PERCEIVED STEREOTYPED ATTITUDES TOWARDS MEMBERS OF THE NIGERIA POLICE FORCE IN MAKURDI, BENUE STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the perceived stereotyped attitudes towards members of the Nigeria Police Force in Makurdi. A total number of 198 respondents comprising 121 males and 77 females participated in the study. A self-developed questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. Three hypotheses were formulated and tested using an independent t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The result shows significant differences in respondent's stereotyped attitudes based on gender ($t_{(196)} = -2.19$, $P<0.05$)., but not on the level of literacy ($F_{(3,192)} = 1.22$, $P>0.05$) or ethnicity($F_{(3,192)} = .716$, $P>0.05$). Recommendations were made for an improvement of the image of the Police and thus attitudes towards members of the force in Makurdi.

Keywords: Stereotype, Attitude, Prejudice, Police, and Discrimination

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The slogan popularly and often said/read by the police to strengthen the police-public relationship and to make the public to have a positive perception of the Nigeria Police Force "Police is your Friend"

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is perceived to have been turned upside down and reframed as Police is your number one ENEMY. Also, it has been the Police watchword to '**serve and protect with integrity'.** But are they serving and protecting Nigerians with Integrity?

The above are all captions or appellations employed by the Police to reduce and if possible eliminate the distrust skepticism, and general disdain that is used to view the Police. It is hard to hear anyone saying anything positive about the Police. The mere mention of the word POLICE tends to elicit facial, verbal, and emotional expressions or gestures that indicate a general dislike or total hatred and avoidance for these men and women who are saddled with the responsibilities to maintain public order. These negative perceptions, to an average Nigerian, May be wholly or partly attributed to the extent to which Nigerian police have relegated their responsibility to protect the weak against the strong.

Our evaluations of the Nigeria Police Force and our attitude towards men and officers of the force remain negative despite the huge investment in public enlightenment and public relations embarked upon by the Police force. Rampant use of excessive force, corruption, and brutality against Nigerian civilians has pitched the public to perceive and respond negatively towards the police (Eleonu & Winston, 2019; Togba, 2017). In this write-up, attitudes refer to our beliefs based on what we have heard from others or sometimes personal experiences from having contact with the police. These beliefs may be true or not, but informs the opinions upon which we act or feel in certain ways toward the police force.

We learn from others or personal experiences as well as model from others how we should feel, relate or react to men and officers of the Nigeria Police force. These over-generalizations we make from what we have experienced or modeled are sometimes baseless and inaccurate thus leading to inaccurate generalizations. The inaccurate generalizations upon which our attitudes towards a group or persons are based is called 'Stereotype'. The importance of the knowledge of stereotypes is based on the fact that they result in attitudes and attitudes in return result in the kind of behaviour that we put forward towards a

particular object, person, or group as is the case with the behaviour of Nigerians towards the Nigeria police force which is based on stereotyped attitude.

Psychologists apart from studying attitudes for the sake of knowledge, are interested in understanding attitudes because of the implied relationship between attitudes and behaviour. The prevailing logic in the study of attitudes is that when a given pattern of behaviour exists, it is a result of the existence of a positive attitude to the behaviour in question (Gire, 2005).

Attitudes have an adverse effect on the behaviour of an individual towards an object, person, or a group of persons and in situations where such attitudes are based on inaccurate generalization (stereotyped), the attitude and subsequent behaviour towards the object of this stereotyped attitudes become negative as the case between Nigerian citizens and the Nigerian Police Force. This is because stereotypes in general, take away our ability to treat each member of a group as an individual. This implies that when we hold stereotyped attitudes towards a group, we tend to treat each member of the group as if the person has the exact characteristics of the stereotyped attitudes, it also leads us to expect the members of the stereotyped group to behave in certain ways (Aronson, 1995).

