

## **ANALYSIS OF THE LEVELS AND CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO POLICE MISCONDUCT DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN ENUGU STATE**

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**Abstract:** The COVID-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges globally, particularly in the enforcement of public health measures. In Enugu State, Nigeria, the enforcement of these measures by the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) led to a notable increase in police misconduct, raising concerns about the underlying factors contributing to this deviance. This study aimed to analyze the levels of police misconduct during the pandemic in Enugu State and to identify the key factors that influenced such behavior. Employing a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through surveys and in-depth interviews from 527 residents across selected local government areas in Enugu State. The study revealed that the level of police misconduct during the COVID-19 pandemic in Enugu State was notably high, with 54.6% of respondents indicating an increase in misconduct. Corruption was identified as the most prevalent form, with 43.3% of respondents perceiving it as the dominant type of misconduct during the enforcement of COVID-19 safety measures. The study highlights the urgent need for enhanced training, stronger oversight mechanisms, and the implementation of community policing strategies to mitigate misconduct and restore public trust in law enforcement. These recommendations aim to inform policy reforms that will improve police accountability and effectiveness, particularly in times of crisis.

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**Keywords:** Police Misconduct, COVID-19 Pandemic, Corruption, Public Trust

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background to the Study**

Police misconduct, characterized by actions that deviate from the ethical and professional standards of policing, has long been a significant concern in many societies, including Nigeria. It encompasses a broad range of behaviors, including corruption, abuse of power, brutality, and other forms of deviance that undermine public trust in law enforcement agencies (Reiner, 2010). The issue of police misconduct becomes even more pronounced during periods of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, when the police are vested with additional powers to enforce public health measures.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which emerged in late 2019, presented unprecedented challenges to governments and law enforcement agencies worldwide. The need to contain the spread of the virus led to the implementation of

strict public health measures, including lockdowns, curfews, travel restrictions, and the enforcement of social distancing (WHO, 2020). In Nigeria, these measures were enforced by the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), which was tasked with ensuring compliance. However, the enforcement of these measures led to numerous reports of police misconduct across the country, with Enugu State being no exception.

Enugu State, located in the southeastern part of Nigeria, witnessed a significant increase in police misconduct during the COVID-19 pandemic. Reports of extortion, unlawful arrests, excessive use of force, and other forms of abuse became rampant as the police enforced lockdown measures and restrictions on movement. This situation not only exacerbated public mistrust of the police but also raised concerns about the factors contributing to such behaviors during the pandemic (Amnesty International, 2020).

Several factors may have contributed to the increase in police misconduct during the COVID-19 pandemic in Enugu State. The stress associated with the enforcement of public health measures, inadequate resources, poor training, and the existing culture of impunity within the police force are some of the potential factors (Alemika, 2018). Additionally, the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic, including increased poverty and unemployment, may have influenced the behavior of law enforcement officers, leading to higher levels of misconduct.

Understanding the levels and contributing factors to police misconduct during the COVID-19 pandemic in Enugu State is crucial for developing strategies to prevent future occurrences, especially during crises. By examining the specific conditions that led to increased misconduct, this study aims to provide insights that can inform policy reforms and improve the overall accountability and effectiveness of the police force in Nigeria.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The enforcement of COVID-19 safety measures in Enugu State, as in other parts of Nigeria, brought to the fore significant issues related to police misconduct. While the police were mandated to ensure public compliance with lockdowns, curfews, and other restrictions, their actions during this period were often marked by abuses of power. Reports of extortion, brutality, and unlawful detentions were widespread, leading to increased public outcry and diminishing trust in law enforcement agencies (NHRC, 2020).

Despite the numerous reports of police misconduct during the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been limited empirical research focusing on the levels and contributing factors to these behaviors in Enugu State. Existing literature primarily addresses police misconduct in broader terms, often overlooking the unique dynamics introduced by the pandemic (Akinlabi, 2017). Moreover, while some studies have examined the impact of police misconduct during emergencies, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis that specifically addresses the Enugu State context during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Given the significant impact of police misconduct on public trust and the rule of law, it is essential to explore the levels of such misconduct during the pandemic and identify the underlying factors that contributed to it. This study seeks to fill the gap in existing research by providing a detailed analysis of police misconduct in Enugu State during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on the extent of the misconduct and the factors that may have influenced it.

## Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is analysis of the Levels and Contributing Factors to Police Misconduct during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Enugu State with the following specific objectives:

1. To identify the levels of police misconduct during the COVID-19 pandemic in Enugu state.
2. To ascertain factors that contributed to police misconduct during the COVID-19 pandemic in Enugu state.

