Women in Black: An Examination of the Challenges Faced by Female Police Officers in Nigeria and Implications for Internal Security

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Abstract

One of the cardinal goals of every society is the security of lives, property, maintenance of law and order and peaceful coexistence. The institution charged with these responsibilities across the globe is the Police Force. One group among this institution that has not been given adequate attention is the women in the Police Force. This article examines the challenges faced by this group over time, government response and implication for sustainable security. Data was sourced from both oral and written sources while the theory adopted is the dominant theory on policewomen inclusion which is cantered around the concept of gendered institutions. The paper finds that in spite of the authority invested on police women like their male counterparts, they are still marginalized. This is in spite of the responses from stakeholders including government and the civil society which in turn has implications on internal security. The article concludes among other things a true reform, sensitization, political will and mainstreaming gender policies and laws will improve women's status in the police.

Keywords: Women in police, Internal security, Policewomen inclusion, Nigeria, Gendered institutions

Introduction

> Women are combatants and military personnel; women are political leaders, protesters and grassroot organizers; some women believe in just-war theory and others are pacifist; women are hostage takers and hostages; women fit in many of the ways men fit in. seeing this many ways women fit it means making visible what is often invisible or undervalued, namely the full extent of women's role and participation in social structures (Warren & Cady, 1994)

Much of the current literature is still mainly about men's involvement in conflict, whether they are creating it, profiting from it, provoking it, supplying it, doing the fighting, directing it or suffering from it. This gender blindness is perpetuated when writers specifically identify men as the main or sole actors in armed conflict, or fail to question the assumption that men's experiences and perspectives of war are universal (Thompson, 2006). It has been held that men fight to protect women while the protector and the protected do not share a relationship of equality because "the male protector confronts evil aggressors, while those under his protection submit to his order and serve as handmaids to his efforts." (Young, 2003). But what happens when the protected becomes the protector by fighting? The reality on ground corroborates that violence is not a male bastion and women are not necessarily peaceful as they have continued to play crucial roles in combat.

As gender becomes visible in almost all areas of human concerns it is essential that women's position as protectors and protected vis-à-vis violence is recognized. This point is shared by the United Nations as one of the key points of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) hence, the promotion of gender equality across the globe and even in policing (Strobl, 2020). It is believed that such equality would lead to development since males tend to be more recruited in the field of security than the females. The president of the African Development Bank, Dr Akinwunmi Adesina emphatically stated that insecurity is the number one challenge to Africa's

development (Nseyen, 2021). In order words, a secured state transcends into development as it harnesses its human and capital resources including women.
Many women in places of power, influence and authority have not found their way to the top or even their position easy as a result of so many factors. For those in police their conditions are not different. This article examines the challenges faced by women in the Nigerian police and the implication for internal security. This is imperative as adequate attention has not been given to women in policing in recent scholarship, particularly in Nigeria. The sources of data are both written and oral with emphasis on feminist narrative methodology which allows the interviewee a free hand to discuss issues without being boxed in, it bares similarity to the in-depth interview which S. E. Bell (1988) suggest that 'people spontaneously tell stories in their lives and also makes sense of their experiences.' It also resembles a conversation (Riesman, 1993) that allows for more interpersonal and reciprocal relationship between researchers and the individual whose life and experiences constitute the focus of the research (Lawless , 1993). The theory adopted is the dominant theory on policewomen inclusion which is cantered around the concept of "gendered institutions" (Brown, 1997) and the importance of creating inclusive police organizations. The theory propounded by Jennifer Brown highlights the need for police organizations to recognize and challenge their masculine cultures and to create inclusive environments that value and support diversity.

Internal Security and the Nigerian Police

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 as amended provides a constitutional role for the Nigerian Police Force. Section 215 (3) and (4) of the constitution specifically states that "The Nigerian Police Force shall maintain and secure public safety and public order, ensure internal stability and prevent threats to national security" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). Consequently, the Nigerian Police represents the foundation upon which internal security management is built. Internal security operations which is central to the national security apparatus of Nigeria is the means through which law enforcement agencies like the police are engaged to suppress insurgencies and other threats to national security. The nature of threats to internal security in Nigeria according to National Security of Nigeria 2019 "is multifaceted and less predictable with blurred boundaries between external and internal risks factors. This is because threat

factors that manifest at the global, regional and domestic levels are usually mutually reinforcing" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019). There has been an upsurge of internal conflicts in Nigeria and the participation of women has emerged as an inseparable component of many of these intra-state conflicts in which battle lines are drawn in the interiors of human habitations. The sight of uniformed women as state troops and rebel fighters is characteristic (Irom, 2024).

