



# Gender, masculinity and policing: An analysis of the implications of police masculinised culture on policing domestic violence in southern Ghana and Lagos, Nigeria



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## ABSTRACT

This study explores and compares how the masculinised policing culture of the Ghana and Nigeria Police influences their interventions in domestic violence (DV). The police, as a public and security institution, play a very critical and pivotal role in the fight against domestic violence. The domestic violence laws of Ghana and Nigeria made the police the central agency for responding to domestic violence by providing support services for victims, protecting and empowering victims to prevent the reoccurrence of the abuse. This paper argues that the masculinised occupational culture of the police is replicated in their work on domestic violence, thus affecting the intervention process and outcome. Several studies have examined police interventions in domestic violence, but the problem of police masculinised culture and how this culture is implicated in domestic violence interventions has largely been unexplored. Using a qualitative research methodology, this study explores the manifestations of police masculinity and its impact on policing domestic violence. Specifically, interviews were conducted with 100 female victims of DV who had sought police assistance, 30 police officers who handle DV and four social workers while participant observations were undertaken in six police domestic violence units in Southern Ghana and Lagos, Nigeria. The results of the study reveal that masculinised police occupational culture manifests in the personal, structural, and operational aspects of police intervention in DV cases, impeding the success of these interventions. The Ghana and Nigeria police should restructure police training and curriculum to include gender sensitivity.

## 1. Introduction

The police<sup>1</sup> institution has been recognised as one of the world's most masculinised occupations, constructed on demeaning sexist views and practices (Lockwood & Prohaska, 2015). Although contemporary policing is beginning to recognise the necessity for feminine approaches to successful policing, masculinity continues to take a pivotal pre-eminence in policing. Masculinity, in its hegemonic form, resonates with imagery of traditional male characteristics that are displayed through aggression, force, dominance, violence, strength, and "achieved on a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organisation, private life, and cultural process" (Connell, 1987). Policing has long been considered a masculine job where masculinised

traits are upheld, valued, and celebrated. Silvestri (Silvestri, 2017) recognises 'machismo' and the cult of masculinity as dominating the occupational culture of policing. Masculinity dominates police occupation such that police work is almost synonymous with masculine performance. Globally, the representation of women in police institutions is low, making the police occupation highly gendered. In England, women only account for 28% of police officers (BAWP. (British Association of Women in Policing), 2014), 12.5% in the United States of America (Statista, 2017), 10% in Nigeria (Idowu, 2016), and 26% in Ghana (Abbey, 2018). Feminist scholars argue that the aetiology of male dominance is hinged on the patriarchal structure of society that is built on male superiority, female subordination, sex-stereotyped roles, and expectations including occupations (Stark & Flitcraft, 1996).

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<sup>1</sup> In this study, police refers to an institution established by a national government and empowered for the purpose of enforcing law, protecting lives and property, and maintaining order while policing refers to the role and functions of national police institutions.

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Male-dominated institutions are implicated in structural violence and reinforced coercive control. Concerning the police, the continual emphasis on ‘manliness’ as the ideal police officer trait is a hegemonic tool for maintaining male power and dominance. The masculine culture of police increases negative gender stereotyping which consequently affects how they perceive and respond to gender-based crimes (Rabe-Hemp, 2008).

Despite all these, the police play a crucial role in changing the social reputation and demeaning treatment of women through their law enforcement mandates. One such mandate is the enforcement of domestic violence laws. Houston (Houston, 2014) argues that State agencies, including the police, are major change agents in the fight against domestic violence. The need for police involvement in domestic violence is based on the argument that perpetrators must be held accountable for their abusive behaviours to prevent impunity (Karmen, 2007). Feminist theorists also demand public solutions that should encompass treatment and support services for women, as well as the need for the criminal justice system to hold perpetrators accountable. Scholars agree that police enforcement of domestic violence laws is important in breaking the cycle of violence by effecting punitive measures to deter offenders/potential offenders and providing support services for victims. Police involvement in domestic violence instils confidence in victims, promotes the rights of women and decreases gender inequalities by proclaiming a message that DV is unacceptable (Delahunty & Crehan, 2016; Effah-Chukwuma & Asiwaju, 2006; Mogstad et al., 2016). Punishing offenders helps curb future criminality because it serves as a deterrent to others in society and reaffirms that such behaviours are unacceptable (Karmen, 2007).

In view of this, the Ghana, and Lagos State (Nigeria) governments both enacted laws on domestic violence in 2007,<sup>2</sup> criminalising DV and making police involvement mandatory. The criminalisation of domestic violence in Ghana and Lagos State made police involvement paramount in the fight against domestic violence, which led to the establishment of specialised domestic violence units in the two police institutions. However, given the masculinised and patriarchal ethos of police institutions in Africa, including the police force in Ghana and Nigeria, their functionality in promoting the feminist agenda (Battered Women’s Movement<sup>3</sup>) becomes an issue that needs to be critically investigated. Many of the studies on police interventions in DV in Ghana and Nigeria have given little attention to the masculinised police occupational culture<sup>4</sup> and the impact of this culture on police operations in domestic violence. Thus, it is crucial to study how the masculinised culture of the Ghana and Nigeria police is implicated in their operations and interventions in domestic violence against women, in order to fill this gap in the ongoing discourse.

