

Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and Human Rights Violation in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

Okoro Sunday Asangausung¹, Gboyega Abikoye² & Ebere James Okorie³

^{1&3}*Department of Sociology & Anthropology, University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria*

²*Department of Psychology, University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria*

Corresponding Author: Okoro Sunday Asangausung

*Department of Sociology & Anthropology Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Uyo
Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.*

ABSTRACT

The paper investigated the issue of human right violations by officers of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) unit of the Nigeria Police Force using Akwa Ibom State as a case study. The study is guided by the assumptions of social conflict theory developed by Karl Marx. This theory is best appreciated because of the conflicting nature of the social relationships of society and its law enforcement institutions. Descriptive survey design was employed. Structured questionnaire aided the collection of primary data. The non-probability sampling approach was used for the study which involved purposive and snowball sampling methods. The study population consisted victims of human right violations, ex-convicts, people who have knowledge about the activities of SARS and selected officers of the Nigeria police force from the age cohorts of 18 years and 65 years. Primary data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings show that the appearances of officers of Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) are known for show of force, torture, incessant killings and their outlook is always terrified. Identifying an erring officer in SARS is always a difficult one. SARS are still in their operation and violations of human rights are still in the increase, hence, the public outcry to scrap SARS unit from the Nigeria Police Force. The study recommends that a competent court of jurisdiction must be ready to give fair hearing to cases against the Nigeria Police Force on human right abuses and compel the Inspector General of Police to produce the erring officer to appear in court in order to face the consequences of his/her actions and inactions squarely. SARS unit of the Nigeria Police Force should either be restructured with different orientation and operation with international best practices or stands the risk of being scrapped with compulsory retirement of all the officers attached to the unit.

Keywords: Special Anti-Robbery Squad, Human Rights, Violations of Human Rights

Date of Submission: 03-02-2021

Date of Acceptance: 18-02-2021

I. INTRODUCTION

The fundamental rights for all the citizens in Nigeria are guaranteed in Part II, Sections 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42 and 43 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) and Part II, paragraphs 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (2015) emphasized the humane treatment necessary for arrested suspects. However, media reports have shown records of the tremendous violations of individual rights committed by officers of Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) unit of the Nigeria Police Force whose duty is to ensure that people's rights are upheld (Pulse Nigeria Editorial, 2019; Vanguard Newspaper Editorial, 2017; Pulse Nigeria Editorial, 2016; Premium Times Editorial, 2015). The Nigeria Police is charged with the responsibility of the prevention and detection of crime, the apprehension and prosecution of offenders, the preservation of law and order, and the enforcement of all laws and regulations with which it is charged (Iwarimie-Jaja, 2012). This recognition is predicated on the need to secure, protect and safeguard lives and property of the citizens that should not be arbitrary and its exercise must be circumscribed by set of rules with respect to its limits that is in tandem with public perception, legitimacy principles and democratic tenet (Oromareghake, Oluka and Adishi, 2018).

The violation of human rights is not a strange experience in Nigeria (Suleiman, 2014). In a bid to stall crimes by the Nigeria Police, human rights have been violated and there is a public outcry by the citizens to stop these abuses. Naankiel (2013) undertook a survey on the Nigeria Police Force and their violations of human rights between 1993-2007 and he observed that the violations of human rights by officers of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) especially those that involve torture, extra-judicial killings, extortion and other forms of abuses are no longer uncommon. These violations have therefore become Nigeria's major problem. Sizani (2001) asserted

that respect for human rights must be the foundation for building lasting peace and justice. He further noted that fundamental human rights are at risk in Africa and courts must be especially vigilant. that respect for human rights must be the foundation for building lasting peace and justice. He further noted that fundamental human rights are at risk in Africa and court must be especially vigilant protection.

Iwarimie-Jaja (2012) pointed out the tremendous violations of individual rights by law enforcement agencies whose duty is to ensure that people's rights are upheld. Iwarimie-Jaja (2012) further pointed out that arrested persons who are detained by law enforcement agencies like the police and the secret service have lots of complaints leveled against them. In most cases, police officers do command arrested persons to remain silent, subjected them to torture, starvation and difficult conditions to make confessions to accusations. In the words of Iwarimie-Jaja (2012) police behaviour in Nigeria is underlined by high-handedness, arrogance of power and brutalization of the poor masses who are often the victims of un-actualized individual rights.

