ESSAY

GENDER AND ATTITUDES TOWARD PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

A Nigeria police perspective

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This study was designed to examine the influence of gender and age on attitudes toward professional ethics among a sample of the Nigeria police officers. Using a cross-sectional survey, data was collected from a total of 163 participants. Results revealed that gender and age were significant predictors of unethical beliefs; female and older police participants were also more ethical than their male and younger counterparts. These findings were discussed in the context of socialization theory, Gilligan's moral development theory[1] and other organisational practices, while its practical implications for the recruitment, selection and placement in the Nigeria police were also emphasized.

Introduction

Nigeria has consistently been ranked high on the list of corrupt nations in surveys conducted in the past four years by Transparency International, a Berlin-based non-profit organization. Corruption is said to be so pervasive in Nigeria that President Obasanjo, in his first term inauguration speech, acknowledged corruption as the country's biggest problem. The military justified their ending of the first and second republics on the basis of the corrupt practices of the politicians. Many also say that the economy is battered and depressed because of corrupt practices in both the public and private sector. This has brought untold hardships: a high rate of unemployment, the aggravation of poverty and inequality, and the total collapse (in some areas) of essential services like electricity and water. Corrupt practices have also reduced public spending on other social services like education and health. In addition, Nigerians are under close watch virtually everywhere in the world because of what a former American Secretary of State (as reported by Sowunmi) described as Nigerians' tendency to cheat.[2] If corruption has such negative consequences, how can it be defined? Sen defined corruption as any form of behaviour that 'involves the violation of established rules for personal gain and profit'[3] while Lipset and Lenz consider it to be, 'efforts to secure wealth or power through illegal means, private gain at public expense; or a misuse of public power for private benefit'.[4] Corruption in Nigeria includes behaviour such as bribery, fraud, embezzlement, extortion, favouritism and nepotism.[5]

The Nigerian police, in spite of their pivotal role in the criminal justice system, are not immune to the corruption virus that ravages the nation. Sheidu argues that a society gets the kind of police it deserves.[6] This suggests that a corrupt nation cannot but have a corrupt

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police. While there is some sense in this assertion, it is unimaginable that an institution responsible for the enforcement of the law could rank among the most corrupt institutions in the society. Yet Justice Akanbi, chairman of the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) was reported to have revealed that a recent World Bank report listed the Nigerian police and the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) as the two most corrupt organizations in Nigeria.[7] Buttressing the findings of this World Bank report, are the results of a poll conducted in 2000 by Gallup International on behalf of Transparency International and released in 2003. The poll revealed that one in three respondents in Nigeria indicated that if given a 'magic wand' to eliminate corruption in Nigeria they would choose to start with the police.[8] In a similar vein, Perouse de Montclos reports findings of a survey conducted in Lagos in 1993 that, 'only 1% of the people questioned thought that police roadblocks served any purpose other than to extort money from motorists'.[9] Arguing along the same lines, Shettima quoted President Obasanjo (in his characteristic candour) as saying 'police hire out their guns to armed robbers'.[10]

Corruption in the Nigerian police has largely been blamed on a number of institutional and structural factors. These include underpayment, stressful working condition, poor equipment, and inadequate accommodation. Others factors are the near absence of promotion, inadequate operational vehicles and erratic communication facilities.[11] For instance, a representative of the police 'rank and file' told the Nigerian Senate Committee on Police Affairs that they (the police) 'demand bribe from Nigerians to augment the operational costs incurred in protecting lives and property'.[12] Another representative of the police 'rank and file' had this to say to the Committee:

> 'They accuse us of collecting bribes and I wonder why? We maintain the patrol vehicles attached to us to combat crime, we fuel them and if any of us is injured in an operation, we tax ourselves to treat that person'.[13]

Though these factors appear plausible when accounting for the prevalence of police corruption in Nigeria, they cannot be said to explain the phenomenon completely. An important field of study that is yet to receive empirical attention in Nigeria is the ethical beliefs of the police. Many have blamed police misconduct on wrong attitudes and often see a change of attitudes a panacea. The connection between police attitude change and good behaviour is based on the assumed causal relationship between attitudes and behaviour [14] and the possibility of influencing the determinants of such attitudes.