The objective of this study is to interrogate how masculinisation of the police in Ghana and Nigeria influences their interventions in domestic violence by examining the manifestations of masculinity in policing domestic violence and analysing their impact on the intervention process and outcome using radical feminist theory as the framework of analysis.

<sup>2</sup> The Domestic Violence Act 2007 (Act 732) of the Republic of Ghana and The Prohibition Against Domestic Violence Law of Lagos State, Nigeria Law No 15, 2007

<sup>3</sup> Battered Women’s Movement begun in the 1970s in the United States when feminist movements highlighted the problem of domestic violence against women and demanded for public attention to support battered women and end violence. “The central goals concern the protection of abused women: that is to provide assistance to abused women and their children and to change gender inequalities in the domestic, economic and political arenas that form the foundation of and provide support form male violence” (Dobash & Dobash, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> “Police occupational culture has been variously defined but is often taken to mean the accepted practices and underlying attitudes and values that construct and transmit norms of how to be a police officer and how to do policing” (Paoline, 2003).

### 1.1. Literature review

There have been increasing laws and policies for arrest and prosecution of domestic violence perpetrators in most countries in the globe, yet the problem of domestic violence continues to persist. The number of domestic violence reports to police are generally low. The results of the National Crime Victimization Survey in Nigeria indicated that from 2007 to 2009, only 22% of DV cases were reported to the police and the percentage reduced to 18% in 2010 (Abioye et al., 2012). Police perception and attitude to gender-based crimes have been found to decrease victim’s confidence and willingness to seek police assistance. Some of the reasons for victims’ refusal to report DV to the police is as a result of fear of further violence, shame and embarrassment, as well as trivialization of their experiences by the police (Delahunty & Crehan, 2016). Police response to domestic violence and other gender-based crimes has a close correlation with the masculine occupational culture. The masculine culture of the police affects male officers’ notion and “belief in negative stereotypes regarding women”, thereby influencing their perception and attitude to domestic violence (Lockwood & Prohaska, 2015). DeJong et al. (DeJong et al., 2008) opine that these notions and beliefs lead to the trivialization of gender-based crimes, blaming of victims and general irritation by domestic violence calls. Crimes that involve women are thus considered feminine and not taken seriously. The traditional policing epistemologies, including gender stereotyped lens have negative impact on police response to domestic violence (Rabe-Hemp, 2008).

Police masculinity is not only implicated in the performance of their jobs, but also in their domestic relationships. Blumenstein et al. (Blumenstein et al., 2012) reveal that police officers who conform to traditional policing culture perpetrate more psychological violence against their intimate partners. Thus, police masculine culture has negative consequence on their intimate relationships and this includes domestic violence and parental challenges (Walklate, 2004).

The literature on police masculinity and DV have generally examined its implications on individual police personnel, with little focus particularly on how masculinity is implicated in the structure and operations of DV units in police institutions. Critical to this is the fact that these literatures concentrated on experiences in Western Countries. Thus, this study is necessary to unveil how masculinity manifests in the operations of police DV units in Ghana and Nigeria.

### 1.2. Radical feminist theory

The radical feminist theory of domestic violence has its historical background in second-wave feminism where ending violence against women was a major struggle taken up by the feminist movement. Radical feminist theorists argue that patriarchy and the subordination of women are the major causes of domestic violence. Accordingly, feminists believe domestic violence springs from the male oppression of women, which results from patriarchy, whereby men are the primary abusers and women the main victims (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Walker, 1979). Therefore, gender socialisation patterns, the privacy of marriage, sexism as well as the failure of the criminal justice system to effectively protect and support abused women are all reflections of patriarchal ideologies that reinforce domestic violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Feminist theorists view the stereotyped socialisation of men and women as an element of patriarchy that promotes the abuse of women. The privacy of marriage is challenged through the feminist slogan ‘the personal is political’ (Millett, 1971). Police intervention was among the major mechanisms for making the private public. A major argument of the feminist theory is that male domination and power is not only inherent in physical strength but also in the institutions and structures of society (Bograd et al., 1988). Feminist theorists, therefore, view combating male dominance in institutions as highly significant in dealing with domestic violence. Analyses based on radical feminist critiques of police institutions and policing across diverse societies in the world have established the masculinised culture underpinning policing ideals and operations.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. Research design

The study adopted ethnographic research design to explore the masculinised police culture and its implications on domestic violence interventions in Ghana and Nigeria. Participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and photography were employed to collect data. This allowed the researcher (me) to obtain a holistic picture of the masculinised cultural practices, with an emphasis on portraying the everyday experiences of individuals by observing and interviewing them and relevant others. Being an ethnographic research positions the researcher as a co-producer of knowledge or data whose background and personality could influence the data collection process and the type of data collected. As a female raised in a patriarchal system where women are subjugated and oppressed, I was conscious of how my personality could influence the data. To deal with these potential biases, diverse data collection approaches or methods such as the unstructured in-depth interviews, and the documented sources were employed to ensure objectivity.

### 2.2. Study area/research context

The study was conducted in six police domestic violence units in Southern Ghana and Lagos, Nigeria because they are the primary units in the Ghana and Nigeria police that handle domestic violence and sexual offences. Specifically, the study was conducted in the Domestic Violence and Victim's Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Ghana Police Service which was created in 2007 to enforce the DV Law and respond to the increasing rate of domestic violence in Ghana. With its headquarters in Accra, DOVVSU presently has 110 offices in Ghana. Fieldwork was carried out in the Greater Accra Regional DOVVSU headquarters in Accra Central police station, DOVVSU unit in Nsawam police station in the Eastern Region and the Western Regional DOVVSU headquarters in Sekondi, Western Region. The choice of these police stations was due to the enormous number of cases they handle.

