

# Systematic Brutality, Torture and Abuse of Human Rights by the Nigerian Police: Narratives of Inmates in Ogun State Prisons

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**DOI:10.36108/NJSA/7102/51(0110)**

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## **Abstract**

*Nigeria is a country where serious cases of abuse of police authority and human rights infringements by security agents often stimulate intense public debate. Though there have been consistent denials by the leadership of the Nigerian Police on the use of torture-based interrogations to elicit information from arrestees, extant literature affirms that the police rely on different forms of torture as principal means of investigation. This paper appraised the recurrent problem of brutality and abuse of human right by the Nigerian police. Triangulating both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection which included questionnaires administered on 1000 accidentally selected inmates, 50 purposively selected in-depth interviewees and 10 officials of the five prisons in Ogun State who were key informants. The study found that the police rely heavily on the use of torture to elicit “confessions” from arrestees. Former detainees reported experiences that included being bound and suspended mid-air in painful positions, kicked and beaten with machetes, gun butts, boots, fists, electrical wires, animal hides, and other instruments. The lack of capacity to conduct proper criminal investigation is responsible for the reliance of the police on torture-induced confessions. Therefore, there is need for the government to improve on the capacity of the Police in their investigative responsibilities and encourage professionalism amongst its rank and file.*

**Keywords:** Brutality, human rights infringement, criminal investigations, Nigeria Police

## **Introduction**

Police brutality, use of torture as interrogative technique and other wanton abuses of human rights remain some of the major flaws of the Nigeria Police Force which has attracted public odium, opprobrium, and condemnation to the Force (Amnesty International, 2015; Ogunode, 2015). Torture, described as one of the most extreme forms of violence, resulting to both psychological and physical consequences is sometimes considered as an indispensable interrogation mechanism for gathering strategic intelligence (Constanzo & Gerrity, 2009; Makwerere, Tafadzwa & Musorowegomo, 2012; Justice Project Pakistan, 2014). Empirical studies have shown that torture and other forms of

violent abuse can have enduring negative effects on both survivors and perpetrators, and is ineffective for obtaining reliable information in interrogation (Egede, 2007; Constanzo & Gerrity, 2009).

The activities of the police as an institution are meant to be guided at the national and international level by conventions, standards and treaties (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966). In spite of state prohibitions against torture and custodial misconduct by the police, torture has been reported as being commonly used in police custodies across Nigeria, which is a major reason behind deaths in custody (Amnesty International, 2014; 2015). According to the Network on Police Reform in Nigeria (NOPRIN, 2010), personnel of the Nigeria Police routinely carry out summary executions of persons accused or suspected of crime; rely on torture as a principal means of investigation; commit rape of both sexes, and engage in extortion at nearly every opportunity. Violent treatment of accused persons by the police or other law enforcement officers is strongly against Article 5 of the Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, resolution 34/169 of 17 December 1979:

No law enforcement official may inflict, instigate or tolerate any act of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, nor may any law enforcement official invoke superior orders or exceptional circumstances such as a state of war or a threat of war, a threat to national security, internal political instability or any other public emergency as a justification of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

A former Inspector-General of Police, Ibrahim Coomasie once accused the NPF of “barbaric treatment of Nigerians” (*Punch*, 2016: 38). For instance, there were reports from some female ex-detainees of sexual abuse by police officers, including being raped and having pepper spray used on their genitals. However, in a swift response to the Amnesty International report, the NPF rejected the report in which the SARS were accused of torturing detainees and demanding bribes to free them (*Premium Times*, 2016). The Police described the report in its entirety as “misleading, a clear misrepresentation of facts, unverified accounts and absolute distortion of the current situation in Special Anti-Robbery Squad [SARS] throughout the country.” The police, in a statement on Thursday by its spokesperson, Don Awunah, a Deputy Commissioner of Police, said the report was evidently the characteristic mind-set and pattern of Amnesty International to deride and castigate public institutions especially in developing countries like Nigeria. This therefore underscores empirical studies directed at finding out facts about the treatment of arrestees in police custody across the country.