Given the diversity of the workforce of the present day Nigerian police in terms of demographics such as gender, age and education, the workplace ethical attitudes of the police cannot be said to be homogeneous. Rather, it appears far more complex. Of particular interest is the gender composition of the workforce. Though there are no available statistics regarding the gender composition, available evidence suggests an increase in the number of police-women in the rank and file of the Nigeria police. According to a report credited to the former Inspector-General of Police, Mr Tafa Balogun, the police have recently introduced female mobile police personnel to combat riots by females and children when they occur.[15] The report also adds that the female outfit is the first of its kind in the world. Similarly, there is a growing number of university graduates in the Nigeria police. The rank and file can now boast over 3,000 university graduates.[16]

It is therefore imperative to examine how these factors affect the workplace ethical attitudes of the police. This study examines the predictive value of gender and age on attitude towards professional ethics among a sample of the Nigeria police. The study seeks to identify any significant differences between male and female levels of ethical beliefs and between the younger and older police officers. Interest in this study has been stimulated by the structural changes in the workforce of the Nigeria police and the need to arrest the incidence of corruption among its personnel.

Theory, research and hypotheses

The social learning theory[17] is a model that can be used to explain the relationship between gender and ethical attitudes. The model suggests that through reinforcement by significant actors (parents, schools and churches), individuals are socialized as children to adopt their culture and appropriate sex roles. Boys and girls are therefore taught to do 'boy' or 'girl' things.[18] Young girls are

taught to be tidy, reserved in interaction with others and socially oriented; little boys are taught to be out-going, physically active and achievement oriented.[19] Furthermore, traditional boys' games emphasize respect for rules and fairness, while the traditional girls' games reflect respect for inclusion and avoidance of hurt.[20] In research on children at play, Lever found that boys like games that have lots of intricate rules; girls, on the other hand, enjoy shorter and less complex games.[21] This early differential socialization process is assumed to form the basis of ethical and moral development of adult life.[22] This suggests that female police officers might be expected to be more ethical than their male counterparts on account of their different socialisation experiences.

Gilligan also posits that women think and speak in 'different ways and in different voices' than men, when faced with ethical issues.[23] She presented two contrasting ways of resolving ethical dilemmas: feminine ethics based on 'care and compassion' and masculine ethics based on 'universal justice'. Under the former, she contends that individuals judge each other guilty if they do something wrong to one another, whereas under the latter, individuals (women in particular) who knowingly allow others to feel pain blame themselves for not doing something to prevent or alleviate the pain of others.[24]

Gilligan attributed differences in resolving ethical dilemmas between men and women to differences in the socialisation process. Because women have been taught to be reserved and relationship oriented, they tend to develop a caring ethic. Men, on the other hand, having been socialized to be tough and achievement oriented, tend to develop an ethic of justice and fairness. These gender differences in ethical decision-making are thought to have implications for adults' business attitudes and interactions. Men are more likely to break rules given their competitive orientation; women on the other hand, are more likely to abide by rules and be less tolerant of rule breakers because of their concern for relationships.

The relationship between gender and ethical beliefs is well documented, particularly in the western world with studies showing conflicting results. Some studies have found significant differences in ethical attitudes of men and women.[25] For example, Borkowski and Ugras report the findings of a meta-analysis of 47 studies showing that female students consistently exhibit stronger ethical attitudes than their male counterparts.[26] Again, in a survey using a series of vignettes across different settings in the US, Hunt found that among business professionals females displayed higher ethical judgment than their male counterparts.[27] Ruegger and King (also in a study of American students) found that female subjects were more ethical than males.[28] In contrast to studies that found gender differences in ethical attitudes, a number of studies found that the ethical beliefs of males and females were similar.[29]