In Lagos Nigeria, the research was conducted in the Family Support Unit (FSU) and gender office of the Nigeria Police Force. The FSU was established in 2012 due to consistent civil society and public outcry on incessant brutalities and violence against Nigerian women by family members. It signalled a change from police indifference to these brutalities, which were hitherto often dismissed as domestic matters. The FSU presently has offices in 10 police stations in Lagos State. In 2015, the gender office in the Lagos State police command was created to oversee the entire work of the FSU. Fieldwork was conducted in the Family Support Units of Ilupeju police divisional headquarters in Odi-Olowo Ojuwoye Local Government, Isokoko police divisional headquarters in Agege Local Government and the gender office of the Lagos State police command in Ikeja Local Government in Lagos State, Nigeria. These stations were also selected due to the vast number of cases they handle, making it suitable to have access to domestic violence victims with a diverse range of experiences.

### 2.3. Study population and sampling

The study population comprised female victims of domestic violence, police officers who handle domestic violence cases, and social workers with crucial knowledge and experience of police work in handling domestic violence. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the right interviewees for the study. Creswell (Creswell, 2014) contends that "the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites (or documents or visual material) that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question." The interviews with the police were useful in acquiring information on police masculinised culture while interviews with victims and social workers were germane in identifying how police masculinity impacted police response to DV.

Specifically, 100 female victims of domestic violence who had sought police assistance (50 in Southern Ghana and 50 in Lagos State), 30 police officers who work in the domestic violence units (nine policewomen and six policemen in Southern Ghana, and 14 policewomen and one<sup>5</sup> policeman in Lagos) and four social workers from Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF) Ghana, Hurds Foundations in Ghana, National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons in Nigeria and Rape Relief in Nigeria participated in the study. The sample size was chosen based on the principle of saturation, which is a qualitative technique whereby the researcher stops gathering new information because new data no longer reveal insight on the research topic (Charmaz, 2006). Therefore, the sample size was considered sufficient for unravelling all the nuances of police culture and domestic violence.

### 2.4. Data collection procedure

I began the study by seeking approval to collect data in the selected police stations from the Ghana Police Service headquarters in Accra and the Nigeria Police Force headquarters in Lagos State. When the approval was granted, I then proceeded to the individual police stations to seek permission from the police commanders in charge of the police stations and the police heads of the domestic violence units who then introduced me to all the police officers working in their units. The purpose and rationale of the study were also adequately articulated to the police officers. Being an ethnographic study, I was further granted a desk in the DV units to facilitate observation. With permission secured, individual police officers were approached for their consent to be interviewed. Once they consented, interviews were conducted based on an agreed-upon schedule. I also approached female victims of domestic violence who had come to report their cases to the police, introduced the purpose of the study, and sought their consent for participation. Once they agreed, they were interviewed in the police stations during the initial complaints and follow-up interviews continued after the sessions in the police stations, usually on the phone and in some victims' homes.

These follow-up interviews were to seek victims' opinions about their experiences with the police and to allow victims to freely express their views on the police without fear or prejudice. Interviews with social workers took place in their offices and on phones after initial consent was obtained. Interviews averaged an hour and thirty minutes. While the majority of the interviews were digitally recorded, a few others were written down during the interview process. In Ghana, most interviews were conducted in the Akan language with few in English, while in Nigeria, the interview languages were English and Pidgin English.

Participant observation was undertaken in the selected police stations throughout the period of data collection to further complement the data from the interviews. Participant observation involves continuous and constant observation of a situation (Jacob, 1987). I observed how domestic violence cases were handled, police attitudes and behaviours, both female and male victims' experiences in the police stations, and the general and everyday practices in the selected police stations. This granted me an opportunity and access to first-hand information on the masculine culture of the police. Fieldnotes from the observation were taken. Also, photographs demonstrating the work of domestic violence units, as well as other visual materials in the form of posters and flyers for public sensitisations on domestic violence and the work of the police were collected and analysed. These photographs complemented the data from the interviews and observation. Secondary data collection sources

<sup>5</sup> In Lagos, Nigeria, only had one policeman was deployed to work in the domestic violence unit (Gender Office in the Lagos State Police Command). All the police officers working in the Family Support Unit were women. During the interviews, it was revealed that only policewomen were deployed to work in the DV units because domestic violence concerned women. The Gender Office had a male police officer because the name 'gender' required the presence of both men and women.

used included domestic violence laws, police regulation acts, newspaper reports, policy documents, and articles.

### 2.5. Ethical considerations

All ethical principles were duly observed throughout the data collection process. Approval for the conduct of this study was first sought and granted by the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan. Also, the study received ethical approval from the Ghana Police Service ethical board in the Criminal Investigation Department in Accra and the Nigeria Police Force ethical board in the Public Relations Office in the Lagos State police command. Furthermore, I sought the approval of the police commanders in the selected police stations and the heads of the DV units, which was facilitated by the ethical approval letters received from the Ghana and Nigeria Police.