Violations of human rights by the NPF over the years have recorded unprecedented heights. The magnitude of such violations abounded in the areas of torture, illegal detention and extrajudicial killings. Police extrajudicial killings can be studied under deaths in custody, killing at checkpoints, and killings during protests and demonstrations (Naankiel, 2013). The United Nations Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officers provides that;

Law enforcement officials shall at all times fulfill the duty imposed upon them by the law, by serving the community and by protecting all persons against illegal acts, consistent with the high degree of responsibility required by their profession (United Nations Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officers, 1979 cited in Naankiel, 2013).

In Nigeria, cases of brutality by the Nigeria Police on innocent and defenceless citizens abound. Police are known for excessive use of force at police check points and during patrol duties, torture and cold blood murder have been committed at police stations and during interrogations. These acts by the police are inhuman and degrading to individuals who are so treated. Numerous cases abound which accuse the Nigeria Police of arbitrarily denying individuals of rights to obtain bail. It is suffice to say that, in police cells, detainees are ill-treated, overcrowding and infestation of diseases that violates the right to good health, human dignity and life.

The powers of the police to grant bail are empowered by the Nigerian Constitution and regulated by sections 17 and 340 of the Criminal Procedure Act and the Criminal Procedure Code, respectively which requires that the arrestee arrested without a warrant, for a non-capital offence was entitled to be charged to court within twenty-four hours or be released on bail. However, this rule has not been strictly followed, perhaps due to the fact that bail itself has become a corrupt means for collecting bribe. No wonder, Nwankwo, Mbachu and Ugochukwu (1993:40) said that "The police station has turned to a bank; the divisional police officers are bank managers".

However, Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) during its formation was known to operate covertly. SARS operatives were not allowed to be on police uniform, publicly carry guns or have walkie-talkies. They were given unmarked vehicles with sometimes no license plates or private plate numbers during duty (Vanguard News, 2017). Following several reports of human rights violation by members of the public to the office of the Inspector General of Police, on 7 August 2015 the then IGP Solomon Arase announced that it would be splitting the SARS unit into two units, operational unit and the investigation unit to curtail case of human rights violation. In September 2016, Pulse.ng compiled a report on Nigeria Police brutality with the heading "*Meet SARS, the Police Unit with license to kill*". The report highlighted the brutality and ignorance of the rules of engagement in the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (Pulse Nigeria, 2016).

Previous studies such as Naankiel (2013), Suleiman (2015), Oromareghake *et al.* (2018 and Okemini (2019) and many others have dealt with the issue of human rights violation by the Nigeria Police Force with different methods of investigation, but study has not been carried out in Akwa Ibom State with specific attention to officers of Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) Unit of the Nigeria Police Force on violations of human rights. It is against this background, that the study is conducted to fill the gap in the body of literature.

Aims/Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to investigate the issue of human rights violations by Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in Nigeria. Also, the following are the specific objectives;

- i to examine some human rights violations leveled against Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in Akwa Ibom State;
- ii to know causes of human right violations by Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in Akwa Ibom State;
- iii to know the perceptions of the public towards the activities of Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in Akwa Ibom State; and
- iv to make positive recommendations that could reduce the rate of human rights violations by SARS in Nigeria.

Research Questions

- The following questions guided the study;
- i What are some human rights violations leveled against Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in Akwa Ibom State?
 - ii What are causes of human right violations by Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in Akwa Ibom State?
 - iii What are the perceptions of the public towards the activities of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in Akwa Ibom State?

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Meaning of Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS)

Special Anti-Robbery Squad otherwise known as SARS is a dreaded controversial police unit in the Nigeria Police Force (Vanguard Newspaper Editorial, 2017). The Special Anti-Robbery Squad is a unit under the Force Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Department headed by the Deputy Inspector General of Police. The DIG receives its directives from the Inspector General of Police. SARS as it is popularly called is known for extortion, torture, framing up suspects and even blackmail (PM News Editorial, 2011). While the police unit has proven effective against crime, it is believed that the unit is corrupt. SARS have become a controversial police unit in Nigeria since 2012 according to reports (Salami, 2019).