The internal security challenges facing Nigeria include terrorism and violent extremism, armed banditry, kidnapping, militancy and separatist movement, pastoralist and farmers conflict, transnational organized crimes, piracy and sea robbery, porous borders, cybercrime and technology challenges, socio-political threats, fake news, hate speeches, environmental threats, public health challenges, economic challenges, regional and global security challenges. Recent researches have shown that women's participation in violent activities has grown both quantitatively and qualitatively as states are increasingly recruiting women into the regular army not only for support roles but also for frontline operations. Women in regular army are increasingly becoming visible in interstate wars and many of them are engaged in fighting within their own country, against irregular armed forces. (Irom, 2023). Non state actors like Boko Haram are successfully mobilizing women too to fight against state forces and they are becoming active in pro and anti-state violence. Women are engaged in all conceivable task that directly or indirectly aid violence including but not limited to nursing, spying, fundraising, recruitment, fighting and suicide bombing (Irom, 2024).

On one hand, women's participation in conflicts offers a nuanced picture of the complexities of the range of motivations that prompt them to support violence, on the other hand, what social protection systems have the Nigeria state built for women and girls coming out of conflict, women and girls who have been particularly abused, exploited and displaced for example in the Northeast. The solutions will lie in building better police agencies with broad based strokes of activities that place policewomen in the center. This is because social protection systems include "a well-trained police force and a fair and functioning justice system" (UN Women, 2019). Other SDG's that can be linked to women's protection systems are goal 5, target 5.4 which specifically calls for gender equality and the

rights of women in public services such as in police agencies and those that address safety and access to justice such as goal 11 which hope to "make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable" and goal 16 which "provides access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels (United Nations n.d).

In Nigeria, gender biases in the form of social and cultural attitudes within the police profession and in the larger society continues to be significant barriers to the recruitment and retaining of women. For example, the recruitment of the first female police officer took place in 1955 (Akinjobi-Babatunde, 2015) but the women were subjected to some strict guidelines and this has not changed considerably. Thus, although often regarded as pioneers by external observers, these early policewomen were the products of institutions who were reifying gendersterotypes and maintaining the boundaries of what constituted mens work (crime fighting, pattrolling and detective work) and what constituted women's work (caring for victims, completting paper work and taking care of welfare issues). The Ngerian police force does not have many female voices amongst their ranks and the voices available are concentrated lower in the chain of command (Akinjobi-Babatunde, Women Police in the Nigerian Security Sector, 2015). This is because the cultural legacy of feminised matronly policing continues even as women have proved themselves to be more effective than males in some areas. According to UN figures, an average of 9% of national police force are female (UN Women, 2011-2012). Although in Nigeria the present day 12% numbers of female officers have probably been the highest (Prenzler & Sinclair, 2013), this still falls short of the 50% participation that would reflect a gender balance to manage post-conflics policing demands.

The ENDSARs protest of 2020 brought the Nigerian Police forward for public scrutinity for its inefficiency, corruption and human rights abuses. In response to the widespread calls for reforms, the Nigerian Police Force Act 2020 was the response to this calls for reform (Osho, 2023). The 2020 Act replaced the colonial era Police Act of 1943 which governed the Nigerian Police Force for decades and was widely regarded as outdated and ill-suited to address the dynamic security challenges of a mordern democratic Nigeria. The enactment of the Nigerian Police

Force 2020 amongst all its promises of a restructured and professionalized police force did not take into cognisasnce the larger UN goals of achiev[ing] gender equality and empower[ing] all women and girls (UN Women, 2011-2012).