Worried by the incessant reports of human rights abuse of the members of the Police Force, the Inspector-General of Police, Ibrahim Idris, recently warned the Special Anti-Robbery Squad operatives against torture and extra-judicial killings, saying “no policeman in the world had the right or authority to kill crime suspects” (*Punch*, 2016: 23). He admonished the SARS personnel to always respect the right of every Nigerian, noting that this was the way they could change the negative public perception about them. SARS detainees are held in a variety of locations, including a grim detention centre in Abuja known as the ‘Abattoir’, where Amnesty International found 130 detainees living in overcrowded cells.

Constant and consistent reports are received from lawyers, human rights activists, social analysts, and journalists about police regularly demanding bribes, stealing, extorting money and engaging in different forms of brutality and abuse of rights (Amnesty International, 2014; Aborisade & Fayemi, 2015). However, not many empirical studies have been conducted to detail out the manner of abuse and systematic brutality that arrestees are exposed to while in police custody. This may largely be due to the difficulty in gathering data on the subject matter from police departments across the country as a result of the “code of silence” with which such matters are treated. This informs the decision to engage prison inmates in this present study as detainees in police custody and police officers may be economical with the truth on the use of torture and other forms of violence by the police. In addition, this present study aims to explore and expose the investigative techniques deployed by the police and the manner of relationship of the men of the Force with their arrestees in the light of the accusations and denials that have trailed the issue of brutality and abuse of human rights of the police.

### ***Theoretical Framework: Social Conflict, Symbolic Interactionism and Police Brutality***

A substantial amount of scholarly attention has been drawn to the topic of police brutality and human rights abuses over the last few decades (Hickman, Piquero, Lawton & Green, 2001; Holmes, Smith, Freng & Munoz, 2008; Frank, 2009; Alemika, 2003; King, 2009; Wolfe & Piquero, 2011). In spite of that, a large number of scholars have asserted that theory-based research has only recently emerged to specifically explain the brutality of police behaviour (Chamlin, 1989; Lersch, 1998; Hickman, Piquero, Lawton & Green, 2001; Wolfe & Piquero, 2011). There are theorists of various orientations that attempts at finding the causality of violence perpetrated by the police (Jacobs & Britt, 1979; Westmarland, 2006; Holmes *et al.*, 2008). This study will apply two of the more popular existing theories:

**Social Conflict Theory:** These theorists hold that the state functions as an instrument of the dominant class, such as race, economic class and ethnic groups (Lersch, 1998: 82). Government institutions which include police force

are the product of political processes which reveal the interests of the powerful in society. As postulated by these theorists, the main function of the police is to preserve the status quo of inequality and assist the powerful to exploit the powerless in order to prevent their resistance to the exploitation that they suffer (Holmes *et al.*, 2008; Lersch, 1998). Also, consequent on the analysis of formal complaints made by Lersch (1998), he discovered that the economically marginalised and politically powerless were more likely to file complaints of police misconduct and to “experience more serious acts of misconduct” than those with greater power and more resources (91).

Supporting this school of thought, which originated from Marxist tradition, is documented evidence on the establishment of the Police Force in Nigeria by the colonialists, which was primarily to meet the need of the colonialists to crush civilian opposition (Aborisade & Fayemi, 2015). During the colonial period, both the local police force and the Nigeria Police Force were implicated in numerous acts of abuse and corruption (Human Rights Watch, 2012). The engagement of the police with the populace was situated on the need to enforce colonial laws that attracted debilitating and hateful reactions from the people, including segregation, forced taxation and crushing of anti-colonial uprisings (Aborisade & Fayemi, 2015).