Basically, the duty of the Nigerian Police Force as set out in the Nigerian Police Act 2004 is to secure lives and properties, prevent, detect crime, and apprehend offenders. The same law empowers the police officer to detain and search any person whom he reasonably suspects of having in his possession anything stolen or unlawfully obtained. In order to carry out their responsibilities effectively, the Nigerian Police Force established various units; one of such unit is the Special Anti-Robbery (SARS) has the sole responsibility of carrying out special anti-robbery operations without wearing a police uniform or badge.

History of Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in the Nigeria Police Force

The Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) was formed in 1992 by former Commissioner of Police, Simeon Danladi Midenda. The major reason SARS was formed was when Col. Rindam, a Nigeria Army Colonel was killed by police officers at a checkpoint in Lagos. When the information reached the Army, soldiers were dispatched into the streets of Lagos in search of any police officer. The Nigerian police withdrew from checkpoints, security areas and other points, some police officers were said to have resigned while others fled for their lives. With the absence of police for two weeks, crime rate was increased and SARS was formed with only 15 officers operating in the shadows without the knowledge of the Nigeria Army while monitoring police radio chatters. Prior to this time, three anti-robbery squad units were in operation and then Commissioner of Police, Simeon Danladi Midenda needed to distinguish his squad from the already existing units. Simeon Danladi Midenda named his team Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). After months of dialogue, the Nigerian Army and the Nigeria Police Force came to an understanding and official police duties began again in Lagos. The SARS unit was officially commissioned in Lagos following a ceasefire by the Nigeria Army after settlement.

Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and Their Issues

Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) is one of the 14 units in the Force Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Department (FCIID) which was established to detain, investigate and prosecute people involved in crimes like armed robbery, kidnapping and other forms of crimes. In 2009, after several years of operations the squad grew in number and strength. Due to the surge of internet fraudsters and cultism in the universities, SARS operatives infiltrated Nigerian universities, made several successful arrests but in the process harassed innocent youths. According to Pulse Nigeria (2019), officers of SARS have become a national scourge, witch-hunt machinery against Nigerian youths with dreadlocks, piercings, cars, expensive phones, guns, mustache, intimidating appearance (Pulse Nigeria Editorial, 2019).

P.M. News (2010) reported that Amnesty International (AI) would sue the Nigerian Police over human rights abuses as Special Anti-Robbery Squad in Borokiri, Port Harcourt arrested three bike riders and detained them for over one week while being "beaten every night with the butt of a gun and iron belt. It is on record that on 20 May 2010, a Federal High Court sitting in Enugu State ordered the then Inspector General of Police (IGP) Ogbonna Okechukwu Onovo to produce a Special Anti-Robbery Squad officer who had gunned down a 15 years-old boy in high school. According to the SARS officer, the teen was mistaken for a kidnapper (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, 2020). Similarly, on 27th July 2010, an extensive editorial report was published by Sahara Reporters on how SARS among other police unit profit 9.35Billion Naira (\$60million) from roadblocks and extortion within 18 months (Sahara Reporters Editorial, 2010). Also, on 3rd June 2011, the

Nigeria Police Force discovered an attempt by a SARS operative Musa Agbu to bomb the force Headquarters in Abuja because the Inspector General of Police (IGP) Hafiz Ringim scuttled his ambition (Vanguard Newspaper Editorial, 2011).

Following several reports of human rights violation by members of the public to the office of the Inspector General of Police, on 7 August 2015, the then Inspector General of Police (IGP) Solomon Arase announced that it would be splitting the SARS unit into two units, operational unit and the investigation unit to curtail case of human rights violation (Premium Times Nigeria Editorial, 2015). In September 2016, Pulse Nigeria Editorial (2016) compiled a report on Nigeria Police brutality with the heading "Meet SARS, the Police Unit with license to kill". The report highlighted the brutality and ignorance of the rules of engagement in the Special Anti-Robbery Squad.

Meaning of Human Rights:

Human rights are rights which people have simply as human beings irrespective of their nationalities, religion, citizenship, marital status, occupation, income or any other social or cultural activities (Ehinder, 1998). In other words, human rights are of universal application and implications. Clinton (1997) contends that human rights are the cornerstone of a viable and visible democracy, giving hope to all in society: the strong and the weak, rich and poor, great and small. Every person has these rights simply because they are human beings. They are guaranteed to everyone without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status. Human rights are essential to the full development of individuals and communities.