Thus, the Police Force Act 2020 herald as a significant milestone in the journey towards reforming policing in Nigeria with key provisions emphasizing community policing, accountability, respect for human rights and improved welfare for officers aiming to align the NPF with international best practises leaves a lot to be desired as it is silent on the issues of gender inclusion. One major area of international best practises will mean a call for the review of the 2020 ACT to make adequate provisions for a more gender sensitive and inclusive police force as examplified by the path breaking Madison Police Department in the state of Winconsin which was at the fore front of gender inclusion, commensing the approach as part of its community policing efforts in the 1980's (Carlson, 2017).

Similarly, Rwandan National Police increased the gender balance of their force to promote gender-responsiveness of their agency in relation to SGBV cases (Willscroft, 2013) and increase numbers of policewomen from 2 to 17 % over 10 years in Liberia ushering in a speadier response to sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) incidents and an improved institutional pursuits of SGBV targeted foreign development assistance (Bacon, 2017). The aftermath of the ENDSARs protest saw the invisibility of police women hence their experience were not represented in policy and operational decision-making and the outcome was the 2020 Act that was silent on women in police making the police more incomplete and inbalanced.

Challenges Facing Women in the Nigerian Police Force

Extant Police Laws

There are laws that have hindered women from joining or having interests in joining the police. For example, Section 121 of the Nigeria Police Act and Regulation Cap 359 LFN 1990, provides that, women police officers shall as a general rule be employed in the following duties, which are connected with women and children, and shall be particularly employed in the following duties: Investigation and record of sexual offences against women and children; Record of

statement from female witnesses and female accused persons and from children; Attendance when women and children are being interviewed by male police officers; The searching, escort and guarding of women prisoners to and from police station; School crossing duties and Crowd control, where women and children are present in large number (NPF Act, 1990).Similarly, Section 122 in prescribing additional duties which woman police officers must perform when relieving male police officers considered, clerical duties, telephone duties and officer's orderly duties (NPF Act, 1990).

Section 126 of the regulation states that a married police woman who is pregnant may be granted maternity leave, while Section 127 states that unmarried police woman who becomes pregnant shall be discharged from the police force and shall not be enlisted except with the approval of the Inspector General of Police. This discriminatory law was wielded on a lady constable, Olajide Omolola in Ekiti State when her unit realised that she was pregnant not less than a year into her recruitment (Ojomoyela, 2021). Another police woman who asked for anonymity stated that, "I was baffled that i could not get pregnant after i joined the police, meanwhile my male colleagues who joined were making babies. Such law and policy should be removed so that many women who take interest in police work can join" (Female SP, personal communication, March 15. 2021).

Another Law is the law which prohibits the female police officer from carrying arms. While this law has been reviewed in the Nigeria Armed Forces, with many women now joining special operations across the country (Wuyo, 2021), this review is yet to be extended to the Nigerian Police Force. A female recruit summed it thus "my joy in joining the Police Force was to protect my community and serve my nation, but I was surprised that while my male counterparts who did not perform well in the police academy were allowed to carry arms I was not allowed" (Female Recruit, personal communication, March 14, 2021). The outcome of the non-carrying of arms law by police women can be exemplified in Bayelsa state in 2019 when armed robbers attacked a police station, shot at female officers and killed a pregnant senior officer (Osahon, Godwin , & Ogugbuaja, 2019). Although some of these laws were from colonial times, the much-celebrated 2020 Act provided the

Police Force with an opportunity to review these gender exclusive and discriminatory laws but the statuesque was retained

Low Representation

In Nigeria, the numbers of police women still remain very low and one of the reasons is the requirement on recruitment. W**hile physical strength is a prerequisite for joining any law enforcement agency, the Nigeria Police Force like every other armed force in the country places a high premium on physical capabilities while downplaying on intellectual and psychological capabilities. There is no doubt that only few females will do well or would be able to compete with their male counterpart in this area while the insecurity challenges bedevilling the country today don't only challenge physical capabilities. As a female constable retorted, "I joined the Police in 2020 but on a good day I am better in many other areas than some of the boys that were recruited. Apart from physical attributes or physical stages where they perform better, they were not better than some of the female applicants who were not lucky to be selected" (Female Constable, personal communication, March 10, 2021). T**here is no doubt that such a requirement which has made recruitment impossible for more female should have been modified in the much-celebrated 2020 ACT. There have been calls for the "Nigerian police to encourage female folks to join the force irrespective of their physical attributes" (Ehiemua, 2014) .

