



## **The Work Ethical Behaviour of Nigerian Police Officers as a Function of Self-Esteem, Gender and Age**

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### **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Authors NSA and EW designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol, and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors BEN and MNI managed the analyses of the study and the literature searches. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study investigated the influence of self-esteem, gender and age on work ethical behaviour of police officers. 200 Police Officers comprising of one hundred and six (106) males (53%) and ninety four (94) females (47%) with their ages ranging from 18-51 from the Imo State Police Command in the South Eastern region of Nigeria were selected using convenience sampling technique. They were administered with a self developed work ethic questionnaire and index of self-esteem questionnaire developed by Hudson (1982). Three hypotheses were tested; (i) Self-esteem will not be a statistical significant factor affecting work ethical behaviour of police officers; (ii) Gender will not be a statistical factor affecting work ethical behaviour of police officers. (iii) Age will not be a statistical significant factor affecting work ethical behaviour of police officers. A cross sectional survey was adopted, while F-test for 3-way ANOVA was used to analyze the data. Results showed that self-esteem and gender influenced adherence to work ethics ( $P < .05$ ) while age did not. Officers with high self-esteem in

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general and female officers in particular were more ethical in their behaviour.

*Keywords: Self esteem; gender; age; nigerian police officers; ethical behaviour.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Nigeria Police Force was formed in the year 1930 and later enshrined in section 194 of the 1979 constitution [1]. Their roles include the enforcement of law, protection of lives and properties as well as the maintenance of internal peace and security. However, the Force has drawn great attention from a vast majority of the Nigerian population following a spate of total collapse in the adherence to its work ethics. Thus, great attention has shifted from the ethical behavior of those in the economic sector, administrative and other spheres of social life to individuals in the Nigerian Police Force, thereby putting heavy ethical demand on the work of police officers. These demands include a number of norms which the police officers have to abide by in their day-to-day work in case their activities are appraised as professionals according to public expectations. Ethical behavior as used in this work involves refraining from negative acts/behavior that is contrary to the code of conducts of the Nigerian Police Force. It is characterized by honesty, fairness and equity in interpersonal, professional and relationships. An officer who espouses ethical behavior will respect the rights of the citizens.

Generally, there has been a negative perception of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) which emanated from their poor performance in handling crimes and poor work ethics exhibited by some of its members. This has lowered the level of confidence and trust the Nigerian citizens have on the NPF. As [2] pointed out, resident cooperation with police can only improve if residents' perceptions of police legitimacy and trustworthiness are increased. Westmarland [3] opined that people are interested more on what the police do than how they do it. This statement is true especially in the Nigerian context. The media and the public have not shown interest in how the NPF do their job as well as identifying some of the factors that may have deterred their efficiency. Presently the NPF is understaffed, under equipped with the necessary logistics like sophisticated arms, communication gadgets and vehicles needed for the successful execution of their mission to serve and protect [4]. For example, Nigeria has a population of over 150,000,000; it requires 375,000 police men to meet the United Nations recommended strength. Unfortunately, what Nigeria has today is 310,177 given a shortfall of 64,823 whereas the recommended United Nations Police ratio in any given population is 400:1 (400 citizens for one policeman). Nevertheless, the Nigerian government is currently making efforts to reform the police. A White Paper with 79 recommendations for improving the police force, known as Police Reform Bill is ongoing. Key reforms such as: Police officers who receive as little as \$40 (£26) a month, should be raised to \$100 for police constables, Deal with the estimated 10,000 officers with criminal records hired between 2001 and 2004, Establish a reliable system for the public to complain about the police, better educated recruits should attain a certain level of qualification before being considered, job applications should be transparently managed, policemen should not have to buy their own uniforms, the police are in dire need of an up-to-date communication network, and the police should be given better investigating tools and the training to use them [5]. The willingness to abide to ethical norms by police officers depends on their attitude toward work. Given the diversity of the workforce of the police in terms of demographic