## Research Questions

The following research questions are formulated to guide the study:

1. What are the levels of police misconduct during the COVID-19 pandemic in Enugu state?
2. What factors contributed to police misconduct during the COVID-19 pandemic in Enugu state?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Understanding Police Misconduct

Police misconduct refers to inappropriate actions taken by police officers in connection with their official duties. These actions can range from minor infractions, such as lateness or neglect of duty, to severe breaches of law, including corruption, brutality, and abuse of authority (Lambo, 2010; Padersen-Henry, 2017). The conceptualization of police misconduct has been widely debated, with various scholars offering differing perspectives. For instance, Brodeur (2010) defines the police as part of a system authorized to use controlled force, typically prohibited to the general public, to enforce societal rules. This definition underscores the delicate balance between maintaining order and the potential for misconduct when that balance is disrupted.

The history of policing, rooted in the Greek concept of "polis" (city or state), has always involved maintaining public order, safety, and the enforcement of laws (Osse, 2006). Modern policing, which emerged with the establishment of the Metropolitan Police in London by Sir Robert Peel in 1829, set the framework for contemporary law enforcement practices, emphasizing the prevention of crime and the protection of citizens (Newburn, 2012). However, the authority granted to police officers also opens the door to potential misuse, which has been a persistent issue in policing practices globally (Albrecht, 2019).

### 2. Levels of Police Misconduct During COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented global crisis, prompting governments to implement strict public health measures to control the virus's spread. In this context, police forces were often at the forefront of enforcing these measures, leading to increased interactions with the public and, consequently, a heightened risk of misconduct (Jones, 2020). Reports from various countries indicate a rise in police misconduct during the pandemic, ranging from excessive use of force to unlawful detentions and discriminatory practices (Amnesty International, 2020; Frenkel et al., 2020).

In Enugu State, the levels of police misconduct during the COVID-19 pandemic mirrored global trends, with significant incidents reported across various communities. These incidents often involved the use of excessive force to enforce lockdown measures, mandatory mask-wearing, and social distancing protocols. The militarization of the police, a trend observed in many regions, contributed to the severity of these incidents, as officers were often equipped and authorized to use force in ways that heightened tensions between law enforcement and the public (Balko, 2013).

### 3. Contributing Factors to Police Misconduct During the Pandemic

Several factors contributed to the rise in police misconduct during the COVID-19 pandemic in Enugu State. These factors can be broadly categorized into organizational, environmental, and societal influences.

**3.1 Organizational Factors** The internal culture of police organizations plays a crucial role in shaping officers' behavior. Organizational factors such as inadequate training, lack of clear guidelines on the use of force, and insufficient oversight mechanisms can create an environment where misconduct is more likely to occur (Porter, 2005; Prenzler, 2009). During the pandemic, the sudden imposition of new responsibilities on police forces, such

as enforcing public health mandates, often without adequate training or resources, exacerbated these issues. The emphasis on rapid enforcement over community engagement led to a breakdown in trust between the police and the public, further contributing to instances of misconduct (Punch, 2003).

**3.2 Environmental Factors** The environment in which police officers operate also significantly impacts their behavior. In Enugu State, the socio-political environment during the pandemic was characterized by heightened anxiety, economic hardship, and widespread uncertainty. These conditions created a volatile atmosphere where confrontations between police and citizens were more likely to escalate into incidents of misconduct. The pressure to maintain order in an increasingly chaotic situation may have led some officers to resort to excessive force or other inappropriate measures (Albrecht, 2019).

Moreover, the militarization of police forces, which involves equipping officers with military-grade weapons and adopting a more aggressive stance in public interactions, has been identified as a significant factor contributing to police misconduct. This approach, while intended to enhance public safety, often results in increased tensions and a higher likelihood of violence during police encounters, particularly in marginalized communities (Mummelo, 2018; Balko, 2013).

**3.3 Societal Factors** Societal attitudes towards law enforcement and the role of the police in enforcing public health measures also influenced the levels of misconduct during the pandemic. In many cases, the public's reluctance to comply with COVID-19 restrictions, fueled by economic desperation and mistrust of the authorities, led to confrontations with police. In Enugu State, as in other regions, the enforcement of these measures disproportionately affected vulnerable groups, including the poor, women, and minority communities. This disproportionate impact exacerbated existing social inequalities and contributed to the perception of the police as enforcers of an unjust system, rather than protectors of public health (Chirambwi, 2016; BoonKuo et al., 2021). Additionally, the use of social media and other digital platforms played a dual role during the pandemic. On the one hand, these platforms allowed for greater transparency and accountability by providing a means to document and report instances of police misconduct. On the other hand, the spread of misinformation and the rapid dissemination of confrontational incidents sometimes fueled further unrest and contributed to the breakdown of police-community relations (Chauhan & Hughes, 2015).

#### **4. The Impact of Police Misconduct on Public Trust and Law Enforcement**

The increase in police misconduct during the COVID-19 pandemic has had profound implications for public trust in law enforcement. Incidents of excessive force, corruption, and abuse of authority have eroded the public's confidence in the police, particularly in communities that were already marginalized or disproportionately affected by the pandemic's economic and social impacts (Porter & Prenzler, 2012). This erosion of trust not only hampers effective law enforcement but also undermines broader public health efforts, as individuals are less likely to comply with health measures if they perceive them as being enforced unjustly. In Enugu State, the long-term consequences of this loss of trust may include increased resistance to law enforcement efforts, higher rates of crime, and further deterioration of police-community relations. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that includes reforming police practices, improving oversight and accountability mechanisms, and fostering better communication and cooperation between the police and the communities they serve (Jones, Jones & Cantal, 2020).