Many people view human rights as a set of moral principles that apply to everyone. Human rights are also part of international law, contained in treaties and declarations that spell out specific rights that countries are required to uphold. Countries often incorporate human rights in their own national, state, and local laws. They are commonly understood as inalienable, fundamental rights to which a person is inherently entitled simply because she or he is a human being and which are inherent in all human beings, regardless of their age, ethnic origin, location, language, religion, ethnicity, or any other status (Weston, 2014).

For the purpose of this study, human rights are universal, legal guarantees, protecting individuals and groups against actions which interfere with fundamental freedoms.

Meaning of Human Rights Violation:

For the purpose of this study, human rights violations refer to abuses or disregards to the rights of individuals by a unit of Nigeria Police Force known as SARS which is against Part IV of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended (1999) and the United Nations Universal Declaration for Human Rights (UDHR, 1948). The State is the main guardian of human rights and has the authority to take the necessary measures to protect your human rights. Therefore, it is the one which bears responsibility when something has happened to you.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is Social Conflict theory by Karl Marx. The theory seeks to explicate the contradiction inherent in social structure of the capitalist society.

Though, there are certain areas of common interest among the desperate existing social classes in the society such as the accessibility to political, economic and social resources that are fundamental and undermine existing relations between and among groups/classes. In other words, police legitimacy and human rights violation is based on the argument that the police were not created to serve the society or the people, but to serve some parts of the society or people at the expense of others. The main function of the police have been to protect the property and well-being of those who benefit most on economic, social and political hubs in the society based on the extraction of private profit. The police were created primarily in response to rioting and disorder directed against oppressive working and living conditions and prevents and protects the exploitative mechanism of the European traders and capitalists which led to the creation of police and inherited by Nigeria leaders after independence (Alemika, 2009).

The views of the society from the above form the theoretical foundation of the analyses of this contribution. Therefore, the organization, structure, role, function and performance of the police institution in our democratic environment are better appreciated against the backdrop of the conflicting nature of the social relationships of society and its law enforcement institutions.

In other words, the police force was created to enforce laws and maintain order in a conflict-laden social order characterized by unequal, inequitable economic and political power relations. Even though the values and sentiments of the general public may find their way into crime control laws, their enforcement policies and actions are imbued with and organized largely to promote oppression against the poor and powerless who experience more frequent and greater violence from the police and security operations.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State and descriptive survey design was adopted. Population of the study consisted victims of human rights violation and people who have knowledge about the activities of SARS as a unit in the Nigeria Police Force between the age cohorts of 18 years and 65 years (both male and female) taking residence in Akwa Ibom State. In-depth interviews were conducted among victims of human rights violation by SARS and people who are quite familiar with the activities of SARS in Akwa Ibom State. A sample size of 400 was obtained using Taro Yammen's scientific formula. The non-probability sampling approach was used for the study which involved purposive and respondent driven sampling methods. The purposive sampling enabled the researcher to identify people who have special insights into my research questions because of their experiences and contacts; thereby having useful data to provide. Respondent driven sampling method enabled the researcher to identify and contact victims of human rights violations by SARS through referrals. Quantitative method of data collection that involved the use of structured questionnaire was adopted to obtain first-hand information from respondents. Study participants were victims of human rights violations and those that have knowledge on the topic under investigation. This was done to get on the victims' experiences of violation. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency tables and simple percentages).

IV. DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 1: Presentation of Demographic Data of Respondents

Description	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	206	51.89
Female	191	48.11
Total	397	100
Age bracket		
18-23 years	65	16.37
24-29 years	58	14.61
30-35 years	62	15.62
36-41 years	49	12.34
42-47 years	51	12.85
48-53 years	53	13.35
54-59 years	29	7.30
60-65 years	30	7.56
Total	397	100
Educational Background		
No formal education	2	0.50
Primary	59	19.90
Secondary	164	41.31
Tertiary	152	38.29
Total	397	100
Religion		
Christianity	368	92.70
Islam	6	1.51
African Traditional Religion	2	0.50
Others	21	5.29
Total	397	100
Occupation		
Business	86	21.66
Farming	33	8.31
Civil servant	39	9.82
Student	202	50.88
Applicant	37	9.32
Total	397	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2020.

Table 1 show that 206 respondents representing 51.89% were males while 191 respondents representing 48.11% were females. In this case, male respondents formed the majority in the study population.