A.I. Mohammed ,M. Abdullahi, & U. Y. Lawal, (2016) in their study of gender roles in the Nigeria Police Force, in Borno State, reveal that women are not discriminated in the recruitment but are grossly discriminated against in assigning roles and duties such as guarding, patrolling, handling of fire arms in crime control and prevention. They further found that assignment of roles and duties were given only on rare occasions to women mobile police to handle firearms while women are less in number than their male counterparts. They recommended the need to create public awareness for women to join the Police workforce. The above reflects the pains of female police officers in Nigeria as they are generally assigned to cases of rape, write statements, fly the flags, administrative, financial and other non-combatant roles in the force. As a new recruit puts it, "I was surprised that when I joined, there was no cleaner in the station, so I am involved in the sweeping and cleaning of the station at times. I also fly the flag early in the morning and other

jobs that the Divisional Police Officer thinks are for women" (Female Constable, personal communication, March 15, 2021). It is therefore not out of place to understand why in spite of training and retraining at the Nigerian Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Kuru by senior women police officers, in the history of Nigeria, no female officer has risen or been selected to the highly coveted position of the Inspector General of Police even if such a police woman merits it.

Sexual Harassment

One of the key areas where women police have mostly been violated is workplace harassment and molestation by their superior officers. This often takes the nomenclature of force, cajole or blackmail while police women do not expose this threat for fear of intimidation and punitive transfer. Other problems include hostile reception from their male counterparts and discrimination in posting by male senior rank officers who are either demanding for sexual gratification or money in order to do their official duty. A police officer once stated that "when I was harassed by my Divisional Police Officer, I could not report not only because there is no clear-cut mechanism to report such vice but I was afraid that the constituted panel that may call me to defend myself may also be bias or made up of serial abusers. Such a case would have been like reporting to a greater evil (Female Traffic warder, personal communication, March 15, 2021). Failure to yield to such sexual advances are met with unnecessary query, threat of recommendation for transfer to dry' zones or dangerous areas prone to violence like Northeast and stagnated promotion. **Maternity and Peculiarity Neglect**

The peculiarities of women are not considered in making policies that relate to transfer, courtship, marriage and maternity. Section 124 of the Police Act and Regulation Cap 359 LFN 1990 provides that any woman police officer who desires to marry must first apply in writing to the Commissioner of Police via the State Police Command where she is serving, requesting permission to marry, giving the name, address and occupation of the person she intends to marry. The police force opens for public scrutiny a woman who intends to marry but such laws do not apply to male police officers.

Also, while it is usually easy for male officers to be transferred or mobilise for official duty or assignments, it has not been easy for women who are expected to get the approval of not just their husband, but that of their in-law (husband's family) and other extended family members. CSP Akinfenwa once stated that her work has been easy because she has an understanding husband (Busari, Ajibike, & Asogbon, 2015).

Not all female officers are as lucky as CSP Akinfenwa. Most often, the greatest challenge for police women is during pregnancy and after putting to birth. They are neglected during maternity period and when they resume, the NPF has still not created offices where such women can breastfeed their babies. Although crèches exist in Police Women/Wives Schools (POWA), they are mostly located far from the stations. As an officer noted "when I gave birth to my first child more than a decade ago, there was no crèche for me to take the baby to except private ones. I am surprised that after more than a decade, junior women officers still face similar issue. I hope this will be addressed soon" (Female SPO, personal communication, March 14, 2021).

Victims of Power Tussle among Colleagues

A major step was taken in 2009 when the Nigeria Police Force in collaboration with Development Partners including UN WOMEN & United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), International NGO including ActionAid and Civil Society Organisations (CSO) embarked on a sensitization workshop for Senior Police officers, and came out with a resolution to embark on development of gender policy, capacity for women, development of a gender sensitive curriculum and training for the Nigeria Police Force. The Committee submitted its report in 2010 with issues of gender mainstreaming and gendered policies on the front burner (NPF, UN WOMEN and UNFPA, 2010). it has been difficult to access the impacts of the 2010 report since female police officers are still the most vulnerable to attack from within and outside their profession. While there have been reports in the media of how some female police officers'/road traffickers were attacked by their male colleagues, there was a report of how Sergeant Lovender Elekwachi, a mother of one was killed by one of her colleagues while they were enforcing COVID -19 regulations in Port Harcourt Rivers State in April 2020 (Busari K. , 2021)

