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Police Culture and the Management of Crime Victims in Wakari LGA, Taraba State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The management of crime victims is a critical indicator of policing effectiveness and the performance of the criminal justice system, yet in Wukari Local Government Area (LGA) of Taraba State, Nigeria, an enforcement-centred police culture marked by delayed responses, extortion, and procedural inefficiencies has raised serious concerns about victims' protection and welfare. This study examines the influence of police culture on the management of crime victims in Wukari LGA, identifies prevalent forms of victimization, and evaluates how institutional practices shape victims' experiences. Guided by Restorative Justice Theory, a descriptive cross-sectional survey design was employed, drawing a sample of 400 respondents from a projected population of 374,800 using Taro Yamane's formula. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and supplemented with interviews involving ten key informants, and were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic evaluation. The findings reveal that prevailing police culture in Wukari significantly undermines victim management, with widespread extortion, delayed crime scene response, slow investigations, and manipulation of evidence contributing to secondary victimization. As a result, victims frequently feel neglected and lose confidence in law enforcement, which in turn fuels underreporting of crimes. The study

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concludes that the management of crime victims in Wukari LGA is largely ineffective due to entrenched policing norms and institutional deficiencies, and recommends the adoption of victim-centred policing, enhanced officer capacity and training, and strengthened accountability and oversight mechanisms to improve victim protection and restore public trust.

Keywords: Police Culture; Crime Victims; Victim Management; Restorative Justice; Wukari, Nigeria.

Introduction

Crime and victimisation constitute complex and multifaceted phenomena with far-reaching consequences on social, economic, and political life. Globally, the management of crime victims has increasingly gained attention as governments and law enforcement agencies recognise that victims' welfare, protection, and satisfaction are critical indicators of the effectiveness of the criminal justice system. The global community faces numerous challenges in addressing the impact of crime, including escalating criminal sophistication, transnational organised crime, and human rights violations arising from inadequate victim support (Smith & Brown, 2017). Countries across the world have instituted various measures to protect and manage crime victims. For example, in the United Kingdom, the Victims' Code and specialised police victim support units ensure that victims receive timely information, assistance, and follow-up (Harris & Jenkins, 2018). Similarly, the United States has established the Office for Victims of Crime, which provides funding, advocacy, and training to law enforcement agencies to enhance victim management (Jones & Carter, 2019).

In Africa, the challenges of victim management are compounded by weak institutional frameworks, inadequate resources, and entrenched policing cultures that prioritise enforcement over victim welfare. Countries such as South Africa and Kenya have made significant strides in formalising victim support services within police structures; however, gaps persist in implementation, community engagement, and culturally sensitive approaches to victim care (Moyo, 2016). Scholars have argued that African policing systems are often shaped by historical and colonial legacies, which emphasised control and order rather than community-oriented or victim-centred policing (Chikwanha, 2015). Consequently, victims frequently encounter systemic barriers, including corruption, inefficiency, and perceived bias, which undermine their confidence in law enforcement.

In Nigeria, the issue of crime victim management is further complicated by high crime rates, inadequate policing resources, and prevailing cultural attitudes toward crime and justice. Research indicates that victims often perceive the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) as unresponsive, corrupt, or lacking the capacity to provide timely support and redress (Akinwale, 2018). Reports of delayed investigations, bribery, and selective enforcement have been widely documented, contributing to underreporting of crimes and a general mistrust of police institutions (Eze, 2019). Furthermore, the policing culture in Nigeria has historically emphasised law enforcement and control, often neglecting the social and psychological needs of crime victims. This approach has limited the capacity of the NPF to provide comprehensive support services that could enhance victims' recovery and promote public confidence in the criminal justice system.

Similarly, Wukari Local Government Area (Wukari LGA) in Taraba State faces similar challenges in managing crime victims. The area has witnessed various forms of crime, including theft, domestic violence, and property offences, which have significant socio-economic and psychological impacts on victims. Adamu (2020) posited that many victims do not report crimes due to fear, lack of trust in the police, or perceived ineffectiveness of law enforcement. Moreover, the prevailing police culture in Wukari LGA, characterised by a reactive and enforcement-centred approach, often fails to prioritise victim welfare, follow-up, or community engagement. This situation undermines public confidence in policing institutions and limits the effectiveness of crime prevention and control efforts.

