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FLUCTUATING HAPPINESS MEDIATED THE INFLUENCE OF ANTI-MATTERING ON AGGRESSION AMONG OFFICERS OF THE NIGERIA POLICE FORCE

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ABSTRACT

Background: This study investigated the mediating effects of fluctuating happiness between anti-mattering and aggressive behaviours among members of the Nigeria Police Force in Ibadan. **Methods:** Using correlational design, 278 police officers in the Nigeria Police Force in Ibadan responded to a survey comprising the Anti-mattering Scale, Authentic Happiness Scale and Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire. **Results:** Findings from the data showed that anti-mattering directly predicted higher levels of fluctuating happiness [$\beta = 0.159$, $t = 2.68$, $p < 0.01$]. Fluctuating happiness directly predicted more aggressive behaviours [$\beta = 0.430$, $t = 7.910$, $p < 0.01$]. Anti-mattering did not directly predict aggressive behaviours [$\beta = .457$, $t = 1.875$, $p > 0.05$]. However, anti-mattering indirectly predicted more aggressive behaviours through fluctuating happiness [BootEffect = 0.307, BootSE = 0.147, BootCI: 0.048 – 0.606]. Consequently, the model showed a full mediation. **Conclusion:** The study concluded that, through fluctuating happiness, anti-mattering increases aggressive behaviours among police officers in Nigeria.

Keywords: Anti-mattering, Fluctuating happiness, Aggressive behaviours, Nigeria Police Force

INTRODUCTION

The use of brute force by the police and military forces against citizens is a global problem. For example, in the African continent, specifically October 2020, Nigerians witnessed dark days in the #EndSARS protest against atrocities of members of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a unit in the Nigeria Police Force at the time. During the protest, the Nigerian Army violently responded to peaceful protests at the Lekki tollgate in Lagos, Nigeria, shooting at least 12 people and more than 56 people lost their lives across the country (Amnesty International, 2021; British Broadcasting Corporation, 2021). In August 2020, Soweto, South Africa, Nathaniel Julius, who was unarmed and living with Down Syndrome met untimely death at the hands of the police because he was unresponsive to the officers' questioning (Sakpa, 2020). In June 2025, protests broke out in Nairobi, Kenya over the unexplained death of a Kenyan blogger who was in police custody in addition to the death of a street hawker killed by two suspected police officers during the protests (Gangji, 2025).

In 2020, near the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France, Cedric Chouviat, a 42-year-old food delivery driver was alleged of talking on the phone while driving by some French police officers. The altercation that ensued resulted in Chouviat being forced on his face down while still wearing

his helmet. He was getting suffocated but the police officers did not respond despite his complaint. Reports showed that he died about 2 days later due to laryngeal hernia according to autopsy results (Pieper, 2023). The fatal shooting of a 17-year-old boy by French police officers in June 2023 was another grim example of police brutality against civilians (Gozzi, 2023). The United States of America is not left out in unwarranted police use of force against civilians. In May 2020, George Floyd, was an unarmed Black man, who died after Derek Chauvin, a white Minneapolis police officer, knelt on Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes, despite Floyd repeatedly protested that he could not breathe (Moore, 2025). From the foregoing examples, it is obvious that police brutality is not limited to any continent, country, or culture.

While police brutality refers to the unwarranted use of force and aggressiveness against civilians in forms that include assaults (physical and sexual), battery, torture, murder, harassment, psychological intimidation, false arrests (Moore, 2025; DeVlyder et al., 2017), the present study conceptualises police brutality as aggressive behaviours exhibited by the police. Police aggressiveness towards civilians has led to the loss of many lives and such losses, without any doubt, had severe psychological impact on families of those affected. For instance, evidence showed that there is greater likelihood of anticipatory stress and depression when an individual has been affected by police aggressiveness directly or indirectly (Alang et al., 2023) and more empirical evidences showed that police aggressiveness is positively associated with health difficulties and public distress (Howard et al., 2023; DeVlyder et al., 2022).