Negative Public Image

The Nigerian police has not had a good public image (Ojukwu, 2016) which has in turn affected the fabric of the police force itself. How does one explain when a police woman beats up the daughter blue black for desiring to pursue a career in the police force like the mom (Osaretin Osho, personal communication, March 15, 2021). Along with this, most people still hold the view that the police force is usually joined by the never do well in the society as aptly captured in this quote;

> I recall that, 99.9% of the candidates were from broken homes and it was either their parents could not afford responsibilities for their children's higher education or the candidates were being settled with police enrolment so that they would in turn share the burden of training or catering for other siblings. This underscores the fact that motives differ for joining the police force. These days, because of gross unemployment in the nation, we find thousands of school-leavers from both secondary and tertiary institutions clamouring to enlist into any of the military or para-military forces (Ibiang, 2017).

While the above reflects the belief of members of the public, the perception of the public to females in the force can better be imagined. This point was reiterated further in the biography of Chief Superintendent of Police Sybil Akinfenwa when she was asked about corruption in the Nigeria Police. She responded with emphasis that "although the phenomenon has eaten deep into every facet of the society the public is quick to point fingers at the police" (Busari, Ajibike, & Asogbon, 2015). This negative image of the police by the public has also robbed the morale of police women, especially those who joined to make a difference.

Poor Welfare

Although the issue of poor welfare does not only affect the police force, according to UNODC and NBC assessment of corruption in Nigeria the police top the ladder with 46.4%, followed by prosecutors 33.0%, judges/magistrates 31.5%, tax/ revenue

officers 27.3%, customs officers 26.5%, and public utility officers 22.4% (UNODC-NBS, 2017). However, women suffer the most because unlike their male counterparts who usually make their supplement from road blocks and other investigative assignments where complainants would give them gifts or tips to pursue their investigation, the women are not this lucky. A male visitor to a police station recounted how;

> I went to the police station about 8:30am to make a complaint, and I noticed a female police officer who was handing over after her night shift. Apart from the fact that she was had a flu, she was begging one of her male counterparts who went for raids to assist her with some money to buy some medication as well as pay her way home. When she realised, I was watching her, she shyly smiled. I pity the policewoman (Mr. Ojo, personal communication, March 15, 2021)

The attempts to demonstrate the federal government efforts at salary increase for a better welfare of the entire police force has not changed the status of women who are mostly in the lower cadre. Also, the impact of the initiation of SERVICOM the Federal Government's service delivery initiative that is meant to ensure quality service such as investigating complaints from members of the public, organise periodic workshop among others (NPF, nd), is yet to be felt by female police officers (Female SPO, personal communication, March 14, 2021).

Woman oriented approach to Internal Security Challenges

The above challenges demonstrate that implementation of gender sensitive policies in the police will need deliberate actions. This becomes more urgent with the present war on terrorism and the increase insecurity in Nigeria. There is no doubt that the contribution of everyone including women is also needed to confront the daring cases of internal securities challenges as they can play prominent roles in nonphysical or unconventional crime prevention. The practical advantages of women in policing which can assist in abating insecurity in Nigeria is discussed under the following headings as culled from Staci Strobl (2020).

Women Offer what Post-Conflict Policing Demands: Since there is a correlation between the agencies focused in recruiting and retaining women police officers and the development of community policing or the responsiveness to community needs and co-production of safety and security (Schuck, 2017), including women in recruiting can be a key factor for propelling organizational change in the police force since having women's experiences represented in policy and operational decision making makes organizations more balanced and complete. Doing 'gender in policing' (Chan, Doran , & Marel, 2010) or being determinly pro-woman can reduce the trend of patriarchy in the Nigerian police and transcend gender differentiation with the ultimate goal of promoting UN 50% female inclusion rates until it is attained.

