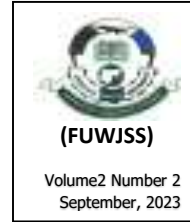


# **COVID-19 LOCKDOWN AND UNPROFESSIONAL CONDUCTS OF SECURITY AGENTS IN NIGERIA**

**MICHAEL, Christopher Eraye**

Department of Sociology  
Federal University of Lafia, Nasarawa State, Nigeria



**ZUMVE, Samuel Iornienge**

Department of Sociology  
Federal University Dutsin-ma, Katsina State, Nigeria

## **Abstract**

The paper explores the nexus between COVID-19 lockdown and the conduct of security agents during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The activities of security operatives in enforcing lockdown restriction during the COVID-19 lockdown uncovered unprofessional conducts exhibited against civilians by the Police and Military deployed to enforce the lockdown restrictions. Through content-analysis of secondary data anchored on Routine Activity Theory, this paper discusses how conducts of security agents during the COVID-19 lockdown vitiate from constitutional provisions of security agents to protect citizens and ensure law and order in the country. The study's results confirmed that extrajudicial killings, extortion of money from motorists, unwarranted and arbitrary arrest, torture of civilians and harassment were some of the unprofessional conducts exhibited by security agents against civilians during the COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria. The paper concludes that these unprofessional conducts of the security agents, rather than inhibit, facilitate the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria. Consequently, the paper recommends that security agents should be periodically retrained especially on how to enforce restrictions of government during periods of emergencies, while also adhering to the ethics of their profession. Unprofessional conduct of security agents must be resisted vehemently and culprits be made to face the full weight of the law; and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) must continue to speak up against all the negative activities of security operatives in the course of discharging their constitutional responsibilities.

**Key words:** COVID-19, lockdown, professionalism, security agents, community spread

## Introduction

The outbreak and spread of diverse diseases has become part of global society. The consequences of old and new diseases on socio-economic development are enormous. While diseases of different types are witnessed across the globe, the end of 2019 ushered in Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic that has left serious implications on individuals, families, communities, countries, continents and the entire world (Ishor & Ioranmee, 2020). The emergence of the deadly virus, COVID-19 has been traced to China's major business hub, the Wuhan city regardless of the contentious conspiracy theories and blame game between the Chinese and the American governments and the eventual 5G debate (Raimi, 2020). Lu, Stratton and Tang (2020) pointed out that at the end of 2019 in Wuhan, China, a series of pneumonia cases of unknown cause emerged. Some weeks later, in January 2020, after a careful and meticulous deep sequencing analysis from lower respiratory tract samples identified a new virus, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-COV-2) as a causative agent for the observed pneumonia cluster (Gennaro, Pizzol, Marotta, Antunes, Racalbutto, Veronese & Smith, 2020). World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) named the disease caused by the SARs-COV-2 as "COVID 19" and by March 11, 2020 the statistics of countries involved was 114, with more than 118,000 cases and over 4000 deaths, the WHO declared the pandemic status of the disease (WHO, 2020, Gennaro, et al, 2020).The infectious disease, COVID-19 pandemic is described as the worst global health challenges in this century with devastating consequences on global economy and mortality rates (Ishor & Ioranmee, 2020). The pandemic known as COVID-19 had claimed the greatest number of lies around the world, and has brought about sweeping changes in all aspects of human life (Agwanwo and Zumve, 2020). According to WHO (2020) COVID-19 is a disease of Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) due to the speed of spread and scale of transmission. At the global scene, it was reported that as at June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020, 7,201,136 cases of COVID-19 were conformed, with 408,782 mortalities and about 3,538,086 recoveries from the virus (World Meter, 2020, European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDE), 2020). Evidently, this brought the statistics of those who were infected to 2,860,760 globally. Of the statistics, the United States of America, Brazil, Russia, Spain, United Kingdom, India, Italy, Peru, Germany, Iran, Turkey, France, Chile, Mexico, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia as some of the most affected countries across continents with over 100,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 (ECDC, 2020), WHO, 2020, Ishor & Ioramee, 2020). The statistics above is a clear demonstration that even countries with sufficient resources were not prepared for such eventualities. This is clearly observed in the rate of the

spread of COVID-19 and the fatality rate rates (Akanni & Gabriel, 2020). In resource limited countries of Africa, the preparedness to contend with the crisis of COVID-19 was quite low. This is because of lack of manpower, health facilities and the endemic corruption associated with political leaders and agents of social control. The vulnerable population such as the aged, the poor and those with other underline health conditions were more at risk (Ishor & Ioramee, 2020).