#### **Theoretical Framework**

##### **Rotten Apple Theory**

The Rotten Apple Theory is a prominent criminological framework used to explain police misconduct by attributing such behavior to individual officers rather than systemic issues within law enforcement agencies. Originating from the early 20th century, this theory has been instrumental in shaping the discourse on police ethics

and accountability. The theory posits that a few "bad apples" within the police force are responsible for misconduct, suggesting that these officers deviate from the otherwise ethical and law-abiding majority.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, law enforcement agencies worldwide were tasked with enforcing public health measures, which placed unprecedented pressure on police officers. In Enugu State, Nigeria, this pressure manifested in various forms of misconduct, including the excessive use of force, corruption, and human rights abuses. The Rotten Apple Theory provides a framework to analyze these behaviors by focusing on individual officers who may have engaged in misconduct during this period.

### **Key Assumptions of the Theory**

The Rotten Apple Theory operates on several core assumptions:

- **Individual Responsibility:** The theory emphasizes that misconduct is primarily the result of individual officers' moral and ethical failures rather than a reflection of the entire police organization.
- **Isolated Incidents:** It assumes that instances of misconduct are isolated and not indicative of a broader, systemic issue within the police force.
- **Internal Disciplinary Measures:** The theory suggests that police departments have the mechanisms to identify and remove these "bad apples" through internal disciplinary processes, thus maintaining the integrity of the organization as a whole.

### **Application to Enugu State During COVID-19**

In Enugu State, the enforcement of COVID-19 safety measures led to numerous reports of police misconduct. The Rotten Apple Theory can be applied to analyze these incidents by identifying specific officers whose actions deviated from the expected norms and standards of policing. For instance, instances where officers used excessive force to enforce lockdowns or mask mandates can be examined under this framework, highlighting how individual failings contributed to broader patterns of misconduct.

However, while the Rotten Apple Theory provides a useful lens for understanding certain cases of misconduct, it also has significant limitations. Critics argue that this theory oversimplifies the issue by neglecting the systemic factors that can contribute to unethical behavior within the police force. For example, the stress and strain caused by the pandemic, coupled with inadequate training and resources, may have exacerbated these behaviors, indicating that the problem may be more deeply rooted than the theory suggests.

The Rotten Apple Theory offers a valuable framework for understanding certain aspects of police misconduct, particularly in identifying individual officers who engage in unethical behavior. However, its limitations highlight the need for a more comprehensive approach that addresses the systemic and cultural factors contributing to misconduct. In the context of Enugu State during the COVID-19 pandemic, this means looking beyond individual officers to examine the broader organizational and societal influences that shaped police behavior during this challenging period.

### **Police Nature of the Job Theory**

The Police Nature of the Job Theory is a criminological framework that emphasizes the unique challenges and pressures inherent in police work, which can predispose officers to misconduct. This theory posits that the nature of police work—marked by constant exposure to danger, stress, and ethical dilemmas—can lead to behaviors that deviate from legal and ethical standards. Originating from the works of Skolnick and Fyfe, this theory has been influential in understanding how the demands of the job can impact officers' conduct.

The COVID-19 pandemic intensified the already demanding nature of police work, as officers were required to enforce unprecedented public health measures under challenging conditions. In Enugu State, this resulted in various forms of police misconduct, including the misuse of force and the infringement of citizens' rights. The Police Nature of the Job Theory provides a framework to analyze how the intrinsic challenges of police work during the pandemic contributed to these behaviors.

### **Key Assumptions of the Theory**

The Police Nature of the Job Theory is based on several key assumptions:

- ❖ **Inherent Stress and Danger:** The theory posits that police officers routinely face situations that involve significant stress, danger, and rapid decision-making, which can affect their judgment and behavior.
- ❖ **Moral and Ethical Dilemmas:** Officers are often required to navigate complex moral and ethical dilemmas, particularly in high-pressure situations, which can lead to decisions that might not align with legal or ethical standards.
- ❖ **Desensitization to Violence:** Continuous exposure to criminal activity and violence can desensitize officers, potentially leading to a greater propensity for using excessive force or engaging in other forms of misconduct.

### **Application to Enugu State During COVID-19**

In Enugu State, the enforcement of COVID-19 measures such as lockdowns, social distancing, and mandatory mask-wearing created situations where officers were frequently placed in high-stress environments. The Police Nature of the Job Theory can be applied to understand how these pressures may have influenced officers' behavior during the pandemic. For instance, the need to enforce unpopular and restrictive measures might have heightened tensions between the police and the public, leading to instances where officers resorted to excessive force. Moreover, the theory can help explain how the constant exposure to stress and danger during the pandemic may have affected officers' mental and emotional well-being, potentially leading to burnout, frustration, and ultimately, misconduct. The pandemic's impact on police work also included the challenge of enforcing regulations that were often met with public resistance, further increasing the likelihood of confrontations that could escalate into misconduct.