Attitudes play a key role in the interactions among people. People influence our attitudes and these attitudes, in turn, are inflected to some extent by the way that we interact with others. The stereotyped attitudes held by Nigerians towards the Nigeria Police Force are based on inaccurate generalizations about their behaviour and subsequently affected the way we act, feel, and behave towards them.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The police are the agents of the executive arm of government empowered to enforce the law and ensure social order through the legitimized use of force (Alemika, 1993). Unfounded generalisations otherwise known as stereotypes can have a damaging influence on the integrity and image of the police if nothing is done to correct the wrong impression. However, little scientific evidence exists, particularly in

Benue state to collaborate on whether or not the public's attitudes towards police are fact-based or mere stereotypes perpetuated to taint the police image. This study is an attempt to unravel the role attitudes play in social interactions and their influence on behaviour. This research, therefore, examines those stereotyped attitudes that members of the public have towards members of the Police Force as well as their effect on the behaviour and thinking of the population towards the Nigerian Police Force. The reason behind these stereotyped attitudes shall also be investigated to determine these attitudes to foster a better understanding and cooperation between the Nigerian Police Force and members of the public.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research is aimed at investigating the nature, effect, and implication of stereotyped attitudes held by the public toward the Nigerian Police. In pursuance of these, the researcher has set the following objectives

i. To determine if stereotyped attitudes are held by the public towards members of the Nigerian Police Force in Makurdi.
ii. To determine the nature of the relationship that exists between the public and members of the Nigerian Police Force in Makurdi.
iii. To evaluate the implications of the stereotyped attitudes held by the public towards members of the Nigerian Police Force in Makurdi.
iv. To critically examine the role of information from others, direct experience of the Police in promoting stereotyped attitudes about members of the Nigerian Police Force in Makurdi.
v. To suggest and make recommendations at the end of the study that will go a long way in the reduction and possible elimination of the stereotyped attitudes held by the public towards the members of the Nigerian Police Force in Makurdi.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

A study of this magnitude is supposed to cover the entire country for that is the area of jurisdiction of the Nigerian Police Force in Makurdi.

Due to financial and time constraints, this study was limited to the Makurdi metropolis which is secured and manned by Benue State Police Command.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Theories of attitude and Stereotype formation

Nobody has ever been born with a particular attitude toward a race, religion, ethnic group, or even members of a particular profession like the Nigerian police force. People learn to form the attitudes they put up towards an individual or group of people just the same way we learn the alphabet. As a result of this development, certain theoretical approaches have been carefully postulated to explain all about the emergence of stereotypes, attitudes, prejudice as well as forms of discrimination. Some of these theories or approaches include Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982), Attribution theory (Herder, 1958) as well as Stereotyping and Ethnocentrism theory (Summer, 1906). Each of these theories explains how stereotyped attitudes are formed and spiral down into labeling others (Biernat, Vescio & Green, 1996) and discrimination (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). For this study, only the social learning and identity theories are expanded.

Social Learning Theory

This theory was propounded by social psychologist Albert Bandura in 1977. According to Bandura (1977), people learn by observing others. According to the social learning approach to stereotypes and prejudices, people's feelings about members of a group are shaped by the observed behaviour s of their parents, other adults (significant others), and peers. A practical example is a situation whereby parents who hold stereotyped attitudes or prejudices about a group commend their children for expressing such attitudes. These children will not only learn but practice attitudes in favour of prejudice.

Likewise, young children learn such attitudes by imitating the adult who serves as a model. Such learning starts at an early age since children as young as three years old begin to show preferences for

members of their age group. The social learning theory is a general theory of human behaviour. Bandura (1977) was concerned with mass communication which he used to specifically explain media effects. He warned that children and adults acquire attitudes, emotional responses, and new styles of conduct through filmed and television modeling. His warning struck a responsive chord in parents and educators who feared that escalating violence on television would transform children into bullies.

Some criticisms have been leveled against the social learning theory. Sophia & Reynald, (2020), criticized that children do not only learn inappropriate/appropriate behaviour, but also learn about the customs of people, which has been leveled against the theory, and the theory completely ignores the genetic influences in the acquisition of stereotyped attitudes.

Social Identity Theory

The social identity theory of stereotyping was developed by Tajfel (1982), and Turner (1992). The theory holds that people favor in-groups over out-groups to enhance their self-esteem. The social identity theory was originally developed to enhance or help understand the psychological basis of inter-group discrimination, Tajfel (1982) attempted to identify reasons that would lead members of one group to discriminate in favour of their in-group.