The present study very well agrees that members of the police force in any given society constantly face threats to their own lives and those of the people they protect. Some individuals might argue that use of force by the police is justifiable in situations that pose threat to their lives or that of others, the scale of police brutality against civilians from one society to another raises questions about community policing. The fundamental question raised is: Why do police officers exhibit brutality and deadly aggressive force against the same civilians they are meant to protect when it obviously unwarranted? What factors increase the likelihood of aggressive behaviours from a police officer towards unarmed civilians?

Previous attempts to answer this question revealed that an inverse relationship exists between police violence or victimisation and public perception of police trust, effectiveness and satisfaction; gender, age, education, and race also predicted poorer police perceptions (Jackson et al., 2021). Police perceptions among victims of police victimisation or brutality will no doubt be unfavourable as shown in the study. However, there is still some knowledge gap with regard to why police victimise or brutalise civilians. Some report showed that racial and ethnic differences appear to predict police brutality such as Blacks showing greater worries about police brutality than their White counterparts (Alang et al., 2023; DeVlyder et al., 2022). There are reports that individuals of colour are 2.5 times more likely to be fatally shot by the police than their counterparts (Lowery, 2016). If racial differences contribute to police brutality, one could as well ask why police brutality happens in homogenous societies where cultural and ethnical characteristics are the same.

Some studies argued that cities with high population density appear to record more police violence than relatively less dense cities (Ross, 2015). Looking at the Nigerian situation, Lagos State is one of the most densely populated mega cities in Nigeria, with a record number of police brutality including the #EndSARS protest where no fewer than 12 people lost their lives from shootings by members of the Nigerian army and more than 56 individuals lost their lives across the country. While there might be more difficulties to deal with in a much larger city, brutalising unarmed members of the public is certainly not a component of community policing. Additionally, the link between population density and police brutality raises questions about adequacy of police officers and police-public relationship. It is logical to say that if the ratio of

police officers to the population size of a community is adequate, community policing will be more effective and less stressful. Additionally, if members of the NPF have a good relationship with members of the public, community policing will be easier and more effective notwithstanding population density.

Previous reports on psychosocial predictors identified psychological well-being, empathy, emotional intelligence and stress as likely contributors to police aggressive tendencies, where police officers with low empathy, emotional intelligence, psychological well-being, and high stress scores showed higher aggressive tendencies (Nwankwo et al., 2020; Dela Cruz, 2024). There are also suggestions that gender and age appear to show differences in police victimisation. For example, males, transgender respondents and younger adults were found to have reported more police violence in the United States (DeVylder et al., 2017). Similar to the Nigerian context, the #EndSARS protest was championed mostly by youths because of alleged indiscriminate arrests and killing of youths who were often framed as “yahoo boys” – social label for individuals who engage in fraudulent activities. If the gender and age of civilians predict police brutality, then there is a systemic problem in the policing systems where such patterns are characteristic. It also implies there is the need to look into the police system itself to identify what factors could be playing a role in their tendency to exhibit brutality against civilians.

Some studies attempted to explain police brutality from the perspective of victims' perceptions (Jackson et al., 2021), sociodemographic characteristics, or reports (Alang et al., 2023; DeVylder et al., 2022). However, the present study approached police brutality from the perspective of the police officers themselves by investigating likely dispositional factors that could predispose any given police officer to the exhibition of brutality against civilians. A look at the positive psychology theory showed that people possess dispositional traits that shape their mental and behavioural wellbeing. These traits were called signature strengths such as having a sense of hope, personal and social appreciations, kindness, humor, generosity, and optimism (Wellik & Hoover, 2004). If the exercise of signature strengths of positive emotion, virtue and strength, and positive institutions, as encapsulated in authentic happiness, leads to a transformative and satisfactory life (Seligman, 2002), then one might ask whether authentic happiness as a dispositional factor plays a role in the likelihood that any police officer will exhibit brutal behaviours when it is unwarranted.

