

**DISBANDMENT OF POLICE SPECIAL ANTI-ROBBERY SQUAD AGAINST
BRUTALIZATION: VICTIMIZATION AND REFORMS AMONG POLICE LAW
ENFORCEMENT IN NIGERIA**

Daniel I. Ishaya, and Jauro Godiya
Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences
Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This study examined disbandment of police special anti-robbery squad against victimization and brutalization of Nigeria citizens. Conceptual analysis and theoretical background of SARS were critically access. The problem of Nigeria police force unit SARS and disbandment is a wide spread phenomenon aim at extortion, corruption, lack of integrity and inadequate arms and ammunition. Reformative approach methods were adopted and secondary data sources were used for information. SARS is one of the Nigeria Police Force Units that are saddled with the responsibility of fighting crimes in the society such as Arm robbery, kidnapping, Yahoo boys, advanced fraudulent behavior and other forms of challenges bedeviling Police SARS and citizens. SARS has both positive and negative consequences. The positive elements connote to reduce robbery activities and all manners of criminal elements though they were passive to be engaged in extrajudicial killings of innocent citizens, tortures, harassment, beating, unwarranted abuse of laws and fraudulent human rights. The paper concluded and recommends that lack of synergy between Police Force and member of the public in society were the major mistrust. Therefore, disbandment and reformation of the Nigeria police force unit is germane for proper rehabilitation, re-orientation as well as restructures of the Police Law enforcement agencies for better advancement and transformation of modern policing in the society.

Keywords: Disbandment, Brutalization, Victimization, Policing, Reformation

INTRODUCTION

Disbandment of police special anti-robbery squad of Nigeria police force was dissolved on 11th October, 2020 as a result of victimization and brutalization of innocent citizens across sections of the country. This form of brutalization necessitated crime victims to any persons whether individuals or corporate entities who have suffered the negative consequences of impact of criminal actions of offenders either in the form of incurring economic or financial losses. The sustaining of physical injuries, losing of life incurring psychological trauma, emotional and physical abuse or material loss or damage or other social disadvantages resulting from natural, mechanical disaster or misfortune (Igbo, 2006; Ayodele, 2005, UN 1984). This further collaborate the work of Daniel (2020) victims of police brutality and victimization in contemporary societies were used indiscriminately. Though people suffered due to economic depression and material loss, victims of injustice, hurricane victims, crime and arm-robbery victims, Covid-19 virus victims, cancer victims, holocaust victims and most importantly police brutality and victimization victims as well as other forms of social problems. Daniel (2008) maintain that police brutality and victimization in

Disbandment of Police Special Anti-Robbery Squad against Brutalization: Victimization and Reforms among Police Law Enforcement in Nigeria

Nigeria society is a wide spread phenomenon encompassing every aspect of the life of members of the society. Victims are individuals or corporate bodies who directly or indirectly bear the brunt of criminal activities. Thus, those who suffer from outright violation of fundamental human rights, exploitation, police brutality, racism, sexism, apartheid, state oppression, unfair economic policies, interference in the domestic affairs of sovereign countries, white-collar and conventional crime can be referred to be victims of crimes (Gyong, 1986).

According to United Nation's report (1984) a person or collectivity may be made a victims of crime or brutality as a result of conduct which is a violation of rights proclaimed in the universal declaration of human rights, or otherwise constitutes an abuse of power violation of international law and fundamental personal, economic, social, cultural, environmental civil or political rights possessed by that person or collectivity or otherwise constitutes an offense under national legislation United Nation report. In view of this, many victims feel that defining themselves as a victim has negative connotations and choose instead to define themselves as a survivor. This means that is a very personal choice that can only be made by the person victimized (Ayodele, 2005). Police special anti-robbery squad brutality and victimization among law enforcement are uncalled for which leads to the issues of human rights violation and abuse of the fundamental human rights across sub-section of the country which includes, police brutality (Daniel, 2020; Danbazau, 2007). A human right is defining as something whereby no one may be deprived of without great affront to justice. Human rights includes those rights which are inherent in our nature and without which we cannot live as human beings. It means that there are certain deeds which should never be done, certain freedoms which should never be invaded, some things which are sacred in human relationship.