A number of studies on police attitude towards ethical issues conducted in the US have reported that women officers, on average, express higher ethical standards than males. For example, in a longitudinal survey of law enforcement officers in the US, Miller and Braswell found that female officers gave significantly more ethical responses for both idealistic and realistic situations than their male counterparts.[30] In Australia, Huon investigated the attitudes of police officers and recruits toward breaches of ethics and found that females appeared to have higher personal ethical standards than male officers of equivalent rank.[31]

Empirical research has also implicated age in ethical reasoning. For example, Peterson, Rhoads, and Vaught, found age to be a significant predictor of ethical behaviour and that older people possessed higher ethical standards (about work) than younger people.[32] Other studies examining the influence of age on ethical perception came to the same conclusion: older subjects tended to be more ethical than younger ones.[33] However, a number of studies did not find a correlation between age and ethical beliefs.[34]

The review of literature and the theoretical proposition guiding the present work suggest that gender and age are likely to be predictive of unethical beliefs among the sampled police officers. Female and older police participants are likely to be more ethical than their male and younger counterparts.

Method

Research design and setting

A cross-sectional survey design was utilized for data collection on the relationship between

participants' attitudes towards professional ethics and demographic variables. The target population for the present survey was made up of officers and men and women of the Nigerian Police, Oyo State Command, Ibadan. The city is the capital city of Oyo state and is reputed to be the largest city in West Africa with an estimated population of about 1.3 million inhabitants. The Oyo state police command is headed by a commissioner of police assisted by a deputy commissioner of police, supported by three assistant commissioners of police in-charge of operation, administration and criminal investigation.

For effective coverage of the state, the police state command is divided into four area commands headed by area commanders. These commands are, in turn, divided into divisional police offices headed by divisional police officers. Two of these area commands are based in Iyanganku and Agodi (both in Ibadan), while the other two are in Oyo and Ogbomoso. Data collection was restricted to the two command areas in Ibadan for logistics reasons.

Participants and procedure

A total of 163 participants took part in the study. Of these, 45 (27.6%) were constables; 49 (30.1%) were corporals; 38 (23.3%) sergeants; 20 (12.3%) were inspectors and 11(6.7%) were of the rank of assistant superintendent of police (ASP). Their ages range from 23 to 56 years with the average age being 32.20 (SD=7.28) years. In terms of their sex distribution, 107 (65.6%) were male and 56 (34.4%) were female. The average tenure of participants within the organization was 9.29 years (SD=7.15), ranging from 2 to 26 years. The educational qualification of the participants also ranged from primary school certificate to university degree; 9 (5.5%) had primary school certificates, 67 (41.1%) had secondary school certificate, 35 (21.5%) had national certificates in education (NCE)/ordinary national diploma (OND); and 52 (31.9%) had a university education.

Permission to conduct the study was sought from the management of the Oyo state police command. Participants were then randomly selected across all the divisional police offices in Ibadan. This was achieved with the help of the divisional police officers (DPOs) who were responsible for the administration of questionnaires, which were hand-delivered to the participants in sealed envelopes. The questionnaire contained an introductory part explaining the purpose of the survey, which was given as an academic research exercise designed to find out participants' feelings concerning certain prevailing work situations. The next two sections were made up of a 21-item scale measuring attitudes to professional ethics and background information such as rank, sex, education, and tenure within the organization.

The confidentiality of all information was guaranteed by asking participants not to include their names on the completed questionnaires. They were also asked to submit the completed questionnaires in sealed forms to their respective Divisional Police Officers (DPOs) for subsequent collection. It took an average of three weeks to collect data on 185 respondents. However, 163 were analysed. The other forms were either not filled or only partially completed.

Measurement

A questionnaire developed by Hyams was used to measure police officers' ethical attitudes.[35] The 21-item questionnaire was designed to differentiate attitudes towards corrupt behaviour, use of unnecessary force or violence, acceptance of bribes and other ethical violations. Krejei, Kvapil, and Semrad[36] in their investigation of the relationship between job satisfaction, job frustration, narcissism and attitudes towards professional ethical behaviours among police officers reported an alpha coefficient of .720. An alpha coefficient of .89 was obtained for the present study. The response format of the scale consisted of a 5-point Likert-type (strongly agree to strongly disagree) with a possible total score ranging from 20 to 100. High scores on the scale reflect less ethical attitudes.