In Nigeria, the spread of the novel coronavirus continued to increase. The number of COVID-19 confirmed cases as at February 27<sup>th</sup> to 12,801 as at 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2020 with 4,040 recoveries. As at 13<sup>th</sup> July, 2020 a total of 33,156 cases were recorded, 13, 671 were discharged from the isolation centre, and 744 died from COVID-19 (Ishor & Ioramee, 2020). On the same date, a total of 595 new cases were confirmed, 4 deaths were recorded and a total of 2,046 tests were carried out across the country (Ishor & Ioramee, 2020). The virus spread across the 36 States including Federal Capital Territory. Lagos States had the highest confirmed cases (12,583) and Kogi State has the lowest (5) cases of COVID-19 (National Centre for Disease Control, NCDC, 2020). The upsurge in the statistics of infected persons were attributed to community transmission of the virus. The statistics further indicated that more effort were required from World Health Organization (WHO) and government at all levels, health institutions, communities and individual to reduce the rate of spread and transmission.

The pandemic nature of COVID-19 inevitably compelled the World Health Organization to outline some measures to curb the rapid spread of the disease. WHO (2020), Africa Center for Disease Control and Prevention (ACDCP), (2020) and Gennaro *et al* (2020) identified some of the preventive measures against COVID-19. As one of the spontaneous response to the situation, many nations were forced to embark on the lockdown of all forms of social and economic activities of what is referred to as the 'stay-at-home order.' The preventive measures against COVID-19 included the use of face mask, to cover cough and sneezes, wash hands regularly with soap under running water, avoid contact with infected persons, restraining of freedom of movement by imposing total or partial shutting down of borders, keeping social and physical distance of about 2m/6ft between persons, ensuring personal hygienic behaviours and refrain from touching eyes nose and mouth with unwashed hands. Drawing inspiration from WHO, the Nigeria government, adopted WHO's measures, modified and outlined other measures aim at preventing the spread of COVID-19. The measures were imposing total lockdown in states like Lagos, Ogun and Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The measures were periodically reviewed in line with the prevailing conditions of the disease spread and the economic challenges posed by the disease. Beyond the above states, inter states land borders

suspension was enforced, public and private institutions and international airports were shutdown (Ishor & Loramec, 2020). The Federal government bases on the recommendations of NCDC encouraged the various state governments to replicate the measures in their respective states (NCDC, 2020). In this regards, states and local government councils established various forms of COVID-19 enforcement committees and taskforces (Romon, 2020), and in addition, involved the various law enforcement agencies to police the compliance of COVID-19 safety guidelines.

Although the outbreak of COVID-19 was not on the verge of stopping in the rear future, but the mitigation measures advanced by WHO, adopted and modified by the Federal Government and employed by various states and local government councils has helped in reducing the extent of its spread. The world Health Organisation (2020) pointed out that COVID-19 outbreak cannot be stopped immediately, but adhering to the preventive measures could slow its spread. Substantiating the view that adopting preventive measures could reduce the rapid spread of the disease. Studies conducted in the Universities of Kentucky and Louisvilte (2020) uncovered that adhering to government imposed social and physical distancing strategies was cogent in the reduction of COVID-19 daily spread by 5.4% after 1-5 days, 6.8% between 6-10 days, 8.2% between 11-15 days and 9.1% between 6-20 days.

In Nigeria, adhering strictly to the outlined preventive measures of COVID-19 was a serious challenge to many Nigerians, who could not bear the economic hardship associated with the COVID-19 and the preventive measures. Nwokoye (2020) observed that the pandemic and the preventive measures were worrisome. The situation in Nigeria was pathetic because it was difficult to establish sincerity about the statistics of COVID-19, the effort of government aimed cushioning the economic hardship imposed by COVID-19 and the preventive measures. Acknowledging the need to curb the spread of COVID-19 and reducing the economic hardship, international organizations, corporate bodies, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), Civil Society Organization(CSO) and individuals donated billions of naira and other facilities to the government of Nigeria to fight against COVID-19, address the economic hardship and the sufferings of the poor and vulnerable population (Ishor & Ioramee, 2020). The funds were to be deployed into providing health facilities and equipment. Beyond the donations, the federal government earmarked substantial quantum of resources for curbing the spread of the disease, but government was economical with truth. The way and manner the funds were utilized is yet to be explained and accounted for and accepted by many Nigerians. With the funds, screening, testing and equipping of isolation centers and provision of other required equipment was still a challenge. The most unexplainable aspect of the donated funds

earmarked for used as palliatives for vulnerable population is that, the funds could not be clearly accounted for (See the Guardian, 23 July, 2020; Premium Times Nigerian, 21 April, 2021). A significant population of the vulnerable population never benefited from the funds as there were allegations that the funds were diverted into personal use by the privileged class. The Federal Government through the minister of Humanitarian Service and Accountant General reported that many citizens benefited from the palliatives, but it was difficult to ascertain the persons who benefited from the palliatives. With government insincerity in the management of the COVID-19 funds and the economic hardship on Nigerians, adhering to the preventive measures became a serious problem for many. Ishor and Ioramee (2020) maintained that economic hardship associated with the COVID-19 lockdown, was partly responsible for the lack of adherence to some of the COVID-19 preventive measures outlined by government. The cumulative effect of this is the continuous community transmission of the virus.

