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An Exploration of Police-Public Cooperation Challenges

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Abstract

This study explores the challenges faced by officers engaged in community policing in southwestern Nigeria, utilising theoretical frameworks from Herzberg's two-factor theory and open systems theory. These challenges often lead to job dissatisfaction and reduced commitment among officers, necessitating strategies to empower officers in navigating societal dynamics, alleviating job dissatisfaction, and fostering stronger commitment to community policing. The research aims to explore obstacles presented by community members, underlying factors contributing to these challenges, and the nature and consequences of these challenges on officers and their commitment to community policing. Employing a qualitative approach with phenomenological methodology, the study conducts in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with officers from two state commands. Thematic analysis highlights challenges hindering community policing efforts in Nigeria, including deep-rooted distrust, negative perceptions, and historical injustices towards law enforcement. Factors such as fear of reprisal, systemic discrimination, and corruption within law enforcement exacerbate these issues. Recommendations include fostering transparency, procedural justice, accountability, and community empowerment to rebuild trust and enhance collaboration between police and communities. Legislative reforms and policy changes are also essential to overcome legal obstacles and promote decentralisation efforts in policing. Addressing economic disparities and investing in education and community development are crucial for creating environments conducive to successful collaborative policing efforts, ultimately fostering safer and more resilient communities.

Keywords: *Community Policing, Nigeria Police Force, Job Context Factors, Law Enforcement*

Introduction

Community policing, as both a philosophy and tactic, underscores the collaboration between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve, as outlined by Trojanowicz (1998) and Trojanowicz & Bucqueroux (1990). Ikuteyijo & Rotimi (2012) defined community policing as a cooperative partnership between law enforcement and community members, wherein individuals actively participate in upholding safety and security. Hussein et al. (2016) expanded on this by explaining that community policing involves joint efforts between the police and law-abiding community members to collectively tackle and prevent crime. This approach prioritizes collaboration and problem-solving to address the underlying causes of crime and disorder.

The People as Job Context Challenges of Community Policing

Community policing is seen as a transformative approach in law enforcement, emphasising collaborative efforts between police officers and the communities they serve (Ikuteyijo, 2009). Hence, community policing has an objective to foster collaboration between law enforcement and communities, empowering them to actively participate in ensuring neighbourhood safety (Trojanowicz, 1998). Therefore, community engagement, communication, and cooperation between law enforcement agencies and the public is

important (Braga et al., 2019; Lum et al., 2011). Furthermore, community policing is a proactive approach to law enforcement that emphasises collaboration between police officers and the communities to address crime and social disorder. Unlike traditional policing, which focuses primarily on reactive measures, community policing seeks to build trust, enhance communication, and empower communities to play an active role in crime prevention and public safety. However, the success of community policing initiatives heavily depends on the societal context in which they are implemented. Hence, despite the implementation of modern and community-oriented training programs within the Nigeria Police Force, the observed transformations and policing are still predominantly viewed as "reactive and combative rather than proactive" (Daniel, 2011). Moore (1992) argued that the predominant model, which stresses strictly professional law enforcement, has proven ineffective in crime prevention and control, neglected the professionalization of policing, and perpetuated a detrimental disconnect between police forces and the communities they serve.

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) faces a daunting mandate due to the inherent ambiguity of the law's role as an instrument of order, compounded by the uncooperative attitudes prevalent among the Nigerian public (Carter & Marenin, 1977). Yet, to maintain a positive public image, the police must prioritise the broader interests of the communities they serve in all operational decisions (Okereke, 1993). However, for the police to serve public interests and order maintenance, full public cooperation with the police is undeniably essential. The relationship between the police and the community can involve various interactions, perceptions, and assessments. Public and police sentiments toward each other are shaped by past experiences and influenced by information received from friends, education, media, and societal stereotypes (Carter & Marenin, 1977).