Those within the age brackets of 18-23 years were 65 (16.37%), 24-29 years were 58 (14.61%), 30-35 years were 62 (15.62%), 36-41 years were 49 (12.34%), 42-47 years were 51 (12.85%), 48-53 years were 53

(13.35%), 54-59 years were 29 (7.30%) and 60-65 years were 30 (7.56%). It reveals that those within the age brackets of 18-23 years formed the majority.

Respondents without formal education were 2 (0.50%), those that attended primary school were 59 (19.90%), and those who attended secondary school were 164 (41.31%) while tertiary institution were 152 (38.29%). It therefore means that, majority of respondents attended tertiary institution.

Christian worshippers were 368 respondents representing 92.70% being the highest, Moslems were 6 (1.51%), adherents of African traditional religion were 2 (0.50) while adherents of other religions were 21 (5.29%).

Respondents who are doing business were 86 (21.66%), farming were 33 (8.31%), civil servants were 39 (9.82%), students were 202 (50.88%) and applicants were 37 (9.32%). Most of the respondents in the study population were students who are still undergoing their studies in their various institutions of learning.

Table 2: Presentation of Field Data

Question/Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Are you aware of the incessant violation of human rights by officers of Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in Akwa Ibom State?	Yes	354	89.17
	No	35	8.82
	Undecided	8	2.02
	Total	397	100
Have you ever been harassed, arrested and detained by officers of Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in Akwa Ibom State?	Yes	212	53.40
	No	130	32.75
	Undecided	55	13.85
	Total	397	100
Would you consider your arrest/detention to be illegal?	Yes	219	55.16
	No	112	28.21
	Undecided	66	16.62
	Total	397	100
Did you commit any offence when you were arrested and detained by officers of Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS)?	Yes	161	40.55
	No	212	53.40
	Undecided	24	6.05
	Total	397	100
Were you in Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) detention more than 48 hours	Yes	219	55.16
	No	164	41.31
	Undecided	14	3.53
	Total	397	100
Officers of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) are aware of the laws against human rights violations but they tend to neglect them.	Agreed	307	77.33
	Disagreed	67	16.88
	Undecided	23	5.79
	Total	397	100
Officers of Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) are known for arbitrary arrest, unlawful detention, and torture to extract information, extra judicial killings, harassment, extortion, intimidation, bribery and corruption?	Agreed	385	96.98
	Disagreed	10	2.52
	Undecided	2	0.50
	Total	397	100
Desire for quick wealth, ignorance of the law, poor welfare package, illiteracy, lack of proper supervision, societal regards for human rights, lack of professional training, poor judicial justice system, illegitimate recruitment, absolute power and poor funding are the reasons for human rights violations by officers of Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in Akwa Ibom State?	Agreed	392	98.25
	Disagreed	4	1.00
	Undecided	3	0.75
	Total	397	100
Do you think the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) Unit should be scrapped from the Nigeria Police Force?	Yes	301	75.82
	No	88	22.17
	Undecided	8	2.02
	Total	397	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2020.

Table 2 shows that majority of 354 respondents representing 89.17% said that they are aware of the incessant violations of human rights by officers of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), 35 respondents representing 8.82% said that they are not aware, while 8 respondents representing 2.02% were undecided.

Evidence show that 212 respondents representing 53.40% of the study population said that they have been harassed, arrested and detained by officers of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), 130 respondents representing 32.75% said that they have not been harassed, arrested and detained by officers of Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) but they have people they know who must have been harassed, arrested and detained by officers of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), while 55 respondents representing 13.85% were undecided. This unanimous agreement by majority of respondents is an indication of incessant and continuous harassment, unwarranted detention and arrest and torture by officers of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) pointing to a gross negligence of citizens' rights.

Result shows 219 respondents representing 55.16% said that their arrest and detention by officers of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) was considered illegal, because the method of arrest and detention was terrified involving the use of excessive force, 112 respondents representing 28.21% said that their arrest and subsequent detention was not illegal but the torture and harassment they received from the SARS was illegal and 66 respondents representing 16.62% were undecided. The above figure confirmed the idea that officers of Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) are known for illegal arrest and detention which is a gross violation of citizen's rights.

Evidence also show that 161 respondents representing 40.55% said that they had committed an offence that led to their arrest and detention by officers of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) but their treatment was evil and unforgettable. Majority of 212 respondents representing 53.40% said that they were arrested and detained by officers of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) without committing any offence, thereby putting them in difficult situation and undeserved confinement while 24 respondents representing 6.05% were undecided.