Leveraging Women's Talents and Skills: Although women's talents and skills such as empathy, communication skills, non-violent approaches have been stereotyped as feminine, researches support the notion that women are more likely than their male counterparts to offer public service orientation to the police profession. In US for example the style of policing that women tend to employ as a de-escalation strategy involves less physical force and more verbal communication because they are less authoritarian (Bastick, 2008). This communication skills promotes crime prevention within the framework of community-oriented policing and provides better comfort to crime victims (Rabe-Hemp, 2018). Two examples will suffice to drive home this point. Firstly, envisioning a broader perspective of human security after the Liberian civil war in 1989-2003 and pressured by civil society groups in 2006 and 2017 because of the subsequent widespread insecurity and particularly gender-based crime, the Liberian national Police created a women's and children protection system, accompanied by the adoption of a 20% quota for women's inclusion in policing and the armed forces.

Specifically, it was believed that women were more likely to engage 'vertical linkages of communications' between the security sector agencies, other governmental agencies and civil societies groups and communities (Bastick, 2008). The implications here is that in Liberia, men's domination of policing had maintained patterns of insularity within police agencies that do not advance the interest of post-conflict security. Secondly, in Slovenia where although not

necessarily by design female officers and female Roma leaders emerged as the prime example for healthier police-community relations after Roma and non-Roma people experienced ethnic conflict and community violence. Due to positive media coverage, several years after the program debut it influenced changes in the police. Thus, once a brutal top-down police force during Yugoslavian days evolved into a democratic framework in independent Slovenia (Strobi, Banutal , Duque, & Herberfield, 2014). Overall police women have a calming effect on police -citizen interaction and when in police leadership roles, they are more likely to exhibit transformational leadership, participation, consultation and inclusion.

Better use of Force Decision-Making: Based on a roundtable at the National Centre for Women and policing in 2001, academics and practitioners discussed how women are less likely to use excessive force on the job. Participants agreed that female officers were not reluctant to use force, but rather that they had demonstrated a capacity to use it wisely based on community policing curricula at police academies (Lonsway, 2001). Although there is less research on this outside the US, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute reported that international trends in the use of force points to the same conclusion (Bastick, 2008). While a study has demonstrated that countries with a high percentage of police women (18% and higher) are less likely to devolve into civil unrest or civil war (Gibbs, Ruiz, & Klapper-Lehman, 2915).

Lower Levels of Corruption and other Abuse of Power: In Uganda, women are frequently appointed to head corruption investigations in the police force due to the perception that they are less likely to be socially or politically connected to the alleged wrongdoers (Goetz, 2007). After the World bank and other international organizations criticised the levels of police corruption during the tenure of President Alberto Fujimori's government in Peru (1990-2000), studies analysing the social networks of corruption and individual personality test revealed that Peruvian policewomen were more likely to be honest, disciplined and trustworthy than male officers. Consequently, the Peruvian National Police in 2011, heavily recruited 09% of women as traffic police which was higher by 10% than the rates two years ago to break the cycle of police bribery and other abuses (Jones, 2000).

Increased Gender Responsiveness: This refers to the capacity of law enforcement agencies to respond to the unique needs of women in the communities that they serve. It is already an established fact that the needs of women and children are more likely to be met by law enforcement when it invests in involving women in policing. The Liberian National Police improvement in handling of sexual and gender-based violence cases has also been attributed to its concerted efforts to increase its numbers of policewomen (Bacon, 2017). Similarly, the Rwandan National Police reportedly increased the gender balance of their force to promote the gender responsiveness of their agency in relation to sexual and gender-based violence cases (Willscroft, 2013).

Conclusion

The paper has demonstrated that in spite of the authority invested on police women like their male counterparts, they face challenges which ranges from extant laws, sexual harassment, to societal beliefs or belief system. This has implication on internal security challenges bedevilling the country. In advocating a woman-oriented option for the Nigerian police force, the changes should aim for transparency and utilize local governance. Public sensitization will help the public understand the key role that women play to keep democracy growing. As many gender and policing scholars have noted, the true obstacle to women and policing is not women's interest in the profession, their capacity, the lack of intergovernmental treaties nor national policies. The issues of gender and policing is cultural, whether within the profession or within society at large. In this regard the inclusion of women in policing is necessary in Nigeria.

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