According to this theory, each of us strives to enhance our self-esteem, which has two components: a personal identity and various collective social identities that are based on the groups to which we belong. In other words, people can boost their self-esteem through their achievements or affiliation with successful groups. The threats to one's self-esteem heighten the need for in-group favouritism. Secondly, the expression of in-group favouritism enhances one’s self-esteem.

The theory believes that an individual derives pleasure and pride from connections with positive groups. There is a need to belittle "them" to feel secure about "us". Social identity is the individual's self-concept derived from his or her perceived membership in social groups (Zahra, Alexander, and Adams, 2022).

Elaboration Likelihood Model

This is a recent theory of attitude proposed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), it asserts that there are two basic "routes" of information. The central route is taken when an individual carefully ponders the information received about the object or group of attitudes. The information is pondered in terms of its content and logic. (Petty and Wegener, 1999).

The peripheral route is taken when an individual depends on non-message factors such as attractiveness and credibility of the source or conditioned emotional responses (Petty and Wegener, 1998).

Both routes lead to Persuasion. However, the elaboration likelihood model believes that the durability of attitude formation and change depends on the extent to which people elaborate or (think about) the content of persuasive communication (Petty and Fabrigar, 1997).

RESEARCH METHOD

Design of the Study

The study employed the survey method to elicit information from respondents and a questionnaire was designed on policing and public views on general perception about the members of the Police Force serving in Makurdi and it was administered accordingly.

Research Hypotheses

The following are the hypotheses of the study

i. There will be a significant difference in attitudes towards members of the Nigeria Police Force in Makurdi based on gender.
ii. There will be a significant difference in attitudes toward members of the Police Force in Makurdi based on the level of literacy.
iii. There will be a significant difference in attitudes towards members of the Police Force in Makurdi based on ethnicity.

Participants

Participants for this research were members of the general public residing in Makurdi metropolis. The participants were randomly selected from the five axes of Makurdi metropolis of Benue State, where people were always in contact with members of the Police Force and they cut across all walks of life and different ethnic groups. Also, all the respondents that were used in the research, were adults. A total of 198 participants were randomly selected from the general population which comprised all the inhabitants of Makurdi metropolis.

After the participants were randomly sampled, they were made to understand the purpose of the research and were adequately assured of the confidentiality of their responses, as stated by one of the ethical guidelines of research like this one at hand. Among the participants, 121 (61.1%) were males with the valid percent of (61.1%), and 77 (38.9%) with the valid percent of (38.9) were females with the sum of 198 (100%). As for their marital status; 108 (54.5%) with the valid percent of (56.5%) of the respondents were single, 70 (35.4%) with a valid percentage of (36.6%) were married, 13 (6.6%) with a valid percentage of (6.8%) were divorced, 7 (3.5%) with no response with the total of 198(100.0%)

In terms of the level of education, 9 (4.5%) with a valid percentage of (4.5%) attended primary school, 67 (33.8%) with valid percentage of (34.2%) were secondary school leavers, 109 (55.1%) with valid percent of (55.6%) attend university education, 11 (5.6%) with valid percentage of (5.6%) attended none of the schools (have no qualification) totaling 196 (99.0%) as valid response while 2 (1.0%) are missing as no response totaling altogether 198 (100.0%).

As regards the ethnic groups they were 123 (62.1%) with valid percentage of (62.8%) as Tiv, 30 (15.2%) with valid percentage of (15.3%) as Idoma, 12 (6.1%) with a valid percentage of (6.1%) as Igede, 31 (15.7%) with valid percentage (15.8%) as others totaling 196 (99.0%) with the valid percentage of (100.0%) as a valid response, while 2 (1.0%) are missing with no response totaling 198 (100.0%) as whole.

The sample was drawn from five (5) axes of Makurdi metropolis, which are Wurukum, High level, North-bank, Wadata and Ankpa quarters.

Research Instrument

Data for this research work were collected using self-developed questionnaires using Likert Scale tested with Conbrach's alpha coefficient bothering on the perceptual analysis of policing. A test-retest was carried out and the results obtained were same.

The responses were scored based on a Likert Scale of Strongly Agree =5, Agree =4, Not Sure =3, Disagree =4, Strongly Disagree =1, after which the responses were collected, computed, and analysed accordingly.