Efforts to ensure adherence to COVID-19 regulation of government, the security operatives were empowered to enforce the regulations and violators be made to face the full weight of the regulation. Security agents are individuals within the security organization established through appropriate law, who are required to engage in different activities as outlined by law, aimed at protecting lives and property of citizens as well as enforcing government regulation (Ndubueze, 2021). This implies that these individuals have the constitutional responsibility to apprehend and prosecute directly or indirectly any human or group alleged to have violated any law or regulations. In Nigeria, the military, Police, Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corp, Department of State Service were involved in the enforcement of government COVID-19 lockdown regulations. The operatives' role in relation to COVID-19 restriction was prominent at the peak of COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. It was during this period of enforcement that the unprofessionalism and violation of the code of conduct by some security agents were overtly displayed in Nigeria. This study is a deviation from others as it will focus on the conduct of security agents which is considered an aberration while discharging their constitutional responsibilities.

### **Theoretical Framework: Routine Activity Theory**

The Routine Activities Theory (RAT) of Cohen and Felson (1979) is one of the theories of environmental criminology (See Purpura, P. in Security and Loss Prevention 6<sup>th</sup> edition, 2013). RAT posits that for a criminal event to occur there must be a convergence in time and space of three factors. The presence of a motivated offender, the absence of a capable guardian and the presence of a suitable target (person or object) are key to

RAT elucidation. Whether or not these elements converge or coincide is a product of the routine activities of potential targets and offenders. From these perspectives, the unprofessional security operatives who are supposed to be citizens' guardian, have rather become the motivated offender in this context. Commercial Drivers, Medical Practitioners, Journalist and Commuters may encompass part of the routine activities suitable target, and absence of capable guardians (for example, professional security agents, Closed Circuit Television, cameras or members of the public) (Newton, 2004). Daily activities of people such as travelling, driving to work, and covering of events by Journalist can bring offenders (Unprofessional security agents) in contact with suitable victims and target in the absence of a professional guardian. In line with RAT, the security operative allegedly became the offender as they engaged in unprofessional conduct such extortion of monies, harassment, and brutalization of the alleged COVID-19 violators. Although, security operatives were saddled with the responsibility of protecting citizens, the peak of the Covid-17 pandemic revealed that many operatives become offenders while attempting to enforce the government COVID-19 lockdown restrictions in Nigeria. The suitable target were citizen who embarked on legitimate and essential duties like the medical practitioners and journalists. In 2020, incidences of security brutality of those on essential duties and unavoidable travels were overtly displayed in Nigeria, especially in the absence of security operatives with a display of high professionalism in line with the code of their profession. This theory has clearly demonstrated that the peak of COVID-19 in year 2020, security agents with lack of professionalism and adherence to the code of their profession violated the law and the rights of the Nigerian citizens especially those who were on essential duties and unavoidable travels. This therefore, informed our decision to adopt this theoretical frame for this analysis.

This work is basically a qualitative and therefore depends on secondary data. The study was carried out with a focus on the analysis of reports on COVID-19 spread, lockdown regulations and the unethical conducts of security agents. The consequences of such unethical behaviour of security agents on the spread of COVID-19 is also discussed. On this, extant and relevant literature on COVID-19 and activities of security agents during the pandemic were reviewed with the objective of establishing how the unprofessional conducts of the security agents violated the rights of the citizens. Decrying this very worrisome situation, the National Human Rights Commission (2020) in Ezezi (2020) lamented that "whereas COVID-19 led to the death of 11 victims, law enforcement agents extra-judicially executed 18 persons in the course of the enforcement regulations. The excessive or disproportionate use of force, abuse of power, corruption and non-adherence to national and international laws, best practices and rules of engagement.

### **Research Methodology**

This paper is strictly a desk review with a focus on secondary data. The study was conducted through a meticulous analysis of reports and publications on COVID-19 and the activities of security operatives in imposing lockdown regulations within Nigeria and other countries. Extant literatures on the subject matter were reviewed with the aim to properly situate the study.

### **Government Regulations on COVID-19 and the Role of the Security Operatives**

The rapid spread and effort by government to stem the tide of COVID-19 resulted in the formulation and imposition of regulations. It is the responsibility of government to enforce regulations that could help solve problems and this can be enforced via agencies or institutions (Warimie-jaja, 2016). Ishor and Ioramee (2020) pointed out that although the outbreak of COVID-19 cannot be stopped immediately, but its rapid spread can be slowed down through appropriate measures. Some of the preventive measures for the spread of COVID-19 outlined by government of Nigeria were discussed by Ishor and Ioramee (2020). According to them, government introduced lockdown in some major states. The lockdown was to ensure that social distance rule of government was upheld. Social distancing is a set of non-pharmaceutical measures targeted at preventing the transmission of infectious disease by observing a physical distance between people and curtail the frequency of close contact with people (European Central for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC, 2020)). Since the transmission of COVID-19 is essentially through people who are in close contract for a long period, it was assumed that social distancing could help prevent the upsurge in the disease.