In the present democratic Nigeria, it is evident that classes and groups that have dominant economic power equally control political decision-making, including the enactment of criminal law by the legislature, its enforcement and interpretation by the police and judiciary respectively. Also, there are differentials in police treatment of high profile and low profile offenders. The respect of human rights is often extended to rich arrestees as against the poor that are often subjected to different forms of abuses, violations and brutality. Hence, there is a common belief that the law that governs the affluent is significantly different from the law of the poor (Ogunode, 2015). In corroborating this postulation, Human Rights Watch (2010), stated that the police as an institution is often regarded as an instrument of oppression by the ruling class and bureaucrats. They are willing “tools” in the hands of the state rulers and bourgeoisie to secure them from any uprising from the oppressed (Egede, 2007). This explains why the rights of the rich are more protected over and above that of the poor within the society (Ogunode, 2015).

However, despite empirical evidence that indicate that police-citizens’ interaction is characterized by the power dynamics of racial, gender and class divisions, there are a few limitations of social conflict theory in effectively explaining the causality of police brutality and rights abuse. As a macro-sociological theory, it tends to assume that it is the external influence of the elite class which constructs and mandates police officers’ behaviours in their daily encounters with civilians (*Punch & Gilmour*, 2010). Though this hold true to explain the way the police have often being used as instruments of oppression by Nigerian elites to torment the masses by means of indiscriminate arrest, torture and infringement of their rights (Okeshola, 2013). However, exclusively limiting one’s understanding of the phenomenon of human rights

abuses by police to this theoretical framework is undoubtedly oversimplifying the micro-level decision making processes of the parties involved. This therefore justifies the adoption of the symbolic interactionist perspective in examining police brutality and human rights abuses in Nigeria from a micro-sociological lens.

**Symbolic Interactionist Theory:** This theory can effectively compliment conflict theory to explain why some officers engage in brutality, torture and other forms of human rights abuses while officers of other units within the same NPF do not engage in it. Therefore, as against the macro-level theory, symbolic interactionism emphasises the subjective meanings and significant influences of socialisation in explaining the patterns of micro-level social interactions (Mead, 1934). As interactions between people, including violent encounters between civilians and police officers, are reciprocal on the part of two related parties, each party embodies its own reflected appraisal of the self, which subsequently influences one's behaviours when engaging in interpersonal relationships. The concept of "the self" is argued to be greatly influenced by the subjective interpretations and "reflection of appraisals" made by the reference groups (Mead, 1934; Matsueda, 1992). This formation of self-identity is applied to individuals' behaviours and interactions through "role-taking," which then constructs the general social structures (Matsueda, 1992). The theory also "stresses that people help to create their social circumstances and do not merely react to them" (Goffman, 1959; Matsueda, 1999; Brym, Lie & Rytina, 2009).

As it can be extrapolated from symbolic interactionism, civilians and police both learn to behave in accordance to the norms, rules and expectations of a given society. In the context of police-civilian interactions, consistent with the the perspectives of the Marxists, members of the minority groups and police officers are likely to be viewed as "rule violators" and oppressors respectively in the eyes of one another. The peculiarity of the organisational culture of the police makes police apparatus to act as an officer's situationally dominant reference group when any issue arises on duty (Ouchi, 1979). First, under the precondition of the lack of appropriate constraints imposed by the upper body of the society, a police officer must have internalised his role as a control agent and that of authority in order to engage in the act of human right abuse. The police divisions and the political elites portray the role of police as control agents and "crime fighters," rather than social workers to serve the interest of the public (Fry & Berkes, 1983). Institutionalisation of an abstract group identity, as Matsueda (1992) argues, is "the most effective form of social control" because people eventually learn to act according to the expected code of conduct (Mead, 1934: 1581). Subsequently, the society at large accepts the authority of the police (whether willingly or not) and interacts with them in a rather submissive manner. Finally, the officers internalise their new

occupational identity and enact their expected role to maintain social control in society.

As scholars have observed the organisational culture and structure significantly influence the behaviour of individual officers and teaches them to internalise values, attitudes, and beliefs that are used to ensure that appropriate occupational and/or organisational behaviours are adopted” (Ouchi, 1979; Fry & Berkes, 1983: 226). The degree to which each segment of the police force employs the “paramilitary police model,” embraces the soldier-bureaucrat identities and appraises the value of attaining control over civilians differs considerably (Fry and Berkes, 1983). Also, the more an officer is exposed to other officers’ misconduct, the more susceptible he is to “slide further down the slippery slope” and take on the role of “brutal officer” – also known as “reciprocal role-taking” (Matsueda, 1992; Punch and Gilmour, 2010: 11).