Also, individual interviewees were adequately informed about the purpose of the research, assured of the confidentiality of the data while their consent was sought before conducting interviews. Participation was, therefore, voluntary and was also without any remuneration. This study maintained an optimum sense of anonymity because domestic violence is a sensitive topic, and victims sometimes experience stigmatisation. Therefore, the identities of victims are concealed, and the data utilised only for the purpose of the research after which they will be appropriately discarded after some time. Data were collected between May 2017 and July 2018.

### 2.6. Data analysis

Data collected from the recorded interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis technique. All the data were grouped into emerging themes and sub-themes. The secondary data collected were analysed similarly. Photographs were visually analysed and compared with primary data to complement and validate the findings.

## 3. Results and discussion

This study aimed to examine how the masculinised culture of the Ghana and Nigeria police was implicated in their work on domestic violence. Five major themes emerged out of the data analysis and these are presented in the subsequent sections.

### 3.1. Masculine training and feminisation of domestic violence

The masculine culture of the police is manifested in the training content for new police recruits in both the Ghana Police Service and the Nigeria Police Force. The training content for police personnel emphasises masculinity with little or no training on gender issues, including domestic violence. According to police personnel interviewed, the training aimed to eliminate 'civilian' attributes and instil in recruits the masculinised qualities of vigour, perseverance, strength, discipline, toughness, braveness, and assertiveness. In the Nigeria Police Force Training School, there was no training on gender issues or domestic violence, even though domestic violence was part of police work. While in Ghana, police confessed they were only given a brief lecture on domestic violence. A police officer recounted:

The training comprised parade, fatigue, bodybuilding, jungle training, early morning rising, lecture, and handling of guns. It is meant to toughen you so that you can do the job. Because if you are not tough and strong, you will not be able to overpower criminals. So, we are trained in toughness to be tough, only that. In the police college, they did not give us any training on gender or domestic violence. After the training, they posted us to this unit. (Policewoman, Investigator in FSU in Ilupeju, Nigeria)

Another police officer reported that:

At the training, they make you feel it is not good being a civilian. So, when you are there, they train you to delete that civilian mentality from your mind. It included parades, jungle training, bodybuilding, gun handling, etc. to make you strong. After the training, we realised that it had changed our thinking faculty and our entire beings. It makes us look down on civilians. We only had one lecture on domestic violence, like a few hours, that is all. Then like all my colleagues, we were deployed to work DOVVSU (Policeman, Investigator in DOVVSU Sekondi, Ghana)

The above narratives reveal that police training is heavily masculinised, to the neglect of gender issues or domestic violence issues. All the police personnel interviewed admitted they learned to handle domestic violence only when they were posted to the DV units. Although some of the police officers indicated they received some training on handling DV after they had worked for a couple of years, the training was organised by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and not the police institutions, revealing a lack of commitment from the police authorities to gender issues or domestic violence. This study corroborates Prokos and Padavic's (Prokos & Padavic, 2002) research on the United States Police Academy, which also reveals that both formal and informal training curricula for US police trainees are very masculine. Feminist theorists have observed that crime and the criminal justice system have always been historically built on male experiences; hence the masculinised focus and training for personnel involved in crime prevention and law enforcement (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988).

From the research data of this study, it is seen that domestic violence is feminised, virtually synonymous with women's ordeal in the domestic sphere. The socially constructed attributes ascribed to the feminine gender as being tender, weak, soft, and fragile conformed to the traits of the poor victims in a 'feminine' environment (home). The billboards, flyers, and posters in the DOVVSU, FSU, and Gender Offices feature female characters reinforcing the feminisation of domestic violence. This invariably creates a subconscious cultural connotation that the domestic violence unit is a place for women victims seeking redress against male violators. The following statements from victims and police officers attest to this understanding:

I know that DOVVSU is there for we the women. Because the government knows that we women are suffering that is why they set up DOVVSU, so that if your husband is beating you or not looking after the children, when you bring him here, the police will help you. (Victim of sexual violence, DOVVSU, Sekondi, Ghana)

Here we deal mostly with the vulnerable- the women, because it is the women who are usually the victims, so more or less our work is about women. (Policeman, Investigator in DOVVSU Sekondi, Ghana)

The nature of our job here is purposely for women. So, we are specialists in investigating sexual offences and protecting women. This is the reason the FSU was set up. That is why we are all women; a man cannot work here because the job is about women. (Policewoman, Investigator FSU in Isokoko, Nigeria)

These extracts give a clear indication that domestic violence is viewed as a crime committed against women. Mogstad et al.'s (Mogstad et al., 2016) qualitative study on policing domestic violence in South Africa has similar findings. The researchers found that the South African police held the same attitude towards domestic abuse and victimhood – men as perpetrators and women as victims. This study found that although police institutions were masculinised, their epistemological rationale for policing domestic violence in this regard was somehow based on a feminist perspective. Radical feminists view domestic violence as male oppression of women using physical and emotional abuse, making men the perpetrators and women the victims (Seeley & Plunkett, 2002). Thus, like feminist theorists, the police believe domestic violence is primarily male violence against women. This, therefore, creates a philosophical irony. How can a patriarchal and masculinised institution embrace a

feminist standpoint rather than opposing it? Does it mean feminist also hold patriarchal ideologies which they are to object? The answer to this critical question could be traced to the effect of the Battered Women's Movement in the 1970s on the criminal justice system. One significant achievement of the feminist movement was influencing the criminal justice system into accepting domestic violence as a criminal offence against women, and that women's experience of oppression in the personal domestic realm is a political situation requiring intervention from external agencies of crime prevention and law enforcement, the personal being political and the private public (Hall et al., 2015).