Timbee (2011) Police brutality and harassment of innocent citizens is the major obstacle to the prospects of the Nigeria police. Special Ant-Robbery Squad Unit of Nigeria Police in guaranteeing security of lives and property, law and order with the backing of autocratic leaders and repressive laws the police often acted outside the rule of law. The police have in most cases been laws themselves, killing innocent people, detaining persons arbitrary and with impunity. Political opponents of governments, workers, students radicals and human rights activist have always suffered excessive waves of brutalities, abductions, unwarranted scarcity and violation of privacy, extra-judicial killings, body injury and intimidation, harassment and loss of personal liberties in the hands of police with major emphasis to special anti-robbery squad victimization and brutalization of the citizens across sub-sections of Nigeria society (Daniel, 2020; Alemika, 2003, Channel TV, 2020).

Police brutality and victimization also occurs in the form of suspects, armed robbery and recruitment as hired assassins. During the criminal investigation and interrogation, a combination of such factors as poor training, inadequate infrastructure and absence of respect for due process and human rights. The Police resort to torture to extract confession to include beating with stick, iron bars, wires and cables, sticking pins or sharp objects, shooting of suspects on the limbs. The violation of human rights and police brutality is used to describe the excessive use of force by the police. Police maintain frontline against violent criminals and the circumstances which may provoke police brutality vary but may include attempts to extort confession using third degree method, preventing crimes in a spirit of disgust or contempt towards particular criminal or by way of revenge been injured or killed in situation of tension or danger to be control in the cause of committing corrupt acts (Alemika, 2003).

Nigeria have reported widespread brutality and victimization by the Police during crime control; crowd control; management of protests and demonstration as well as investigation at the checkpoints and police commands across all police formation of all states and federal capital territory, Abuja (Channel TV, 2020; Buhari, 2020).

These and other practices such as arresting a relation as substitute for wanted suspects, apart from being a human right violation, create indelible negative impression of the police among the victims of the practice. Extra judicial killings and summary executions by security agencies were tolerated or encouraged under the military regimes as crime control strategies but such cannot be tolerated under the democratic society. Recently, the violation of the human rights of citizens by the police has been acknowledge by the police authority that the tainted image of the force is aggravated by the unwholesome behavior of some men. Instead of detecting crimes and criminals, they engage in the molestation of members of the public unlawful exercise of authority, corruption and victimization of the citizens.

Conceptual Analysis and Background

The special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) was a branch of the Nigeria Police Force Unit under the criminal investigation and intelligence Department (FCIID) headed by the Deputy Inspector General of Police. The Special Anti-Robbery Squad was founded in 1992 by the former Police Commissioner Simeon Danladi Midenda in Lagos because when Col. Rindan, a Nigeria Army Colonel was killed by Police officers at the checkpoint in Lagos. The information reached the Army, soldiers were dispatched into the streets of Lagos in search of any Police officer.

The squad major functions deal with crimes associated with armed robbery, car snatching, kidnapping, cattle rustling and crimes associated with firearms respectively. SARS has been alleged to be seriously engaged in human rights abuse, illegal stop and search, arrest and detection, extra-judicial killings, sexual harassment and police brutality of innocent citizens. The Niger Police withdrew SARS from checkpoints, security flashing areas and other points of interest for criminals. Similarly, some Police officers were said to have resigned while other fled for their lives due to the absence of police for two weeks. Crime rate increased and SARS was formed with only 15 officers operating in the shadows without knowledge of the army while monitoring police radio chatters. The Nigeria Army and the Nigeria Police Force came to an understanding of official police duties began again in Lagos. The Special Anti-Robbery Squad Unit was officially commissioned in Lagos following a ceasefire by the Army after settlement.