Fundamentally, authentic happiness is a stable or enduring emotional state derived from personal appreciation of the value and meaning about one's life (Sanli et al., 2019). When this emotional state is unstable, it is called fluctuating happiness. In other words, the states of pleasure and displeasure consistently flips or alternates (Sanli et al., 2019). Emotional states could influence an individual's actions, self-perception, perceptions about others, and how they believe others perceive them. Therefore, behavioural reactions could be a function of emotional and cognitive states, that is happiness and mattering respectively. There are reasons to believe that both concepts are theoretically and practically linked (Prilleltensky, 2020). Additionally, Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky (2021) explained that mattering, which is feeling valued and giving value to others, contributes to adaptive living, happiness and work.

From the perspective of psychopathology, the presence of maladaptive behaviours such as police brutality is an indication of emotional and cognitive maladies. Therefore, the present study considers fluctuating happiness and anti-mattering as maladaptive emotional and cognitive states that should be examined in the context of police brutality. Anti-mattering is the perception of insignificance and unimportance to others. High levels of anti-mattering increases personal vulnerability to maladaptiveness in significant areas of life including work (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021). A possible argument is to say that fluctuating happiness and anti-mattering are dispositional factors whose interactions could predict aggressive

tendencies in any given individual including police officers. However, whether this is true remains unclear in the context of this study.

Given this backdrop, the present study aimed to investigate the contributory roles of fluctuating happiness and anti-mattering. Additionally, the study investigated whether a mediatory path existed between fluctuating happiness and anti-mattering in relation to police aggressiveness as shown in Figure 1. Consequently, it was hypothesised that fluctuating happiness will significantly mediate the impact of anti-mattering on police aggressive behaviours.

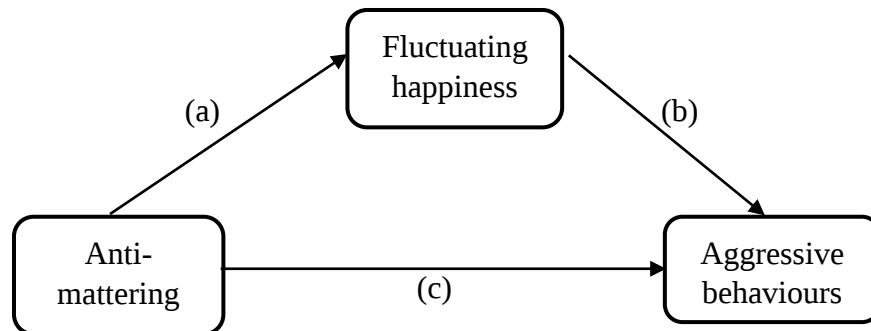


Figure 1: Mediator Path between Anti-mattering and Fluctuating Happiness

In Figure 1, anti-mattering is the predictor, fluctuating happiness is the mediator and aggression is the outcome variable. Path (a) indicates the effects of anti-mattering on fluctuating happiness, which is expected to be statistically significant for mediation analysis. Path (b) indicates the effects of the mediator on aggression, which is also expected to be significant for mediation to occur. Path (c) is the direct effects of anti-mattering on aggression. A full mediation occurs when this path is not statistically significant while a partial mediation occurs when it is statistically significant (Hayes, 2022).

METHODS

Design

The study utilised correlational design because all variables were correlated and measured as interval data. There were no variable categorisations or grouping of participants. There were three variables: anti-mattering was the predictor, fluctuating happiness was the mediator and aggressive behaviours were the outcome variable.

Setting

This study was carried out in Ibadan North in Ibadan, where the state police headquarters is located for Oyo State, Nigeria. The police stations used included Mokola Police Station, Yemetu Police Station, Ikolaba Police Station, Ashi Police Station, Bodija Police Station, and Sango Police Station.