Media representations of law enforcement and crime play a significant role in shaping public perceptions of community policing efforts. Negative portrayals of police in the media, along with sensationalized crime stories and instances of police brutality, can fuel fear, distrust, and scepticism toward law enforcement agencies (Dowler et al., 2006). Conversely, positive media coverage that highlights successful community policing initiatives and collaborative problem-solving efforts can bolster public support and engagement. In Nigeria, media coverage of policing often mirrors broader societal challenges, including corruption, political instability, and human rights abuses (Abubakar et al., 2022). Biased or sensationalized reporting has the potential to erode confidence in law enforcement institutions and hinder efforts to promote and implement community-oriented policing.

Implementing community policing strategies has been challenging for the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) for different reasons. However, research efforts have primarily scrutinised these challenges through lenses such as changes in crime rates and public satisfaction, but insufficiently considered the people's influence on community policing implementation. It is especially important to consider such influence through police officers' perspectives given that such perceptions directly impact the effectiveness of community policing endeavours, shaping officers' interactions with community members and influencing cooperation and the overall success of crime prevention efforts.

Theoretical Frameworks

The Herzberg Two-Factor Theory

The Herzberg Two-Factor Theory, also known as the Motivation-Hygiene Theory by Herzberg (1959), suggests that there are two distinct sets of factors that influence employee motivation and job satisfaction: motivators and hygiene factors. Motivators, such as recognition, achievement, and growth opportunities, are intrinsic to the job itself and lead to

satisfaction when present. On the other hand, hygiene factors, such as working conditions, salary, and interpersonal relationships, are extrinsic to the job and, when inadequate, can lead to dissatisfaction but do not necessarily increase satisfaction when improved.

Applying the hygiene aspect of the Herzberg Two-Factor Theory to community policing, we can understand how the attitudes of the people towards police officers and policing practices serve as hygiene factors that impact officers' ability to deliver on their roles effectively. In community policing, officers rely heavily on cooperation and trust from the community to fulfil their duties, such as crime prevention, maintaining public order, and solving community problems. When the community perceives the police positively and trusts their intentions, it creates a supportive environment (hygiene factor) that enhances officers' job satisfaction and effectiveness. Conversely, negative perceptions, distrust, or hostility towards the police can create barriers and challenges (hygiene factors) that hinder officers' ability to engage with the community, gather information, and effectively address issues.

Open Systems Theory

The concept of open systems theory was proposed by biologist von Bertalanffy (1950) and subsequently expanded upon by organisational theorists. The theory views organizations as dynamic entities that interact with their external environment. In the context of community policing, this theory emphasizes the ongoing exchange of inputs (like resources and information) between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve. In the context of community policing, Open Systems Theory offers insights into the interactions between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve. Community policing operates within a broader societal context, where the police department interacts with various external stakeholders, including community members, local government, advocacy groups, and other law enforcement agencies. These interactions constitute the inputs and outputs of the open system of community policing.

When relations between the people and police officers are strained, it disrupts this exchange and creates dysfunction within the community policing system. Negative interactions, such as police misconduct or lack of responsiveness, lead to distrust and alienation among community members. This breakdown hampers cooperation, hindering law enforcement's ability to gather intelligence, address crime effectively, and maintain public safety. In situations of poor relations, the implications for policing outcomes are significant. Reduced community trust and cooperation can result in increased crime rates, decreased quality of life, and heightened tensions between law enforcement and the community. Therefore, Open Systems Theory underscores the importance of fostering positive relationships and open communication channels to ensure the effective functioning of community policing efforts.

This study utilizes theoretical frameworks from Herzberg's two-factor theory and open systems theory to examine the difficulties officers face when engaging with the public during community policing activities in South-Western Nigeria. These challenges often lead to job dissatisfaction and diminished commitment among officers. Addressing this knowledge gap is essential for developing strategies to empower officers in navigating the societal dynamics they confront, alleviating job dissatisfaction, and fostering a stronger commitment to community policing. Ultimately, these efforts aim to enhance the effectiveness of community-oriented law enforcement. Therefore, the research objectives of this study are to:

Explore the obstacles presented by community members to the practice of community policing.

Explore the underlying factors contributing to these challenges.

Assess the nature and consequences of these challenges on officers and their commitment to community policing.