Data from key informants and police reveal that the feminisation of the DV units hinder most men who experience domestic violence from seeking help from the police out of fear of being stigmatised. A key informant noted:

You see, the place is such that it is the domain of women. In fact, it takes a courageous man to go to the DOVVSU, the moment people see you there they will start laughing at you. So that is why most men do not want to go there. (Social Worker, Women in Law and Development in Africa, Ghana)

This was corroborated by a police officer who remarked that:

Men are very proud, and they do not want to be seen as weak. Because this place is generally seen to be for women, they (men) do not want to come here. (Policewoman, Investigator in FSU in Ilupeju, Nigeria)

The above narratives reveal that male victims are unable to seek help because of the stereotype attached to the DV units. Critical to this is the societal imagery and expectations of a real man as strong and energetic with masculine characteristics of power, making male victims unwilling to seek help. Dutton (Dutton, 2006) contends that numerous societies are built on a patriarchal belief system where hegemonic masculinity which encourages hierarchy, dominance, and aggression is valued. These beliefs, DeFrancisco et al. (DeFrancisco et al., 2014) argue, could result in society's failure to admit or accept female perpetrated violence. Thus, patriarchy is not detrimental to women only but equally harmful to men.

### 3.2. Masculinisation of policewomen

Young (Young, 2011) states that the stereotypical image of a police officer is a man. Therefore, the masculinised imagery of an ideal police officer can be said to have a clear linkage to the attitude and behaviour of both policemen and policewomen. This study found that police officers are generally masculinised. However, policewomen were found to be exhibiting more traits of hegemonic masculinity than male officers working in the domestic violence units of the two police institutions. During participant observation, it was observed that female police officers were more hostile, impatient, insensitive, and more aggressive than the policemen working in the domestic violence units. Interviews with victims also confirmed police masculinisation.

I initially thought a fellow woman will be sympathetic and supportive. In fact, the policewomen are worse than the policemen. The policewoman did not even care about me, she just threw me off. The man was even more supportive than women. (Female victim of physical and economic, Gender Office, Nigeria)

Another victim in Ghana also revealed:

I will say the men are better than the women here. The men are even more receptive and understanding. The women are very harsh, and unapproachable. (Female victim of physical violence, DOVVSU Accra, Ghana)

Consequently, a good number of victims sought help from policemen than the policewomen. A primary reason could be attributed to the masculinised training given to the women which compels them to want to demonstrate that they meet the expected personality standard. Rabe-

Hemp (Rabe-Hemp, 2008) in his study on the challenges encountered by female police officers, notes that women negotiated their gender roles through police training to be accepted. The second reason could also be connected to police culture, which celebrates masculinity. Niland (Niland, 1996) argues that policewomen become more driven to display masculinity because police organisational operations of rewards and punishments endorse masculine values and policewomen are forced to comply.

Two policewomen attested to being victims of domestic violence. These policewomen who had experienced domestic violence were more hostile and insensitive to victims than those who had not experienced domestic violence. In response to a victim, one policewoman said:

When my own (domestic violence) happened, did I disturb anybody? I struggled by myself, so why are they troubling us. They don't want to struggle; no man will treat you better. I am still suffering my own. (Policewoman, Investigator in gender office, Nigeria)

As illustrated above, the policewoman who experienced domestic violence did not seek professional help which could be a result of the masculine attribute acquired from police training. Thus, policewomen have been trained to be tough, to endure suffering, and suppress their emotions just as men are expected to do. This contradicts the findings of Greenberg et al.'s (Greenberg et al., 2018) study on trauma in the United Kingdom, where it is posited that trauma victims have high or elevated empathic levels in relating with individuals going through similar experiences. The case of the two policewomen who have been victims of DV suggests that when DV victims do not receive assistance and are trained to suppress the trauma, they may become more insensitive and resentful instead of being empathic and supportive to other victims.

On the other hand, the policemen interviewed confessed their masculinity had been transformed by the nature of work in the DV units and by the subsequent training received on domestic violence, becoming more empathic, humane, patient, sensitive, and supportive of women. The following statements from some respondents are relevant in this regard.

When I was posted here initially, I didn't like the job. But after the training I received, together with what I saw here, I was touched, and I began to develop an interest in the job. I now have a passion for what am doing, and I have sympathy for women. (Policeman, Investigator in gender office, Nigeria)

You see this is the best unit in the whole police service. When I came here initially, I was depressed. I saw how vulnerable women are, and the job has changed me. Even it has taught me how to relate to my wife better. I can say working in DOVVSU changed my entire attitude in relating to women. (Policeman, Investigator in DOVVSU Sekondi, Ghana)

This research has demonstrated that masculinity is, therefore, a social construct that can be acquired and learned. The anatomy of a man does not necessarily make him masculine. Thus, an individual can be masculine depending on the culture, environment, and socialisation as is the case of female police officers. This is in line with the feminist theory and nurture school of thought which also argues that masculinity is acquired and not biological (Hatty, 2000). Therefore, as a social construct, it can as well be unlearned (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Woods, 2001).