Participants

The study involved 278 officers in the Nigeria Police Force serving in Ibadan North Local Government, Ibadan, Oyo state, Nigeria. Sample size was determined by using Slovin's formula: $N / (1 + N(e^2))$ where estimated population (N) was 634, and margin error (e) was 0.05 or 95% confidence interval. This yielded an estimated sample size of 225. An addition of 20% possible attrition yielded 270 participants. Participants were selected using non-random convenience sampling because participants were approached and asked for willingness to participate in the study. The inclusion criterion was that each participant must be a currently serving police officer. In order to ensure this eligibility, the data were collected at the police stations. Only eligible and consenting police officers were allowed to participate.

Instruments

A structured questionnaire was designed which comprised self-report measures of Anti-mattering Scale, Authentic Happiness Scale and Buss-Perry Aggressiveness Questionnaire.

The Anti-mattering Scale

The Anti-mattering Scale developed by Flett et al. (2021) had five items that assess an individual's perception of insignificance and unimportance, which were rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 4 (A lot). No item was reverse-scored. Sample item included "How important do you feel you are to other people?" and "How interested are people generally in terms of what you have to say?" The present study found a Cronbach's alpha of .78 for the internal consistence of the items.

The Authentic Happiness Scale

The questionnaire also contained the Authentic Happiness Scale developed by Sanli et al. (2019). Responses were rated on 5-point Likert ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). There were no reversed-scored items. High scores represented high levels of each happiness dimension. In this study, the researcher found Cronbach's alpha of .89 and .82 for the authentic and fluctuating happiness dimensions respectively. Sample items included "How much do you feel like you don't matter?"

Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire

The 29- item Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire developed by Buss & Perry (1992) was used to assess aggressive behaviours among the police officers. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert ranging from 1 (completely false/uncharacteristic of me) to 5 (completely true/characteristic of me). It measured physical and verbal aggressiveness, anger, and hostility. The present study found internal consistency to be Cronbach's alpha of .85. Sample items included "Sometimes I fly off the handle for no good reason." "Once in a while, I can't control the urge to strike another person."

Procedure

Participants were served with a structured questionnaire which contained items that measured variables of interest to the study. Data collection was anonymous, that is, participants' responses were anonymised by not asking for any identifying information. Each participant was approached, intimated about the study, and asked for consent to participate in the study. Only participants who gave verbal consent were served with the questionnaire. Participation was voluntary and could be declined at any point in the study without any consequence. Data collection spanned a period of 4 weeks.

Data Analyses

Demographic data were analysed using descriptive statistics including mean, standard deviation, and percentage. Pearson's correlation was used to test inter-variable pairwise relationships. A linear regression analysis was used to test the mediatory path between anti-mattering and fluctuating happiness leading to aggressive behaviours. Bootstrapping method with 5000 bootstrap samples was used to test the statistical significance of the mediation at 95% confidence interval. Bootstrap statistical significance was accepted only when the lower and upper confidence interval limits did not include a zero (Wright et al., 2011). The Process Macro version 4.2 by Hayes (2022) already integrated into IBM SPSS version 29 was used to conduct the mediation analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Committee, University of Ibadan, Ibadan Nigeria approved the study with the registration number UI/SSHREC/2024/0081. Additional necessary permissions were obtained from relevant authorities.

RESULTS

First, the demographic distributions were analysed. The result is shown in Table 1 as follows:

Table 1: *Demographic Characteristics Distribution*

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency (n = 278)	Percent	Mean	SD
Age			36.16	9.28
Work experience (years)			15.93	9.35
Gender				
Male	142	51.1		
Female	134	48.2		
Not indicated	2	0.7		
Education				
Secondary	148	53.2		
Tertiary	130	46.8		
Ethnicity				
Yoruba	194	69.8		
Hausa	31	11.2		
Igbo	28	10.1		
Others	25	9.0		
Religion				
Muslim	93	33.5		
Christian	176	63.3		
Others	9	3.2		
Ranks				
Constable	32	11.5		
Corporal	37	13.3		
Sergeant	45	16.2		
Inspector	85	30.6		
Assistant Superintendent	32	11.5		
Deputy Superintendent	10	3.6		
Superintendent	9	3.2		
Not indicated	28	10.1		

