperial policing orientation has been maintained and strengthened over time by Nigeria's post-colonial government and elites, who benefit from promoting a neo-colonial political economy alongside repressive policies.

While these historical developments took place, the contemporary Nigerian police have often struggled with issues relating to public acceptance, perceived legitimacy and trust. Alemika (1999) argues that corruption represents one of the most crucial issues that exacerbate hostile police public relations in the country. Aremu (2006) contends that Nigerian police appear tainted with uncomplimentary public remarks due to civilian harassment, extortion of money from motorists, and accidental killings. Even during the recent Covid-19 pandemic, many human rights cases of abuse seem to resonate across police operatives' dispensation of their duties (Transparency International, 2020). This is despite a concerted effort by local and international human rights organisations advise to security agencies to adopt approaches that do not lead to abuse of power (Amnesty International, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2020). A recent study conducted by Aborisade (2021), comprising 71 people in Nigeria, highlights significant concerns relating to torture, force and extortion associated with victims' perspectives of the Nigerian police. The victims' perspectives on the channel of reporting alleged police misconduct are of central importance to this debate.



The widespread alienation of the police-public relation in Nigeria is a concern. The available avenues/ institutions that have sought to address the situation are central to such concern. Ojedokun et al. (2021) argue that several institutional channels are available, including the public complaint bureau, which is part of the police public relations office, the police public complaints social media handles and telephone hotlines, and the Police Service Commission (PSC). The PSC is the body through which the public can seek police accountability. However, Chukwuma (2003) and Ojo (2003) contend that Nigerians widely believe that police authority are unlikely to hold their personnel to account for professional misdeeds following complaints levied against them. Meiklejohn (1965) argues that while lawsuits or filing complaints could help ensure accountability, only a few citizens directly challenge police actions when grievous harm occurs. The implication of such a perception is that it might exacerbate tensions and the perceived lack of accountability or oversight on how the Nigerian police exercise their powers. One such implication is the mass #EndSARS protest, where members of the public in October 2020 took to the streets in mass to air their grievances against the SARS for perceived extortion, inhumane public treatment, corruption, torture and a need to reform the police. It is against the preceding gap that the study seeks to explore victims' experiences of police response to crime and the avenue for redress in the event of perceived police misconduct, drawing on an Interpretative Phenomenological Analytical lens.

### **Methodology**

Our study adopts the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which, according to Smith and Osborn (2015: 41) is defined as 'a qualitative approach which aims to provide detailed examinations of personal lived experience.' The theoretical tenets of IPA underpin the study. Phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography were used to explore victims' personal and lived experiences of how they make sense of police response to crime complaints and avenues for redress following perceived anomalies and misconduct. The justification for using IPA in our study is to explore the meanings that particular events and experiences hold for the participants (Smith & Eatough, 2021), as using a quantitative approach will not allow for a detailed account and the subjective lived experiences of the participants themselves who have experience perceived police misconduct. Phenomenology allowed for and was used to explore victims' accounts or perceptions of policing instead of attempting to produce an objective view of the topic itself.

The ideographic element was used to analyse in detail each individual account and experience of reporting police misconduct before moving to more general recurrent claims in the dataset. Given that humans are sense-making beings, Hermeneutics enable the researcher to make sense

of how the participants made sense of their experiences by focusing on what is important to the participant and how the latter interpret their own personal lived experiences of crime, including reporting police misconduct. Another justification for using IPA is that by drawing on significant events of crimes experienced by the participants and how they interpret the police responses, including the process for filing complaints, we can infer from the language used how the participants interpret and make meaning of the issue of avenues for addressing police misconduct and ensuring accountability.