The study however discovered that the female police officers in Ghana exhibited more hegemonic masculinity traits than the female police officers in Nigeria. This could be attributed to the differences in the gender practices of the two police institutions. Comparatively, there is some level of gender equality in the Ghana Police Service than in the Nigeria Police Force. For example, the 2004 Police Regulations Act of the Nigeria Police Force (Police act and regulation laws of the federation republic of Nigeria, 2004) prohibits the recruitment of married women while married women can join the police in Ghana. Unlike what obtains in the Ghana police, Nigeria policewomen are not allowed to marry

without the consent of the police commissioner. Again Regulation 127 of the Police Act stipulates that

an unmarried woman police officer who becomes pregnant shall be discharged from the force and shall not be re-enlisted except with the approval of the IGP.

These inequalities are founded on patriarchal hegemony. Feminist scholars such as Dobash and Dobash (Dobash & Dobash, 1979) and Walker (Walker, 1979) contend that gender inequality and male domination are direct by-products of patriarchy. In this vein, the argument of the feminist theory is validated. The state and its institutions are very instrumental in the maintenance of two systems of inequality—class and gender (Bograd et al., 1988; Woods, 2001). Alemika and Agugua (Alemika & Agugua, 2001) in their study on gender relations and discrimination in the Nigeria police, also found that the discriminatory practices against policewomen are products of Nigeria's patriarchal culture which subjugates women and considers them as second-class citizens.

### 3.3. Masculinised operations

Young (Young, 2011) notes that “the institution of policing can be examined as a discursive field; the police cultures themselves represent discursive forms, the beliefs, and practices of the institution influence the police officers, and vice versa, the police officers influence the beliefs and practices of the institution.” Thus, there is a strong connection between police training and their attitude, and this has an effect on their work, including their work in domestic violence. The study found that hegemonic masculinity affects police attitudes and the way they handle domestic violence. One significant impact identified was hostility towards victims. Police officers were often unwelcoming and unfriendly to victims. Some police officers got irritated by the victims' presence and display of vulnerability and often blamed, insulted, mocked, and sometimes even ordered them out of their offices. The police station was equally a hostile environment that was filled with much tension. During interviews, some victims cried because of the treatment received from the police. The following are some of the narratives of victims' experiences.

The police are very disrespectful and hostile. I was here this morning to make a complaint against my husband, and they were so harsh to me. The policewoman without hearing my story started shouting at me that I should leave her office (weeping). I went to see their boss, and she was even worse. I can't stay here (she leaves) (Female Victim of physical abuse, gender office, Nigeria).

The following interaction with a victim of sexual violence in Ghana sheds some light on the effects of police hostility and blaming.

Policewoman: Ehe, where are you? (Shouting) look at my face. A small girl like you, your mother sent you to school and you chose to go to 'ayaase' (sexual pleasure) school. Bad girl! See your face. Don't come close to me; move back. Bad girl! Tell me what happened so that I will write your statement. (Victim becomes silent)

Policewoman: Hee! I don't have time for you. Won't you talk? (Victim remains silent)

Policewoman: (shouting) If you will not talk, get out of my face.

(Victim leaves)

On one occasion, a police officer's first response to a victim who reported sexual violence case was:

Eeeh! You people were enjoying sex on a hot sunny afternoon. So, are you saying you did not enjoy it? You are enjoying yourself. (Policewoman, Investigator in DOVVSU Nsawam, Ghana)

The above narrative provides evidence of police hostility, mockery, and the blaming of victims which made some victims abandon their cases. Victims interviewed generally revealed experiencing secondary victimisation and more psychological abuse after their encounter with police in Ghana. Police attitudes of impatience, blaming of victims, lack of empathy, hostility, embarrassment, and harassment through interrogations caused further psychological damage to victims. It was also discovered that a good number of victims did not return to the police stations after the initial reports. A significant reason given by these victims in follow-up interviews was their dissatisfaction with police attitude towards them after the initial report.

The negative attitudes of police did not only cause victims to abandon their cases but also prevented other victims from reporting to police as these victims discouraged other victims from seeking police assistance. This indicates that a reduced reporting rate is not necessarily an indication of reduced prevalence but could also be the result of a lack of satisfaction with police response. This corroborates DeJong et al.'s (DeJong et al., 2008) survey on policing philosophy and attitude to intimate partner violence, where the researchers establish that the continual blaming of victims by police is common among police officers who uphold patriarchal and masculinised policing philosophies.

During fieldwork it was observed that police disposition to the emotional situations of victims was equally hostile and problematic. Most officers were irritated when victims shed tears during interventions. A police officer reacting to a victim weeping, exclaimed:

Madam! Keep quiet; you are making noise. We don't cry here. If you want to cry, go out and cry. You are making noise. (Policeman, Investigator in DOVVSU Sekondi, Ghana)

Stop crying. This is not the time to cry. Crying will not solve the problem. If you keep crying, I will send you out because you are disturbing us. (Policewoman, Investigator in FSU Isokoko, Lagos Nigeria)

Victims were therefore obliged to suppress their emotions in a bid to satisfy and persuade police officers to assist them.