variables such as gender, age educational level, rank and length of service; the ethical attitude of police officers cannot be said to be homogenous, rather it appears far more complex. But this research is particularly interested in self-esteem, gender and age composition of the workforce. Though there are no available statistics regarding the self-esteem, gender and age composition of the workforce, available evidence shows an increase in the number of women and youths in the police force. It is also worth stating that work ethic is also changing as workplace diversity, generational and cultural differences make the work ethic more complex. Thus, ethical attitude based on a more homogenous work environment may not apply in tomorrow's workplace. Based on the above, it is therefore imperative to examine how self-esteem, gender and age difference affect the workplace ethical attitudes of individuals in the Nigeria Police Force (NPF). The image of Nigeria to the rest of the world is that Nigerians are corrupt. There is corruption everywhere in Nigeria that the President, Goodluck Jonathan in his inaugural speech acknowledged corruption as the country's biggest problem. The federal government established the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) as agents for fighting corruption in the country. Corruption has brought untold hardship to Nigerians, a high rate of poverty inequality and total collapse of essential services like electricity, education and water. Some of the corrupt acts in Nigeria includes: bribery, Frauds, embezzlement, extortion, favoritism and nepotism to mention but a few.

The Nigerian police force, in spite of its pivotal role in criminal justice system is not immune to this virus that ravages the nation. It is unimaginable that an institution saddled with the responsibility of enforcing law could rank among the most corrupt institutions in the country. However, there seems to be an existing inverse relationship between the effort being made by the government to boost sanity and performance in the Nigeria Police Force. It is to this effect that the Inspector general (I.G) of Police warned commissioners against unlawful detention and unhealthy work ethic. Thus, it is for this reason that this research is being proposed to provide answers to the problem of unhealthy work ethic among police officers of the Nigeria police force.

One attribute that may determine how an individual responds to work ethic is self esteem. According to [6], it is generally accepted that people seek to maintain, enhance and protect their self-esteem. Also, the manner in which they foster their self-esteem has a great deal to do with their behavior and the consequences to others. Thus, their level of self-esteem influences their ethical behavior as regards to work. Self-esteem rises and falls in response to successes and failures in domains on which one has staked self worth [6]. Although there may be cultural variability in its expression, the tendency to seek self-esteem is well established in western cultures.

Steele [7] stated that individuals with high self-esteem have integrity which they try as much as possible to protect by strictly adhering to their work ethic. This quest to protect their integrity is bedrock on the axiom which states; "whatever reduces a man's dignity reduces his authority". Integrity here is generally considered to be "uprightness" within an individual. A person who has high self-esteem does not only obey the law but also adheres to rules and standards. This kind of behavior is usually referred to as ethical behavior. Conversely, those with low self esteem seem not to care much about ethical behavior since they are in the struggle to get to "the top", they believe they have very little or nothing to lose. Unfortunately, it is often difficult to judge the extent to which one adheres to high ethical principles/behaviour. For example, a decision regarding a

particular course of action might be based on ethical standards, fear of punishment or enlightened self-interest.

There is this belief that men are more likely to consider rules, right and fairness, while, females are more likely to be concerned with relationships, compassion and caring [8]. That is to say, they are emotional. This difference is basically considered to be the result of gender socialization in early childhood. Traditional girls game involve indirect competition, and are more concerned with inclusion and turn-taking while traditional boys games tend to have more complex and rigid rules, and involved competing against others within the parameter of these rules. Gilligan's Theory of Moral Development posits that women think and speak in different ways and in different voices than men when faced with ethical issue [9]. She presented two contrasting ways of resolving ethical dilemmas. Feminine ethics is based on care and compassion whereas masculine ethics is based on universal justice. Under the former, she contends that individuals (women in particular) who knowingly allow another person to feel pain blame themselves for not doing something to prevent or act as a palliative to their pains. While under the latter, individuals judge each other guilty if they do something wrong to one another.