Methods

Study Design

The methods used in this study have been previously described in (Ibrahim, Accepted). The research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing a phenomenological methodology (Creswell, 2003, 2007; Lester, 1999). By adopting this method, the study seeks to delve into and comprehend individuals' lived experiences and the subjective meanings they assign to these experiences (Lester, 1999; Merleau-Ponty, 2012). This approach facilitates an examination of the societal context and systemic challenges confronted by community police officers in their professional roles, as well as the factors that influence their commitment to community policing. For data collection, the study utilizes in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD), guided by a structured questioning guide developed based on the study's propositions. These open-ended questions are designed to elicit detailed insights into the challenges faced by community police officers and the societal factors impacting their dedication to community policing.

Participants

The study was conducted across two state commands, Ondo and Oyo, within the Nigeria Police Force, chosen randomly from the southwest region. These commands were selected to represent typical characteristics of the broader Nigeria Police Force, encompassing various divisions and departments. Data collection involved four In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) conducted at divisional police stations and two IDIs held at the commands' headquarters. Additionally, three Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) took place at divisional police stations. The distribution of IDI and FGD sessions across the research sites is detailed in Table 1. All IDI and FGD sessions occurred within participants' offices, providing a natural setting conducive to qualitative research. While social conditions were uncontrolled, efforts were made to manage the physical environment to ensure focus, with no extraneous activities or non-participants allowed in the offices during sessions. Participants were divided into IDI and FGD groups. The six IDI participants consisted of three Divisional Police Officers (DPO), one Divisional Crime Officer (DCO), and two heads of the community policing department. Two IDI participants held the rank of Chief Superintendent of Police (CSP), while four were Deputy Superintendents of Police (DSP), all of whom were male. The selection of male participants was based on availability as designated by the head of the division or department. The FGDs accommodated 7, 9, and 10 participants, respectively. In the 7-participant FGD, there were four rank-and-file officers, two inspectors, and one superior officer. The 9-participant FGD comprised three rank-and-file officers, two inspectors, and three superior police officers. Lastly, the 10-participant FGD included four rank-and-file officers, three inspectors, and three superior police officers, with both male and female officers randomly selected from three divisions.

Table 1: Pattern of Participant Selection for In-depth Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

Command	Division	IDI	Rank	Position	FGD	Rank	Position
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Ondo	A Division	1	Chief Superintendent of Police	Divisional Police Officer	1	Constable to Deputy Superintendent of Police	Investigating Police Officer to Divisional Crime Officer
	B Division	1	Chief Superintendent of Police	Divisional Police Officer	1	Corporal to Deputy Superintendent of Police	Investigating Police Officer to Divisional Crime Officer
	Headquarters	1	Assistant Superintendent of Police	Officer Commanding of Community Policing	-	-	-
Oyo	Eleyele	1	Deputy Superintendent of Police	Divisional Police Officer	-	-	-
	Mokola	-	-	-	1	Constable to Assistant Superintendent of Police	Investigating Police Officer to Patrol Guard
	Sango	1	Deputy Superintendent of Police	Divisional Crime Officer	-	-	-
	Headquarters	1	Deputy Superintendent of Police	Officer Commanding of Community Policing	-	-	-

Source: Computed field data, 2015.

Data Collection Materials

Interview Guide

The study utilized an interview guide tailored to align with the research objectives. The questions were non-leading, allowing insights to naturally emerge from participants' responses. This approach ensured that the interview guide remained dynamic throughout both the In-Depth Interviews (IDI) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), enabling real-time adjustments and spontaneous follow-up inquiries to thoroughly explore emergent themes. This flexible approach facilitated a comprehensive examination of the research objectives, with participant responses informing the main themes of the questions and leading to further probing.

Examples of the questions included:

- Identification of Obstacles: Participants were prompted to articulate challenges posed by community members to the practice of community policing, with queries such as "Please describe how the attitudes and behaviours of community members impact your work."
- Factors behind the Obstacles: Questions in this section aimed to elicit responses from participants and guide further exploration. For instance, participants were asked, "Can you elaborate on the factors you believe are responsible for these challenges?"
- Impact of Challenges: Participants were questioned about how the identified issues affect their job, with inquiries such as "How do the challenges you mentioned impact your day-to-day work?"