The demographic characteristic distributions showed 142 (51.1%) male and 134 (48.2%) female participants whose average age was 36.16 years (SD = 9.28). More participants had secondary school education (53.2%) than tertiary school education (46.8%). There were more Yorubas (69.8%) than Hausa (11.2%), Igbo (10.1%) and others (9%). There were more Christians (63.3%) than Muslims (33.5%) and others (3.2%). There were 85 (30.6%) Inspectors, 45 (16.2%) Sergeants, 37 (13.3%) Corporals, 32 (11.5%) Assistant Superintendent and Constables respectively, 10 (3.6%) Deputy Superintendents and 9 (3.2%) Superintendents. Others (10.1%) did not indicate their ranks. Average work experience in the police force was 15.93 (SD = 9.35).

In order to examine correlations between the independent variables and the dependent variable, Pearson's Correlation was used and the results are in Table 2.

Table 2: Pairwise Correlations of Study Variables

Correlates	Fluctuating happiness	Anti-mattering	Aggressiveness
Fluctuating happiness	--		
Anti-mattering	0.159**	--	
Aggressiveness	0.446**	0.170**	--
Mean	21.95	10.19	76.27
SD	6.48	3.41	15.29

Note: **p < 0.01.

The Pearson's show that fluctuating happiness was significantly and positively associated with aggressiveness [$r = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$]. Similarly, anti-mattering was significantly and positively associated with aggressiveness [$r = 0.17$, $p < 0.01$].

The mediation analysis was tested in three steps. Step 1 in Table 3.1 shows anti-mattering as a predictor of fluctuating happiness. Step 2 in Table 3.2 shows direct effects of anti-mattering and fluctuating happiness on aggressiveness. Step 3 in Table 3.3 shows indirect effect of anti-mattering on aggressiveness when fluctuating happiness is the mediator.

Table 3.1: Direct Effect of Anti-mattering on Fluctuating Happiness

Predictor	β	SE	t	p	Confidence Interval (95%)	
					Lower Limit	Upper Limit
Anti-mattering	0.159	0.113	2.681	0.008	0.081	0.526

Model Statistics: $R^2 = 0.025$, $F(1, 276) = 7.19$, $p < 0.01$

Outcome variable: Fluctuating Happiness

The regression model test of anti-mattering in Table 3.1 revealed that anti-mattering significantly explained 3.1% of total variance in fluctuating happiness as indicated by the coefficient of determination [$R^2 = 0.025$, $F(2, 276) = 7.19$, $p < 0.001$]. Additionally, anti-mattering showed significant effect on fluctuating happiness [$\beta = 0.30$, $t = 2.68$, $p < 0.01$]. This is path (a) as indicated in Figure 1.

Table 3.2: Direct Effects of Anti-mattering and Fluctuating Happiness on Aggressiveness

Predictor	β	SE	t	P	Confidence Interval (95%)	
					Lower Limit	Upper Limit
Anti-mattering	0.102	0.244	1.875	0.062	-0.023	0.937
Fluctuating happiness	0.430	0.128	7.910	0.001	0.916	1.266

Model Statistics: $R^2 = 0.209$, $F(2, 275) = 36.33$, $p < 0.001$

Outcome variable: Aggressiveness

The regression model test of anti-mattering and fluctuating happiness in Table 3.1 showed that anti-mattering and fluctuating happiness accounted for 20.9% of aggressiveness as indicated by the coefficient of determination [$R^2 = 0.209$, $F(2, 275) = 36.33$, $p < 0.001$]. The direct effects of anti-mattering [$\beta = 0.10$, $t = 1.88$, $p > 0.05$] on aggression was not significant while the direct effect of fluctuating happiness on aggressiveness were statistically significant

[$\beta = 0.43$, $t = 7.91$, $p < 0.001$]. These are indicated as paths (b) and (c) respectively in Figure 1.

