International Journal of Innovative Legal & Political Studies 8(3):97-112, July-Sept., 2020

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Victimology, Victimisation And Victims Access To Justice In Nigeria

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ABSTRACT
Everyone is a victim at one point or the other. The focus on understanding of victims as dynamic components of crime with varying degrees of responsibility dominated many early works in victimology, and because of the nature of these studies, it lines of inquiry are referred to as penal victimology which has to do with the interaction and relationship between offenders and victims within the confines of criminal law. This paper examines the importance of access to justice as an essential instrument for the protection of human rights in Nigeria. The conceptual framework of victimology, victimocracy and victimization. It starts by discussing the various problems that are confronted by victims in ensuring that justice is done to their cases, we strengthened our argument by examining the theories of victimization. It is interesting to note that; it is only when an individual victim who is perceived to be victimized has access to courts that his or her fundamental rights can be enforced. The paper then looks at the reality of the Nigeria situation and posits that there are a number of obstacles to the realization of access to justice in the country. These obstacles such as: undue delay in the administration of criminal justice, high cost of litigation, reliance on technical rules, *locus standi*, illiteracy, fear of attack by offenders. With regards to offenders – victims' relationship, political influence and weak criminal justice system are then examined in turn, in validation of the proposition. It further looks at the prospects for improvement of access to justice in Nigeria and opines that if mechanisms such as judicial reforms, and resort to alternative dispute resolution mechanisms are encouraged and properly put in place, with less emphasis on technical rules, and of the legal aid scheme is strengthened, there would be meaningful access to justice which will impact positively in the quest for the protection of human rights protection of those victimized in the country.
Keywords: Victimology, Victimocracy, Victimization, Victims Access to Justice

INTRODUCTION

For several decades, victimology as a field has undergone significant growth, mostly through developments in the measurement of victimization, the criminal justice response to people affected, and attention channeled towards victim services and trauma (Baumer & Lauritsen, 2010; Buzawa & Buzawa, 2003; Zaykowsi & Campagna, 2014). Scholars have also advanced diverse theoretical frameworks in better understanding why some individuals and groups are victimized at higher rates than others (Miethe, & Meier, 1994; Sampson & Lauristen, 1990; Schieck, 1999; Burgess, 2019). While these developments are well known, it is unclear how far the Nigerian criminal justice, system have thrived to ensure that justice is done to victims' cases in the country.

The political and constitutional development of Nigeria has been intertwined with the quest for the promotion and protection of human rights in the country. As early as before independent constitutional conference, to the 1st and 2nd Republic as well as the vast military dispensations, to democratic government today, questions about human rights have received merited attention in legal and political

debate. There has been a continuous struggle for the protection of human rights of individuals, group and communities in Nigeria.

The Willinck Commission and the Oputa Panel are eloquent testimonies of this concerted effort to promote and protect human rights and justice in the country. While the purpose of the former was to pacify the feeling of marginalization, victimization by the minority groups in the country during the colonial ear, the Oputa Panel examined instances of victimization and human right abuses from 1st January, 1984 to 28th May 1999. Notwithstanding, the report of the Oputa Panel was eventually not released for public knowledge, much less implementation, the point remains that its very constitution signaled the concern of the government to correct the mistake of the past in respect of human right abuses. While these formalistic approaches can easily be mentioned, the same cannot be said of the actual implementation of mechanisms designed to facilitate the realization of basic human rights. This is because there is a wide gulf between official pronouncements of respect for human rights and their actual implementation. The explanation for this appears to be that there still exist a number of substantive and procedural obstacles or impediments that not only inhibit the actual implementation of such measures, but preclude the masses in general from having access to justice in Nigeria (Adekule, 2016).

Research Questions

The research question is then:

i. What are these hindrances and how can they be surmounted to guarantee access to justice for the vast majority of Nigeria?
ii. Are there any in-built legal mechanisms that can be deployed to ensure the attainment of access to justice in the country?
iii. What has been the response of successive government to the quest for the enforcement of basic rights through increased access to justice?
iv. What role do victimologists play?

This paper is targeted to examine these questions and to chart a new course in the quest for the promotion and protection of the fundamental human rights of victims in Nigeria through enhanced access to justice.