The study recruited 24 participants from Delta state. The sampling size was justified following theoretical and conceptual saturation. In determining theoretical saturation, key conceptual concepts relating to 'experiences of crime', 'police responses' and experiences of channels of complaints to aid accountability following police misconduct' were adopted. Using this approach, as informed by the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967), we arrived at saturation when no additional data emerged as we repeatedly noted similar instances over and over again on each participant's accounts of their experiences with the police. To strengthen confidence that data saturation has been reached, we also noticed in the coding of the dataset that there are repeated instances of the same code with no new code emerging even following the collection of additional data (Birks & Mills, 2015). The sampling size also reflected IPA's theoretical underpinning, as a small sample will allow for a detailed analysis of individual accounts and transcripts. This is particularly important considering the study's attention to the idiographic (individual) account.

A purposive and snowball sampling technique was adopted to identify samples whose closely defined characteristics align with the study's research question. Participants were accessed via approaching religious organisations, law firms and charities/foundations working with and providing support for victims. The head of such organisations was first informed of the study's purpose. They were requested to voluntarily disseminate the study to their contacts, who could then reach the researcher via email or phone contact details provided to voluntarily book a phone or Microsoft teams interview at a mutually agreed time. Through the snowball sampling techniques, participants were also asked to identify other potential participants who met the study's inclusion criteria and might be willing to participate voluntarily. Through the snowball approach, more participants were able to be recruited.

The criteria for assessing and including participants in the study were that they must be from Delta state, aged 18 years and above, able to give informed consent, victims of crime and have experienced police response to crime, including issues of perceived misconduct as not all persons might have direct experiences which is crucial for the study. The rationale for choosing

Delta state is because it was the origin of the infamous #EndSARS protest, which was because of the tragic shooting of a Nigeria by the Nigeria police Special Anti-robbery Squad Unit (SARS) (Abimbade, Olayoku and Herro, 2022). These criteria were assessed via preliminary questions asked of the participants. Ethical approval was sought from and approved by the first author's University of affiliation in the UK. Before the interview, all participants were briefed on the purpose of the study and consented. The participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time before data analysis and before conducting the virtual data collection via phone and Microsoft teams. The interviews were recorded, and each lasted between 45 minutes and an hour. All participants voluntary consented before participating in the study.

In total, 24 participants met the study's inclusion criteria. Of the 24, eighteen were female, while the other six were male. The participants' age ranged from 18 to 59. Of the 24, 19 of the participants indicated being employed or self-employed amounting to 79.2%, while 5 participants amounting to 20.8%, indicated being unemployed. Regarding the level of education, 21% indicated having obtained education up to the tertiary level, including university, while three indicated their level of education as secondary. All participants had experienced (e.g., directly or indirectly) of one form of encounter or the other with the police. They also had experiences with various forms of crime, such as theft, extortion, and burglary. Although all participants were recruited from Delta, their state of origin span several Nigeria geopolitical zones, including southwest and south-south.

Regarding analysis and arriving at themes/findings, we adopt the analytical framework of IPA. The stages involve the initial reading of the interview transcript. Here the researcher engaged in an iterative process of engaging in the reading and re-reading of the transcribed text to have an overall insight into the interview. The re-reading of the transcript was also helpful in collating wide-ranging notes on the significant experiences of the participants. The second stage involves a return to the transcript and using previously collated notes to identify relevant codes that were later organised into themes. To ensure robustness in the analytical process, a senior colleague who is a senior lecturer and psychologist experienced in IPA also engaged in the coding. All codes were reviewed jointly by the two researchers. The approach of double coding help establishes the reliability of the coding process. The third stage involved linking themes and the identification of thematic clusters. The fourth stage encompasses the production of the summary of superordinate themes alongside consistent themes where appropriate. All participants' identifiable information was deleted and replaced with pseudonyms to aid anonymity.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### ***Lack of trust and poor police-public relation***

A notable experience shared by participants was the perceived sense that poor police-public relation creates a negative outlook towards the police. The perceived deviation from legitimate policing duties undermined victims' confidence and trust in the police (Akintayo, 2019; Ayodele & Aderinto, 2014). A male participant from Delta in his early thirties recounted his experience:

I experienced a situation before when I was coming from the north. I was carrying pepper. I did show them that this is a legitimate business I am doing [...]. They were saying that no, maybe you might be hiding some arms inside the pepper, and I said you can check the basket of pepper and if you see anything that is incriminating, then charge me. Then they said they will check, and after checking, they found nothing incriminating or illegal inside the sack of pepper I was carrying, and they said OK you have to find us some money else we will not release this. [...] To avoid much embarrassment, I said OK, what do you really want, and they said, you have to find us like N3000. [...] Their way of acting is not really nice, and they extort money from people, including bus drivers, instead of doing their legitimate job. (George).

