



The Nigeria Police Force and Management of Occupational Hazards in Rivers State

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Abstract	Original Research Article
<p>There is an increasing level of violence in Nigeria today. Members of the Police Force are regularly drafted to deal with the situations. This makes the police have various risks. These hazards include homicide, assaults, and injuries. Other factors are exposure to stress due to long working hours, inadequate personal protective equipment, and violent confrontations. These occupational hazards threaten officers' safety and efficiency. Areas raising problems have been: Patrol (chase of criminals, encountering riots, armed robbers, and kidnappers); Investigation (search and pursuit of high-profile criminals); Traffic Control (inhaling of dust, gas emissions, long standing posture). Station Guard (long sitting position, attacks at police stations, and assaults by cell escapees) and, Stop and Search (stop for checks on vehicles/criminals). The study therefore examines the risk associated with police duties in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study adopted the multi stage cluster and simple random sampling techniques. The instrument was a structured questionnaire administered to 370 officers. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Results indicated more police officers work in the department of operations, investigations and traffic, with challenging working conditions. Minimum work load is 12 hours of duty. They highly demand personal protective equipment (PPE), especially body armor. The Inspectorate rank is more prone to fatalities. It is recommended that Police Management Team provide and enforce risk management policies to ensure the well-being of officers; adopt 'critical incident protocol' for law enforcement as a way of reducing incidences of fatalities; the government should improve upon safety policy reforms, provide modern protective gear as well as working conditions of police officers.</p> <p>Keywords: Law enforcement, Nigeria, Occupational hazards, Police, Risk.</p>	

INTRODUCTION

The police are duty-bound to maintain law and order, peace and tranquility in the society. They are saddled with enormous responsibilities ranging from constant patrol of the nooks and crannies of every village, town and city; effect arrest of suspects / criminals; control and direct traffic; investigate criminal cases; perform escort duties to essential and sensitive materials; assist maintain orderliness in elections; attend to distress calls relating to robberies and kidnappings; and a lot more. They always come to terms with the good and bad citizens. These special interactions in the wake of enforcing the laws present risks situations to the police officers. For example, a simple arrest of an accused felon could lead to serious assault, injury or even death to a police officer. In all, police officers take risk in the discharge of their duties.

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) is established by Section 214 of the 1999 constitution, with an Act - the Police Act and Regulations. Section 4 of the Police Act 2020 (Act No 2) stipulates the functions and duties of the police to include; prevent and detect crimes, and protect the rights and freedom of every person in Nigeria; maintain public safety, law and order; protect the lives and properties of all persons; enforce all laws and regulations without any prejudice to the enabling acts of other security agencies; discharge such duties within and outside Nigeria as required etc. The NPF is directed from the Force Headquarters. The order and-control liabilities are vested upon Inspector General of Police. Seven departments are headed by Deputy Inspector Generals of Police. They include Finance and Administration; Operations; Logistics; Criminal Investigation; Training; Research and Planning; Information and Communication Technology. Department of Operations is

key to all police functional exercises, particularly tactical operations, strategic tasks; joint military activities; the execution and control of riots, debacles, elections etc.

On September 11, 2001, 72 law enforcement officers were killed during the terrorist attacks on the world trade centre in New York City. This catastrophic loss exemplifies the extreme occupational risk for police officers in the United States (Kyriacou et al., 2006). There is scanty information in the occupational literature on prevention and interventions to reduce police mortality in the line of duty. In October 2020, Nigeria Police officers experienced numerous deaths, maim and destruction of police/government properties in the ENDSARS saga.