Digital Recording Device

To ensure accuracy, comprehensive documentation, and data integrity, a digital audio recording device was utilized to record all IDI and FGD sessions. This method effectively

captured nuances and subtleties in participants' responses, thereby enhancing the quality of the collected data.

Participant Recruitment and Data Collection Procedures

For this study, two state commands, Ondo and Oyo, were randomly selected from the southwest region. The community policing units within each command facilitated the identification of willing divisions for participation. Divisional Police Officers (DPOs) were contacted to assess the availability of officers for research, and divisions with responsive personnel were included. The community policing unit officers played a crucial role in coordinating and facilitating both in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). Before collecting data at each site, the study's purpose and procedures were clearly explained to the officers. Interested individuals were provided with informed consent forms, detailing the study's objectives. Participants willingly signed the consent forms, affirming their commitment to participate in the study.

The IDI and FGD sessions followed a consistent *modus operandi*, with researchers introducing themselves, explaining the study's purpose, and emphasising its academic nature. Confidentiality was maintained, with personal identifiers excluded from the data collection process. FGD sessions were structured to reflect group opinions, with participants encouraged to express agreement or disagreement with fellow discussants.

The interview format utilised open-ended questions, employing phrases like "tell me about" to elicit diverse responses. Basic counselling skills, including non-verbal understanding, active listening, reflection, and nodding, were employed to create a comfortable environment for open sharing. Careful attention was given to avoid straying into tangential topics that did not contribute meaningfully to the study's objectives. The average duration of IDIs was approximately one hour, while FGDs lasted approximately an hour and forty minutes on average.

Data Analysis

The analysis process began with the transcription of audio recordings into written texts. Conducting interviews and discussions in English facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the audio data. Multiple readings of the transcribed documents were performed to immerse the researcher in the data and discern the underlying ideas' tone and overarching meaning. Thematic analysis was conducted using Nvivo software, initially employing a deductive approach followed by an inductive one. This method allowed for a nuanced interpretation of participant responses. Thematic analysis involved identifying patterns (themes) within the data, utilizing both deductive and inductive approaches.

Following the guidelines outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006) and building upon them, the analysis comprised several steps:

Data Immersion: Thorough reading and re-reading of transcripts to familiarize with participants' responses and grasp the data's essence.

Deductive Initial Coding: Coding guided by the research objectives, focusing on job content factors impeding and encouraging commitment to community policing.

Inductive Code Generation: Examination of initial codes to uncover underlying patterns and meanings, labelling them accordingly.

Theme Development: Grouping of codes into themes based on relevance and relationships, organizing data into coherent clusters.

Theme Review: Scrutiny of emerging themes to ensure coherence and consistency, with careful wording to accurately capture each theme's essence.

Narrative Writing: Recounting data narratives, incorporating selected quotes to

support each theme and provide context.

Theme Validation: Confirming theme validity by revisiting the data to ensure alignment with participants' experiences.

Reflective practices were employed throughout the analysis process to address personal biases and preconceptions, fostering reflexivity.

Results

People in Society as Job Context Militating Against Community Policing

The data reveals several aspects of challenges that officers experience with the people as recounted by participants. The data is presented under different sub-themes below.

Non-Cooperation with Law Enforcement

Acceptance of and collaboration with law enforcement emerged as a significant concern. Participants observed a prevalent unwillingness among people to accept and cooperate with the police, indicative of deep-rooted distrust between law enforcement and the community. Some participants submitted as follows:

Some people have developed hatred for the police and they believe there is nothing good that can come out of the police. This is erroneous.

FGD Mokola Division

A participant similarly opined as follows:

In Nigeria, the public does not like cooperating with the police.