Victimology is the scientific study of victim. Victimologists focus on a range of victims related issues including: (a) estimating he extent of different types of victimization (b) explaining why victimization occurs to whom or what (c) the effects and consequences of victimization and (d) examining victims' rights within the legal systems.

Nigeria practices legal pluralism. The implication of this is that different legal system cohabits in Nigeria. These are; the common law, customary law and Islamic law. These different systems of laws exist for the sole reason of ensuring that those who practice it or are subject to its way obtain justice. The reason behind this is that justice is considered the end of law as the law is a means to justice. Hence, the Nigerian situation opposes popular opinion as people stand in lines in order to get "access to justice". The courts are clogged, there is few manpower and most of the officials are not fully trained in the dispensation of their responsibilities.

In order to put an end to this problem, it was necessary to enact the Administration of Justice Commission Act; the commission had the responsibilities of ensuring that:

a. The court system in Nigeria is generally maintained and adequately financed;
b. Judges and officers of the courts conform to the Code of Ethics of their office;
c. Criminal matters are speedily dealt with;
d. Congestion of cases in courts is drastically reduced;
e. Congestion in prisons is reduced to the barest minimum;
f. Persons awaiting trial are, as far as possible, not detained in prison custody;
g. The relationship between the organs charged with responsibility for all aspects of the administration of justice is cordial and there exists maximum co-operation amongst the organs for effectiveness of the system of administration of justice in Nigeria (Adekunle, 2016, p.300).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Under this section, the following key concepts shall be defined so as to aid in the clearity of our study. These concepts are: Victimology, Victimocracy, Victimisation and Victims access to justice.

What is Victimology?

The scientific study of victimology is a relatively recent field, founded by Hans von Hentig (1948) and Benjamin Mendelsohn (1963) who claims to have coined the term in 1947. It is almost the mirror image or *"reverse of criminology"* (Schafer, 1977, p.35). Criminology is concerned mainly with criminal and criminal justice systems response to them. Victimology, on the other hand, is the study of who become a victim, how victims are victimized, how much harm they suffer, and their role in the criminal act (Victims – offenders' relationship). It also looks at victim's rights and their role in the criminal justice system. (Mark, N. Lainier, Stuart Henry and Desire, J. M. Anastasia, (2005). Victimology has been defined as "the scientific study of physical, emotional and financial harm people suffer because of criminal activities (Karmen, 2001, p.9). This interrelationship has a long history, Prior to the development of formal social-control mechanism, society relied on the development of informal justice. Individuals, families and clan sought justice for harms caused by others. Endless feuding and persistent physical confrontation led to what has been called the "Golden Age" (Karmen, 2001), when restitution became the focus of crime control. With the advent of the social contract, individuals gave up the right to retaliation, and crime became crime against the state, not individual. The Classicist social contract, simply put, says that individual must give up some personal liberties in exchange for a greater good. Thus, individuals forfeited the right to individualized justice, revenge, the vigilantism. This creed is still practicing today. Advanced societies relying on system of justice based on the social contract increasingly, though inadvertently neglected the victims of crime (Mark, Stuart & Anastasia, 2015, p.10).

Since the founding of Victimology, there have been controversy between the broad view (Mendelsohn, 1963) that victimology should be the study of all victims and the narrow view that it should include only crime Victims. Clearly, if a broad definition is taken of crime as a violation of human rights (Schwendinger and Schwendinger, 1970; S. Cohen, 1993; Tifft and Sullivan, 2001). This is more consistent with the broad view of victimology.

Victimology has also been criticized for the missionary zeal of its reform policy (Fattah, 1992; Weed, 1995) and for its focus on victims of individual crimes rather than socially harmful crime, although there are rare exceptions to this in French victimology studies (Joutsen, 1994).

The term "VICTIMOCRACY" was coined by Eric Ganshas and co-authored by Adam Katz. Victimocracy is considered a form of government in which victims are presented, whether in a legitimate or self-styled manner, to enable them have an amount of influence that is unequal to their actual ability to help them raise legitimate threats to a population (Dudequest, 2013).