Sparrow (2000) established the origin of risk for humans, as having been capable of managing coherent thoughts, against weighing up the risks of attacking large animals against the reward of tasty food; investing in the planting of crops for the reward of the harvest. Concluding that, systematic and logical-risk management- only began with the coming of probability mathematics. The meaning and definition of risk management differs from every perspective of its origin. Iske (2003) defines risk as “a measure of the probability and severity of adverse effect” (risk is a calculation of how likely an incident is to occur, and given its occurrence, how dire the consequences would be). In recent times, risk management practices have evolved from pure business enterprises into wide varieties of professional settings, including athletic, banking, engineering, architecture, schools, social works, policing and others. Archbold (2014) noticed that, the idea behind using risk management in agencies is to identify risks, make changes to avoid or reduce further organizational loss. For the police, the new paradigm fits its accountability since its core mandate is to identify organizational risks, apply some type of corrective action (changing department policies or training) and then monitoring the impact of the corrective action.

The problem of security and safety is based upon the kind of safety and security that exist within the institution, attributable to the purpose for which it was created. Safety and security measures is a response to problems arising in certain areas, which helps to mitigate and prevent / protect the men of the Nigeria Police Force.

Statement of the Problem

As the society is skewed towards violence and crime, the police officers are at the gateway with the vengeance. The Nigeria Police Force is in the frontline of maintaining internal security in the country. Deaths and injuries meted upon serving officers in recent years have damped the morale of the workforce and reduce service delivery. There is an increasing level of violence in the Nigerian society today and members of the police force are regularly drafted to deal with the situations. This makes the police and its working environments have various risks, especially workplace violence, all negatively impact physical and mental health on officers. Previous literatures on police studies have rested heavily on trends in the rate of officers’ assaults and accidental deaths, historical analysis of death rates, and accidents involving police officers. Others are on risk of assault, effects of personal protective

equipment (PPE). No known research has been undertaken on occupational hazards of police work in Nigeria as it relates to Rivers State. It is against this background that this study seeks to look at the NPF and management of occupational hazards in Rivers State.

Research Questions

1. What are the main causes of occupational injuries and death amongst police officers?
2. To what extent are the personal protective equipment (PPE) enough in preventing injuries and death?
3. What part of the body is more prone to fatality?
4. What rank of police officers is more prone to fatalities?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A study by the University of Buffalo (2008) pointed out that policing is a dangerous work, and the danger lurks not on the streets alone. The pressures, put officers at risk of high blood pressure, insomnia, increased levels of destructive stress hormones, heart problems, post-traumatic stress disorder and suicide. Rasdi et al. (2018) studied customized occupational safety and health website and its effectiveness in improving psychological safety climate (PSC) among police officers in Malaysia and expressed, that police work is among those occupations characterised as having a high prevalence (30% to 80%) of work related mental and psychological health problems.

There is great awareness of physical hazards, injuries and death that accompany the work of policemen. Violence against police officers is common place. Brandl (2012) observed that 10% of all injury accidents were as a result of assaults, 35% from unintentional actions of suspects, and about 55% of accidents were completely accidental. 60% of injury accidents occurred while officers were performing tasks. There has been life-threatening injuries in the wake of intervening in situations where police are invited and dealing with hostile citizens and suspects. Kaminski and Sorensen (1995) with data from Baltimore County Police Department (BCPD) reported that, each year a large number of law enforcement officers are assaulted in the United State. 62 police officers killed in 1992, 81,252 attacked, and 36.5 percent (29,657) with injury. Kyriacou et al. (2006) research on police deaths in New York and London in the twentieth century discovered that, 585 police officers in New York and 160 police officers in London died participating in law enforcement activities.

Mayhew (2001) recorded that, homicide is more common for United States officers during undercover work, making arrests, conducting drug raids, attending to domestic disputes or pursuing speeding motorists, assaults and communicable diseases. In South Africa, Plani et al. (2003) discovered that 92 South African Police Service (SAPS) members (69%) were injured by firearms. 80 shot by criminal suspects, 3 SAPS members attempted suicide and sustained self-inflicted gunshot wounds, and 9 members were injured due to negligent discharges, 2 members were stabbed by criminal suspects. The study identified sergeant, constable and inspector ranks as most

injured in the group, while the chest, abdomen and lower limbs represented the site most affected of the gunshot wounds. Ojedokun (2014) discovered that, in the past three decades, hundreds of Nigeria policemen have been killed in the line of duty. In 2009 alone, a total of 263 police officers died while at their duty posts or performing official duties. Alemika and Chukwuma (2000) observed that Nigeria police officers are killed or injured as a result of the intervention in criminal activities or apprehension of offenders; they can also be targets of violence by citizens in different situations, such as strikes and protests or riots.