The postulations of both the social conflict and symbolic interactionist theories have provided a holistic theoretical approach that considers both micro- and macro-sociological explanations for the contravention of human rights by law enforcement officers in Nigeria. The social conflict theory tends to assume that it is the external influence of the elite class which constructs and mandates police officers’ behaviours in their daily encounters with civilians. On the other hand, symbolic interactionist theory is able to address the variations between units and segments and explain why only some officers become “bad apples” and why some will rather conform to ethics of their job.

## **Methodology**

### ***Area of the Study***

Victimisation survey is considered as important source of reliable information, as a basis for understanding and combating crime (Van Dijk, Van Kesteren & Smit, 2008). The survey for this study was conducted in prison environment to elicit information from inmates about their experience while in prison custody prior to their conviction or transfer to the prison facility. This study excluded detainees in police custody as attempts to include some police divisions in the study were rebuffed by the authorities of the stations. Therefore, since the prison inmates had passed through arrest and detention stages before being admitted into prison, they were considered relevant respondents for the study as ex-detainees of the police. The study conducted a mixed-method victimisation survey that covered all the five (5) prison facilities in Ogun State.

Ijebu-Ode prison, established in 1925 with a capacity for 322 inmates, as at the time of visit of the researcher (24 July–12 August, 2016), there were 316 (male: 298 and female: 18) inmates in the prison. Meanwhile, the Old Abeokuta Prison, Ibara was established in 1900 to house a capacity of 900 inmates, as at the time of the researchers’ visit, the total inmate population was 771 (male: 741, female: 30). Sagamu prison was established in 1936 with a capacity of 288 inmates and there were 227 inmates as at the time of the visit of researchers. The New Abeokuta Prison located at Oba was established in 1986 with a capacity 550 inmates, while 448 prisoners were residents when

researchers visited the facility. As it can be observed, none of the prisons visited are overcrowded. According to the prison officials, this is as a result of decongestion policy of prison service authority.

### ***Methods of Data Collection***

Qualitative and quantitative primary data were obtained from prison inmates from the five prisons while their officials were also included in the study as key informants. The sample size 1,000 selected using the convenience sampling technique. In-depth interviews and key informant interviews were conducted with 50 purposely selected inmates and 10 purposively selected prison officials respectively. The selection criteria for respondents of in-depth interviews amongst the participants of the research included their detention experience (as indicated in the questionnaire), the length of stay in police detention, and willingness to participate in in-depth interview.

Approval for the study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State. Volunteering officials of the Prison assisted in the distribution and collection of questionnaires from the inmates which facilitated a total recovery of all questionnaires administered. The respondents were duly informed about the purpose of the study and other rights as respondents of the study including confidentiality while both written and verbal consents were obtained from them before the interviews took place. Data collected from the field were analysed in order to meet with the research objectives and answer the research questions raised. Information from In-depth Interview and Key Informant Interview collected with electronic tape and notes were later transcribed, synthesized and organized under thematic headings. Significant statements were quoted verbatim to corroborate or refute important findings. Information gathered from the questionnaire was analysed using descriptive statistical tools and the statistical programme for social sciences SPSS software. Descriptive statistics was used for the summarising of frequency and measures of central tendency.