Special Anti-Robbery Squad is one of the fourteen (14) units in the Force Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Department which was established to detain, investigate and prosecute, kidnapping and other forms of crimes. In 2009, after several years of operations the squad greed in number and strength due to the surge greed in number and strength due to the surge of internet fraudsters and cultism in universities, made several successful arrest but in the harassed innocent youths. In May 2020, Amnesty International disclosed that it would be suing the Nigeria Police over human rights abuse stating that the special anti-robbery squad in Borokiri, Portharcourt arrested three (3) bike riders and detained them for over one week while being beaten every night with the butt of a gun and iron belt on 20 May, 2010. A Federal High Court Enugu State ordered the then Inspector General of Police Ogbonna Okechukwu Onovo to produce a Special Anti-Robbery Squad officer who had gunned down a fifteen (15) years-old boy in high school. In 2011, the Nigeria Police Force discovered an attempt by a SARS operative Musa Agbu to bomb the Force Headquarters because the IGP Hafiz Ringim scuttled his ambition.

Following several reports of human rights violation by members of the public to the office of the Inspector General of Police. On 7th August, 2015 the then IGP Solomon Arase announced that it would be splitting the SARS Unit into two units. The operational unit and the investigation unit to curtail cases of human rights violation. However, in 2016, pulse.ng compiled a report on Nigeria police brutality with heading meet SARS, the Police Unit with license to kill. The report highlighted the brutality and ignorance of the rules of engagement in the special anti-robbery squad. In 2017, the Nigeria youth actively took up the ENDSARS campaign on social media alongside other activities and it later culminated into advocacies and protects in a call to end the Police brutality and scrap the notorious Police Unit (Amnesty International Report, 2016).

Disbandment of Police Special Anti-Robbery Squad against Brutalization: Victimization and Reforms among Police Law Enforcement in Nigeria

On 21st August, 2019 four SARS operative were arrested and charged with murder after being caught on film manhandling and shooting to death two suspected phone thieves in broad daylight. SARS was indicted and responsible for human abuse, cruelty, degrading treatment of Nigerians in their custody and other widespread torture. Some of the human rights abuse by SARS include the shootings of their detainees in the leg, mock or threats of execution, hanging and severe beating. Recently, the IGP official dissolved the Special Anti-Robbery Squad across all the police formation in the country dated on 11th October, 2020 with the aim of Police reforms and restructure of the Nigeria Police Force. The disbandment came as a result of illegal and extra-judicial killing melted on the citizens (Adamu,2020).

Impact of Police Brutality and Victimization in Nigeria

The Police repression had been institutionalized since colonial rule. Though, it's become increasingly intensified under the successive military regimes after 1966. According to Alemika (1993) Police repression has persisted and in most cases intensified. The Nigeria Police Force is still largely vicious and corrupt. Political opponents of government and military administrations usually workers, students, radicals and human rights activist continue to suffer excessive and recurrent waves of brutalities, abductions unwarranted searches and violations of private family life, extra-judicial killings, bodily injury, intimidation, harassment and loss of personal liberties in the hands of the police and sundry state "intelligence" and security agencies in the country.

Modus Operandi

The formation of Police Special Anti-Robbery Squad was known to operate covertly or undercover. The operatives were not allowed to wear police uniform, publicly carry guns or have walkie-talkies. They were given unmarked vehicles with sometimes no license plates or private plate numbers during duty.

Functions and Duties of SARS

The Nigeria Police Force Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Department (FCIID) is the highest investigating arm of the Nigeria Police Force. Its functions include investigation and prosecution of serious and complex criminal cases within and outside the country. The Department also do response for effective and efficient administration, the NPF CID is divided into section with most of them headed by Commissioner of Police. The sections under the force Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Department include the following: Administration, Anti-Fraud section, the Central Criminal Registry (CCR), Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), Special Enquiry Bureau, X-Squad, General Investigation, Special Fraud Unit (SFU), Legal Section, Forensic Science, Interpol, Homicide, Anti-Human Trafficking Unit and CIB/SIB Force, CID Annex Kaduna.