Police duties and challenges are universal. Police are the gatekeepers of the criminal justice system and the most visible representation of the state's power to both protect and control citizens (Allard & Prenzler, 2009). Police deaths – at the hands of other persons - entail a direct challenge to the rule of law and government authority. West et al. (2017) noted that police work involves exposure to multiple critical incident stressors, including the risk of being seriously injured or killed. Common non-fatal injuries among law enforcement officers are attributable to assaults, transportation incidents, and training incidents.

An employer and employee both have the responsibility of maintaining, preventing, and regulating work life in order to prevent risk. Association of Chief Police Officers (2012) noted that, policing is a dangerous job. In recognition of the challenges, officers have a duty to achieve excellent stewards of health and safety management to promote occupational health, safety and welfare. If this is accomplished, the police will have a safe and healthy workforce, able to deliver better service to the public. This will reduce the loss through death of valuable hands, experience and skills in the service.

There are many studies indicating the physical danger of police work and its relative tendencies. Violanti (2006) supporting the assertion that police work involves both physical and psychological dangers, stated that, terrorism adds a new and challenging dimension to dangers faced by police officers and contributes substantially to the risk of post-traumatic stress. He further noted that, police officers have an increased risk of suicide when compared to the general population.

Globally, the trend of police risk is increasing. The question now is, what is the role of police management in this regard? According to Allard and Prenzler (2009) in Australia, since the 1960s the trend have remain either at a stable or declining rate despite increases in crime, and availability of firearms and increased high risk activities such as drugs raids. Accordingly, this is due to improvements in procedures, body armour and training have contributed to this counter-effect. Kyricou et al. (2006) expressed that, New York City have adopted police training and policing strategies since 1980's, including community policing methods, which integrate officers with community resources and emphasized crime prevention and proactive problem solving. Police training and policing strategies are central in occupational police deaths. In England, several parliamentary Acts were passed during the 19th century to develop a professional police force that emphasized restrained force and limited use of lethal weapons and tactics.

This responsibility led to the establishment of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) with the goal of assuring safe and healthy working conditions for employee. It is cumbersome on the part of the police management with regards to financial cost and man hour loss experience from the budget. This cost includes replacing injured officers, organizing appropriate treatment, and conducting "back-to-back" testing (Larsen, 2016:7).

Different work environments have various risks to face which could result in accidents or casualties. To prevent and minimize the occurrence, the management and workers alike must understand occupational safety and health policies of their organization, put into practice to safeguard work environment. The police size, budget and strength are depleted daily by the challenges of occupational hazards, and morale of the officers and men are devoured. Times of India (2011) reported that, criminals are using highly technical instruments, police personnel don't have proper training, modern and sufficiency of arms, lack technical advancement, insufficient vehicles, and police personnel are less the states and when compared to what is required by the country. In 2007, Ministry of Home Affairs, India estimated 145.2 policemen among Indians, less than United States police availability of 328.4/100000 person and United Kingdom 252.8/100000 person. Oladoye et al. (2018) located the Nigeria police in a crucial level, both local and national in the emergency response process. They noted that worn – out equipment, inadequate facilities and insufficient training as major challenges in emergency preparedness and response activities in Illorin town.