It was on this note that WHO (2020) advised that in doing social distancing, people have to stay at least 6 feet from others, and stay out of crowded places, avoid mass gatherings. The social distancing regulation was to help limit opportunities to come in contact with contaminated surfaces and infected persons outside their homes. In Nigeria, building on the social or physical distancing regulation, the government at the center and States via the appropriate agencies introduced many measures. Akanni and Gabriel (2020) asserted that the closure of international airports, public and private schools, markets, schools and suspension of public gathering were some of the preventive measures from government. There was also ban on worship centers. Ishor and Ioramee (2020) pointed out that communities were advised to avoid conducting burials that required crowds. Similarly, nighttime curfew ban on non-essentials inter-state travel, partial and

controlled interstates migration of goods and services, mandatory use of face masks or covering in public places were also introduced to slow down the spread of COVID-19 (NCDC, 2020). With time, the number of commuters per vehicle was also restricted. Religious centers were allowed to open, but was restricted to only 50 congregants. Commuters were compulsory required to stop at some designated centers for temperature checks (Ani, 2020). Those with high temperatures were taken for further investigation.

Although there was a heated debate on the viability of the regulations or what may be called lockdown, as recommended by WHO to enforce social distancing and security operatives in Nigeria were mandated to enforce some aspects of the lockdown or regulations. In this context, the military, National Security and Civil Defense Corp (NSCDC) and Police were mandated to enforce the lockdown especially that which involve movement, restriction and gatherings. This implies that security operatives were mandated to ensure the government COVID – 19 regulation violators were to be arrested and sanctioned accordingly. Wika and Plangshak (2020) was worried about the role of security operative in the enforcement of COVID-19 lockdown regulations. He further revealed that security operatives were to enforce government regulation on COVID-19 and nothing more. Ishor and Ioramee (2020) pointed out that security agents are not the brain behind any regulations on COVID-19, rather the instruction of government. The task of the security agent was to enforce the lockdown and ensure that violators are sanction accordingly. Oyekanmi and Akeruche (2020) pointed out that it was expected that security operatives enforcing the COVID-19 regulations, ensure that vehicular and passengers movement conform to the regulators, monitor the hour of travels, and arrest those who violate COVID-19 regulations of government. In doing so, they are expected to be professionals in their dealings (Oyekanmi & Akeruche, 2020). It has been established that some of the security agent were unprofessional in their conducts.

### **Conduct of Security Operatives in Nigeria at the Peak of COVID-19 in 2020**

Professionalism is required in every profession. Every security organization has professional code of conducts that guide its operations. Aborisade (2016) maintained that even with the ethics of their profession, there are few individuals who succumbed to the temptations of violating such professional code of conducts. Some of the unprofessional conduct of security operatives while attempting to enforce the COVID-19 regulations in Nigeria in 2020 included:

1. **Extra- judicial killing:** The killing of person by government security agents without the sanction of any judicial proceeding or legal process has become common sight in our society. The security



operative have been accused of embarking on extra-judicial killing of Nigerians. Agbakwuni (2020) maintained that the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has sound the alarmed over the alleged high number of extra-judicial killings by security agents as attempt to enforce government regulation. Extra-judicial killings are a routine feature of policing in Nigeria. Many Nigerians are murdered each year by security operatives (Michael, 2021, Michael & Chinwokwu, 2021, Open Society, Justice Initiative, 2010). It was alleged that about 18 deaths were recorded as a result of the action of the security agents attempting to enforce the lockdown. The deaths were attributed to the unprofessional conduct of the police and military. Buttressing the established cases of unprofessional conduct of security agent in enforcing lockdown rules, Kola (2020) reported that 24 out of Nigeria's 36 States between March 30 and April 13, 2020 had witnessed killings orchestrated by security agents. Kola (2020) in an apt manner revealed that there were 8 documented incidents of security operatives' excesses leading to 18 deaths. Out of the statistics, 12 deaths were recorded in Kaduna State, Abia had 2, Ebonyi, Niger Delta and Katsina States had 1 death each recorded. Okeowo and Mainga(2020) asserted that although the cases of security brutality and extra-judicial killing is not new in Africa, the era of COVID-19 also uncovered the high level of security agents inhumanity against fellow citizens. The security agents in many African countries are known to have resorted to extra judicial killing while carrying out their function of law enforcement (Okeowo & Mainga, 2020). It is quite unfortunate that some security agents will even shoot first and asked questions later. This draconian approach to imposing COVID-19 lockdown played out in some Africa countries. Kenya, South Africa and Nigeria witnessed cases of extra-judicial killing orchestrated by security agents especially the Police, Army and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC). Human rights are meant to be protected and government regulation are meant for the betterment of our society in emergency situations. This emergency situation with all the regulations also calls for carefulness so as to ensure citizens of Africa benefit from such preventive measures. There are professional measures that are required to punish violators of any lockdown regulations. This involved jail term. Indeed, this is what was expected of the security agents to facilitate should people violates the lockdown regulations and not resorting to extra-judicial killings of Africans. Allen, Donohue, Fuentes, Goldenberg and O'Hanlon (2020) had earlier observed that what was expected of security agents in enforcing

COVID-19 lockdown is intelligence, focus on killing the enemy and not the population and be professional in their conducts. This is partly because of the challenges the COVID-19 has presented to the masses. These admonitions in some African countries were not adhered to, as cases of inhuman treatment of the alleged violators of the lockdown were killed by security agents. Elsewhere Michael (2010) has argued that resorting to extra-judicial killings by security agents clearly uncover the high level of unprofessionalism in their task. In developing countries, the security agents easily resort to extra judicial killings because of weak political and social institutions, corrupt and ineffective judicial system. This acts by security operatives has created mob action and other security challenges in some communities.