Gilligan and Attanucci [10] attributed the differences in resolving dilemmas between men and women to difference in the socialization process. This is because women have been taught to be reserved and relationship oriented and for this reason, they tend to develop a caring ethical behavior. Men on the other hand, having being 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 adult's 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 to rule breakers because of their concern for relationships [11]

A number of studies on police attitude towards ethical issue conducted in the western world have reported that female officers on average expressed higher ethical standard than males. For example, in a longitudinal survey of law enforcing officers in the United States, [12] found that female officers gave significantly more ethical responses for both idealistic and realistic situations than their male counterparts. In Australia, [13] investigated the attitude to police officers and recruits towards breaches of ethics and found that females appeared to have higher ethical personal standard than male officers of equivalent rank. Similarly, [14] examined the influence of gender and age on attitude towards professional ethic among a sample of the Nigeria police officers using a cross-sectional survey, data was collected from a total of 163 participants and the results revealed that gender and age were significant predictors of unethical beliefs; females and older police officers were more ethical than their male and younger counterparts. Again [15] reported the findings of a meta-analysis of 47 students showing that female students consistently exhibit stronger ethical attitudes than their male counterparts. In a survey using a series of vignettes across different settings in the US, [16], found that, among business professionals females displayed higher ethical judgment than the male folks.

Another variable which may significantly influence the extent in which an individual adheres to the ethical demands of his/her work place is age. In the contemporary Nigerian society, old age is usually likened to wisdom, uprightness and adherence to norms [17]. This is because, the more advanced in age one becomes the more

experience he/she acquires and for this reason, they think, talk and act out of their wealth of past experiences. Thus, their actions are compelled by positive reasoning. The younger police officers on the other hand, may act out of youthful exuberance without considering the consequences of their actions. However, younger officers who are in close contact with the older colleagues may be influenced by their attitudes. This study seeks to empirically confirm the influence of the age of police officers on their work ethical behaviours.

According to the observational theory of Bandura [18], much of what we learn are obtained by observing others, and this is much more efficient than learning through direct experience because it spares more countless responses that might be followed by either punishment or no reinforcement of any kind. The people whose behavior is observed are referred to as models. [18] identified four (4) main processes that are crucial for observational learning. Attention, retention/representation, behavior production and motivation. In order to learn through observation you must attend to the model. Factors that regulate attention include whether we think the behavior is important and can yield some profit to us. Secondly, we must learn to make some mental representation of what we have witnessed in memory, since we may not have the occasion to use an observed behavior for up to several years. Behavior production on the other hand, involves the process of converting the mental representations into appropriate actions. For instance, you may remember that someone cheated on his taxes or embezzled money that was entrusted under his care but can you perform the feat? Lastly, observational learning is most effective when observers are motivated to enact the model behavior. Your motivation may depend on whether you encounter a situation in which you believe that the response is likely to lead to favorable consequence(s) for you.

From the above, it is therefore, deduced that every officer in the Nigeria police force has a role model, and severe punishment to this model (as a result of negligence to work ethic and/ or non adherence to code of conduct) will restrain the officer from emulating him/her. If on the contrary, the model gets away with his/her wrong deeds, the observer will therefore, have every cause to emulate him/her. Thus, to ensure that police officers eschew unhealthy work attitude, anyone caught espousing it should be severely punished, to serve as a deterrent to others who may wish to emulate him or her.

Afolabi and Omole [4] conducted a study on personality and workforce diversity as predictors of ethical behavior and job satisfaction among Nigerian Police officers. They upheld their hypothesis which predicted that age, gender, educational attainment and work experience of Police officers will independently and jointly predict their ethical behaviour. The results showing the contribution of each of the predictor variables in the joint prediction revealed that age contributed significantly with older police officers scoring higher on professional ethical scale than the younger ones. The contribution of gender was also significant, thus male police officers scored higher on professional ethical scale than their female colleagues. The present study therefore seeks to find out if self esteem, gender, and age can predict police officers work ethical behaviour.

### **1.1 Hypotheses**

Self-esteem will not be a statistical significant factor affecting work ethical behaviour of police officers.

Gender will not be a statistical significant factor affecting work ethical behaviour of police officers.

There will be no statistical significant effect of age on work ethical behaviour of police officers.