Methods of Data Collection.

To get the data for this research, the researcher with the aid of the supervisor designed a questionnaire which was used to elicit responses from the respondents. The questionnaire was divided into two sections with the first part, Section A asking about the demographic characteristics of the participants, while the second part Section B asked questions about the respondent's relationship with members of the police force and his/her attitudes towards the men and officers of the Police Force. The researcher visited the five axes of Makurdi metropolis of Benue State, where people were always in contact with members of the Police Force and got their responses.

The questionnaire was administered to the participants after the respondents were made to understand the instruction given on the questionnaires. They were also assured that their responses will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and only for the research. The participants were given two (2) days to complete the questionnaire. After filling out the questionnaires they were collected, and debriefed, data were collated, analysed and the results were interpreted.

Method of Data Analysis

The independent t-test was used in the study. This is because the researcher wanted to find out the difference between two groups, that is males and females in their attitudes towards members of the Police Force.

Also used in the study was One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). This is because one independent factor which is educational attainment has four levels as follows: primary, secondary, tertiary and none.

Apart from education, ethnicity was also tested using a One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Many ethnic groups were tested as follows: Tiv, Idoma, Igede ethnic group, and other tribal groups.

RESULTS

Hypotheses Testing

The hypotheses were tested to show the different categories of people used in the study and the results of the analyses are presented hypothesis by hypothesis below:-

Hypothesis 1 stated that there will be a significant difference in attitudes towards the members of the Police Force based on gender.

Table 1 *Summary of independent t-test showing the difference between genders on attitudes towards members of the Police Force in Makurdi.*

Variables	N	M	SD	Df	T	P-Value	Remarks
Male	121	44.36	7.05	196	-2.19	<0.05	Significant
Female	77	46.2	6.35				

The result obtained as shown in Table 1 indicate that there is a difference between males and females in attitude towards members of the Police Force in Makurdi. ($t_{(196)}$=-2.19, P<0.05).

This result means that the hypothesis is accepted which stated that negative attitudes toward members of the Police Force are influenced by gender. However, examining the mean scores of the two groups, it is clear that female (X=46.52) scored higher than males(X=44.36).

The results, therefore, yield support to the research hypothesis and the null hypothesis is rejected on attitudes towards members of the Police Force. This aligns with the position of Brown and Coulter

(1983), who confirmed that men consider the police to be more favourable than their women counterparts. Opposing Ojo (2014) considers and recognised the police as being friendly to women more than men folks.

Hypothesis 2 stated that there will be a significant difference in attitudes towards members of the Police Force in Makurdi based on the level of literacy.

Table 2. *Summary of one-way Analysis of variance (ANOVA) showing the difference in attitudes towards members of the Police Force in Makurdi based on the level of literacy.*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	171.131	3	57.044	1.217	.305
Within Groups	8999.537	192	46.873		
Total	9170.668	195			

The result obtained showed in table two above indicate that there is no significant difference in attitude toward members of the police force based on literacy ($F_{(3,192)}$=1.22, P>0.05). This result affirms the assertion of Ayodele and Aderito, (2014) that the educated in Nigeria will have more positive views of the police than the uneducated. This means that the hypothesis is rejected and the null hypothesis accepted. However, an examination of the means of the two groups indicates that those with none (no educational attainment) literate (X=46.45) slightly differs from those with the university (high) (X=45.67) in attitudes towards the members of the police force.

Hypothesis 3 stated that there will be a significant difference in attitudes towards members of the Police Force based on ethnicity.

Table 3. *Summary of one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) showing the difference in attitudes towards members of the police force in Makurdi.*

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	101.530	3	33.843	.716	.543
Within Groups	9069.138	192	47.235		
Total	9170.668	195			

The result obtained as shown in Table 3 above indicate that there is no significant difference in attitude towards members of the Police Force based on ethnicity (F(3,192)=.716, P>0.05). This result confirmed as pinioned by Sargeant, Murphy and Cherney, (2014) that the police rationally serve the people, there would be likely less resentment and division among the general public based on cultural streaks. This means that the hypothesis is rejected and the null hypothesis accepted. However, an examination of the means of the groups indicates that others (X=46.65) slightly scored higher than idoma (X=45.10) in attitudes towards members of the Police Force.