2. **Extortion from commuters and motorist:** The attempt to obtain money and other valuables by means of threat has become a common sight in our communities. It involves the practice of obtaining something especially money through threat or coercion. The emergence of COVID-19 and government lockdown rules to regulate the spread of the virus, presented an important platform for security agents to extort money and valuables from motorists. Extortion of money and valuables from motorists and commuters although not an act of COVID-19 invention, but has been part of the unprofessional conduct of law enforcement agents in Africa. Iwarimie-jaja (2016), Aborisade (2016) and Adisa, Alabi and Adejoh (2018) had earlier observed the extortion from transporters by security agents in Nigeria. Thus, the era of COVID-19 only helped in expanding such unprofessional acts. The Rule of Law and Accountability Advocacy Center (RULAAG, 2020) observed that under the guise of enforcing curfew in Lagos State, security agents stopped several vehicles and money demanded from the drivers before they are freed. Explaining further RULAAC (2020) revealed that their observation established that some motorists were forced to pay between N5,000-N 6,500 if their car were impounded over the curfew, but it was as high as N10,000 if the car stay overnight before letting you proceed to your destination.

The Social Action (2020) reported a similar incident in Delta, where extortion of money from alleged violators of the COVID-19 lockdown was a daily routine. Social Action (2020) reported that on Friday the 17<sup>th</sup> of April, 2020, officers of the Nigerian Police extorted the sum of N120, 000 from Mrs Nwabuabo Obiajulu and her son for flouting the lockdown directives. Mugabi (2020) reporting the happenings in Africa on COVID-19 lockdown, pointed

out that there have been reports that detailed the unprofessionalism of Africa's security forces including the extortion of money from motorists. The unprofessional conduct of security agents speaks volumes in Nigeria as many motorists lament the daily extortion of money from them during the lockdown. Even those on emergency and essential services were not left out of the extortion. Ishor and Ioramee (2020) pointed out in their COVID-19 progress review that, there were widespread report of extortions and collection of bribes by the security agents. In Nigeria, motorists willing to violate the lockdown were mandated to increase the transportation fair for the purpose of bribing the security agents on the roads. There were instances where beyond the amount of money collected from the drivers, each commuter was mandated to pay certain amount to the driver the driver for onward settlement of security operatives before their tripe can be guaranteed. This also compounded the deplorable conditions of the commuters. The extortion from the commuters was for alleged violations of lockdown in terms of movement and carrying more than the expected number of passengers. In some States of the federation, commercial drivers were expected to carry few number of passengers. However, some of the motorists violated the restriction, even when some of the commuters were not using face mask. The security operatives after extortion will allow them to their fate and that of those at their expected destinations. Again, drivers were required to have hand sanitizers in their vehicles. Many also violated such orders, but were never apprehended by security operatives due to extortion and collection of bribe.

3. **Unwarranted brutality and torture of violators:** Professionalism has been jettison by many security agents in their daily dealings with the people they are required by law to protect. This unprofessionalism played out clearly during the COVID-19 lockdown in many African countries. The notion by security agents that every citizen must be subdued into compliance via the use of brutal force and torture goes contrary to every element of the right to human dignity, which cannot be curtailed even during emergency (Lum, Maupi & Stoits, 2020, Okeowo & Mainga, 2020). The Nigeria 1999 constitution as amended prohibits brutality and torture by security agents. However, brutality and torture are intrinsic to the existence and function of security agents in Nigeria (Aborisade, 2016). The WHO (2020) observed with dismay that citizens in the COVID-19 era, were tortured, ill-treated and brutalized by security forces in Nigeria.