Results

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to examine the relative contributions of gender and age to unethical attitudes amongst this sample. The order of entry of the variables into the regression analysis is presented in Table 1. First, in order to control for their possible influence, rank, education and tenure were introduced (step

1). Next, (step 2) age was entered to test for its main effect. Finally, (step 3) gender was entered to test for its main effect.

Table 1: Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Unethical Attitudes (N=163)

Variable	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Rank	-.28***		
Tenure	-.05ns		
Education	.25**		
Age		.21*	
Gender			-.53***
R2	.131	.154	-.391
ΔR2	.131	.023	.237
F	8.08***	7.16***	20.17***

Note: Bolded items are beta values
*P<0.05 **P<0.01 ***P<.001 ns (not significant)

The results of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis as presented in Table 1 show that the overall model was significant, R^2 =.391, adjusted R^2 = .372, F (5, 157) = 20.17, P<.001. As predicted, a significant main effect was observed for both age (R^2 = .023, P<.05) and gender (R^2 = .237, P<.001). In other words, 2.3% of the variance in unethical attitudes was predicted by age; while 23.7% of variance in unethical attitudes was explained by gender.

The review of literature suggested that there would be differences in ethical beliefs of male and female on one hand, and between old and young on the other. Subsequently, this line of thought was examined using an analysis of variance (ANOVA) approach. In this regard, participants were split into female/male (based on their sex) and into old/young (based on their mean age). This resulted into a comparison of four groups. Mean scores and standard deviations for each of the four groups, as well as the results of the 2 X 2 ANOVA are presented in Tables 1 and 2 respectively.

Table 2: Mean and Standard deviation of Gender and Age on Unethical Attitudes

Variable	Levels	N	Mean	SD
Gender	Male	113	64.24	15.44
	Female	50	48.18	19.57
Age	Old	56	44.60	13.67
	Young	107	67.	15.57

Consistent with the predictions in this study, the means (as reflected in Table 1) show that generally female police participants were more ethical than their male counterparts. Similarly, older police participants were more ethical than their younger ones.

Results in Table 2 also reveal significant main effects for gender (F (1,163) = 67.10, P<.001); age (F (1,163) = 19.57, P<.001) thus confirming hypothesized influence of gender and age on unethical beliefs. However, there was no significant interaction between the two factors.

Discussion

This study was designed to examine the influence of gender and age on workplace ethical attitudes among a sample of Nigerian police officers. This has become imperative given the changes in the demographic composition of the police, the most significant of these being gender.

The results of the hierarchical regression analysis reveal that gender and age are predictive of ethical beliefs among the present sample. Specifically, it was found that, after controlling for the possible influence of rank, education

Table 3: Summary of 2 X 2 ANOVA for Gender and Age on Unethical Attitudes

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P
Gender (A)	13477.89	1	13477.89	67.10	<.001
Age (B)	3826.93	1	3826.93	19.05	<.001
A X B	511.55	1	511.55	2.55	Ns
Error	31938.25	159	200.87		
Total	**6278772**	**163**			

and tenure, gender and age separately predicted unethical beliefs; contributing 23.7% and 2.3% respectively to the total variance in unethical beliefs. This is consistent with previous studies that have found gender[37] and age[38] to be predictive of unethical beliefs.