Also noteworthy was a lack of psychosocial support for victims. Interventions prioritised criminality with minimal or no regard for the emotional wellbeing of victims, with emotion distress being considered a feminine trait. The complaint procedure that entailed victims' statements were short and captured only the criminal aspect of victims' experiences. Victims were not allowed to pour out their emotions which Cooper et al. (Cooper et al., 2013) contend to be important for the recovery process. Also, there was no counselling section in the domestic violence units. The procedure adopted in the DV units seems to have been informed wholly by the police training in evidential elicitation for the purpose of prosecution. Therefore, there was a total neglect of psychosocial support for victims, which is what a gender-sensitive approach would have given equal priority. An informant argued:

The police, by their training itself, don't have that capacity to deal with such social issues. How can they solve a situation or a problem they were not trained to solve? (Social worker, Women in Law and Development in Africa, Ghana)

A police officer confessed during an interview that:

Madam, I am telling you that 80% of the cases which come here can just be solved through counselling, but there is no counselling unit. That is why we are failing. Even the way most of these officers talk to victims is enough to cause depression. (Policewoman, Investigator in DOVVSU Sekondi, Ghana)

The above quotes reveal the link between police training/approach and DV response and how it negatively affects intervention outcomes. Walker (Walker, 1979) suggests that therapies that do not include a feminist perspective will leave victims/survivors vulnerable to

re-victimisation. As clearly evidenced in the study, masculinised operations greatly impeded the success of police intervention in DV cases.

The preference for punishment and the use of force dominated police operations in dealing with domestic violence. Emphasis was on prosecution, arrest, and detention. During an interview with the police, they noted: "Here we use force. We force them to comply" (Policewoman, Lagos). "In other places, they may persuade, talk to them, but here even though we use mediation, we will force you" (Policeman, Ghana). The police were, therefore, overbearing, which is also an attribute of masculinisation. In response to a victim who disagreed with police judgment and left an abusive marriage, a police officer noted:

You must go back to your husband's house and stay there.

You are not supposed to leave that house. You must do what

we have told you to do. (Policeman, Investigator in Ilupeju, Nigeria)

The DOVVSU unit in Nsawam police station had a cane to discipline perpetrators and wayward children. Bittner (Bittner and Jacobs, 1974) has remarked that "the police use force to impose or compel obedience to its own transitory". In a similar vein, Junior and Muniz (Junior & Muniz, 2006) have also observed that the discretionary power of the police is a direct consequence of their mandate.

### 3.4. Ill-equipped domestic violence units

The culture of hegemonic masculinity was implicated in the level of seriousness invested in the DV units by the police institutions in the two countries under study. DOVVSU and FSU were considered the feminine aspect of police work. As a masculinised institution, the police institutions consequently did not give priority to the domestic violence units in its operation or administration because their work was not considered 'real police work'. Waddington (Waddington, 1999) maintains that police institutions consider crime-fighting to be the very heart of policing. In Ghana, preference and more attention were given to more masculine units such as the Anti-Armed Robbery Squad, Special Weapons, and Tactics, Drug Law Enforcement Unit, Commercial Crime Unit, Anti-Human Trafficking Unit, Central Firearms Registry among others. Similarly, in Lagos Nigeria, the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), Counter-Terrorism Unit, Arms and Ammunitions Unit, and Highway Patrol Unit were more recognised than the FSU. During an interview with a policewoman in Ghana, she noted: "*As for us they don't even count us as part of police work. They call us NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations).*"

Another police officer in Nigeria noted:

Although the police administration knows our work, they don't care about us. It is like we don't even exist. No support from the police administration. (Policewoman, Investigator in FSU in Isokoko, Nigeria)

Consequently, police units considered to be engaged in masculine operations are taken more seriously by the police authorities during the allocation of resources.

Last year, the Lagos State Government allocated a good number of vehicles to the police. When they distributed the vehicles among the Units, none was given to the Family Support Unit or the gender office. (Policewoman, Investigator in FSU Ilupeju, Nigeria)

Recently some vehicles were sent to the Western Regional Command from the Police Headquarters in Accra. They gave the other Units, but not DOVVSU. They didn't give us. (Policeman, Investigator in DOVVU Sekondi, Ghana)

During fieldwork in the police stations, it was observed that the Highway Patrol Unit of Ilupeju police station had several vehicles and these were often parked by the roadside with several police officers

sleeping in the vehicles. In contrast, the FSU had no vehicle for its use. When asked why this was so, a police officer in Lagos replied: 'the Lagos State Commander wants it so.' In the same vein, the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) in Sekondi had several vehicles while the DOVVSU regional headquarters in Sekondi had none. DOVVSU and FSU, as well as the Gender Office, are severely under-resourced compared to the other units. This situation of affairs, therefore, reveals explicit denigration of the domestic violence units, which is a manifestation of the masculine culture of police occupation.

This corroborates feminists' argument that male domination and power is not only inherent in physical strength but also in institutions and structures (Bograd et al., 1988). Connell (Connell, 2006) contends that gender regimes in the police are sustained through the classification of intelligence work as feminine while crime-fighting is deemed masculine, leading to a denigration of the work perceived as feminine. The result of the study conforms with the findings of Young's (Young, 2011) survey on gender and policing in the United Kingdom which also reveals that domestic violence units are devalued mainly because they are perceived as places for women and work for women.