George's personal experience highlights a perceived indifference to the police response, which he describes as one driven by personal gains. 'Extortion' from George's lens was perceived as a limitation undermining respect for the police. The extract highlights how the police were perceived as exacerbating the citizen's suffering, which resonates with previous studies (Aborisade, 2021; Alemika & Chukwuma, 2003). The extract also illustrates a historical trend associated with colonial policing, as argued by Alemika (1988), who contends that imperial policing orientation has been maintained and strengthened over time despite independence as the economic condition of exploitation, injustice, and oppression still exist. George's extract also highlights 'power' relations, which seem to be abused—being a civilian amid the policemen positions George in a state of weakness with limited opportunity to resist the extortion. His reference to words like 'to avoid much embarrassment' highlights his state of being helpless and, as such, resigning to the fate he found himself. The implication of such a feeling is that it breeds a lack of trust in the security forces whilst also undermining the institution, which might be perceived as corrupt.

Another participant recounting his experience commented that:

My experience related to when I was arrested at the police A Division, and I tried to give my statement. They did not allow me to talk, and when my uncle came,

they just told him to go back, and there was no other thing. The matter was later settled out of the station based on their findings that I was not found wanting and was vindicated. [...] The police did not allow me to explain myself, and I slept in the cell till daybreak. If it were a genuine investigation, they would have asked what had happened before my arrest but nothing like that, and I was not even aware of whom to report the matter concerning how I was treated by the police to. (Alejan).

Here, the victim's experience, coupled with the perceived poor police public relations, is instrumental to how the police are perceived. Being arrested without the opportunity to give an account was considered detrimental, given the subsequent finding of his innocence. Alejan's experience denotes a sense of frustration with the lack of awareness of avenues of complaint. This situation further appears to influence his perception of his experience with the police. Such limited awareness of complaint channels further denotes concerns that led to the mass #EndSAR protest, highlighting public frustration with abuse from the Special Anti-Robbery Squad unit that has gone unchecked (Ike et al., 2021). Another participant with direct experience of crime also recounted her experiences as follows:

I remember when I was robbed at home where I was living with my siblings and parents, we reported it to the police, but they did nothing. They just said, 'write your statement and bring money to buy fuel before we can come to the scene or even investigate; if not, forget it, as there is nothing we can do about it.' I requested to see the DPO, and I remember how the officer mockingly scoffed at me, saying do not even bother yourself, as nothing will happen! I was so shocked and wondered whom to report the poor treatment to, as they all seemed like a bird of a kind! (Oghalete).

Again, poor police public relations seem to be a barrier to trust building and confidence in the police. Terms such as 'they all seemed like a bird of a kind' portray poor police legitimacy as an organisation. The participants felt less confident in reporting the perceived misconduct and were helpless about where to lay a complaint.

### ***Misconduct and extortion***

Among the interviewed participants, there was a sense that the police appeared to be unprofessional in dispensing their duties. Recounting their experiences, some participants expressed concern about their experiences with crime and how the police handled such crime reports. The negative experiences appear to inform how they view the police. As one female participant from Delta commented:

I experienced a serious crime when they (robbers) came to snatch my car away. I went to the police to report, and instead of the police to address the issue, they said I should give them money. I gave them money. They should give me clearance so that I go and announce it in the radio they refused. Then the police again started extorting money from me. So, the police are not reliable in Nigeria because when anything happens, and you run to the police, the police will disappoint you. Once the boys [referring to the robbers] extort money from you and you run to the police, the police will treat you harder than how the boys treat you. It is as if you are just giving yourself another problem. We do not have anybody to run to for now, and we trust in God, and we believe that God is the only hope we have for now (Carrie).