**Results and Discussions****Table 1: Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

<b>Details</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	977	97.7
Female	23	2.3
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100.00
<b>Age</b>		
18-24years	330	33.0
25-34years	434	43.4
35-49years	175	17.5
50years & above	61	6.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100.0
<b>Ethnic</b>		
Yoruba	630	63.0
Hausa	115	11.5
Igbo	159	15.9
Others	96	9.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100.0
<b>Length of stay in Prison</b>		
>6 months	177	17.7
<6 months >1 year	137	13.7
1-5 years	484	48.4
6-10years	93	9.3
>11 years	109	10.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100.0

Table 1 shows that 98% of the respondents were males while the 2% were females. This is so because the statistics of male inmates available in the prisons visited outweighs that of female significantly considering the fact that only two prisons (Ijebu Ode and Ibara) can accommodate female offenders. The table also shows that 45% of the respondents were between the ages of 25-34, 40% of the respondents fell between the age ranges of 18-24, 18% of the respondents were between 35-49years while 4% of the respondents were 50years and above. This shows that all the age ranges participated in the research giving it a better description of the concept under study.

It is also shown that 64% of the respondents were Yoruba, 16% of the respondents were Igbos, 12% of the respondents were Hausas while 8% of the respondents chose others (Cotonou, Delta, Benue, Edo). This therefore implies that the respondents represented diverse ethnic groups which make it imperative for the generalization of the scenario in Nigeria. The table also shows that 53% of the respondents had stayed in the prison within the duration of 5years, 19% of the respondents were less than 6 months in the prison, 15% of the respondents had stayed in the prison lesser than 1year but more than 6months, 10% had stayed in the prison for 6-10years while 3% of the



respondents were above 11years in the prison. This shows that all level of inmates participated in the study.

**Table 2: Prison Inmates’ encounter with the Nigerian Police**

Details	Frequency	Percent
<b>Abuse by Police</b>		
Yes	678	67.8
No	322	32.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100.00
<b>Slapped by Police</b>		
Yes	666	66.6
No	334	33.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100.00
<b>Kicked by Police</b>		
Yes	645	64.5
No	355	35.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100.00
<b>Beaten by Police</b>		
Yes	758	75.8
No	242	24.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100.00
<b>Injured by Police</b>		
Yes	688	68.8
No	312	31.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100.00
<b>Police pointed gun at you</b>		
Yes	665	66.5
No	335	33.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100.00
<b>Police threatened to shoot you</b>		
Yes	634	63.4
No	366	36.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100.00
<b>Sexually assaulted by Police</b>		
Yes	402	40.2
No	598	59.8
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100.00

Table 2 shows that 76% of the respondents agreed that the Nigerian police battered them at the point of arrest and their stay in the custody, 69% of the respondents sustained injury in the cause of their encounter with the Nigeria police, 68% of the respondents also agreed that they were abused. The table also shows that 67% of the respondents attest to being slapped by the Nigeria police and also pointed gun at, 65% of the respondents agreed to be kicked by

the Nigeria police, 63.4% of the respondents were threatened to be shot by the Nigeria police, while 40% of the respondents were sexually assaulted. This result shows that Nigerian police subject suspects to various forms of human right abuse neglecting the constitution and international code/conduct as well as the treaties signed against brutality and torture.

Furthermore, the study sought to examine the kind of weapon that the police officials used to abuse or torture the arrestees from the point of arrest through detention. Table 3 shows the response of the ex-detainees.

***The Investigative Techniques Deployed by the Police and its Consequences***

Based on the wide reports that the Nigeria Police mainly rely on confession approach at conducting its investigation, this study enquired from the ex-detainees on the weapons and methods used to elicit confession from them. Table 3 shows the responses of the prison inmates on whether weapons were used on them during interrogation:

**Table 3: Weapon Deployed by the Police for Eliciting Information from Arrestees**

Details	Frequency	Percent
<b>Club or Baton</b>		
Yes	590	59.0
No	410	41.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100.00
<b>Knife or other sharp objects</b>		
Yes	584	58.4
No	416	41.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100.00
<b>Rope, Wire or Horse Whip</b>		
Yes	576	57.6
No	424	42.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100.00
<b>Electric Iron or Boiling Ring</b>		
Yes	501	50.1
No	499	49.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100.00
<b>Others</b>		
Yes	175	17.5
No	825	82.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100.00

Table 3 shows that 59% of the respondents agreed that Nigeria police uses baton in their interaction with them, 58% of the respondents agreed that knife and other sharp objects e.g. cutlass were deployed to make them confess their offenses prior the court hearing, 58% also attest to the use of rope, wire and horse whip during the process of investigation on their case. The table also

shows that 50% of the respondents agreed that electric iron and boiling ring were used during their interaction while 17.5% noted that the Nigeria police subjected them to hanging on the air during their interactive session. The above shows that Nigeria Police adopts different weapons to make arrestees make confessions for their offenses.