The Police Nature of the Job Theory offers a compelling framework for understanding how the unique challenges of police work can contribute to misconduct, particularly during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. In Enugu State, the heightened pressures of enforcing pandemic-related measures likely exacerbated these challenges, leading to increased instances of misconduct. However, while the theory provides important insights, it must be applied alongside other frameworks that address systemic and organizational factors to develop a more comprehensive approach to preventing and addressing police misconduct.

### **Empirical Review**

Laufs and Waseem (2020), Policing in Pandemics: A Systematic Review and Best Practices for Police Response to COVID-19. Laufs and Waseem provide a systematic review of policing during pandemics, with a particular focus on the impact of COVID-19. The study examines how the pandemic affected police-community relations, the mental health and well-being of officers, intra-organizational dynamics, and inter-agency cooperation. It offers recommendations for best practices in policing during public health emergencies, emphasizing the importance of managing stress and maintaining positive community relations.

Frenkel et al. (2020), the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on European Police Officers: Stress, Demands, and Coping Resources. Frenkel and colleagues explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on police officers in five European countries, focusing on the stress and demands placed on them and the coping resources available. The study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data to assess how these factors influenced police behavior and well-being during the pandemic.

Jennings and Perez (2020), the Immediate Impact of COVID-19 on Law Enforcement in the United States. This study examines the immediate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on law enforcement in the United States, particularly the challenges faced by officers in enforcing public health directives. It discusses the increased risk of virus exposure, communication challenges, and the public's resistance to safety measures, all of which contributed to heightened stress levels among officers.

Sewell (2020), Policing the Block: Pandemics, Systemic Racism, and the Blood of America. Sewell's study examines the intersection of systemic racism and policing during the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. It argues that the pandemic exacerbated existing racial tensions and led to increased instances of police misconduct, particularly against minority communities. The study highlights how the pandemic served as a catalyst for exposing deeper issues within the policing system.

Boon-Kuo et al. (2020), Policing Biosecurity: Police Enforcement of Special Measures in New South Wales and Victoria during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Boon-Kuo and colleagues explore how the COVID-19 pandemic led to the expansion of police powers in Australia, particularly in New South Wales and Victoria. The study discusses how these expanded powers, such as the authority to enforce lockdowns and issue fines, led to increased scrutiny and criticism of police behavior, particularly concerning racial profiling and the criminalization of previously legal activities.

## **Research Method**

### **Research Design:**

A mixed-method design was used, combining descriptive survey and qualitative exploratory approaches. This combination allows for a broad understanding of the subject matter and provides deeper insights through qualitative exploration.

### **Area of Study:**

The study focused on Enugu State, located in the South East of Nigeria. Enugu State has 17 local government areas with a population of approximately 3.27 million (2006 census). It is located in the South East geo-political zone. Enugu State was created on 27 August, 1991 from Old Anambra by the then Military President Ibrahim Babangida. The State shares borders with Abia State and Imo State to the south, Ebonyi State to the east, Benue State to the northeast, Kogi State to the northwest and Anambra State to the west. Enugu state has 17 Local Government Areas

### **Study Population:**

The population of the study is 4,738,362. It is the estimated population of Enugu State gotten from the 2006 Nigeria Population Commission census data for the state which is 3,267,837 at a growth rate of 3% per annum.

The formula is  $P_t = P_o (1 + rt)$

Were

Pt is the projected population at year t Po is the population for the base year r is the growth rate t is the number of years in this case:

$$r=3\%=0.03 \quad t=15$$

The table below shows the breakdown of the 2006 and estimated population of each Local Governments Areas in Enugu State.

**Table 3.1: Local Governments Areas in Enugu State 47**

S/N	Name Of Local Governments Areas	Population	Population Projection 2006-2021 (15 years) by 3%
1	Aninri	136,221	197,520
2	Awgu	197,292	286,073
3	Enugu East	277,119	401,823
4	Enugu North	242,140	351,103
5	Enugu South	198,032	287,146
6	Ezeagu	170,603	247,374
7	Igbo Etit	208,333	302,083
8	Igbo Eze North	258,829	375,302
9	Igbo Eze South	147,364	213,678
10	Isi Uzo	148,597	215,466
11	Nkanu East	153,591	222,707
12	Nkanu West	147,385	213,708
13	Nsukka	309,448	448,699
14	Oji River	128,741	186,674
15	Udenu	178,687	259,096
16	Udi	238,305	345,542
17	Uzo Wani	127,150	184,368
Total	Number of Population in Enugu State	3,267,837	4,738,362

**Source: Nigerian Population Commission (2006)**

**Sample and Sampling Techniques:**

A sample size of 600 respondents was determined using Cochran's formula, with participants selected from four local government areas (Oji River, Awgu, Udenu, Nkanu East) using multi-stage sampling. At the first stage, four Local Government Areas from the 17 Local Government Areas in Enugu State will be purposively selected namely; Oji River, Awgu, Udenu and Nkanu East. Also, four boundary communities (Ugwu Oba, Obinwanne, Amala and Amechi Idodo) from the four selected Local Government Areas will also be purposively selected. In the second stage, proportionate stratified random sampling was used. This helped us to get a sample of 117, 180, 163 and 140 respondents from Oji River, Awgu, Udenu and

Nkanu LGAs respectively, making it a total of 600 respondents used for the study. Proportionate sampling technique is used because the populations in the four local government areas are not the same.