In the American form of victimology, it is basically the legislating of untired legal and social experiments so as to prevent circumstances under which it could happen. Unfortunately, since so much victimization occurs due to the poor choices of the victim, that legislation untimely only prohibits freedom and personal liberty. Victimocracy has to do with the relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor. Here, suffering is the exclusive privilege of the elites. Victimology is a society in which the ruling class justifies its position through a mythos of victimhood. The mythos of victimhood is in two (2) dimensions. First, the master morality of the ruling class which postulates that: "we are opposed by the ruling class, and we continue to suffer from their historical and ongoing domination of society. To rectify this oppressing condition, it is important to create social and legal frameworks that is able to elevate us above the other class, this will effectively close the gap and repay for wrongs committed". Second, the slave morality of the ruled class which postulates that; "we are the privileged group of this society, who we must submit to legal and social disadvantages in other to level the playing field and make reparations for our oppressions of the other class, to whom we submit entirely". Victimocracy from the above mythos of victimhood, can be seen as a system whereby follow victims victimizes lesser victims.

Moreover, the Nigerian form of Victimocracy, based on a related development in Azagbene Community of Ekeremor Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, it was reported that the whole community was burnt down by the Nigerian army on the 23rd of July, 2019 due to the murder of its two personnel. (The

Nation, August 9, 2019:22). Nevertheless, the law did not empower the army to destroy a whole community instead of fishing out the principal suspects. Ironically, it is imperative to state here categorically and unequivocally that the citizens are facing what is called 'Double Victimization'. First they are victimized by the armed bandits who terrorized their socio-economic life, existence, well-being and activities. They can hardly report these armed bandits to the police due to fear of loss of life and loved ones. Second, they were victims of government military personnel who are saddled with the responsibility of protecting their life. (O.E. Jonjon, Personal Communication, August, 13, 2019). The level of access to justice, by the victims of Azagbene Community will be limited and on technicalities when dealing with the military institution known for some level of governmental lawlessness.

Similarly, in Taraba State, northeast Nigeria soldiers of the 93 battalion opened fire on Wednesday the 7th of August, 2019 on police team taking a kidnapping suspect to headquarters, killing three (3) officers (Inspector Mark Ediale, Sgt. Us man Dezumi and Sgt. Dahiru Musa) and a civilian. The officers were of the Intelligence Response Team (IRT) were returning with the suspect from a town along Ibi-Jalingo road in Taraba,when Nigerian army soldiers managing a security checkpoint shot at their car, while the kidnap kinspin, Hamish Bala Wedume escaped. (The Nation, August 10, 2019).

Victimization generally is a widespread phenomenon/problem encompassing every fact of the life of individuals and organizations. Thus, the generic meaning of victimization is a situation in which persons or groups suffer physical, mental or psychological harm and/ or injuries, material loss or physical or mechanical disaster or misfortune. (Gyong, 2010). But specifically, victims of crime are in reality individual or groups who have directly or indirectly suffered the brunt of criminal activities. Thus, they suffer from outright violations of fundamental human rights perpetrates by individual or the state, discriminatory socio-economic policies, white collar elite and conventional (common) crime, among others can be said to be victims of crime.

Similarly, in the eyes of the New South Wales Council for Civic Liberties (NSWNCCL, 2019), victims of crime are citizens who have had their lives interrupted by crime. Aristotle (2019) noted that a victim is an identifiable person who has been harmed individually and directly by the perpetrators rather than merely the society as a whole.

Meaning of Access to Justice

The term "access to justice" is broad. It is capable of containing several other concepts under its umbrella. Since the term "justice" itself is jurisprudential in nature, what constitutes "access to justice" is bound to differ when considered based on different parameters.

Deborah Rhode, an American Scholar commenting on the differing opinion on the connotation of access to justice noted that: One central problem in discussions about access to justice is a lack of clarity or consensus about what exactly the problem is? To what should Americans have access? Is it justice in a procedural sense: access to legal assistance and legal processes that can address law related concerns? Or is it justice in a substantive sense: access to a just resolution of legal disputes and social problems? Participants in this debate have different conceptions of justice and of the strategies best able to secure it (Deborah, 2004). Criminologist, Clients, Judges, Court Administrators, Victimologists, bar associations; legal aid programs and public interest organizations all have concerns that may argue for different research and policy priorities.