Security agents, especially the Police has unethically institutionalized brutality and torture into its operation, from routine checks, through arrest, interrogation and detention. Brutality and torture has become institutional norm for some security agencies. Beyond the brutality and torture on the streets, the Nigerian Police institutionalization of these unconstitutional acts are seen in the dedication of torture chambers, instruments of tortures and brutality and officer known as officer in charge (O/C) of torture in all their station. In some stations, the torture chambers are known as workshop the theatre and panel beater point. Although security agents' acts of brutality and torture have been in existence for decades, the COVID-19 lockdown restriction openly showcased security acts of brutality and torture on citizens. In Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Uganda, patches of security agents' brutality and torture of the alleged violators of the COVID-19 restriction were witnessed (Okeono & Mainga, 2020). Mugabi (2020) observed that Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda and South Africa are some of the countries that security agents have used brutality and torture to keep people off the streets. In Nigeria, security agents brutality and torture occur in two places. First is on the street and second is in their station. On the streets while enforcing the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, the alleged violators were beaten at certain parts of the body, forced gymnastics such as frog jump, prolonged standing forced stress positions, aimed at humiliating the assumed violated. Kola (2020) pointed out that, there were instances where motorists were forcefully dragged out of vehicles, commuters were forced out of vehicles, some were asked to sit on the dirty ground, enter stagnant but dirty water. Aborisade (2016) has earlier observed that some security agents' brutality and torture required the victims to undress publicly and roll on dirty water. Any little resistance from their victim, could attract more torture such as whipping and slapping on the head, ear and other parts of the body. The Open Society Justice Initiative (2010) documents various forms of security agents' brutality and torture especially by the Police in their station to include:

- i. Beating which are always severe.
- ii. Mandating other detainees to give the new victim cruel treatment
- iii. Use of tear gas or pepper spray
- iv. Clubbing of the soles of the feet and/or the ankles.
- v. Slapping of one or both ears with a cupped hand.
- vi. Banging the victims head against the wall or floor.
- vii. Burning the victim with cigarettes, flame or hot irons.

- viii. Exposing the victim to climatic stress.
- ix. Exposing the victim to different insects, rodents and reptiles that can induce phobia.
- x. Sexual torture.
- xi. Mental torture.
- xii. Sleep deprivation
- xiii. Starvation and/or deprivation of water.

Drawing from the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, it was observed by Agbakwunu (2020) that some of these torture mechanisms were employed to torment the alleged lockdown violators in Nigeria. Commenting on why security agents often resort to brutality and torture of their victims, Iwarime-Jaja (2016) observed that such resort is meant to instill fear on the victim and pave ways for the security agents to achieve their aims. Brutality and torture instill fear and make the victim succumbed to the demands of the security agents. More importantly, weak social political and legal institutions are partly responsible for the upsurge in security agents' brutality and torture of civilians. From another perspective, Michael (2010) uncovered that some security agents resort to brutality and torture of civilian to express the high level of frustration witnessed on their jobs. Lack of improved welfare which manifest in poor remuneration, lack of allowances, delayed allowance, exposure to climate hazards and other unpalatable conditions among security agents breeds frustration with a resultant transfer of aggression on citizens at slightest provocation.

4. **Harassment and forced detention:** Harassment of the civilian population by security agents has become a common occurrence in Nigerian. Security agents harassment involve continual or arbitrary stopping someone aggressively questioning him or her or by conducting an unwarranted or illegal search and seizure (Michael, 2010). Harassment involve the use of excessive force on citizens, making racists, sexist or homophobic comments, illegal search and seizure and illegal detention (Michael, 2010). Across Africa, the era of COVID-19 and its associated lockdown restrictions created an open platform for security agents' harassment and illegal detention of citizens. The situation in Nigeria was as revealing as both Journalists and Medical personnel were reportedly harassed. Olasupo (2020) pointed out that in Nigeria, Journalist were increasingly harassed and threatened by security agents of government while reporting news during the lockdown. A sport journalist was arrested in Uyo on April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020 by security operative for doing his job during COVID-19 lockdown (Ahmed,

2021, Olasupo, 2020). Earlier, a correspondent of the Sun Newspapers was arrested by men of the Nigeria Police Force in Abakaliki, Ebonyi +State on April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Business Traffic (2020) also reported that the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) on 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2020, mandated its members to embark on strike for the harassment of its members, this act was against the Federal Government directives to the exemption of essential workers from the movement restrictive (Bassey, 2020). Mugabi, (2020) while reporting on the actions of security agents in Africa, pointed out that in Nigeria, the security agents were put in the spotlight for harassing members of the communities they were mandated to protect. Their actions were characterized by arbitrary arrest, detention and extortion. Beyond those on essential services, countless citizens were harassed and detained by security forces as a way of enforcing COVID-19 lockdown.

Olasupo (2020) presented another dimension of security agents' harassment of civilians during the COVID-19 lockdown. The source maintained that after the arbitrary arrest and detention, some of the victim could be subjected to sexual abuse. Aborisade (2016) had earlier reported that security forces are known to have sexually abused people they are paid to protect. The Open Society of Justice Initiative (2020) was vehement in their analysis that some female suspects and detainees are sexually abused by the Police. The report of the second presidential committee on Police Reform in 2008 cited in Osji (2010), acknowledged sexual abuse to be one of the forms of security agents' brutality on detainees. Michael (2010) pointed out that the Nigeria situation is so deplorable that often, female civilians arbitrary arrested, would have to secure their freedom after sexual exchanges with security persons. The lockdown in Nigeria presented avenue for some sex workers to be arrested, detained and abused sexually. Osji (2010) reported earlier that the most pervasive form of sexual abuse by security agents especially the Police is committed against sex worker. Abusing a female sex worker for any form of violation, is one of the fringe benefits attached to security patrol. These are daily occurrences on the social and security structure of Nigeria. The implication of sexually abusing detained civilians on the grounds of violation are enormous, but detrimental to the victim and the generality of our society.