### 3.5. Solidarity with offending police officers

The study also found a disregard for domestic violence offences by police officers as a clear consequence of masculinisation. Cases where police officers themselves are perpetrators of DV are disregarded and not given due attention, unlike what obtains when officers are involved in crimes such as armed robbery, theft, and other forms of misconduct. During an interview with a police officer in DOVVSU, she stated that:

I am currently working on a case where a police officer is a perpetrator. I submitted the docket to the headquarters for approval several months ago, up till now, I have not heard anything from them. (Policewoman, Investigator in DOVVSU Accra, Ghana)

Again, The Police Regulations Act of the Ghana Police Service and The Police Act of Nigeria Police Force (the laws regulating the police) do not mention domestic violence as an offence, neither do they stipulate sanctions for offending police personnel. However, the two Police Acts recognise absenteeism and lateness to duty as grievous offences, and punishment for offending officers is dismissal. In an interview with a police officer in Lagos on the punishment for police perpetrators of DV, she said:

When we get a case where a police officer is a perpetrator, we send the report of our investigation to PROVOST (the disciplinary unit of the police force), and they will determine the punishment for the police officer. The punishment is usually fatigue (sweeping, cleaning, or weeding). (Policewoman, Investigator in FSU Isokoko, Nigeria)

The above illustration, therefore, depicts that lateness was considered more harmful and accorded a severer punishment than DV.

In Ghana, police respondents revealed that punishment for offending officers in DV cases could include a reduction in salary or rank depending on the gravity of the offence. However, the police often shielded the perpetrators. The following statement is by a police respondent:

Indeed, if the perpetrator is a police officer, the police authority can reduce his rank or salary. But you know, we try to protect ourselves, so oftentimes we don't send the cases to the headquarters, we just try to warn them. (Policeman, Investigator in DOVVSU Sekondi, Ghana)

Thus, police offenders are concealed as a way of showing solidarity in a masculine culture. "A key characteristic of police culture is that of solidarity" (Young, 2011). In Lagos, Nigeria, a victim whose violator was a police officer stated that the FSU supported the police perpetrator, and unlawfully ejected her from her matrimonial home instead of safeguarding her rights. The findings of the study align with a study by Heal (Heal, 2019) on police offenders in the UK, where the researcher also

found that only 3.9% of DV cases involving police officers were prosecuted and the police often supported the offending officers.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study examined how police masculinised culture was implicated in police response to domestic violence. Although the domestic violence laws in Ghana and Nigeria aim to improve the care and well-being of DV victims, the masculinised occupational culture of the police impeded their success, thereby complicating the plight of domestic violence victims. Masculinity was a major component of police culture and this did not only manifest in the training content of the Ghana and Nigeria police, but greatly translated into how police perceived and handled domestic violence cases. Domestic violence as a crime was generally feminised and, as a result, the domestic violence units in the two police institutions were considered the feminine arm of the police. The units were therefore demeaned, highly neglected, and under-resourced compared with other units such as anti-robbery and counter-terrorism units which are more masculine. Critical to the conceptualisation of masculinity is the underlining principle that it is a mere social construct acquired through socialisation rather than being biologically inherent. This was demonstrated in policewomen who were found to be more hostile and demonstrated more attributes of hegemonic masculinity than policemen in the two police institutions. It can, therefore, be argued that the inherent masculinity in policing is a learned and acquired behaviour. Hegemonic masculine traits of aggression, force, dominance, and violence manifested in police interventions in domestic violence. Domestic violence operations emphasised the use of force, hostility, insensitivity, and dominance. This invariably increased victims' psychological trauma, thereby decreasing their willingness to seek police assistance subsequently. The study also found police officers display of solidarity with offending police officers by shielding them from punishment and not giving much recognition for domestic violence offences involving police officers. This conforms with feminist theorists' observation that responses to domestic violence guard masculinity instead of targeting gender equality (Abrams, 2016). Thus, the criminal justice system's failure to effectively respond to domestic violence indicates that men and patriarchal ideologies regulate the entire criminal justice institutions, including the police and DV units within the police force.

The study therefore recommends that the Ghana and Nigeria police should restructure police training and curriculum to include gender sensitivity and effective handling of domestic violence courses and modules in police colleges. Training on domestic violence should be made a compulsory part of police training. This will greatly reduce the gender stereotypical views, minimise masculinised performance, and improve police skills in handling domestic violence. The Nigeria and Ghana government, as well as the two police institutions, should provide funding for the police units dealing with domestic violence. They should be provided with adequate logistics such as computers, vehicles, adequate office spaces, and facilities to enhance their work. This study also recommends that domestic violence units should encompass a broad range of specialists and personnel. Thus, a comprehensive approach which includes social workers, counsellors, educationists, traditional and community leaders, religious leaders, and lawyers should join the police team in responding to DV. These actors are necessary for complementing the work of police, reducing police hostility and masculinity, and providing holistic interventions that will meet the needs of victims and be more sustainable.

This qualitative research has a relatively small sample size and therefore the results cannot be generalised for all police domestic violence units in Ghana and Nigeria, although, it gives an in-depth insight into police masculine culture and how it is implicated in policing domestic violence. Therefore, there is a need for future research to explore police masculine culture using quantitative research methodology to provide more robust data that can be generalised.

#### CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Abena Asefuaba Yalley:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing - original draft, preparation, Writing - review & editing. **Molatokunbo Suenfunmi Olutayo:** Supervision.

#### Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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