This statistical information was also corroborated by respondents of in-depth interviews as majority of those interviewed described the violent ways with which confessions were extracted from them. One of them volunteered:

I was beaten severely to confess what I didn't do. I was beaten with a baton and a long pipe used to lose trailer tyre. I was shot on my left leg just to confess. They also injured me on my left hand – leaving scar on my body... (*Respondent 2/IDI/Sagamu Prison*)

Another respondent added:

I have a lot of experience ranging from being beaten at the point of arrest (1:00am midnight) in front of my parents within our compound. One officer requested to shoot my leg– if not for the presence of my brother DSP at Abuja. Before the day break, I could no longer walk because I was beaten mercilessly. They took me to the torture room immediately my brother left requesting me to say the truth about an incident that happened two months ago– when the robbery took place. At the torture room, the police officer said they can do anything for me – there was a pillar in the room. I was unable to walk to the pillar; my hand at the back and was hanged onto a swing pushing me anyhow and pouring schnapps on me...I was in the torture room for twenty four minutes with series of punishment; hanging, beating and pouring water on me. I couldn't talk immediately I was dropped but later regained consciousness just to be asked same question. Are you ready to confess? They battered our mechanic with cutlass and *Hausa's sunda* (herdsmen's stick) while been hanged me for 15 minutes. His back was flowing with blood due to the cutlass used for beating him. I was subjected at a point to say goodbye because the police officer had gun on him. He shot six bullets around me– he threatened to kill me. They requested me to write a statement on how I robbed the woman and those things we collected. They tortured me to sign a statement indicting my intent... (*Respondent 5/IDI/Sagamu Prison*)

The study further moved to examine the physical and psychological effects of the interrogation methods used by the police on their arrestees. Table 4 shows

the forms of injuries sustained by the ex-detainees during their interrogation and stay in police detentions.

**Table 4: Injuries Sustained by Prison Inmates during Police detention**

<b>Details</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Minor Scratches</b>		
Yes	544	54.4
No	456	45.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100.00
<b>Severe cuts or wounds on the body</b>		
Yes	706	70.6
No	29.4	29.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100.00
<b>Difficulty in breathing or fainting</b>		
Yes	593	59.3
No	40.7	40.7
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100.00
<b>Serious Head Injuries</b>		
Yes	578	57.8
No	422	42.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100.00
<b>Broken Arms and Legs</b>		
Yes	560	56.0
No	440	44.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100.00
<b>Lasting physical scars</b>		
Yes	560	56.0
No	440	44.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100.00

Table 4 shows that 71% of the respondents sustained severe cuts or wounds on the body as a result of their encounter with the police, 59% of the respondents had difficulty breathing while some fainted during their interaction with the police, 58% of the respondents also sustained head injury since their encounter with the police. The table also shows that 56% of the respondents agreed that their legs and arms were broken during their police encounter, 54% of the respondents had minor scratches while an average percentage of the respondents had lasting physical scars on their body. This table noted that Nigeria police had left the prison inmates with physical and health related problems to cater for within their lifetime.