**Table 3.2: Proportionate Stratified Random Sampling Formula**

	The Four Local Government Areas				
	Oji River	Awgu	Udenu	Nkanu East	Total
Size	186,674	286,073	259,096	222,707	954,550

**Source: Author Compilation**

$$\text{Proportion of the sample} = \frac{\text{Sample}}{\text{population}} = \frac{n}{N}$$

Where: n = sample size (600)

Where: N = Total number of the population of the four selected LGA (954,550)

Substituting the values in the formula;

$$\text{Proportion of the sample} = \frac{600}{954,550} = 0.00063$$

**The sample size for each stratum is computed as follows:**

- Oji River stratum =  $0.00063 \times 186,674 = 117$
- Awgu stratum =  $0.00063 \times 286,073 = 180$
- Udenu stratum =  $0.00063 \times 259,096 = 163$
- Nkanu East stratum =  $0.00063 \times 222,707 = 140$

**Total sample size = 600**

**Table 3.3 List of Selected Border Communities in the various Local Government Areas**

S/N	OJI RIVER (117)	AWGU (180)	UDENU (163)	NKANU EAST (140)
1	Ugwu Oba	Obinwanne	Amala	Amechi Idodo

**Source: Author Compilation**

In addition, 20 participants were selected purposively for in-depth interviews. . Five (5) participants in Enugu Metropolis includes two (2) market leaders at Ogbete Main Market, Enugu, three (3) Peace Mass Transit bus drivers located at old park Enugu. Also, the five (5) participants in Nsukka Metropolis includes two (2) Romchi Mass Transit bus drivers and Three (3) Globis Motors Limited drivers located at Nsukka Town and finally one (1) Neighborhood Watch, two (2) Motorcyclist (Okada riders). Two (2) hawkers, One (1) artisan, four (4) police officers drawn from the checkpoints border between Abia, Anambra, Benue, Ebonyi and Enugu State.

**Instrument for Data Collection:**

Data were collected using a semi-structured questionnaire and an in-depth interview guide to capture both quantitative and qualitative data.

**Administration of Instruments:**

The instruments were administered by three trained research assistants, who were local to the selected communities and fluent in indigenous languages. In-depth interviews were conducted in settings chosen by the participants, with sessions recorded and non-verbal cues observed.

**Method of Data Analysis:**

A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis was used in this study. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 23.0, employing both descriptive and inferential statistics. Qualitative data were processed using QDA Miner5 Lite, with findings presented in tables, charts, and narrative analysis.

**Result Presentation****4.1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents****Table 4.1.2: Distribution of the respondents by LGA**

<b>LGA</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Amaechi Idodo, Nkanu east	113	21.4
Amala, Udenu	141	26.8
Obinwanne	170	32.3
Ugwu-Oba Oji	103	19.5
Total	527	100.0

**Source:** Author's Fieldwork, 2021

Data presented in Table 4.1.2 show that 21.4% of the respondents were from Amaechi Idodo in Nkanu East LGA, 26.8% were from Amala in Udenu LGA, 32.3% were from Obinwanne, while 19.5% were from Ugwu-Oba in Oji-river LGA. This is an indication that the respondents were fairly distributed across the LGAs which formed the study area, with Obinwanne having a slight higher margin of respondents.

**Table 4.1.3: Distribution of the respondents by Sex**

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Female	282	53.5
Male	245	46.5
Total	527	100.0

**Source:** Author's Fieldwork, 2021

Table 4.1.3 presented data on respondents' sex as follows: 53.5% females and 46.5% males. This is an indication that there were more female than male respondents for this study.

**Table 4.1.4: Distribution of the respondents by Age**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
18-28	344	65.3
29-39	90	17.1
40-50	44	8.3
51-60	37	7.0
62 and above	12	2.3
Total	527	100.0

**Source:** Author's Fieldwork, 2021

Data presented in Table 4.1.4 show that 65.3% of the respondents are between 18-23 years old, 17.1% are between 29-39 years old, 8.3% are between 40-50 years old, 7% are between 51-60 years old, while 2.3% are 62 years and above. This implies that majority of the respondents are youth in their prime age as indicated and they occupy more than two-third of the total respondent at 82.4%.