The theoretical model for the study is the Job Demand-Control (JDC) theory of Karasek (1979). It suggests that occupational stress rises from the balance between job demands and job control. It emphasizes that the strain occurs (as of the police) due to assaults, long sitting/standing posture, unfavourable working conditions with no control over the situations. In these circumstances, the officers have no choice but of factors which require efficient training, police management policies, government / community support and better working conditions.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a survey design on police hazard management of the Rivers State command. Questionnaires were served to respondents of all the ranks serving in the four metropolitan Area Commands (Port Harcourt, Mini-Okoro, Oyigbo and Choba). This involves Senior Police Officers (SPOs), Inspectorate cadre (Inspectors) and Rank and File (sergeants, corporals and constables). Port Harcourt is the capital of Rivers State, with a population of 1,865,000 inhabitants (National Population Census, 2006). The study population was the Rivers State Police Command, made up of about 14,230 police officers (Command Nominal Roll September, 2021). Out of which 389 police officers were drawn using Taro Yamane's technique. Simple random sampling technique was applied to select two divisions from each of the four (4) clusters. As Diobu, Olu-Obasanjo, Mini-Okoro, Trans Amadi, Afam, Eneka, Ozuoba and Special Area Divisions.

Respondents were those willing and available at the time of the study to participate, given that all potential respondents shared a common feature – police officers. The questionnaire was divided into four sections covering major areas as causes of occupational injuries and death, PPE and prevention of injuries

and death, body part prone to fatality, and officers' rank prone to fatality. Data were grouped into various categories, analyzed using descriptive statistics, which involved the use of simple percentages.

RESULTS

Research Question One: What are the main causes of occupational injuries and death amongst police officers?

Table 1: Causes of Occupational Injuries and Death amongst Police Officers.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Operations	105	28.4	28.4	28.4
	Traffic	57	15.4	15.4	43.8
	Investigation	96	25.9	25.9	69.7
	Station Duties	53	14.3	14.3	84.1
	Administration	59	15.9	15.9	100.0
	Total	370	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author's compilation, 2025

Table 1 is on occupational injuries and death amongst Police officers in the command, indicating that, 105 (28.4%) are in the Operations department. About 96 (25.9%) are working in the Investigation department, 59 (15.9%), are in Administrative

section, while 57 (15.4%) are in the Traffic department, and 53 (14.3%) are working in the police station on station duties respectively.

Research Question Two: To what extent are the personal protective equipment (PPE) enough in preventing injuries and death?

Table 2: Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Prevention of Injuries and Deaths

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Helmet	52	14.1	14.1	14.1
	Hand Gloves	32	8.6	8.6	22.7
	Boots	19	5.1	5.1	27.8
	Eye Google	8	2.2	2.2	30.0
	Nose Mask	87	23.5	23.5	53.5
	Ear Plug	5	1.4	1.4	54.9
	Body Armour	167	45.1	45.1	100.0
	Total	370	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author's compilation, 2025

The most required type of PPE is shown in table 2. Body armour is the most required PPE by the respondents, indicated by 167 (45.1%), followed by nose mask with 87 (23.5%)

respondents. Helmet is the third required PPE with 52 (14.1%) respondents. Ear plug is the least required PPE amongst respondents with 5 (1.4%).

Research Question Three: What part of the body is more prone to injury?

Table 3: Part of the Body Prone to Injury

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Head	171	46.2	46.2	46.2
	Chest	61	16.5	16.5	62.7
	Legs	127	34.3	34.3	97.0
	Stomach	11	3.0	3.0	100.0
	Total	370	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author's compilation, 2025

Table 3 is on the most anticipated part of the body to be affected with injury while on duty. Respondents indicated that, the head with 171 (46.2%) is the most anticipated part,

followed by the legs with 127 (34.3%), and the chest with 61 (16.5%), and the least being the stomach with 11 (3%).

Research Question Four: What rank of police officers is more prone to fatalities?

Table 4: Rank of Police Officers Prone to Fatalities

		Rank of Officer			Total
		SENIOR	INSPECTOR	RANK & FILE	
Experience of Occupational Injury or Illness by Officer	Yes	67	81	52	200
	No	43	80	47	170
Total		110	161	99	370

Source: Author's compilation, 2025

On table 4 of occupational injury or illness by officer, the Inspectorate rank indicated experiencing more injury and illness by 81 respondents than other ranks, followed by the Senior officers and the Rank and File by 67 and 52 respondents respectively.