It is disheartening that Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) could detain a suspect more than 48 hours required by the law. This is confirmed by 219 respondents representing 55.16% who said that they spent more than 48 hours in Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) detention, 164 respondents representing 41.31% had a different opinion that Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) did not spend more than 48 hours but their rights were violated while 14 respondents representing 3.53% were undecided.

Evidence show that officers of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) are aware of the laws against violations of human rights but tend to neglect this important aspect of social life. This has been confirmed by 307 respondents representing 77.33% who said that officers of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) are aware of the laws against violations of human rights but tend to neglect its importance, 67 respondents representing 16.88% disagreed, while 23 respondents representing 5.79% were undecided.

A total of 385 respondents representing 96.98% have agreed that officers of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) are known for arbitrary arrest, unlawful detention, and torture to extract information, extra judicial killings, harassment, extortion, intimidation, bribery and corruption, 10 respondents representing 2.52% disagreed while 2 respondents representing 0.50% were undecided. This result is confirmed by the works of Ogbunwezeh (2003), Naankiel (2013), Bunton *et al.* (2003) cited in Suleiman (2015) who observed that human rights violation in Nigeria are high and respect for fundamental human rights of persons by the police was very poor, in their work they asserted that "operation fire for fire "(an anti -robbery police fighters) were the most frequent human right violators, as they committed extra judicial killings in apprehension and detention of crime suspects.

Desire for quick wealth, ignorance of the law, poor welfare package, illiteracy, lack of proper supervision, societal regards for human rights, lack of professional training, poor judicial justice system, illegitimate recruitment, absolute power and poor funding are the reasons for human rights violations by officers of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in Akwa Ibom State. This has been supported by 392 respondents representing 98.25%. Those who disagreed were 4 respondents representing 1.00% while 3 respondents representing 0.75% were undecided. This result is confirmed by the work of Okemini (2019) who conducted a study in Ebonyi State Police Command and observed that lack of proper enforcement of ethical code, poor training and low educational level, poor economic standard, poor leadership style or governance failure and many more constitute the rate of unethical behaviour that affects the efficiency and effectiveness of Nigeria police Force on the rights' of the citizens. With this data, the research question 2 has been answered.

A total of 301 respondents representing 75.82% were of the opinion that Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) Unit should be scrapped from Nigeria Police Force for violation of human rights, 88 respondents representing 22.17% said that Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) Unit should not be scrapped from Nigeria Police Force, rather, it should be restructured and retrained the personnel while 8 respondents representing 2.02% were undecided.

Findings also show in the study that arrested persons who are detained by SARS have lots of complaints leveled against them. Arrested persons alleged that they do not read them their rights to remain silent, but subject them to torture, starvation and difficult conditions to make confession to accusations. Many persons have accused SARS of not allowing their lawyers to have a discussion with them in private and to even give them legal counsel while in police custody.

Also, in police cells, detainees complain of ill-treatment, overcrowding and infestation of diseases which violate their rights to good health, human dignity and life. Others have accused the police of excessive use of force which has occurred at police check points and during patrol duties. Torture and cold blood murder have also been committed at police stations and during interrogations. Such cases point to the fact that police behaviour in Nigeria is underlined by high-mindedness, arrogance of power and brutalization of the poor masses who are often the victims of un-actualized individual rights. Cases of brutality by SARS on innocent and defenceless citizens abound. Brutalization and torture are no respect for the dignity of man. These acts by SARS are inhuman, and degrading to individuals who are so treated. Numerous cases abound which accuse the police of arbitrarily denying individuals of rights to obtain bail.

Findings also show that in some cases, torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in police detention centers has resulted in the death of suspects. In these cases, the police usually justify deaths in custody as failed attempts to escape, labeling the victim as an alleged armed robber, to ensure popular sympathy and inaction from higher ranks in the force to investigate allegations of extra judicial executions by police officers.

Finally, it is observed that many officers attached to SARS unit of the Nigeria Police are corrupt minded individuals and are anxious to make quick money, therefore, could not have the boldness to ensure that the fundamental rights of individuals are upheld. In Nigeria, bail is said to be free and the power of granting bail are empowered by the Nigeria Constitution, and also regulated by Sections 7 and 340 of the Criminal Procedure Act and Administration of Criminal Justice Act (2015), respectively which require that the arrestee arrested without a warrant, for a non-capital offence was entitled to be charged to court within twenty-four (24) hours or be released on bail. However, this rule has not been followed and it has become a means for extortion and bribery before bail could be granted.