FGD Mokola Division

Many participants acknowledge that the unwillingness to accept the police on the part of individuals leads to a refusal to pass information regarding offensive and criminal activities. Some group discussants stated as follows:

There is a bad conception about the police in Nigeria, once you see a police coming to your area your enemy has come. And before you can get useful information to work with here it is very difficult but the Westerners are free with their police.

FGD A Division

An interviewee similarly responded as follows:

Bad relations with the police, low confidence in the police, and lack of communication with the police are among the factors hindering community policing. Many refuse to pass information to the police.

IDI A Division

Concerns Regarding Informant Reprisals

Many participants highlighted the issue of avoiding the police, supported by gathered data revealing people's tendency to steer clear of any interaction with law enforcement, even when necessary. This avoidance could stem from fear of the police or concerns about stigmatization, particularly in sensitive cases like rape. Some participants stated as follows:

The people are still afraid of giving information to the police.

FGD B Division

As a policeman, I may need information now. People just do not want to talk.

Perhaps they are thinking of negative consequences.
IDI Sango Division

Some participants deny that negative outcomes result when people provide information to the police:

People still believe that when they give information to the police they will be treated anyhow which is not true.
FGD B Division

Participants compared Nigeria's situation to that of other countries and reported as follows:

People in Western countries feel free to communicate with the police, but here people are afraid of talking to the police even when something happens and they know that the police should be informed of it.
FGD Mokola Division

They fear in giving information to the police unlike in some other countries. So there is no trust between the people and the police and inadequate communication between the two.
FGD Mokola Division

Previous Encounters and Misinformation Directed at Police

However, some participants also acknowledge that people's fear of providing information to the police may have been because of the way police have treated informants in the past. Some group discussants stated as follows:

It is true that some police officers expose their informants although some informants give wrong information because they just want to implicate others wrongly. Giving false information is a punishable offence under the law.
FGD B Division

An interviewee stated that some individuals give wrong information so as to implicate others they do not like:

At times some people pass information for their own personal aggrandizement or interest. Maybe for instance somebody owes them money or somebody is their tenant they may call you and give you wrong information about the person. If you do not assess the information and you act as if they pass the information to you, you will miss some targets and it can even affect your job.
IDI A Division

Informants as Culprits

Some participants suggest that informants may face unfair treatment from the police due to their own involvement in wrongdoing. Additionally, participants question the rationale behind avoiding the police if individuals have nothing to hide, implying that people may have undisclosed reasons for evading law enforcement interaction. Some participants stated as follows:

Another thing is that the people do not trust us but they also do not trust themselves. They say a clear mind fears no accusation. It is because they have skeletons in their cupboard and they do not want police to know that they do not want police near them. If you do not have anything to hide you do not have to avoid the police. Even if the police are bad and they still take you to the station they will still release you. So because people do not have confidence in

themselves, they do not have confidence in us.

IDI A Division

The Inefficacy of Community Policing Without Public Cooperation

Participants acknowledge that they can hardly do anything let alone succeed if individuals do not freely give police information. Policing can only be efficient if the people offer their assistance. An interviewee stated as follows:

What I am saying in essence is that the community must assist us because it is because of the assistance we will be able to know what is happening in the community. Because even if you have twenty million policemen on ground, there is no way you can police each street.

IDI A Division

Another interviewee similarly responded as follows:

If the people are assisting us and are relating very well with us it will be very easy for us because they will tell us what is happening in their community. And we will be able to come to their rescue in times of distress.

IDI A Division

An interviewee recounted some personal experiences to buttress the point that individuals are among forces militating against community policing:

I was once challenged when I went to deliver a lecture at BCOS sometime back. Someone told me that there is an island in a Western country with a high population but few police officers. Yet, the crime rate on this island is very minimal. The fact is that in that kind of place, everybody is a policeman. If you are strange in an area people will challenge you and ask you why you are there. So what I am trying to say is that apprehension of offenders, protection of life and properties, investigation of crimes, whatever the police duties, is centred on the community. And you can only do the best for the community when there is interchange of ideas.