DISCUSSION OF MAJOR FINDINGS

A total of three hypotheses were formulated and tested by the researcher and the discussion of results is therefore based on the stated hypotheses. This result show that the respondents have a negative attitude towards the members of the Police Force in Makurdi. The results affirm the position that the general public has negative attitudes toward the members of the Police Force in Makurdi. This result is consistent with Jacobs, & Nadar-Grosbois (2020) assertion that we create cognitive simplifications to guide how we process social information.

William, Denise, & Patrick, (1995) asserted that the problem lies in the fact that a generalization about group characteristics does not consider any variation from one individual to the next. The negative attitudes are based on stereotyping and generalization of social information about members of the Nigerian Police Force.

The first hypothesis stated that males will significantly differ from females on attitude towards members of the Police Force. The result obtained showed that the result was significant which means that female have stereotyped attitudes towards members of the Nigeria police force more than male. This shows that gender has a lot to do with stereotyped attitude towards members of the Police Force.

Thus, the study agrees with Lin, Sarah-Jane, & Andrei, (2017) who found that, the power wielded by the Police as a group and the attention they received owing to their relative power has an important influence on stereotyping and negative attitude formation toward members of the force.

The second hypothesis stated that there will be a significant difference in attitude towards members of the police based on the level of literacy. The results obtained for this hypothesis showed a significant meaning, that whether people are educated or not, they will hold stereotyped attitude towards members of the Police Force.

This finding agrees with the work of Olson & Zanna (1993) who postulated that the information that leads to the formation of stereotyped attitudes when generated by the individuals themselves is more powerful in the determination of the attitude than information provided by other people do not necessarily need to be literates to acquire information about the police as they tend to generate this information on their own.

The third hypothesis stated that there will be a significant difference in attitudes toward members of the Police Force based on ethnicity. The result obtained showed that the result was significant, meaning that attitude formation towards members of the Police has a lot to do with an ethnic group that is to say that, stereotyped towards members of the Police are held differently among ethnic groups.

This agrees with the work of Aronson (1995) who asserted that when an ethnic group holds stereotyped or segregated attitudes towards a group, they tend to treat each member of such a group as if they all have the exact characteristics of the stereotyped attitudes which also leads them to expect the members of the stereotyped group to behave in certain ways.

SUMMARY

This work examined the stereotyped attitude towards members of the Nigerian Police Force. The study was conducted with 198 participants randomly selected from the Makurdi metropolis, out of which, 121 were males and 77 were females. A self-developed questionnaire was used by the researcher to collect data. Three hypotheses were stated and tested using independent t-test One-way and analysis of Variance (ANOVA) respectively.

Hypothesis 1 was significant, hypothesis 2 was not significant and hypothesis 3 was also significant. The study found out that as people generally have negative attitudes towards members of the Police, their sex has a lot to do with these attitudes. On the other hand, one's level of education does not determine whether he/she would have negative attitudes toward members of the Police Force, an individual's personal experience with members of the Police Force, however, has a significant impact on his/her development of negative attitudes towards them. Ethnic sentiment has a lot to do with the formation of negative attitudes toward members of a group like the Police Force. As such members of a particular ethnic group showed that they jointly developed negative attitudes towards numbers of the Police Force may be due to what a member of the Police force did to a member of that ethnic group. The negative image of members of the police was developed in this study and negative attitudes towards members of the Police were examined and some interesting findings were made. Thus more light has been shed on stereotyped attitudes toward the police.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations have been made by the researcher.

i. The Police Public Relations unit should step up its advocacy about the functions of the Police and how it has been working towards achieving its goals to prevent the circulation of wrong information of stereotypes.
ii. Corrupt officers should be fished out and shown the way out to prevent them from further tarnishing the image of the force.

iii. Recruitment into the Police Force should be based on merit, and the influences of godfatherism, connectionism, and bribery should be eliminated.

iv. The outstanding performance of officers should be rewarded to boost the morale of officers and men of the Force for effective/efficient performance.

v. Members of the public should also see Police Officers as friends thus, giving useful security information on criminal hide-outs. This is because Police Officers are not magicians and also because those criminals live and share things with us in our communities.

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