Therefore, it is deducible that justice can either be in the procedural or substantive sense or rather viewed from a narrow or broad standpoint. Also, there are two dimensions to access to justice; the demand side (the people who require justice) and the supply side (the government and NGOs). In its narrow sense, access to justice focuses on access to legal advice, legal services and other methods of dispute resolution, before independent and impartial courts, tribunals or forums, or through consensual mechanisms such as negotiation or mediation. Some proponents assert that once access to court is guaranteed, access to justice is assured. This may however be unrealistic as there are other factors that may come into play, even when a case is being heard.

Ladan opined that the term "access to justice" implies that people in need of help in finding effective solutions available from justice systems which are accessible, affordable, comprehensible to ordinary

people and which dispense justice fairly, speedily and without discrimination, fear or favour and provides a greater role for alternative dispute resolution (Ladan, 2012).

In a broad sense, the notion of access to justice has been defined as the right of every individual to require the state to provide a means of dispute resolution that is equally accessible and socially just. In an attempt to further widen the tentacles of access to justice; Adekunle (2016) contends that it refers to social justice, such as the fair distribution of health, housing, welfare, education and legal resources in society, including where necessary, the distribution of such resources on an affirmative action basis to disadvantaged members of the community, and is concerned with the 'needs' rather than the 'wants' of society. Recently, the International Bar Association (IBA) adopted access to justice as a comprehensive concept, which covers different stages of the process of obtaining a solution to civil or criminal justice problems. It starts with the existence of rights enshrined in laws and with awareness and understanding of such rights. It embraces access to dispute resolution mechanism as part of justice institutions that are both formal (i.e. institutions established by the state) and informal (i.e. indigenous courts, councils of elders and similar traditional or religious authorities) Adekunle (2016). The IBA concluded that effective access includes the availability of and access to, counsel and representation and it encompasses the ability of such mechanisms to provide fair, impartial and enforceable solutions. Furthermore, the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (2017) conceptualizes access to justice as having three major features:

(i) **Knowledge**: People must have information and knowledge about their rights and how to access them, and this extends to service providers as they are required to have appropriate knowledge and expertise for the provision of effective services.

(ii) **The environment**: The state's system and infrastructure for service provision must be effective and easily accessible; and

(iii) **The quality of services**: It is not only necessary that services should be provided; the services provided must be the optimal and ultimate service obtainable. From the above definitions, it is deducible that the meaning of access to justice is not cast in iron. It is dependent on the viewpoint from which it is observed. For the purpose of this paper, the broad definition provided above will be adopted.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following sociological theories shall be examined by relating it to the victimization of victims in an attempt to ensure is served in their case.

(a) Social Disorganization Theory

Social disorganisation theory grew out of the research conducted by sociologists and victimologists at the University of Chicago in 1720s and 1930s. It key proponents were Clifford R. Shaw and Henry D. McKay (1942), used spatial mapping in an attempt to examine the dwelling areas of juveniles sent to court. Shaw and McKay uncovered that patterns of delinquency were on the increase in areas marked by poor health, housing, poor socio-economic conditions and transient populations, here, it is believed the poor victims cannot successfully seek justice due to the cost involved in seeking litigation.

Shaw and McKay (1942) explained these patterns by reference to the problem that accompanied immigration to Chicago at this time. They claimed that area settled by newly arrived immigrants experienced a breakdown of social norms due to ethnic diversity and competing cultural traditions (Sub-culture).

The above assertion is very visible in Nigeria, with the current issue of the herdsmen and farmer clashes in the country, the situation whereby the newly arrived immigrant in an attempt to go about their normal nomadic belief and tradition are faced with resistance, hence resulting to violence and victimization as it the case in the Middle Belt and other southern parts of the country. Conventional institutions of social control were therefore weakened and unable to regulate the behavior of the herdsmen, thus hindering victims to access justice in their case.

(b) Anomie/Strain Theory

Anomie was developed by one of the pioneers of Sociology, Emile Durkheim, in a bit to enunciate on the collapse of social norms, often accompanied by speedy social change. American Sociologists Robert

Merton (1957) drew on this idea to explain criminality and deviance in the USA. His theory argues that crime and victimization occur when there is a group between cultural goals of a society (Material wealth, status) and the structural means to achieve these (Education, employment). This strain between means and goals result in frustration and resentment, and encourages some people to use illegitimate or illegal means to secure success.

In short, strain theory posits that the cultural values and social structures of society put pressure on individual citizen to commit crime.