Given these realities, there is a critical need to examine police culture and its influence on the management of crime victims in Wukari LGA. Understanding how police officers perceive their roles, how institutional practices affect victim care, and how victims experience policing is essential for developing effective strategies that enhance victim protection, improve police-community relations, and promote social justice. This study, therefore, seeks to provide empirical insights into the relationship between police culture and the management of crime victims in Wukari LGA, Taraba State, Nigeria.

Literature Review

Recent scholarship consistently demonstrates that police culture shapes how crime victims are managed, particularly in contexts characterised by weak institutional accountability and strained police–public relations. Globally, researchers such as Loftus

(2020) argue that police culture is fundamentally embedded in norms of authority, suspicion, and operational solidarity, all of which influence officers' willingness to assist victims. This foundational perspective is echoed in contemporary victimological research, which stresses that police occupational values are often more influential than formal policies in determining victims' experiences (Baker, 2021). These global insights set the stage for understanding how police culture operates in specific national contexts, including Nigeria.

Building on broader victim-focused policing debates, scholars in the Global South highlight how entrenched police practices directly influence procedural fairness and victim satisfaction. For instance, Tankebe (2019) argues that in many African policing environments, victims often encounter delayed responses, extortion, and insufficient communication, patterns linked to institutional norms rather than individual misconduct. His work aligns with Loftus (2020), reinforcing the idea that everyday routines within police organisations significantly shape victims' access to justice.

Within the Nigerian context, research on policing and victim management has intensified in recent years. Ike and Jidong (2022) report that many victims are reluctant to report crimes due to fear, mistrust, and limited awareness of complaint mechanisms. Their findings mirror Tankebe's (2019) broader African evidence, suggesting that poor victim experiences are not simply isolated incidents but reflections of deep-rooted institutional cultures. Similarly, Olaleye (2021) shows that negative perceptions of police fairness significantly affect victims' willingness to pursue justice, demonstrating the enduring influence of police behaviour on victims' confidence.

Further evidence from Agbiboa (2020) reveals that corruption and arbitrary use of force, reflective of Nigeria's authoritarian policing legacy, continue to shape police–victim encounters. His findings complement Ike and Jidong (2022), illustrating how distrust becomes normalised within communities and ultimately discourages reporting. In another study, Ojedokun and Idemudia (2021) argue that victims often experience secondary victimisation due to police insensitivity, intimidation, or demands for unofficial payments, a pattern consistent with global literature on institutional betrayal (see Baker, 2021).

Beyond misconduct, several scholars highlight organisational stressors as major determinants of victim management outcomes. According to Ojo (2023), officers facing burnout and emotional exhaustion display reduced empathy and procedural attentiveness, two qualities essential for effective victim engagement. These findings resonate with

international research by Perez (2022), who links officer well-being to the quality of victim-centred policing.

Moreover, studies focusing on police discretion underscore how ingrained cultural norms shape the prioritisation of cases. According to Rotimi (2022), crimes involving vulnerable populations, such as sexual assault and domestic violence, are often deprioritised due to patriarchal stereotypes within police institutions. His findings align with global analyses by Duff and Eriksen (2021), who report that cultural trivialization of certain crimes contributes to under-protection of targeted groups.

Another cluster of Nigerian studies emphasises how police culture interacts with structural weaknesses in the justice system. For example, Adeosun (2020) shows that bureaucratic delays, poor documentation practices, and lack of victim follow-up reflect a police culture that prioritises arrest statistics over victim welfare. This argument is supported by Chukwuma (2021), who notes that officers often view victims as burdens rather than clients deserving of support.

Digital-era studies offer additional insights. Ekhator and Nwanze (2023) demonstrate that despite technological upgrades within the Nigerian Police Force, cultural resistance to transparency has hindered the adoption of victim-support systems such as electronic crime reporting and follow-up platforms. This reinforces Agbiboa's (2020) argument that institutional change must confront cultural norms rather than merely introduce new technologies.