## **2. METHODS**

### **2.1 Participants**

A total number of 200 volunteered police officers comprising of 106 males (53%) and 94 females (47%) with their ages ranging from 18-51, took part in this study. They were selected using the convenience sampling technique. One hundred police officers (participants), were drawn from Imo State Police Headquarters, 60 from Fire Service Police Station Owerri, and 40 participants were drawn from the New Owerri police station (area "A").

### **2.2 Measures**

The researchers made use of two questionnaires in the course of carrying out this study. The first instrument which measured the ethical behavior of the participants was a self developed 21 item Likert Scale. This questionnaire was developed after going through the "Police Act" (CAP 359) which was made available to the researchers through the help of the Police public relation officer (PPRO), Imo state police command, Owerri so as to be abreast with the expected ethical behaviours of police officers in Nigeria. Some items on the questionnaire are; "At checkpoints, I delay motorists who refuse to appreciate me monetarily", "It is generally not wrong for an officer to accept bribe from business people" and "I intimidate the public with my uniform". Before the main study, a pilot study was carried out using thirty-three (33) police officers drawn from shell camp police station to ascertain the validity of the questionnaire. The item analysis reduced the items from the original developed twenty-eight (28) items to twenty-one (21). These twenty-one (21) items yielded a Cronbach's alpha level of .83 and a mean score of 65.58. Hence, the questionnaire is reliable.

The second questionnaire which was the "Index of Self Esteem" (ISE) questionnaire developed by Hudson [19] was used to measure the self esteem of the participants. It comprises of twenty five (25) items and uses the likert scoring format. Positive statements were scored directly while the negative ones were scored in the reverse order. The Nigerian norm of the second scale is 31.47 (30.89 for males and 32.04 for females), while the reliability is .93 and a two (2) hour test-retest coefficient of .92.

### **2.2 Procedure**

It took exactly two working weeks to carry out the main research work which included collection of data. At the various police stations visited, there were officers on hand that helped out in the study. Two hundred copies of the questionnaire were distributed at the 3 selected Police Stations in Owerri metropolis which are as follows: one hundred questionnaires at the Police Headquarters; forty questionnaires at the New Owerri Police Station; while sixty questionnaires at the Fire Service Police Station. At the end of the whole exercise, the two hundred questionnaires were properly filled and used for the

analysis. These police stations were randomly selected from the five police stations in Owerri metropolis, the state capital of Imo state (Nigeria), these police stations include the State police headquarters which was part of the study. Information on the number of police officers in these stations were not revealed due to security reasons.

### 2.3 Design and Statistics

The design for this work is a cross-sectional survey design and the statistics adopted is the F-test for 3-Way analysis of variance (2x2x4 ANOVA). This was predicated on the two (2) levels of each of the first two independent variables, viz: Self-esteem (high vs low), gender (male vs female); and the third independent variable Age with four levels each (18-25,26-35, 36-45 & 45+).

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1. The descriptive statistics of variables studied which includes the mean, standard deviation and number of participants respectively**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>N</b>
Low self –esteem	56.90	8.72	108
High self-esteem	64.32	5.79	92
Male	57.83	8.73	106
Female	63.11	6.99	94
26-35	58.36	8.92	58
36-45	60.12	7.37	74
18-25	60.89	9.18	45
46+	64.70	6.86	23

*The descriptive statistics of the scores of the police officers work ethical behaviour*

The above table shows that the first hypothesis which stated that self esteem will not be a statistical significant factor affecting work ethics of police officers is rejected,  $F(1, 184) = 34.648, P < .05$ . This means that self esteem influenced the work ethical behaviour of police officers. Police with high self esteem ( $M = 64.32, SD = 8.72$ ) espoused high ethical behaviour than their counterparts of low self-esteem ( $M = 56.90, SD = 5.79$ ). Similarly, the second hypothesis is also rejected,  $F(1, 184) = 9.541, P = .002$ . Thus gender played a significant role in work ethic. The female police officers ( $M = 63.11, SD = 6.99$ ) exhibited high work ethic than their male counterparts ( $M = 57.83, SD = 8.73$ ). However, the third hypothesis which stated that there will be statistical significant effect of age on work ethic of police officers was upheld,  $F(1, 184) = 1.634, P = .183$ .