**Table 4.1.5: Distribution of the respondents by Level of education**

Education	Frequency	Percentage (%)
No primary school	60	11.4
Primary school	74	14.0
Secondary school	222	42.1
University/Poly/College of Edu	125	23.7
Postgraduate education	46	8.7
Total	527	100.0

**Source:** Author’s Fieldwork, 2021

Data in table 4.1.5 shows that 11.4% of the respondents did not attend school at all, 14%, attended primary school, 42.1% attended secondary school, 23.7% attended University/polytechnic or college of education while 8.7% acquired postgraduate degrees. This implies that a little more than half (56.1%) of the respondents acquired only basic education.

**Table 4.1.6: Distribution of the respondents by marital status**

Marital status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Single	380	72.1
Married	127	24.1
Divorced	10	1.9
Separated	2	.4
Widowed	8	1.5
Total	527	100.0

**Source:** Author’s Fieldwork, 2021

Information on marital status of the respondents presented in above Table 4.1.6 show that 72.1% of the respondents are single, 24.1% of the respondents are married, 19.1% of the respondents are divorced, 0.4% of the respondents are separated, while 1.5% of the respondents are widowed. This implies that nearly

two-third (72.1%) of the total respondents are single, which also aligns with data presented in Table 4.1.3 where the age distribution of the respondents show that they are mostly of youthful age.

**Table 4.1.7: Distribution of the respondents by Occupation**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Acting	1	.2
Artisan	17	3.2
CEO	2	.4
Civil servant	22	4.2
Farming	42	8.0
Freelancer	6	1.1
Logistics	1	.2
Medical Practitioner	1	.2
Student	255	48.4
Teaching	27	5.1
Trading	108	20.5
Unemployed	45	8.5
Total	527	100.0

**Source:** Author's Fieldwork, 2021

Occupation distribution of the respondents presented in Table 4.1.7 shows that: 0.2% were into acting, 3.2% were artisans, 0.4% were CEOs, 4.2% were civil servants, 8% were farmers, 1.1% were freelancers, 0.2% were into logistics, 0.2% were medical practitioners, 48.4% were students, 5.1% were teachers, 20.5% were traders, while 8.5% were unemployed. This implies that nearly half (48.4%) of the respondents were students.

**Table 4.1.8: Distribution of the respondents by Religion**

<b>Religion</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
African Traditional Religion	27	5.1
Christianity	434	82.4
Islam	58	11.0
Others	8	1.5
Total	527	100.0

**Source:** Author's Fieldwork, 2021

Data on religious affiliation of respondents presented in Table 4.1.8 above shows that 5.1% practice African Traditional Religion, 82.4% practice Christianity, 11% practice Islam, while 1.5% practice other sundry religions. This implies that majority of the respondents, over two third (82.4%) in the study area are Christians. This also shows the dominant religious practice of the study area, implying that out of every 10 inhabitant of the study area, eight are Christians.

**Table 4.1.9: Distribution of the respondents by length of stay in Enugu**

Length of stay in Enugu	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1-5 months	24	4.6
6-11 months	9	1.7
1-5 years	164	31.1
6-10 years	80	15.2
11-15 years	92	17.5
16-20 years	80	15.2
Above 20 years	78	14.8
Total	527	100.0

**Source:** Author’s Fieldwork, 2021

Data on respondents’ length of stay in Enugu were presented in Table 4.1.9. It shows that 4.6% of the respondents have only lived in Enugu for 1-5 months, and 1.7% has lived for 6-11 months, 31.1% has lived for 1-5 years, 17.5% lived for 11-15 years, 15.2% lived 16-20 years while 14.8% has lived for above 20 years. This implies that majority of the respondents have lived in Enugu for more than five years and are therefore well fitted to make valuable contribution on the issues of this study.

**Table 5.1.2: Distribution of the respondents on the level of police misconduct during COVID-19 pandemic**

Level of police misconduct has increased, stayed about the same, or decreased during COVID-19 pandemic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Decreased	74	14.0
Increased	288	54.6
Not sure	2	.4
Stayed about the same	163	30.9
Total	527	100.0

**Source:** Author’s Fieldwork, 2021

Table 5.1.2 presents data on whether level of police misconduct has increased, stayed about the same, or decreased during COVID-19 pandemic. It shows that 14% of the respondents indicated that it decreased, while 54.6% indicated that it increased. 0.4% of the respondents are not sure whether level of police misconduct has increased, stayed about the same, or decreased during COVID-19 pandemic, while 30.9% of the respondents indicated that level of police misconduct stayed about the same during COVID-19 pandemic. Impliedly, majority of the respondents at the toll of more than half (54.6%) of the total respondents opined that level of police misconduct increased during COVID-19 pandemic.

To complement the quantitative data. Some responses from the in-depth interview are presented below. One of the participants said that:

People coming from north, when they got the boundary, the police will request money from them, if they bring money the police we allow them to pass, may be they will request 50,000 thousand naira from them people like drivers or people carrying coffins [IDI, Male Passenger, 37 years old, Enugu].