### **Implications of the Conduct of Security Agents on COVID-19 Transmission and Spread in 2020**

The unprofessional conduct of security agents while enforcing COVID-19 lockdown has serious implications on the transmission of COVID-19, especially in resource limited countries. The extortion and collection of bribes from motorists and passengers and allowing them to travel freely across communities and states was capable of promoting the spread of the disease. As the security agents extort money, their victims especially the motorists and passengers are allowed to proceed without considering their COVID-19 status. Those infected could infect others while on transit and at their destinations. Kola (2020) observed that some of those who tested positive for COVID-19, were infected by those who travelled far and near. It is based on this that Kola (2020) insisted that the spread of COVID-19 was partly blamed on security agents who after collecting bribe from motorists, break the lockdown restrictions by allowing them travel without further interference.

Similarly, as the travel restriction due to COVID-19 was ease down in some states, motorists were allowed to carry stipulated number of passengers in their vehicles and that those on boards must be fully masked. This was not properly enforced by security persons. Some security personnel capitalized on the ease to extort money from the commercial motorists and allowing them to convey more than the approved number of passengers in a vehicle. The worrisome aspect of it was that some of the commuters may not have adopted the preventive measure by wearing face and nose mask. This single act was capable of promoting the transmission of COVID-19. It has been argued that some of the community transmission and spread was from people who travelled across the states of the Federation.

The arbitrary arrest and detention of the assumed violators of COVID-19 lockdown was capable of enhancing its transmission and spread. The arrestees and detainees could not have been screened before keeping them together. It was possible for an arrestees or detainees who could have been infected with COVID-19 to aid the transmission and spread among other arrestees and detainees. Thus, the unwarranted and arbitrary arrest and detention of violation of COVID-19 and lumping them together by security agents was rather a facilitating and not an inhibiting technique to the transmission and spread of COVID-19 in our communities.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Abating the transmission and spread of COVID-19 required concerted effort by members of the public and law enforcement agencies to stem the challenges posed by this health problem. Even though, government at all

levels responded to curb the spread of the virus via different institutional and non-institutional mechanisms, more effort was still required to halt the trend of spread. The introduction of lockdown as a means of curbing the transmission and spread of COVID-19 was greeted with so much anxiety. This is because majority of Nigerians live on daily income; thus the restriction was worrisome to them because their living is based on daily “hustling.” Majority of Nigerians hustle per minute to earn a living. Evidently, the role of the security operatives in enforcing government lockdown restrictions on COVID-19 was not quite palatable. It drastically affected the daily living standards of Nigerians. Also, the unprofessional conduct exhibited by some of the security operatives rather made a bad situation worse. Their role was in away facilitating rather than inhibiting the transmission and spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria. It is the position of this paper that security agents are periodically retrained especially on how to enforce restrictions of government during period of emergencies, while also adhering to the ethics of their profession. Similarly, the unprofessional conduct of some security agents must be resisted vehemently and culprits be made to face the full weight of the law, Civil Society Organization (CSO) must continue to speak up against all the negative activities of security operatives in the course of discharging their constitutional duties. It is also pertinent that in the future, security agents should adopt a humanistic and more civil approaches in dealing with violators should there be any lockdown, rather than brutal force that was adopted by some agents of the law enforcement during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## References

- Aborisade, R.A. (2016). *Crime and delinquency: A sociological introduction*. Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press.
- Adisa, W.B, Alabi, T. & Adejoh, S. (2018). Corruption on the road. A test of commercial drivers encounters with Police extortion in Lagos metropolis. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology* 3(4), 1-11.
- Agbakwuni, J. (2020, April, 25<sup>th</sup>). COVID-19: Extra judicial killing by security agencies, worrisome- NHRC. *Vanguard*, P.25.
- Agwanwo, D.E. and Zumve, S.I. (2020). Alternative Approach to Policing COVID-19 Induced Lock-Down: the Need for Integrating the Community Policing Approach in Rivers State, Nigeria. *In Academic Journal of Current Research Vol. 7, No. 12: December, 2020; ISSN (22343-403X); P-ISSN 3244-5621 Impact Factor 6.37.*
- Ahmed, R.U.(2021). Public perception on security forces and human rights violation in the enforcement of COVID-19 lockdown in Kano State,