**Table 2. A 3-way ANOVA summary table (Dependent variable: work ethical behaviour)**

Source	Type III sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig
Corrected model	4563.7072	15	304.247	5.976	.000
Intercept	521387.459	1	521387.459	10241.758	.000
Self-esteem (A)	1763.848	1	1763.848	34.648	.000
Gender (B)	485.691	1	485.691	9.541	.002
Age (C)	249.476	3	83.159	1.634	.183
A* B	22.680	1	22.680	.446	.505
A*C	386.624	3	128.875	2.532	.059
B * C	242.739	3	80.913	1.589	.193
A *B*C	104.569	3	34.856	.685	.562
Error	9367.073	184	50.908		
Total	741390.000	200			
Corrected total	13930.780	199			

*R squared = .328 (adjusted R squared = .273)*

Three hypotheses were statistically tested in the research work and the results drawn from these constitute the findings according to the hypotheses tested.

The first (null) hypothesis speculated that “self-esteem will not be a statistical significant factor affecting the work ethical behaviour of police officers”. This result corroborated the finding of [20], who conducted a study on employees’ self-esteem and found out that an individual’s self-esteem formed around play and organizational experiences would play a significant role in determining employee motivation, work related attitude and behaviour.

The second result also rejected the null hypothesis that gender will not be a statistical significant factor affecting work ethical behaviour of police officers. Thus, gender played a significant. The female police officers were more ethical in their behaviour than their male counterparts. This is in consonance with the research made by Adebayo (2005); his result revealed that gender and age were significant predictors of unethical beliefs. Females and older police officers were more ethical than their male and younger counterparts.

On the other hand, age was not a determinant of work ethical behaviour of police officers. This result is not in line with that of Afolabi and Omole (2011) who found that age and gender jointly and independently predicted Police officers ethical behavior. The results of this study imply that:

- (i) The level of an officer’s self-esteem determines to a large extent how he/she will exhibit ethical behaviour. Therefore, a screening process for officers with high levels of self esteem and competency may help.
- (ii) Due to the fact that female police officers were ethical in their behaviour than their male counterparts, it becomes imperative to encourage more females to join the NPF. Also, more female officers may help address the crisis of legitimacy in Nigerian policing and restore back the image of the NPF.
- (iii) Age should not be considered an important variable during recruitment provided the applicant has the basic requirements and is above the minimum age required for entry into the force.



### **3.1 Limitations of the Study**

One of the major limitations of this study is the use of convenience sampling. It is possible that only police officers who are ethical may have responded to the questionnaire. This method also does not allow the researcher to have any control over the representativeness of the sample. That is, the researcher did not control how well the characteristics of the sample (gender, age, race, education, etc.) match the characteristics of the larger population it is intended to represent. Similarly, the number of participants used does not adequately represent the population of police officers in Imo state. Therefore caution should be made when making generalizations from the findings of this study.

### **4. CONCLUSION**

This study revealed the theoretical and practical aspects of self-esteem, gender and age in relation to the work ethical behaviour of officers in the Nigeria Police Force. In view of the study, it was discovered that self-esteem and gender had influences on the work ethical behaviour of police officers, whereas age did not. It will also enable the general public, the senior police officers in charge of recruitment and most importantly the government to know that police officers with low self-esteem in general and the male police officers in particular are more likely to be involved in unhealthy work ethics. This will encourage management not to discriminate against women during recruitment into the Police Force and also not to generalize that all police officers espouse unethical behaviour. The researchers hereby recommend that the Nigeria police Force should encourage researchers to carry out research on their organization so that they can know their Achilles heels and work hard towards sanitizing the force and winning the trust and confidence of the general public and the government. Professionals like Psychologists should be engaged to take full charge of the recruitment and selection processes of individuals into the Force. By so doing, only individuals that are more likely to espouse ethical behaviour/abide by the ethics of the force will be recruited, thus enhancing their corporate image and achieving their mission to serve and protect.

### **COMPETING INTERESTS**

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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