Problem and Disbandment of SARS

The Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad of the Nigeria Police Force otherwise known as SARS were confronted with endemic problems and hereby dissolved in all the 36 states Police Formation Commands and Federal Capital Territory (Adamu, 2020). The Inspector General of Police announced the disbandment of SARS on October 11, 2020 following intense nationwide protests and menace against the Unit setup to tackle armed robbery and kidnappings.

The outfit was known for its brutality and abuse of power had been branded as an enemy of the people and an instrument of oppression. There are too many scandalous stories and videos of members of SARS involved in kidnapping, murder, theft, rape, torture, unlawful arrests. High – handedness, humiliation, unlawful detention, extra-judicial killings and extortion. SARS had been a problem for years. However, decentralizing Federal SARS was not enough. Finding of the panel on the reform of SARS had shown that there was a need to sanitize the squad's operations.

The panelists also observed that the detainees were kept in cells that were overcrowded and stinking and had inadequate access to food and healthcare. It was clear that restructuring could not improve the operations of SARS without a fundamental reorientation.

The Nigeria Police strength has grown from 112,000 to above half a million men. Despite this increase, crime has equally increased due to unemployment, poverty and frustrated Nigeria. Sadly, the Police itself is one of the worst victims of poor remuneration and motivation. The problem is a widespread. Amnesty International had documented 82 cases of the Squad's brutality in the past three years including hanging, mock execution, beating, punching and kicking, burning with cigarette, waterboarding and other violent tactics. Hundreds of protesters across globe camped outside a government building in ENDSARS now due to victimization and harmful to public as a whole.

Other problems of the Nigeria Police Force over the years has not been able to effectively carryout its functions. This includes:

- a) Inadequate arms and Ammunition: The Nigeria Police Force has shortage and inadequate arms, logistics, telecommunication gadgets and transportation facilities. The Police needs to be empowered with sophisticated weapons so that if confronted with criminals or armed robbers who usually have sophisticated weapons, they will be able to withstand them.
- b) Poor funding and Remuneration: The Police Force supposed to be paid well so that they don't lack most Police officers indulge in collecting bribes due to their meagre take home and remuneration. They are not adequately funded and this is evidenced in their inadequate office and poor residential accommodation.
- c) Corruption and Extortion are widespread among the members of the Nigeria Police Force. This practice has greatly soiled the image of the Police. Agreeing to this worrisome issue, Alemika (2003) argues that Police corruption is a serious issue because they are expected to be moral as Law Enforcement against. If the Police which are employed to prevent the detect corruption or crime and bring culprits to judgment are themselves corrupt, then the society is at risk.
- d) Lack of proper resources management. This practice has also greatly impacted negatively on the Police efficiency. These management inadequacies.
- e) Lack of integrity: Integrity is a fundamental principle of public officers. It guides one's conduct in discharging official duties. The Nigeria Police Force for example lacks integrity. The officers have no respect for the job, they are highly unreliable and often demonstrate this by involvement in crime or collusion with criminals. In their routine works, they tend to protect the rich. Their status often used to oppress their fellow citizens through bribery, blackmail and intimidation (Daudu, 2008).

Reformation Approach Methods

Reformation is the effort to restore a man to society as a better and wiser man and a good citizen (Ashok, 2012). This approach seeks to bring about a change in the attitude of the offender so as to rehabilitate him as a law abiding member of the society. Thus punishment is used as a measure to reclaim the offender and not torture or harass him (it is to be noted that Gandhi diagnosed offenders as patients and regarded. The ultimate aim of the punishment is to "resocialize" the offender to readjust him to society, to rehabilitate him and to change him deep inside (Vitale, 2017).

According to reformationists, a criminal is to be studied like a patient in his entire socio-economic milieu and not in isolation to understand causative factors leading treat and rehabilitate the offender. However, rehabilitation aim counteracts the effect of disabling conditions by measures to recover the socio-cultural or economic deficiencies to the highest possible degree to restore psychological equilibrium and provide vocational guidance and employment.