Conclusion

The paper examined the continuous violations of human rights in Nigeria by officers of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). Findings show that SARS have actually violated human rights in Nigeria in a more serious dimension, the appearances of Officers of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) are always terrified and identifying an erring officer is always a difficult task since they do not have a name tag on their uniform, this is dangerous. SARS are still found in the streets with their patrol vans and violations of human rights are still in the increase, hence, there is public outcry seeking total scrap of SARS Unit from the Nigeria Police Force.

SARS continue to carry out extrajudicial executions of citizens, exert excessive use of lethal force and perpetrate acts of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of alleged criminals on a regular basis. This has betrayed the public trust of the common phrase "police is our friend" thereby giving a bad image and impression to the Nigeria Police as a law enforcement agency. The Nigeria Police Force is not only responsible for failing to respect human rights; the poor performance of the Nigeria police to tackle on crime, the high level of corruption reported within their ranks and the constant human rights violations being committed by the security forces also pose a serious threat to the peace and stability of the country and foster an ever higher level of mistrust and suspicion towards the police among Nigerians. This act of irresponsibility by SARS is traceable to illiteracy, poor job orientation and lack of supervision on the role of engagement which is inimical to the overall interest of the citizenry. No single individual is above the law and the law has spelled out the rights of the citizens which must be accorded with utmost respect and negligence should attract severe penalty no matter who is involved.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

For this study, the following recommendations were made;

- I. Advocacy is needed to put an end to human right abuses and violations by officers of the SARS and Human Rights Activists should rise to their call and sensitize the public on what constitutes human right violations and how victims should be guided against further abuses. This could be done through radio and television programmes, engaging people to ask questions through phone calls and making Nigeria Police to have that consciousness that on their retirement they will become an ordinary citizen.
- II. A competent court of jurisdiction must be ready to give fair hearing to cases against the Nigeria Police Force on human right abuses and compel the Inspector General of Police to produce the erring officer to appear in court in order to face the consequences of his/her actions and inactions squarely. Justice must be delivered within the time frame devoid of delay and technicality.

- III. The federal government should immediately set up or establish an anti- human rights violation group within the Nigeria Police Force that will investigate and bring to justice officers found to have violated the rights of the citizenry.
- IV. Contacts of all the DPOs, Commissioners of Police, Deputies Inspector General of Police (DIGs), Inspector General of Police, human right lawyers and offices of Human Rights Commission nationwide should be made public and accessible to the common man in the street.
- V. After recruitment or graduating from Police College, recruits should be sent to various human right organizations in Nigeria for practical training on human right issues and implications before assigning them to different units in the Nigeria Police Force.
- VI. There is need for a law for adequate and speedy compensation of victims or victim's family in the case of death by the federal government and the cost of compensation should be deducted from the funds budgeted for Nigeria Police within a fiscal year. With this in mind, the Nigeria Police Force headed by the Inspector General of Police (IGP) will be mindful of consequences of economic costs of violating people's rights.
- VII. The IGP should be ready to condemn publicly and immediately sanctioning erring police officers found to have violated human rights without fear or favour and all officers attached to SARS department should undergo psychological test. This task has to be championed by the Inspector General of Police.
- VIII. SARS unit of the Nigeria Police Force should either be restructured with different orientation and operation with international best practices or stands the risk of being scrapped with compulsory retirement of all the officers attached to the unit.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Ahmadu, S. (2001). Human rights and the maintenance of international peace and security. *In: Suleiman Barnabas (ed.). Human rights violations by the Nigerian police: the Nigerian experience in a democracy (2000–2006).* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/268213712_human_rights_violations_by_the_nigerian_police_the_nigerian_experience_in_a_democracy (Retrieved on 30th June, 2020).
- [2]. Clinton, B. W. (1997). Proclamation of human rights day, Bill of Rights Day and Human Rights Week. *In: Clack, G. (ed.) introduction to Human Rights, Washington: The American Conference on International Affairs.*
- [3]. Ehindero, S. G. (1998). *The Nigerian Police and human rights.* Jos: Ehindero Nigeria Limited.
- [4]. Iwarimie-Jaja, D. (2012). *Criminology: the study of crime (4th ed.).* New Owerri: Springfield Publishers Ltd, 461, 551-562p.
- [5]. Laws of the Federation (1999). The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Fundamental Rights (Enforcement Procedure) Rule, 2008. *Federal Republic of Nigeria*, Degree No. 24: 34-42p.
- [6]. Laws of the Federation (2015). *Administration of Criminal Justice Act, 2015.* Federal Republic of Nigeria, 27-30p.
- [7]. Naankiel, P. W. (2013). The Nigeria Police Force and violations of human rights between 1993-2007. *Journal of the National Association for Science, Humanities and Education Research (NASHER)*, 11(1): 66-73.
- [8]. Nwankwo, C., Mbachu, D. and Ugochukwu, B. (1993). *Human rights practices in the Nigeria Police.* Lagos: Constitutional Rights Projects (Nigeria). <https://www.worldcat.org/title/human-rights-practices-in-the-nigerian-police/oclc/30363884> (Retrieved on 12th July, 2020).
- [9]. Okemini, P. C. (2019). *Nigeria Police Force and Abuse of citizen's rights: a case study of Ebonyi State Police Command.* https://www.academia.edu/41262157/the_nigeria_police_force_and_abuse_of_citizens_rights (Retrieved on 12th July, 2020).
- [10]. Oromareghake, P., Oluka, M. L. and Adishi, E. (2018). The Nigerian Police and legitimacy crises: a focus on human rights abuses and protection in contemporary Nigeria. *Journal of Public Administration and Social Welfare Research*, 3(2):25-37.
- [11]. PM News Editorial (2010, January 27). *Amnesty slams Nigeria for rights abuse.* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Anti-Robbery_Squad (Retrieved on 6th June, 2020).
- [12]. PM News Editorial (2011, November 7). *The killing force: Nigeria Police turn their guns on defenseless citizens.* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Anti-Robbery_Squad (Retrieved on 6th June, 2020).
- [13]. Premium Times Nigeria Editorial (2015, August 7). *Police IG splits anti-robbery squad (SARS) to check abuses.* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Anti-Robbery_Squad (Retrieved on 6th June, 2020).