Furthermore, consistent with gender socialisation theory, and Gilligan's assertion that men and women differ in their ethical beliefs, the results of the 2 X 2 ANOVA reveal that female police officers are significantly more ethical than their male counterparts. This pattern of results is consistent with previous findings that female police officers are more ethical than male police officers.[39] Similarly, the results also reveal that, among the present sample, older police officers are seen to be more ethical than their younger ones thus, giving credence to other studies that have found similar results.[40]

Apart from the extrapolations suggested by gender socialisation theory and Gilligan's explanations for differences between men's and women's ethical beliefs, the explanation offered by Brown, Maidment and Bull[41] for gender differences in ethical beliefs is germane to this discussion. They argue that 'because women in policing are not universally accepted by policemen, they can operate outside of the informal rule systems from which they are excluded.'[42] This analysis suggests that because women are considered to be separate from the male police culture (corruption), they are immune to the corrupt practices of their male colleagues and are thus less committed to adhering to the culture of corruption.[43] In Nigeria, police corruption is most clearly manifested in major cities and on highways where they are usually involved in improperly stopping vehicles and then extorting money from motorists. Those assigned to highway patrol are usually men and are therefore the main perpetrators of extortion; a form of corruption and the most common sort among police personnel in Nigeria.[44] By contrast, women police are usually assigned duties that are not 'traditional' police duties and, therefore, are not usually susceptible to the corrupt influences faced by their male colleagues; Hence this pattern of results.

One plausible explanation for differences in the ethical beliefs between old and young police officers concerns changes in societal values and expectations. Research evidence suggests that even though societal values appeared generally stable, it is apparent that there are shifts in preferences for some specific value sets over time.[45] In Nigeria, for instance, there is no doubt that the age-old virtues (hard work, protecting the family name, conscientiousness, and diligence) have given way to 'obsession with materialism, compulsion for a shortcut to affluence, glorification and approbation of ill-gotten wealth'[46] which the younger generation has imbibed. The consequence is that youths are less inclined to observe ethical values and are more prone to break rules when opportunities are presented.

Furthermore, in most organizations, (including the police) applicants are not given a realistic picture of what the organisation is likely to provide and what the job will be like. Most new employees are then disappointed when confronted with the reality of what they will do. One consequence of this is that the temptation (especially for those who are young enough to resort to other illegal means) to 'break-even' becomes attractive. Evidence of this is seen in a report credited to one of the constables that appeared before the Senate Committee on Police Affairs, as reported by *ThisDay* newspaper:

> Before we joined the police, they told us that the salary of a constable is ₦17,000. I'm the first-born of my family and I have other responsibilities that I cater for among those following me. If the Federal government can give a good salary if they see anybody on the road collecting bribe whatever they like let them do to that policeman, but with a salary of ₦8000 before deductions are made…[47]

The reference to the above quote confirms the discrepancy in the expectation and the actual monthly pay of new police recruits. The actual pay of ₦8000 is about the minimum for the lowest paid federal worker in Nigeria. This is hardly enough to keep body and soul together, given the inflation rate in the country.

These findings have practical implications for the recruitment, selection and placement of individuals within the Nigerian police. The results suggest that the employment of more female police officers may help to reduce the level of corruption in the police, and could improve their tarnished image. This line of argument is

consistent with recent revelations shown that women, if given the opportunity, could turn things around for the better. The likes of Dr Dora Akunyili, Director General of the National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) and Mrs Dere Awoshika, Director General of National Programme on Immunization (NPI) are good examples of women who have had a positive effect on society by discharging their responsibilities most honourably. Transparency International honoured Dr Akunyili for her courageous war against expired, substandard and counterfeit drugs, and for boldly challenging other forms of corruption despite serious threats to her life.

That age was implicated in this study also suggests that the management of the police should endeavour to give a realistic explanation and preview of the job to applicants, and especially to young recruits before assigning them specific duties.

In conclusion, the findings of this study reveal that gender and age differences affect the ethical beliefs of the sampled police officers: female and older police participants tended to be more ethical than their male and younger counterparts. The conclusion of a study like this would not be complete without a mention some of its limitations, one of which is the self-reporting nature of the data collection. Secondly, caution must be exercised while making statements on causality with respect to the present findings for two reasons: the non-experimental (cross-sectional survey) nature of the study and the fact that women police are rarely assigned to 'traditional' police duties, which might explain the present pattern of results. Future studies could also explore this line of research in other settings with proportionate representations of both sexes and without marked differentiation of roles. Again, given that Nigeria is a religious country, future studies could also explore the effect on unethical beliefs of factors like culture and religiosity.

Notes

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