'Treatment' was perceived as integral in seeking support when a crime occurs. In its extreme, the participant highlights experiences that seem to suggest that the police force meant to protect lives and properties conjures a less likely option to resort to as it further exacerbates the victims suffering. Again, this resonates with previous literature highlighting how trust within the contemporary Nigerian police is produced as a regurgitation of colonial practice of corruption and exploitation and further undermined through lack of accountability (Alemika, 1988). The participant's experiences of 'theft' conjure a sad experience where being unable to get the necessary permit to announce the incident appears to limit the ability to recover the stolen property. Such feelings seem to conjure a sense of agony and despair. The extract also reinforces the perceived state of helplessness where the resort of God as a supernatural being is perceived as more reliable than consulting the police. The negative image the police conjure appears problematic, given how the participant portrays the offenders as ones whose acts are less harsh than those of the police. The findings thus seem to highlight a negative police-public relationship contrary to Sir Robert Peel's idea of effective policing, which depends on public legitimacy, approval, and support. A similar negative view was expressed by a male participant who commented that:

In my area, you know Warri, that evening I just went outside to get something and, on my way, coming, I just saw some men bellop me (held a gun at me), lock the gate, went into the house and told us to bring all that we had, and all the money and they said we should lie down flat, and they were all with automated machine guns. [...] They rob and went out. [Some of the robbers were caught] before they were now taken to the police station. The police response was very poor because there was no recovery. Not all the gang members were caught, you understand

[...] and they could not get any information that was ok to recover what was stolen. So, it was just so porous and very poor. We did not even get any feedback or response as to how they got on with their investigation. (Sebastian).

The extract represents a significant insight into how Sebastian's personal experience shapes how he perceives the police response. Even when some gang members were apprehended, the perceived lack of cogent information or even recovery of the stolen item conjures a limitation of the perceived efficacy of the police investigations. Of utmost importance is how the near lack of feedback between the police and the victims was perceived as further undermining confidence in the police professionalism. Such issues of poor communication and lack of trust resonate with previous literature (Ike et al., 2021).

### ***Dysfunctional channel of complaint***

While participants expressed concern about their experiences with the police, there was a sense that the complaint channel appeared limited and less functional. Trust in the medium or even access to relevant authorities was construed as a significant challenge limiting efforts to lay complaints against perceived police misconduct. Talking about the issue, a female participant noted that:

I do not have anybody because there is no reliable person there (in the police station) that you want to meet. If you say you want to see the DPO (Divisional Police Officer) or the Area Commander, they will not give you a chance. Maybe you even have the opportunity to see them they will not respond. So, there is no point in meeting any of them though I wish I knew how to report police misconduct (Carrie).

The perceived lack of response highlights a feeling of resignation for Carrie. 'Access' and the ability for decisive 'action' to be taken when complaints are made are important in building confidence in the channel of accountability. The participant response highlights a negative outlook toward the available medium where such complaints might be made. The findings thus resonate with previous literature, which suggests that amongst Nigerians, there appears to be a perceived sense that police authorities are unlikely to hold their officers to account for complaints concerning their professionalism (Chukwuma, 2003; Ojo, 2003). The extract also partly explains why public members seem reluctant to demand accountability.

Another significant finding relating to the perceived dysfunctional complaint channel was the limited awareness of such a platform. Most of the participants interviewed expressed limited or no awareness of where to lay complaints. As one male participant reckoned:

[Regarding complaint] there is no platform whatsoever; you will just go to the counter and lay your complaint, that is all. Currently, in Nigeria, I think there is actually nowhere to go. [...] So technically, there was no anywhere to actually go and complain, and that was why the issues of this #EndSARS came up. If there was an appropriate channel of complaint, then it would have not gone to the extent of mass protest, you understand? There was no appropriate place to lay a complaint about police inefficiency or police inadequacy (Sebastian).