According to Young, structurally speaking, the dismantling of the welfare state alongside increasing disparities between rich and the poor, have contributed inaccessibility to justice among disadvantage groups seeking access to justice. This has occurred alongside high levels of cultural inclusion (Young, 1999).

The above assertion from Young, buttress the fact that the disparity which exists between the rich and poor do serves as a pointer to the fact that the poor in most cases can't face the rich in accessing justice, due to factors like high cost of litigation, intimidation on the part of the rich and, the rich ability to influence the outcome of the case in his/her favour through financial power.

(c) **Subcultural Theory**

The subcultural theory is associated linked anomie and strain are concepts of status, frustration and differential opportunity, which was used by the North American Subcultural theorists to explain the truant and unacceptable activities of disadvantaged group in the mid-90s.

Status frustration is associated with the work of Albert Cohen (1955), who conducted research into group offending/victimizing by young, lower-class men. Cohen argued that lower class youths could not aspire in middle-class cultural goals and so, frustrated they rejected them to create their own subcultural system of value, Eamonn, et al (2009).

Cloward and Ohlin (1960) constructed these ideas, referencing the differential opportunity structures available to lower-class young people in different areas: Criminal (making a living from crime), conflict (territorial violence and gang fighting) and retreatist.

(d) **Social Control Theory**

Strictly speaking control theory does not address the causes of crime, but rather focuses on why people obey law. In other words, it explains conformity rather than deviance. It is primarily associated with the work of Travis Hirschi (1969), an American Social Scientist who proposed that people general conform to social norms due to strong social bonds. Conversely, they key components of social bonds are: Attachment, Commitment, Involvement and belief. This group of people is referred to as Conformists in Robert Mertons' point of view (Merton, 1968). Social control theory is one of the most frequently used and tested victimology/criminological theories.

TRADITIONAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

There were some forms of traditional justice system in Africa in the pre-colonial times. Various communities in Africa had continued with this system of dispensation of justice even in this post-colonial period. According to Triponel and Pearson (2010), Traditional justice systems are increasingly seen as an integral mechanism through which to implement transitional justice. Traditional systems are often referred to by other terms, such as customary, informal, community-based, grassroots, indigenous and local (Allen and Macdonald, 2013). Their appeal lies in their potential to resonate more with local populations and thus to be more effective in providing a sense of justice and restoring community relationships. They are more familiar to local populations and allow for local contexts to be incorporated into transitional justice processes. They can also be faster and more convenient to implement.

A comparative analysis of traditional justice mechanisms in Burundi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Uganda finds there are often high degrees of public participation in these mechanisms and sharing of experiences. Some form of truth-telling is integral to many traditional mechanisms and reconciliation is a primary goal, often focusing on the return of ex-combatants. The focus on reconciliation does not, however, exclude desires for acknowledgement, responsibility and restitution (Huyse, 2008).

The focus on traditional justice has gained momentum since the gacaca community courts were set up in Rwanda. In 2001, the Government of Rwanda gave the public a large role in selecting who would implement the traditional justice system. Judges were elected from among the local population over which they had jurisdiction, following the accepted custom regarding gacaca courts (Triponel and Pearson, 2010).

In Timor-Leste (East Timor), a smaller-scale grass roots traditional justice mechanism – the Community Reconciliation Process – was adopted, with the aim of reintegrating people who had committed 'less serious' harmful acts during the political conflicts into their communities. This involved a series of community-based hearings to determine how to reintegrate perpetrators, for example the performance of community service (Triponel and Pearson, 2010).

Various studies of traditional justice systems have raised concerns about the persistence of ethnic, religious, generational and gender hierarchies and divisions at the local level, which can limit the effectiveness of such practices—and perpetuate inequalities (Valji, 2009; Andrieu, 2010; Allen and Macdonald, 2013; Gready and Robins, 2014). There may also be practical limitations, as community-level justice mechanisms are usually not developed to address the scale or types of atrocities committed during such conflicts (Valji, 2009; Allen and Macdonald, 2013). In addition, if traditional justice mechanisms are 'hijacked' by international actors, institutionalized and implemented in a top-down fashion, they may no longer resonate with local populations. There has been much criticism of the implementation of the gacaca system in Rwanda in this regard (Huyse, 2008; Andrieu, 2010; Allen and Macdonald, 2013; Gready and Robins, 2014).