Police officers are selling face masks at the borders and if you don't have yours, you buy from them for 200 naira instead of the normal 100 naira that other people sell it. If you are in the motor without face masks at the border they will bring you down until you buy from them, or they will delay you till the evening by 4.00pm when the police believe that COVID-19 has left. But once is morning till 3.00pm you will not go anywhere until you settle them or buy face mask as a passenger [IDI, Female Passenger, 40 years old, Enugu].

Another respondent said:

The police allow us to sell our markets at the border starting from 4pm. Earlier they told us to go to our various homes that COVID-19 operates from morning till 3.00pm. So, from morning to 3.00pm they tell you that COVID-19 is real but once is 4.00pm they will tell us that COVID-19 has left with its loads, that's what police officers tell us [IDI, Female Hawker, 19 years old, Enugu].

**Table 5.1.3: Distribution of the respondents by perception of type of police misconduct during the enforcement of COVID-19 safety measures in Enugu state**

<u>Type of police misconduct</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage (%)</u>
(Sexual) harassment of citizens	12	2.3
(Sexual) harassment of colleagues	6	1.1
Abuse and waste of organizational goods	13	2.5
Abuse of force	88	16.7
Abuse of information	6	1.1
Abuse of other police powers	35	6.6
All	1	.2
Conflict of interest: gifts and discount interest	66	12.5
Conflict of interests: side job or activities	13	2.5
Corruption	228	43.3
Fraud	15	2.8
Kidnapping	1	.2
Private misconduct	5	.9
Theft of non-police personnel	27	5.1
Theft of police personnel	11	2.1
Total	527	100.0

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2021

Data presented in Table 5.1.3 shows perception of type of police misconduct during the enforcement of COVID-19 safety measures in Enugu state. It shows that 2.3% and 1.1% of the respondents indicated sexual harassment of citizens and colleagues respectively. 2.5% of the respondents identified abuse and waste of organizational goods police misconduct witnessed during the period, 16.7% of the respondents indicated abuse of force, 1.1% indicated abuse of information, while 6.6% indicated abuse of other police powers, while 43.3% identified corruption. Others responses are as follows; “Fraud” (2.8%), “Kidnapping” (0.2%), “Private misconduct” (0.9%), “Theft of non-police personnel” (5.1%), and “Theft of police personnel” (2.1%). This implies as indicated by a little less than half (43.3%) of the total respondents, “corruption” ranks highest as the most perceived type of police misconduct during the enforcement of COVID-19 safety measures in Enugu state.

**Table 5.1.4: Distribution of the respondents by the rate of police misconduct during the pandemic**

Rate of police misconduct during the pandemic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High	265	50.3
Low	170	32.3
Medium	91	17.3
Others	1	.2
Total	527	100.0

**Source:** Author’s Fieldwork, 2021

Data presented in Table 5.1.4 show that 50.3% of the respondents rate police misconduct during the pandemic as high, 32.3% rate police misconduct during the pandemic as low, 17.3% rated police misconduct at the period as medium, while 0.2% indicated others. This implies that police misconduct during the pandemic is high in the study area as indicated half (50.3%) of the respondents.

Response from the in-depth interview reiterated this submission thus:

Government said no movement, but the police allow movement collecting money from people. if you don’t pay, you will not pass. And if you refuse to pay, they will give you allegation. We all drivers suffered. Peace mass owner did not give us anything (money) during the pandemic. And the government seized the palliative give to people. It was very terrible covid-19 that we did not see or experienced yet we suffered because of it. In my next life I will not be a Nigeria, if we didn’t get Biafra. Because the masses are suffering and government is not doing anything about it. The government is not paying concern [IDI, Male Commercial Driver, 55 years old, Enugu].

**Table 5.1.7: Distribution of respondents by whether police officer were arrested for extortion during the COVID-19**

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
No	141	26.8
Not sure	219	41.6
Yes	167	31.7
Total	44	8.3

**Source:** Author’s Fieldwork, 2021

Data presented in Table 5.1.7 shows that 26.8% of the respondents do not know whether police officers were arrested for extortion during the COVID-19, 41.6% are not sure of the situation, while 31.7% indicated “yes” to police officers being arrested for extortion during the pandemic period. This implies that police officers were not arrested for extortion as indicated by 68.4% of the respondent, i.e. when those who indicated “no” and “not sure” are combined.

**Table 5.1.8: Distribution of the respondents by whether police officers were caught collecting bribe during COVID-19**

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
No	123	23.3
Uncertain	161	30.6
Yes	243	46.1
Total	527	100.0

Source: Author’s Fieldwork, 2021

On whether police officers were caught collecting bribe during the COVID-19, information in table 5.1.8 show that 23.3% of the respondents stated no, 30.6% of the respondents were not sure, while 46.1% of the respondents indicated yes that police officers were caught collecting bribe during COVID-19. This implies that collecting bribes by police officers during COVID19 was very visible to the public and was not done in the secret.