IDI Sango Division

The people's support is indeed fundamental for successful policing. This is the position of an interviewee who opined as follows:

The whole police job of the police is built around the community. If you talk of apprehension of offenders, where do you apprehend offenders, it is within the community. And there are people who want to evade justice after committing offences or crimes. For you to be able to get that person and bring him to book you must collaborate with the community. Sometimes, they i.e. the community will give you information, describe a place for you and so on.

IDI Eleyele Division

Yet, many participants assured that police appreciated good information and handles it properly:

If you have genuine information to give to the police, police will treat such information with utmost secrecy.

FGD B Division

Lack of Community Financial Commitment to Policing

According to the participants, the lack of confidence that people have demonstrated in the police is not only manifested in the unwillingness to supply police with information but also in the fact that communities are not financially supportive of the police. Here are some of the submissions of participants:

Financial constraint is also a problem and that is why it is important for the community to have some level of financial commitment in order to make the process work. For instance, donating patrol vehicles to the police, contributing to building a community police station, etc. Having done this, the police too will have to be accountable to the people so that they will be encouraged to do more.

IDI B Division

Some group discussants similarly submitted as follows:

In other countries, they do not leave the financing of police to the government alone. But in Nigeria, we feel the government must be responsible for everything. In other countries, some communities can provide logistics or whatever the police may need to enhance their performance. In other countries, organizations around the vicinity such as banks assist the police.

FGD Mokola Division

Low Literacy Level

A low level of literacy was another people-related job context factor militating against community policing. Participants believed that low literacy makes it almost impossible for the average community member to know their rights and duties. These affect community policing in different ways. Some participants stated as follows:

Illiteracy and lack of knowledge on the part of the people is a problems to community policing.

FGD A Division

The level of literacy of the community members is very low and it is a problem.

FGD A Division

Some participants similarly remarked as follows:

Most people do not know what community policing entails.

FGD Mokola Division

Our people are novices. Things that are not supposed to panic them are what they panic and fidget over. Those are some of the things militating against the practice of community policing.

IDI Sango Division

Many participants compared the attitude of Nigerians with that of their counterparts in other countries:

Another thing is that in advanced countries their level of education and enlightenment is high, with a low level of poverty. They are free with the

*police and when they pass information everybody goes back to his or her own business.....*IDI Headquarters

In the US for example, the citizens are well enlightened, they know the law and their fundamental human rights. Our people are not learned like in the Western world.

FGD B Division

Colonial History of Police

The historical, traditional conception of the police was very noticeable from accrued data. The attitude of people towards the police probably resulted from such a traditional conception. Participants noted that such traditional conception still affects police-policed relationships. Some participants stated as follows:

You know that from the historical background of policing itself, it was introduced by our colonial masters to intimidate, to oppress. So that mentality is still there with people seeing the police as an instrument of oppression. They do not see anything good coming out of the police.

FGD A Division

An interviewee similarly stated as follows:

You know the colonial mentality is still affecting our people because the colonial police were police of suppression.

IDI A Division

Indeed, the probability that historical factors have affected the police-policed relationship is high. Some group discussants recounted as follows:

When I was younger in the village, I remember that the police were seen as an oppressive instrument. In ancient days, when the short nicker policemen arrive in the community, everyone will run towards the bush. Nobody will want to see them and that mentality is still permeating in the society.

FGD A Division

Some group discussants further stated as follows:

In the old era they see police as a necessary evil that cannot be avoided.

FGD B Division

Discussion

The objectives of this study encompass exploring the obstacles posed by community members to community policing, investigating the underlying factors contributing to these challenges, and evaluating the nature and repercussions of these challenges on officers and their commitment to community policing.