Table 3.3: Indirect Effects of Anti-mattering on Aggressiveness

Predictor	Boot β	Boot SE	Bootstrap Confidence Intervals (95%)	
			Lower Limit	Upper Limit
Anti-mattering	0.068	0.031	0.012	0.132

Outcome variable: Aggressiveness

The bootstrapped indirect effects of anti-mattering on aggressiveness when fluctuating happiness was the mediator in Table 3.3 revealed that the mediation was, at least, statistically significant at 95% confidence interval because the intervals do not include a zero [$\beta = 0.07$, BootCI = 0.012 – 0.132]. Since the direct effect of anti-mattering on aggression was not significant in Table 3.2, the indirect effect is a full mediation.

DISCUSSION

The fundamental question of why police officers exhibit aggressive behaviours, brutalising civilians was addressed in this study and the results showed that anti-mattering and fluctuating happiness are significant dispositional risk factors that increase the vulnerability of Nigerian police officers towards the exhibition of aggressive tendencies. The perception of insignificance and unimportance from others fundamentally increases the risk of aggressive tendencies when there is fluctuating happiness – an unstable emotional state of internalised values and meaning in life.

First, the evidence from this study shows that fluctuating happiness is a risk factor among Nigerian police officers, which, if left unaddressed, will remain a risk factor for more police aggressive tendencies. The question then is, are civilians responsible for the fluctuating happiness of Nigerian police officers? Perhaps further studies might address this. However, as an institution of government, the onus is on the Federal Government of Nigeria to investigate and address the problem of fluctuating happiness in the NPF. From the perspective of positive psychology theory, it means officers in the NPF might not be flourishing, being unstable in their perception of meaning, value, and satisfaction with their lives (Seligman, 2011). Consequently, they are at risk of experiencing maladaptiveness at work (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2021) including the exhibition of violence and aggression against others. It could be argued that happiness is a hinge for psychological well-being, empathy, and emotional intelligence which Nwankwo et al. (2020) highlighted as part of contributors to police aggressive tendencies. It takes being happy to be empathic towards others, understand how others feel or feel well personally.

Second, the current findings showed that anti-mattering exerted effects on police aggressiveness through the influence of fluctuating happiness. This implies that when police officers perceive they are not valued, they might unable to give value to others. Unlike previous reports where public perception of the police showed poor perception of police trust, effectiveness and satisfaction (Jackson et al., 2021), the present study presents a better perspective by evaluating how the police perceive themselves. Police officers who believe that they are not valued in addition to fluctuating happiness are at greater risks of aggression in community policing. In Nigeria, public perception of the Nigerian police appears unfavourable (Jackson et al., 2021) and this may have served negative feedback that could in turn reinforce how the police officers perceive themselves and the civilians. For instance, there is general lack of trust and confidence in the Nigeria police and many believe that policing in Nigeria overflows the confines of the law or they are at variance with international best practices (Nyam, 2020).

Again, it is important to emphasise the need for government's intervention in reshaping the police force in order to earn public trust and value. There is a severe trust deficit between the police and the Nigerian public. This poor perception of the public by the public has been

attributed to corruption in the NPF (Oke et al., 2021). Undoubtedly, police-public relationship in Nigeria is at all-time low and this has implication for effective community policing. The findings of the present study and those of previous reports show that members of NPF feel unvalued by the public, and members of the public have poor perception and working relationship with NPF. The implications of these include increase in the likelihood of police brutality against civilians and ineffective community policing.

Conclusion

Members of the Nigeria Police Force have high sense of anti-mattering and fluctuating happiness. Police aggression is a function of anti-mattering and fluctuating happiness. In other words, anti-mattering is a predictor of police brutality or aggressive tendencies through a full mediation of fluctuating happiness.

Recommendations

As an institution of the federal government of Nigeria, there is the need to create a system of policing that fosters an authentic happiness in the NPF. Police-public relations need to be repaired by creating a system of policing that promotes positive public perception of the police and enhance police's sense of being valued by the public. This is what could enable them to give value to the public and achieve a more effective community policing devoid of brutality against civilians.

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