Sebastian, whose personal experience of crime appears marred by his perceived belief concerning the poor police public relation after the incident, seems not to be aware of the channels for making complaints in his initial state of residence at the time of the interview. Sebastian's reference to the #EndSARS protest is particularly important given the circumstance that led to the widespread protest. Terms such as 'no appropriate place to lay complaint' as one of the drivers of the protest highlight the significance of police accountability and the transparent provision of the medium within which such accountability can take place. A possible explanation that might have informed why Sebastian held such an opinion might be because of his experience where perceived poor handling of the complaint, limited police communication of the progress of the investigation and non-recovery of stolen items were seen as limitations.

Even when few participants were aware of platforms such as the Human Rights Commission, the lack of proactive response was also construed as a limitation. As a participant noted:

You can report it to the human rights affair, but you have to really follow it up. If you do not follow it up, I do not think they can take the case higher or so. Several cases have been reported to major authorities, but still, they are not making any impact at all. [...] [Concerning Police Service Commission] No, I do not think so I have not heard of that. (George).

Here the perceived limited response and lack of seriousness accorded to complaints concerning the police were construed as significant challenges to accountability. The reference to major authorities with less impact on cases reported appears to conjure negative perceptions concerning such channels. A possible explanation that might have informed the participant's views might relate to the limited awareness of publicising the outcomes of the investigation relating to perceived police misconduct. Such limited awareness seems to spur poor confidence in the police, particularly regarding accountability and handling misconduct complaints.

***Reorientation and visible presence of complaint channel***



An interesting point that resonated across participants' individual experiences was the perceived solution that might help bridge the lack of confidence gap between the public and the police. Reorientation and awareness creation concerning avenues for complaint were construed as important. Concerning the former, a participant opined that: 'We need a good leader that will inform them that they are security to the public and not to hurt the citizen. That is just it for now' (Carrie). Another participant also commented that:

They need to reorientate the police on their duties and the rightful things they need to do. Their duty mostly is to protect the citizens and not to extort money from the citizens and not to brutalise the citizen as well or embarrass them. (Caleb).

The extracts highlight the perceived role reorientation plays in improving relations among the public. By orientation, it tends to suggest a perceived disconnect between how the participants perceived the police role as it is and how they were originally meant to enforce their duties. The perceived police corruption, extortion and inhumane citizens' treatment represent concerns that appear to alienate the public from the police. Thus, addressing such issues through 'reorientation' highlights a positive avenue that might potentially reduce the abuse of police powers.

Concerning available channels of complaint, there was a perceived need to ensure that the public is made aware of such channels. One participant noted: 'In that sense, the Legal practitioners have a role to play in educating victims and the public of their rights and procedure to file complaints (Sebastian).' Another participant commented that:

In my experience, I think they need to be a visible creation of an awareness platform on how to report alleged police misconduct. To ensure transparency, engaging legal practitioners, including barristers and solicitors in actually educating the masses on their rights and how to effectively report police misconduct alongside adopting intervention that change negative attitudes and of the victims might eventually go a long way in addressing the problem and building public confidence in the police (Eleanornita).

The extract highlights the vital role public complaints against police misconduct might play in limiting public disorder and protesting against perceived police anomalies. There was also a perceived sense of the role of legal practitioners in educating victims and the masses. This highlights an interesting finding which suggests a victim-informed approach to proffering solutions that helps build confidence in the police.

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The study aimed to explore victims' experiences of crime, police responses to crime, their behaviours and the avenue for redress following perceived police misconduct. Informed by an interpretative phenomenological analysis, the following main themes emerged, Lack of trust and poor police public relations; Misconduct and extortion; Dysfunctional channel of complaint; Reorientation and the visible presence of complaint channel. The findings will be addressed with their link to existing literature. The purpose is to contribute to the existing literature on police-public relations.