Disbandment of Police Special Anti-Robbery Squad against Brutalization: Victimization and Reforms among Police Law Enforcement in Nigeria

Reformation gives an opportunity to deviants to reform themselves for conversion into a normal human being. The reformative view suggests that punishment is only justifiable if it looks to the future and not to the past. The reformative methods have proved useful in the cases of ENDSARS NOW, extra-judicial killings, police brutality, first offender victims, drug addicts and others forms of deterrence melted by the Police Force.

Reformation of the Nigeria Police Force

Buhari (2020) promises extensive Police reform that the disbandment of the Police Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) was the first step of the action called for Nigerians of a wholesome reform of the force. This collaborate his life broadcast on Channel Television and the Nation Newspaper (Tuesday 13th, October, 2020) that those Police Officer responsible for misconduct or wrongful acts be brought to justice. The Police Special Anti-Robbery Squad brutality among the citizens was characterized with injustice and illegality which duty is the protection of life and property of the citizens. The Police is made up of people carrying out their duties diligently and not to tarnish the reputation of the organization. Recently, the genuine concerns and agitations by Nigerians about the excessive use of force and in some cases extra-judicial killings and wrongful conduct of the men of the Nigeria Police Force (Buhari, 2020). The disbanding of Special Anti-Robbery Squad is a commitment to extensive police reforms in order to ensure that the primary duty of the Police and other law enforcement agencies remains the protection of lives and livelihood of the people (The Nation, 2020:13:10). Police reform and restructuring will bring about the transformation as well as commitment to wrongful conduct are duly investigated and prosecuted.

David (2020) observed that the Police reforms comprises a vast complex of institutions and agencies across the spectrum that share a narrative of Police as an essential requires total respect but occasional tinkering these Police reformists convene special commissions where they conduct investigation and come to similar suggestion, conclusion and propose solution which rarely differ in Commission reports. The Organizing principle of Police reform is the idea that the Institution of Police is perfectible. This notion of perfectibility depicts Police whether good or bad today, as absolutely essential and always on a path of improvement. Perfectibility includes concepts such as accountability, Police oversight and Professionalization. These are Police reform's key term to hold Police accountable. The problem is not institutional but situational. Reform, as the primary driver of this eternal pursuit of improvement is always calibrated to restore our faith in police by reminding of their goodness and the very problems and how Police Unit that have been subjected to reform measures, usually by the institution are actually rewarded for their misconduct or police brutality.

Police reform sought to make the police more diverse, multicultural or colorblind as well as rebranding the Force to embrace new techniques and modernization. The reform does not confront Police but rather attempts to co-opt the communities that hold animosity towards Police. It is the Force of progress, order and security tied as it is to the view of Police as the defense the legitimacy of protest against Police (Vitale, Alex, 2017). Police reform is the sine qua non of Police legitimacy without reform there is no Police.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The Nigeria Police Force have been bedeviling with serious challenges confronting human society since inception ranging from lack of integrity, corruption, brutality, lack of accountability, effectiveness and efficiency in the detection, prevention and control of crime. The attitude and perception of Nigeria Police Force remain unchanged which explains major reasons of crime increased. Therefore, reformation and restricting of the Force is a wakeup call to instill positive transformation and values in order to ensure effective service delivery on the organization.

The Police have a tremendous power to discipline any hiring officer whom the public entrust their safety should act in honorable according to ethical values and codes of conduct within the organization. The paper recommends modern techniques and scientific approach to improved Police Force without resorting to torture as methods for gathering evidence and obtaining confession. The Police SARS Unit should ensure adequate peace, order and security of lives and property of the citizens in discharging their duties. They should be indispensable organization of social control, maintenance of peace and stability in the country. There should be synergy between Police and members of society to enhance better policing and crime management.