Finally, several scholars highlight the implications of these cultural practices for justice outcomes and public safety. According to Nwankwo and Alade (2024), persistent negative victim encounters contribute to underreporting, thereby weakening the overall effectiveness of criminal justice institutions. Their findings resonate with Perez (2022) and Baker (2021), who argue that victim confidence is central to crime control and democratic policing.

Theoretical Framework

Restorative Justice Theory: Restorative Justice (RJ) emerged from traditional, community-based conflict resolution, where wrongdoing was addressed through reconciliation and restoration rather than punishment (Strang, 2002). Modern legal systems

shifted toward retributive justice, prioritising the state over victims (Van Ness & Strong, 1997). The RJ movement began in the 1970s with Albert Eglash advocating restitution and Howard Zehr popularising the concept by framing crime as harm to people and relationships (Zehr, 1990). By the 1980s–1990s, practices like victim-offender mediation and community conferencing operationalised these ideas to repair harm and restore social bonds.

RJ assumes that crime is harm to individuals and communities rather than mere law-breaking, emphasising victims' experiences. Justice is inclusive, involving victims, offenders, and the community. The goal is repair, restitution, and reintegration, achieved through voluntary participation, dialogue, and respectful engagement. Community involvement restores social cohesion and trust, moving justice from state-centred punishment to relational and participatory resolution (Strang, 2002; Zehr, 1990).

RJ is victim-centred, addressing emotional, material, and social needs while promoting reconciliation and reducing reoffending (O'Connell, 2019). Community involvement strengthens cohesion and collective responsibility. It is flexible, culturally sensitive, and can reduce court and prison burdens through mediation and restitution, making it particularly suitable for resource-limited or communal societies (Zehr, 1990; Longdom, 2020).

RJ faces challenges such as inconsistent application, potential power imbalances, and limited effectiveness for serious crimes (UKEssays, 2020). Successful implementation requires trained facilitators, resources, and institutional support, which may be lacking. Additionally, restorative outcomes may conflict with societal expectations for deterrence or formal sanctions (Office of Justice Programs, 2021; Longdom, 2020).

RJ reframes policing from purely punitive to victim- and community-focused. Police are encouraged to prioritise victim needs, engage offenders and communities in restorative processes, and facilitate repair and reintegration. In contexts like Wukari LGA, RJ aligns with local norms, reduces systemic burdens, and promotes trust, but requires safeguards to ensure voluntary participation, protect victims' rights, and integrate formal justice where necessary.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive, cross-sectional survey design to examine the research objectives. Using Taro Yamane's formula, a sample size of 400 respondents was

drawn from the total population of 374,800 in Wukari LGA. Structured questionnaires were administered to the selected respondents across all wards to collect quantitative data. Additionally, interviews were conducted with ten key informants to complement and contextualise the survey findings. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, while qualitative data from the interviews were thematically analysed, highlighting key points and insights shared by the informants.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Respondents' Rating of Police Culture and Management of Crime Victims in Wukari LGA, N=384

Police Culture	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	STD
Extortion	**210**	**128**	**24**	**11**	**11**	**4.34**	**.931**
Delayed Trial	237	128	3	4	12	4.49	.840
Slow action to arrest & gather evidence	201	148	13	10	12	4.34	.909
Delayed appearance at the crime Scene	230	129	6	4	15	4.45	.901
Perversion of justice	271	81	7	6	19	4.51	.988
Implanting exhibit	229	120	15	4	16	4.41	.941
Impact on Management of Victims	Frequency			Percentage			
Poor	260			67.7			
Fair	98			25.5			
Good	26			6.8			
Total	384			100			

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 presents respondents' perceptions of the impact of police culture and its various forms on the management of crime victims in Wukari LGA. Using a five-point Likert scale, all dimensions of police culture recorded mean scores above the average of 2.5, indicating that these practices are prevalent in handling cases involving victims of crime. Among the indicators, pervasion of justice had the highest mean score (Mean = 4.51, SD = 0.988), highlighting it as the most significant factor influencing victim management. This was closely followed by delayed trials (Mean = 4.49, SD = 0.840), delayed appearance at crime scenes when contacted by victims (Mean = 4.45, SD = 0.901), and implanting exhibits to

skew narratives (Mean = 4.41, SD = 0.941). Extortion of victims and slow action to arrest and gather evidence also recorded high mean scores (Mean = 4.34), indicating widespread occurrence. The relatively low standard deviations across all items suggest minimal variability in respondents' opinions, reflecting a consensus about the prevalence of these negative police practices.