Also, respondents of in-depth interviews spoke about the effects of their detention experience and violence meted to them by the police:

It has affected me a lot because my hands were not in order. If not for my family that treated me, I would have been

handicapped. Ever since, I have sustained back pain.  
(Respondent 4/IDI/Ilaro Prison)

It has affected me because I was so weak to the extent that I was taken to the hospital immediately I got to the prison.  
(Respondent 3/IDI/New Abeokuta Prison)

The beaten and the gunshot really affected me to the extent that I was limping for two good years. I really suffered a lot to the extent that I was almost dead. Till now, no one knows I am still alive here. (Respondent 2/IDI/Sagamu Prison)

It has affected me because I now have a chest pain and was unable to hear very well up till now. (Respondent 6/IDI/Ijebu-Ode Prison)

A prison official corroborated the story of the ex-detainees:

...they come (from police detentions) with all sorts of medical cases that we have to manage here. Some females were even impregnated by the policemen, but because they give birth while in prison custody, there will be that believe that it is the prison officials that got them pregnant which is never true... (Prison Official 5/Ijebu-Ode)

### **Discussion of Findings**

This paper was motivated by the need to confirm or debunk the ongoing accusations and denials by human rights organisations and the Nigeria Police respectively on the abuse of rights of arrestees in police custody. While empirical studies have asserted that there is high rate of abuse of human rights of detainees in custody (Alemika, 2003; Egede, 2007; NOPRIN, 2010; Amnesty International, 2014), police authorities have denied such allegations describing it as “malicious and ill-informed” (*Premium Times*, 2016). However, findings from this study suggest that there is high prevalence of violence and abuse of human rights by the police as they go about their investigative procedures on criminal cases. Majority of the ex-detainees included in this study expressed varying degrees of violence that they were made to undergo both at the point of arrest and while in police custody. This goes to affirm the position of Amnesty International (2014) that detainees are often subjected to inhuman treatments in police custody which include being bound, kicked and beaten with machetes, gun butts, boots, fists, electrical wires, animal hides, and other instruments. Others include being shot in the leg or assaulted by police officers while in custody and suffering multiple fractures; being forced to perform impossibly painful calisthenics; and being raped.

This paper also supports the assertion that detainees suffer severe injuries and post-detention trauma as a result of the gruesome treatments that they are made to undergo in police cells (Egede, 2007; Boxer, Middlemass & Delorenzo, 2009). According to the degree of violence and human rights abuse suffered by offenders during investigation is capable to negatively impact on their adjustment to prison life after sentence. This can also lead to mental illness that can further aggravate the rehabilitative procedures of the inmates and pose a threat to the health of other inmates in prison. Studies have also found that sexual assaults of female arrestees are responsible for incidences of post-arrest pregnancy (Aborisade & Balogun, 2016).

The findings of this study also lend credence to the adopted theories for the research as socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents show that those that are at the lower rung of societal ladder suffer more brutality and abuse of human rights than the privileged within the society. This supports the postulation of Ogunode (2015) that there is a general social belief that the law that governs the affluent is significantly different from the law that applies to the poor. Similarly, the micro-sociological theory of symbolic interactionism was effective in explaining why some of the police officers do not engage in brutality and abuse of human rights like their colleagues (Mead, 1934; Matsueda, 1992) as evidenced from the respondents who expressed that they were never brutalised while in police custody.

### **Conclusion**

The systematic brutality of the police affects virtually every Nigerian, though at different levels, as the impact weighs down more on the poor. The operations of the Nigeria Police Force bear almost no resemblance of the requirements of the Nigerian law. The activities of the NPF are at marked variance with protecting human life, safety, and security, as it rather endangers the people they ought to protect. It is evident that lack of capacity to conduct proper criminal investigation is responsible for the reliance of the Police on torture-induced confessions. As a result of the multitude of police stations in the country and the manner of development of the authority and responsibility of these police stations and divisions, there has been little supervision and control of this problem.

Urgent measures are therefore required to return policing in Nigeria to the path of lawfulness, respectability, and public confidence. At present, there is no accountability for crimes committed by the police. The NPF is controlled at the federal level and its officers are not answerable to the local populations. The best approach to solve this dilemma of unlawful arrest and detention is through intelligent legislation in respect of the laws governing detention for investigative purposes. Other suggestions include, proper training and retraining of police office, deployment of advanced forensic techniques for investigations, improvement in the capacity of the police in their investigative responsibilities, encouragement of professionalism within its rank and file as well as effective punishment of erring officers as deterrence to others.

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