REFERENCES

- Adamu, M (2020) Inspector General of Police Orders Immediate disbandment of Special Anti-Robbery Squad across all formation of States and Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Pulse Nigeria. 2019-01-21. Retrieved 2010-11-10.
- Alemika, E.E.O (1993) "Colonialism, State and Policing in Nigeria" *Crime, Law and Social Change* 20:189-219.
- Alemika, E.E.O (2003) Forthcoming. *Police, Policing and Rule of Law in Traditional Countries: In lone bindholt etal; Eds. Police Rules of Law in Traditional Societies. Denmark Centre Forhuman Rights. Kluwer Publisher.*
- Ashok, K.J (2012). *Criminology: Penology and Victimology*. Ascent Publications, Shakti Nagar, Delhi.
- Ayodele, O (2005) *Sociology of Victimization: Victimology and Penology. Lecture Note: Department of Sociology, Nasarawa State University, Keffi. 2004/2005.*
- BBC News (2017) *Nigeria Anger at Police Brutality Video: Retrieved 2020 – 02 – 26.*
- Buhari, M. (2020) *Disbandment of Special Anti-Robbery Squad; Beginning of Police Reform: Press Released on 12th October, 2020, Channel Television.*
- Channel TV (2020) *Channel Television Network News 10 – 11.*
- Danbazau, A.B (2007) *Criminology and Criminal Justice: Nigeria Defence Academy Press, Kaduna.*
- Daniel, I. (2008) *Review of Crime Victimization in Lafia Town: M.Sc. Time Paper presentation at Benue State University, Makurdi – 2008.*
- Daniel, I. (2020) *Community Policing Relations and Partnership among Law Enforcement in 21st Century Crime Regulation, Prevention and Management, Nasarawa State: International Institute for Policy Review and Development Strategies (IIPRDS) Internal Journal Series.*
- Dauda, M (2008) *Commenting on the Helpless State of Police When confronted with Armed Robbers. Tell Magazine, 2008.*
- David, C & Tyler, W (2018) *Police: A Field Guide.*

Disbandment of Police Special Anti-Robbery Squad against Brutalization: Victimization and Reforms among Police Law Enforcement in Nigeria

David, C (2020) An Excerpt from Police: A Field Guide by David Correia and Tyler Wall, a radical glossary of the vocabulary of policing that redefines the very way we understand law enforcement. Now available as a FREE.ebookhere.

Ehindero S.G & Alemika, E.E.O (2005) Human Rights and Law Enforcement in Nigeria. Nigeria Police Force Louis Edet House: Force Headquarters, Abuja, FCT, Nigeria.

Gyong, J.E (1989) The Victim of Crime and the Criminal Phenomenon” A paper presented at the Department of Sociology Staff Seminar Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, August, 1989.

Ibidapo-Obe, A. (1995) “Police Brutality: Dimension and Control” In Chukwuma Innocent and Akin Ibidapo-obe (eds) Law Enforcement and Human Rights in Nigeria, Lagos: Civil Liberties Organisation.

Igbo, E.M (2006) Criminology: A Basic Introduction: Jock-Ken publisher plot 3 Umuezei Avenue, Enugu: Nigeria.

Salami, L. (2019) Hand in the hair: Nigeria Police and Men with dreadlocks: Global Comment. Retrieved 2020.

The Nation Newspaper Vol. 13, No. 5187, Tuesday, October, 13, 2020. ENDSARS. Pp 5:18:40.

Timbee, Akuu (2011) The Role of the Nigeria Police Force in Maintaining Peace and Security in Nigeria: Journal of Social Science and Public Policy. Vol 3. Pp 16 – 23.

Vanguard News (2017) How I founded SARS in the Police. RTD CP Midends. Retrieved 2020 – 02-25.

Vitale, Alex, S (2017) The End of Policing, verso Books, 2017, Schrader, Stuart; “The Liberal Solution to Police Violence: Restoring Trust Will Ensure more Obedience,” The Independent June, 30 2015.

Wikipedia (2020) Special Anti-Robbery Squad: en.m.wikipedia org.wiki.special-anti. ENDSARS.en.m.wikipedia.org. 11th October, 2020.

*EXSOC/2020/001/J. Noah/exsocjournal@yahoo.com/FRB/06/11/2020/IRDI/****169*