- Nigeria. *FUOYE Journal of Criminology and Security Studies (FJCSS)*. Department of Criminology and Security Studies, **1 (1)**, 1-9
- Akanni, L.O. & Gabriel, S.C. (2020). *The implication of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Nigerian economy*. Abuja: Centre for the study of the Economies of Africa.
- Allen, J, Donohue, J, Fuentes, R, Goldenberg, P & O' Hanlon, M. (2020). *The military, Police and COVID-19*. USA: Foreign Policy Brookings.
- Ani, M. (2020, May 6<sup>th</sup>). Coronavirus patient protest poor state of isolation centre in Gombe State. A national conservation: Mapping Nigeria's response to COVID-19. *Business Day*, P16
- Bassey, J. (2020, May 20<sup>th</sup>). Doctor withdraw services to protest Police harassment in Lagos. *Business Day*, 14.
- Business Traffic (2020). COVID-19: Lagos doctors begin stay-at-home action over Police harassment. Retrieved from [t:busnesstraffic.com.ng/covid19](http://t:busnesstraffic.com.ng/covid19).
- Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2019). *Coronavirus disease: Principles of contact tracing*. USA: CDCP
- Cohen, L.E. & Felson. M. (1979). Social change and crime rate trends: a routine activity approach. *American Sociological Review* 44, 588-608.
- European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (2020). Guidance on community engagement for public health events caused by communicable disease threats in the EU/EEA. Stockholm: ECDC.
- Gennaro, F.D, Pizzol, D, Arotta, C, Antenus, M, Racalbutto, V, Veronese, N & Smith, L. (2020). Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) current status and future perspectives: A narrative review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17, 1-11
- Human Right Watch (2020). El Salvador: Police abuses in COVID-19 response: Arbitrary Detention, hazardous conditions in detention, quarantine. Retrieved from at: [www.hrworg/news/2020/04](http://www.hrworg/news/2020/04)
- Iwarimie-jaja, D. (2012). *Criminology: The study of crime*. Port Harcourt: Springfield Publishers.
- Kola, A. (2020). *Nigeria: Commission claims 18 killed in virus lockdown*. Nigeria: Human Rights Commission.
- Lu, H, Stratton, C., & Tang, Y.W. (2020). Outbreak of pneumonia of unknown etiology in Wuhan, China: The mystery and the miracle. *Journal of Medical Virology*. 2020, 92, 401-402.
- Lum, C., Maupin, C & Stolts, M (2020). The impact of COVID-19 on law enforcement agencies (Wave-I). America: IACP.
- Michael, C.E & Chiwokwu, E.C. (2020). Exploring the relationship among offenders, victims and bystanders of violence: Analysis of herdsmen victimization in Nigeria. *Sociology and Anthropology*, 8(2), 21-35

- Michael, C.E (2010). Public perception of the involvement of commercial motorcyclist in crime in Uyo L G A Akwa Ibom State. Unpublished M.sc dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of Ibadan.
- Michael, C.E. (2021). Factors in security agents' homicide: Implications on crime management in Nigeria. *Global Scientific Journal*, 9(2), 1312-1335
- Mugabi, I. (2020). *COVID-19: Security forces in Africa brutalizing civilians under lockdown*. Kenya: Africa watch
- Nairametrics (2020).Bank: Customers besiege banks on the first day of the partial lifting of COVID-19 lockdowns. Retrieved from: <http://Nairametrics.com>
- Ndubueze, P.N. (2021). Security agencies, open source intelligence and insurgency control in North East. *FUWUKARI International Journal of Sociology and Development*, 3(1), 13-26
- Nigeria Centre for Disease Control. (2020). Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic daily updates. Abuja: NCDC
- Okeowo, A & Mainga, L. (2020). COVID-19 and police brutality in Africa. Retrieved From: [blog.witness.org](http://blog.witness.org).
- Olasupo, A. (2020, July, 22<sup>nd</sup>). COVID-19: Intimidation, harassment, detention of journalists surge in Nigeria. *The Guardian*, P. 10.
- Olofin, R.(2020, April 17). Nigeria: Policing the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Retrieved From: <https://bit.ly/2VBuDPk>
- Onyekwenni, C. & Akeruche, M.A. (2020). *Understanding the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on the Nigerian economy*. Africa in Focus
- Open Society Justice Initiative (2010). *Criminal force torture, abuse and extrajudicial killing by the Police force*. New York: Open society initiative.
- Pamela, W. (2015). Routine Activities, Criminal Opportunities, crime and Crime Prevention. *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences (Second Edition, 2015)*.
- Premium Times, 21 April, 2021
- Raimi, L. (2020). Assessing the COVID-19 Induced Stay at Home Measures and Social Defiance by the Poor in Rivers State, Nigeria. *Academic Journal of current Research*, 7(4): 97 – 107.
- Rule of Law and Accountability Advocacy Centre (2021, May, 15th). COVID-19: CSO decries extortion of motorists by Police from Idiru station. *Elombahnews*, P.6
- The guardian, 23 July, 2020
- Wika, P.N & Plangshak, M.S (2021).The COVID-19 pandemic: Socio-economic underdevelopment and poverty outcomes in Africa. *FUWUKARI International Journal of Sociology and Development*, 3(1),27-40

- World Health Organization (2020). *Contact tracing in the context of COVID-19*. Geneva: WHO
- World Health Organization (2020). *Strengthening the health system response to COVID-19: Recommendations for the WHO European region*. Geneva: WHO