In terms of overall impact, the respondents overwhelmingly reported that police culture adversely affected the management of crime victims. Specifically, 67.7% (n = 260) rated the impact as poor, 25.5% (n = 98) considered it fair, and only 6.8% (n = 26) viewed it as good. This demonstrates that the negative features of police culture, ranging from corruption, delays, and procedural inefficiency, directly compromise effective victim management in Wukari LGA, reinforcing the need for reforms aimed at accountability, professionalism, and victim-centred policing.

Furthermore, interviewees consistently described police culture in Wukari as predominantly reactive, enforcement-centred, and sometimes exploitative. Officers were reported to prioritise arrests and case closure over victim welfare, often leaving victims marginalised or inadequately attended to. A senior officer from the Wukari Divisional Police Headquarters explained:

"Victims often have to wait for hours, sometimes days, before their complaints are officially recorded. Our focus is usually on gathering evidence for prosecution rather than providing support to the victims." (KII/Police Officer/Wukari/01-08-2025).

Participants identified several practices that hinder effective victim support, echoing the quantitative results. These included extortion, delayed investigation, implanting evidence, and slow response to crime scenes. A community leader stated:

"Sometimes, officers ask for money before they act on a complaint. Others delay appearing at the scene until the situation worsens, leaving victims frustrated and helpless." (KII/Community Leader/Wukari/02-08-2025).

Another interviewee highlighted procedural delays:

"Even when reports are made, the case may drag on for months without action. Victims often lose faith and stop following up." (KII/Resident/Wukari/03-08-2025).

The interviews revealed that these negative aspects of police culture directly affect victim experiences, trust in law enforcement, and willingness to report crimes. Victims

frequently feel neglected, re-victimised, and vulnerable to further crimes. A social worker observed:

"Victims often feel abandoned. They are scared to report incidents again because they believe nothing will be done. This affects community trust and encourages underreporting." (KII/Social Worker/Wukari/04-08-2025).

Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that police culture in Wukari LGA significantly affects the management of crime victims, manifesting through practices such as delayed case trials, slow crime scene response, extortion, and manipulation of evidence. Survey and interview data indicate that these practices are widespread, with the majority of respondents reporting that police engagement with victims is poor and often discourages crime reporting. The study further shows that organisational stressors, limited resources, and entrenched policing norms exacerbate these challenges, undermining accountability, transparency, and public trust. These findings align with broader Nigerian research (Ike & Jidong, 2022; Adebayo & Oladele, 2024), which emphasises that victims' experiences are shaped not only by the occurrence of crime but also by the responsiveness and attitudes of police institutions.

Recommendations

1. Based on the findings of this study, several measures are recommended to improve the management of crime victims in Wukari LGA:

2. Victim-Centered Policing: Police authorities should adopt victim-centred practices that prioritise the needs, safety, and dignity of victims. This includes timely response to crime reports, transparent handling of cases, and provision of psychosocial support. Restorative justice approaches, such as victim-offender mediation and community dialogue, should be integrated into routine policing to enhance victim engagement and promote reconciliation.

3. Capacity Building and Training: Regular training programs should be organised for police officers on ethical conduct, accountability, and modern investigative techniques. Emphasis should be placed on community policing, effective communication with victims, and understanding socio-cultural dynamics that affect crime reporting and victim experiences.

4. Strengthening Accountability and Institutional Oversight: Mechanisms for monitoring police behaviour, addressing misconduct, and ensuring transparency should be strengthened.

Establishing independent complaint units, public feedback channels, and periodic audits of police operations can reduce extortion, corruption, and negligence.

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