- [14]. Pulse Nigeria Editorial (2016, September 23). Meet SARS, the Police Unit with license to kill. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Anti-Robbery_Squad (Retrieved on 6th June, 2020).
- [15]. Pulse Nigeria Editorial (2019, January 23). End SARS: What exactly is the status of SARS?. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Anti-Robbery_Squad (Retrieved on 6th June, 2020).
- [16]. Sahara Reporters (2010, July 27). How Police personnel raked in 9.35 Billion Naira from roadblocks in the Southeast-Nigeria in 18 Months. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Anti-Robbery_Squad (Retrieved on 6th June, 2020).
- [17]. Salami, L. (2019). "Hands in the hair: Nigerian police and men with dreadlocks". Global Comment, 19th December, 2019. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Anti-Robbery_Squad (Retrieved on 6th June, 2020).
- [18]. Salihu, H. A. and Fawole, O. A. (2020). Police crackdowns, human rights abuses, and sex work industry in Nigeria: evidence from an empirical investigation. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1057567720907135> (Retrieved on 3rd June, 2020).
- [19]. Sizani, R. K. (2001). Constitutionalism in Africa. *African Journal of International Affairs and Development*, 6(1): 31-46.
- [20]. Suleiman, B. (2015). Human rights violations by the Nigerian police: the Nigerian experience in a democracy (2000 – 2006). *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences (IJRSS)*, 5(3). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/268213712_human_rights_violations_by_the_nigerian_police_the_nigerian_experience_in_a_democracy (Retrieved on 30th June, 2020).
- [21]. Vanguard Newspaper Editorial (2011, June 4). Police foil attempt to bomb Force Headquarters. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Anti-Robbery_Squad (Retrieved on 6th June, 2020).
- [22]. Vanguard Newspaper Editorial (2017, December 23). How I founded SARS in the Police – Rtd. CP Midenda". https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Anti-Robbery_Squad (Retrieved on 6th June, 2020).
- [23]. Weston, B. H. (2014). Encyclopedia Britannica, human rights. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights (Retrieved on 6th June, 2020).
- [24]. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia (2020). Nigeria: Ovoko Killing - Court Orders IG to Produce Police Officer (Retrieved on 6th June, 2020).