Firstly, lack of trust and poor police-public relation represents a striking pattern in the participant experiences. The direct victims' experience with the police represents one shrouded with poor confidence in the police. This is because issues such as extortion and perceived lack of due process in securing the arrest and detention of victims further undermined trust in the police. The findings resonate with previous studies that highlight issues of limited trust as a factor limiting confidence (Aborisade, 2021; Alemika & Chukwuma, 2003). It also resonates with the literature, highlighting how colonialism and its imperialist practice of exploiting the masses for their private gain impact Nigeria's contemporary policing (Alemika, 1988; Ike et al., 2021). The implication of the findings for police policy is that in the absence of solutions to address police-public relations, it risks undermining the likelihood of the public divulging information that may help dispel crime.

Secondly, misconduct and extortion represent a dominant theme in the participants' experiences. It resonates with previous studies on the impact of corruption on police-public relations (Khan, Ahmed, and Ahmed, 2021; Amnesty International, 2014). How police handle crime complaints by victims appears to impact their views and confidence in the police. As the dataset suggests, the perceived poor treatment and handling of complaints regarding issues such as theft appear to impact how the victim views the level of professionalism accorded to the situation. The findings resonate with other western studies, which suggest victims' treatment is a crucial factor in limiting complaints against the police, including feeling embarrassed of the negative interaction with the police, with examples including illegal body searches in public (Dahl, 2017). It also resonates with studies emphasising poor police treatment of citizens (HRW, 2012; Ojedokun, 2014). Our present study highlights an important finding: in extreme cases, resorting to 'God' was considered one of the main ways of alleviating their lack of confidence by referring to 'trust in God' to help with the situation. This finding is significant in that it deviates from previous studies, which often emphasise issues of torture and corruption as some of the main factors limiting confidence in the police (Aborisade & Oni, 2021; Amnesty International, 2014; Khan, Ahmed, & Ahmed, 2021).

Thirdly, the study finds that issues of dysfunctional complaint channels further undermine confidence in the police. The limited awareness of avenues for reporting police misconduct appears to resonate among most participants. This is even though Nigeria has several complaint channels, including section 131 of the Nigeria Police (Establishment) Act 2020, which provides for establishing the Police Complaints Response Unit. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria also provides the Police Service Commission with a mandate to exercise disciplinary control over the police (Ojedokun et al., 2021). Even when few are aware, they tend to point to the lack of confidence in prosecuting erring officers. Such a finding resonates with previous literature, highlighting victims' reluctance to report on issues relating to poor policing due to the perceived reluctance of authorities to hold police accountable (Ojo, 2003; Chukwuma, 2003). The study also finds that reorientation and the visible presence of the complaint channel could play a significant role in improving victims' and public confidence. Terms such as legal practitioners' role in orientating victims and masses concerning access to complaint channels were considered important in building trust in the police. The findings represent a unique contribution given its victim-informed perspective to addressing the situation.

The study acknowledges some limitations, given the number of participants and the qualitative approach adopted. However, because the study focuses on experiences, the proposed method appears appropriate, and the number of participants is justified given the qualitative nature of the study, which emphasises meaning and depth, not numbers. Future research may adopt a quantitative approach and involve members of the police force to explore the issue relating to factors limiting public confidence. Notwithstanding the limitations, collectively, the study makes an original, significant and rigorous methodological contribution to the literature by drawing on an interpretative phenomenological analytical lens to explore victims' experiences of crime, police response to crime and the avenue for redress following police misconduct. The study's findings are significant, and it also forms the basis for our recommendation on the need to adopt a Legal Education informed Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (LECBT) intervention that could be used to help orientate the masses on the available channel of complaint when police misconduct occurs.

The LECBT derives from our study findings of poor level of legal channels for accountability and the theoretical lens of police legitimacy, which emphasises the formation of individuals' perceptions and outlooks and their effects on behaviour. Hence the need to modify such negative thoughts towards the police using legal education and cognitive behaviour therapy. The LECBT is an intervention that is twofold. The Legal Education (LE) component will

incorporate the aspect of the laws such as human rights, police functions/duties, and avenues for filing complaints against police unprofessionalism. In contrast, the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) component addresses negative thoughts and attitudes toward the police by encouraging more positive views. Collectively, the intervention could play an important role in improving public confidence and trust in the police. This is especially related to the depleting resources allocated to the police and ways of improving their efficiency in combating crime.

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