The data reveals a pervasive reluctance among individuals to cooperate with the police, which stems from deep-seated distrust and negative perceptions of law enforcement within communities. The findings underscore the complex challenges arising from public perceptions and attitudes towards law enforcement, significantly hindering the effectiveness of community policing initiatives. Widespread distrust and resistance towards the police within society reflect broader concerns regarding legitimacy and procedural justice within policing practices (Bradford et al., 2009; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 2017). Other perceptions like fairness and responsiveness foster cooperation, while negative experiences such as discrimination or

abuse of power undermine trust and impede community engagement efforts (Tyler, 2005; Weitzer & Tuch, 2006). The reluctance of community members to cooperate or engage with law enforcement, as evidenced in the data, aligns with existing research highlighting the adverse effects of negative police-community relations on crime reporting and community safety (Lum et al., 2011; Skogan, 2006b, 2006a). Moreover, the tendency to avoid interactions with the police, driven by fear, stigma, or historical mistrust, mirrors global challenges in community policing, underscoring the necessity for targeted interventions to address underlying societal dynamics and cultivate meaningful police-community partnerships (Cordner & Biebel, 2005).

Other factors influencing cooperation with law enforcement in community policing efforts include fear of retaliation, past experiences, cultural attitudes, and socioeconomic disparities (Braga et al., 2018; Cordner, 1995). Experiences and cultural attitudes contribute to suspicion and hostility toward the police, viewing them as oppressive rather than protective (Mazerolle et al., 2012). Colonialism in Nigeria replaced traditional policing with a militarized system serving colonial interests, neglecting the needs of the populace. This legacy left a corrupt police force ill-equipped to serve the people in the post-colonial era (Onyeozili, 2005). Police professionalism and accountability are crucial for fostering trust, yet issues like brutality and lack of transparency undermine public confidence (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Weitzer & Tuch, 2006). Arisukwu & Okunola (2013) emphasize that the quality of interaction between the police and the public greatly influences crime prevention efforts within communities. If the police are perceived as corrupt or hostile, law-abiding citizens may hesitate to cooperate with them, allowing criminals to operate freely. This breakdown in trust makes the entire community vulnerable to crime and corruption. However, fostering a partnership between the police and the public can create an environment where corruption is less tolerated.

In many societies, historical experiences, socio-economic disparities, and instances of police misconduct have contributed to a deep-rooted distrust of law enforcement among certain population segments (Tyler, 2005). In Nigeria, issues such as corruption, ethnic tensions, and ineffective policing strategies have contributed to widespread mistrust of law enforcement agencies (Amnesty International, 2020). This distrust undermines community policing efforts, as residents may be hesitant to engage with the police or participate in collaborative crime prevention activities. Hence, negative attitudes towards the police, fuelled by historical injustices, systemic discrimination, and instances of police misconduct, can erode trust and cooperation between law enforcement agencies and the community. Sherman & Eck (2002) emphasise that community members' distrust of police can hinder the effectiveness of community policing initiatives, as cooperation and information-sharing are essential for problem-solving efforts. Research by Skogan & Hartnett (1999) also emphasises the importance of trust in shaping individuals' willingness to engage with the police and contribute to community safety efforts. Participants also reported fear of reprisal and stigmatization, fuelled by widespread apprehension of the police among community members (Skogan, 2006b, 2006a; Weisburd et al., 2003), presenting significant barriers to community engagement with law enforcement. Concerns about potential victimization by the police, particularly in sensitive cases, discourage community involvement with the police (Bradford et al., 2009).

Ordu & Nnam (2017) highlight corruption within Nigerian law enforcement, particularly in criminal investigations, skewing inquiries in favour of bribe givers. Information sharing between police and the community for effective community policing is important, and citizens' participation fosters a positive relationship, enhancing policing efforts (Ordu & Nnam, 2017). Given that police performance relies on public cooperation and support (Chinwokwu,

2017), exclusion, intimidation, harassment, and brutality by the Nigerian Police Force hinder community policing efforts, whereas effective crime control requires the police to understand the communities they serve, and build mutual understanding that fosters an environment free from fear and intimidation, encouraging cooperation and information sharing.