DISCUSSION

From the findings, majority of the respondents (police officers) are engaged majorly in operational, investigation and traffic duties, with 28.4%, 25.9% and 15.4% respectively. In operations for example, foot or vehicular patrol, stop and search, pursuit of criminals, beat duties; traffic duties, be it hand control, children and elderly road crossing, checking of vehicular particulars, they come in contact with unlicensed and drunken drivers, as well as felons escaping arrest. In the course of investigation, in most communities, officers meet with

offenders who refuses to be arrested, and gang members who fight to set their member(s) free. In these duties, police officers come in constant contact with members of the public thereby exposing them to diseases, injuries and or death. These findings concur with the study of Hesketh and Tehrani (2018) that, some police roles carry a burden of traumatic exposure. Equally, Wong and Chan (2018) in their study of emerging issues in occupational safety and health, identified dynamic and changing working environments result in many unknown risks, which pose challenges and opportunities for workers, organisations and authorities. On the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) in preventing injuries and death, the respondents show that they are in high need in the course of execution of their duties with 85.9% clamouring for PPE. This is in line with the study of Plani et al. (2003) that, many penetrating injuries sustained by police officers can be alleviated through the use of body armour. However, the most

required PPE amongst the study group is identified as body armour, followed by nose mask with 45.1% and 23.5% support respectively. These were identified as the most basic PPEs in preventing vital body parts against injuries/death, and of contacting contagious diseases. The most anticipated part of the body for injury was identified as the head and legs by respondents. The head in cases of assaults, gun shots, while the legs in cases of pursuit of felons, during operations, investigations and in performing traffic duties. These are in line with the study of Edwards and Meader (2015) who recommended that, law enforcement should never have to police our communities without the protection of a bullet-resistance vest.

On the rank of officers most prone to fatalities, the analysis indicated that, the Inspectorate cadre with 74 respondents, followed by the Rank and File are the rank of officers most prone to fatalities. The rank is the supervisory rank and of field workers of the Nigeria Police Force, by which they lead the junior in the performances of duties. They are the most visible group of officers in the performance of statutory responsibilities in the field and with members of the public. In the same vain, the inspectorate rank was identified as the rank that experience most occupational injury and illness than other ranks.

Occupational injuries and death amongst police officers in the operations (28.4%) and investigations (25.9%) departments, by which they are exposed to arrests of criminal elements, traffic duties, beat and patrol duties, stop and search, raid of criminal hideouts and hottest jobs. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and the prevention of injuries and death. 85.9% of respondents stressed that their work responsibilities require more the use of PPE. Body armor, according to 45.1% of respondents is the most required PPE needed to be effective in policing. The head was anticipated by 46.2 % as the most injured of all parts of the body. The inspectorate rank of the police force was identified with 161 respondents as the most vulnerable group prone to more fatalities. This is because the rank in population ratio is higher than other ranks, as well as middle managerial cadre often in lead of the Rank and file in the performance of duties. The next prone rank to fatalities is the Senior Police Officers (SPO) responded by 110 police personnel.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings, the following are recommended:

1. Regular use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and full equipment, especially body armor, to guard against fatalities and death and of other communicable diseases.
2. The management team need to develop operational risk management systems at all stages of operations and to ensure compliance to avoid frequencies of incidences of fatalities.
3. The Inspectorate cadre need more operational training, since they are prone to injuries and death than other ranks.
4. In every operation risk(s) must be identified, especially those of injury and death.

5. Management to develop policies on increased use of safety techniques on tactical pursuit and operations.
6. Intelligence work approach need; to be encouraged to develop threat assessment, create sound risk-benefit decision and reduce operational confrontations of the police with violent criminals.
7. Retain comprehensive records on assaults, accidents and deaths of all personnel, in order to facilitate regular reviews.

CONCLUSION

The exposure of officers to long hours of standing/sitting posture has led to stress, and reduce courage to confront violent criminals. There is a need to balance work with other routine activities of the force. Supervisors need to balance time to recreate, reduce unhealthy conditions. Policies on stress, diseases, injuries and death of officers and their families need reforms. By addressing these, it will motivate officers to brace up to the challenges of commitment to duties.

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