**Table 5.1.10: Distribution of the respondents by the knowledge of police officer that was arrested for actions during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
No	326	61.9
Not sure	100	19.0
Yes	101	19.2
Total	527	100.0

Source: Author’s Fieldwork, 2021

Data presented in Table 5.1.10 is on knowledge of arrest of any police officer for actions during COVID-19. It shows that 61.8% of the respondents stated no knowledge, 19% of the respondents stated not sure”, while 19.2% of the respondents opined “Yes”. This implies that nearly two-third (61.9%) of the total respondents do not have knowledge of any police officer arrested for actions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

**Levels of Police Misconduct during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Enugu State**

The study revealed that the level of police misconduct during the COVID-19 pandemic in Enugu State was notably high. The findings indicate that corruption was the most prevalent form of misconduct, with a significant increase in human rights violations reported by more than half of the respondents ([see Table 5.1.4] and [see Table 6.2.1]). This aligns with previous research, such as the studies by Padersen-Henry (2017) and Worden and McLean (2017), which noted a global rise in police misconduct, particularly during crises that grant law enforcement broader powers. The high level of misconduct during the pandemic was not isolated to Enugu State but reflected



a broader trend observed in various parts of Nigeria and globally, where the enforcement of COVID-19 safety measures often led to an abuse of power. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) also reported a disturbing increase in extra-judicial killings and other forms of police brutality during the lockdown, further corroborating the findings of this study (Adejumo, 2020; Uzoho, 2020).

### **Factors Contributing to Police Misconduct During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Enugu State**

The study identified several factors that contributed to the high levels of police misconduct during the COVID-19 pandemic in Enugu State. A primary factor was the stress and pressure associated with enforcing the COVID-19 safety measures, which was exacerbated by a lack of proper oversight and professional conduct within the police force ([see Table 6.1.1]). This is in line with the General Strain Theory (GST), which posits that stress, particularly from work, can lead to deviant behavior, such as misconduct, if not managed professionally. Another contributing factor was the systemic corruption within the police force, where extortion and bribery became rampant, and officers felt emboldened to engage in misconduct without fear of repercussions ([see Table 5.1.6] and [see Table 5.1.8]). The study also referenced the Rotten Apple Theory, suggesting that the presence of a few corrupt officers can negatively influence others, leading to widespread misconduct. This theory has been supported by previous studies, such as those by Sheptycki (2020) and Oladele (2020), which highlighted how crises like the COVID-19 pandemic can exacerbate existing issues within law enforcement, leading to a surge in corrupt practices.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study thoroughly examined the levels of police misconduct and the factors contributing to these behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic in Enugu State, revealing a marked increase in misconduct, particularly in the form of corruption, extortion, and excessive use of force. The study's specific objectives were effectively addressed by quantifying the extent of misconduct and identifying key contributing factors, including organizational shortcomings, environmental pressures, and societal dynamics. Over half of the respondents perceived an increase in police misconduct during the pandemic, driven primarily by the stress and strain associated with enforcing unfamiliar and stringent public health measures. The lack of proper oversight and systemic corruption within the police force further exacerbated these issues, allowing unethical practices to flourish unchecked. Additionally, the research highlighted how the socio-political environment of heightened anxiety, economic hardship, and public mistrust significantly contributed to the observed misconduct, with the absence of accountability mechanisms and the entrenched culture of impunity within the police force being critical factors that facilitated this rise in deviant behaviors. In conclusion, this study emphasizes the urgent need for systemic reforms in the Nigeria Police Force, particularly in times of crisis, by implementing robust oversight mechanisms, providing comprehensive training, and addressing deeply rooted issues of corruption and impunity to restore public trust in law enforcement and ensure the police can effectively and ethically manage public safety during emergencies.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings and objectives of the study on police misconduct during the COVID-19 pandemic in Enugu State, here are three recommendations:

#### **1. Enhance Training and Professional Development:**

The study identified that inadequate training and poor professional conduct were significant contributors to police misconduct. To address this, it is recommended that the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) enhances its training

programs, focusing on ethical policing, human rights, and crisis management. Special attention should be given to training officers on the appropriate use of force and the importance of maintaining public trust during emergencies like pandemics. Continuous professional development programs should also be implemented to reinforce these values over time.

## **2. Strengthen Oversight and Accountability Mechanisms:**

The study highlighted a lack of proper oversight and accountability as a key factor that allowed police misconduct to flourish. Establishing independent oversight bodies at the state level, particularly in crisis situations, could help monitor police activities more effectively. These bodies should have the power to investigate complaints, enforce disciplinary measures, and ensure that any misconduct is addressed swiftly. Additionally, public reporting systems should be strengthened to encourage citizens to report incidents of misconduct without fear of retaliation.

## **3. Implement Community Policing Strategies:**

To rebuild trust between the police and the community, it is recommended that community policing strategies be implemented. This approach involves engaging with local communities to understand their concerns, involving them in decision-making processes, and ensuring transparency in law enforcement activities. During crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, community policing can help mitigate tensions and reduce instances of misconduct by promoting cooperation and communication between the police and the public.

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