The need for safety and security unmet by traditional state policing led to the involvement of a collective responsibility involving formal state actors like the Nigerian Police Force and informal actors such as community vigilantes and neighbourhood watch groups (Saka et al., 2022). As the colonial system replaced traditional policing with a militarized system, leading to the emergence of a corrupt police force that neglects the needs of the people, "ethnic armies" as alternatives to the ineffective national police (Onyeozili, 2005). Hence, the rise of vigilantism in Nigeria reflects a shift in trust towards informal policing alternatives due to perceived inadequacies in formal policing institutions (Saka et al., 2022). Community-oriented policing models advocated by Kelling & Moore (1989) underscore the significance of building trust and fostering positive police-community relationships (Ordu & Nnam, 2017). However, efforts to decentralize policing and promote community engagement in Nigeria are hindered by colonial-era policing laws and regulations, facing resistance and legal obstacles despite reform endeavours (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2000). In his study, Okereke (1993) delves into the hurdles encountered by the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) stemming from the intricacies of law enforcement practices and public sentiments. The research highlights widespread unfavourable public perceptions of the NPF. Okereke advocates for the enhancement of police-public relations through modifications in law enforcement strategies and the public's perception of the police. These challenges of community policing in the country indicate that collaborative approaches prioritizing transparency and community involvement remain essential for effective community policing efforts. Addressing them necessitates multifaceted approaches prioritizing collaboration, transparency, and accountability between police and communities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study underscores the multifaceted challenges faced by community policing efforts in Nigeria, stemming from deep-rooted distrust, negative perceptions, and historical injustices towards law enforcement agencies. These challenges significantly hinder effective collaboration and cooperation between the police and communities, undermining the success of community policing initiatives. Factors such as fear of reprisal, systemic discrimination, instances of police misconduct, and socioeconomic disparities further exacerbate these issues, leading to reluctance among community members to engage with law enforcement. Furthermore, corruption within law enforcement, legal obstacles, and resistance to decentralization efforts pose additional hurdles to community policing development in Nigeria. Despite reform endeavours, colonial-era policing laws and regulations continue to impede progress in promoting community engagement and fostering trust between the police and communities.

The findings of this study carry significant implications for policy formulation and the execution of community policing initiatives. Research demonstrates that community-oriented policing approaches, which prioritize collaboration, transparency, and accountability, have a positive impact on trust and cooperation between law enforcement agencies and communities (Kelling & Moore, 1989). To foster trust and strengthen police-community relations, proactive measures are needed to promote transparency, accountability, and procedural justice within law enforcement organizations (Weisburd & Eck, 2004).

Strategies such as tailoring police practices to improve perceptions of procedural justice, providing officer training to influence behaviour, and implementing internal organizational

changes to ensure fair treatment of community members are potential avenues for improvement. Emphasizing legitimacy underscores the benefits of consensual policing models, which encourage public cooperation, community identification, and engagement in crime prevention efforts (Tyler, 2017). Therefore, policymakers and law enforcement entities should prioritize initiatives aimed at rebuilding trust, enhancing accountability, and empowering communities. By fostering collaborative partnerships, enhancing officers' cultural competence, and addressing systemic inequalities, stakeholders can work toward creating safer, more resilient communities where law enforcement agencies are viewed as trusted allies in promoting public safety and well-being.

In addition, effectively addressing security challenges and fostering sustainable development, including the development of policing, requires urgent government intervention to address economic disparities and unemployment crises (Adesina, 2013). The prevalence of economic inequalities complicates efforts to build trust and collaboration between law enforcement agencies and communities, aligning with existing literature advocating for equitable resource distribution and institutional transparency (Bradford et al., 2014).

Furthermore, investments in education, poverty reduction, and community development can contribute to creating environments conducive to successful collaborative policing efforts (Cordner, 1995). By providing comprehensive training to all police recruits and promoting community-oriented policing approaches, the gap between law enforcement and the community can be bridged, fostering cooperation across diverse demographic groups. Ultimately, when everyone perceives crime prevention as a shared responsibility, criminals face greater obstacles to success (Arisukwu & Okunola, 2013). Therefore, public education efforts should emphasize the critical role of community cooperation in the effectiveness of community policing initiatives. Efforts should be made to reform outdated colonial-era policing laws and regulations, facilitating decentralisation and community-oriented policing approaches. This may require legislative reforms and policy changes to overcome legal obstacles and resistance to decentralisation efforts.

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