Nigeria has a federal structure and is composed of 36 States. Customary courts are recognized at both the federal and State level. There are 250 ethnic groups with their own customary laws. The Constitution recognizes the customary laws of tribal and ethnic groups. Most States have their own customary courts and customary court of appeal structure, although some of the northern States operate sharia courts and sharia courts of appeal.

An appeal can be taken from a State customary court of appeal or from a sharia court of appeal to the federal court of appeal. The customary courts are treated as part of the State judiciary system. Jurisdiction extends to personal and family matters, including marriage, divorce, guardianship and custody of children. It also covers matters of inheritance, land and commercial transactions.

Decisions made by a traditional justice process must satisfy three conditions to be recognized and enforceable by the formal courts: (a) they must not be incompatible with international human rights; (b) there must a case record; (c) the process must be voluntary for the parties. According to the Evidence Act, custom must be proved by the party asserting its existence. Custom is defined as a rule which, in a particular district, has from long usage obtained the force of law. Proving a custom directly is usually done with a statement from traditional chiefs who know the customary laws of the community, although a formal court is not bound to accept it. A formal court can also legally recognize a custom by taking judicial notice of it. In addition, statutory laws provide that customary laws can be disregarded if: (a) they are deemed not to be in accordance with "natural justice, equity and good conscience"; (b) the parties agreed to exclude the application of customary law; or (c) the transaction in question is unknown in customary law. Some States in Nigeria have codified customary laws.

JUSTICE SERVICE PROVIDERS IN NIGERIA

The government has the capacity to regulate the conduct of its citizens. It is also saddled with the duty and responsibilities of ensuring that there are mechanisms in place to meet the needs and expectations of the people from whom it derives its power. Amongst the numerous responsibilities bestowed on the Nigerian government, one of the important ones is to set the stage for its teeming citizens to settle disputes, control transactions and demonstrate rights and privileges without settling to parochial methods like self-help and jungle justice. In furtherance of the above, the Constitution, has established diverse institutions and vest them with requisite duties, powers and responsibilities. These bodies will be discussed briefly below:

The Court System

The federal government of Nigeria has three arms. These include the executive, legislature and the judiciary. The judicial arm is saddled with the burden of settling issues, disputes and differences between individuals, companies, organizations, institutions and governments. See: Section 4, 5 and 6 of 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria CFRN (as amended in 2011) respectively.

This judicial power is exercised by the courts created in accordance with the constitution and they include, by virtue of Section 6, subsection 5 of the constitution:

a. The Supreme Court of Nigeria;
b. The Court of Appeal;
c. The Federal High Court;
d. The High Court of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja;
e. A High Court of a State;
f. The Sharia Court of Appeal of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja;
g. A sharia Court of Appeal of a State;
h. The Customary Court of Appeal of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja;
i. A Customary Court of Appeal of a State;
j. Such other courts as may be authorized by law to exercise jurisdiction on matters with respect to which the National Assembly may make laws; and
k. Such other court as may be authorized by law to exercise jurisdiction at first instance or on appeal on matters with respect to which a House of Assembly may make laws.

Moreover, the National Industrial Court was developed in harmony with the provision of the afore-cited section of the Constitution.

Furthermore, the Constitution expressly provides that: "The judicial powers vested in accordance with the foregoing provisions of this section – (a) Shall extend, notwithstanding anything to the contrary in this constitution, to all inherent powers and sanctions of a court of law. (b) Shall extend, to all mattes between persons, or between government or authority and to any persons in Nigeria, and to all actions and proceedings relating thereto, to determine any question as to the civil obligations and rights of that person".

Nigeria practices the adversarial system of adjudication. This implies that the judges do not descend into the arena of dispute between the parties and thus do not seek to discover facts, ask questions and basically make their judgment based on the facts that have been placed before the courts by the parties to the suit. Also, Nigeria's criminal jurisprudence is principally regulated by two enactments; the Penal Code and the Criminal Code. The procedure for applying the above Acts is contained in the Criminal Procedure Act (CPA) and the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC).

The Police Force

The constitution in its section 214 established the Nigerian Police and saddles it with the responsibility of detecting and preventing crimes, apprehending offenders, preserving law and order and the protection of live and properties. The Police assist greatly in the execution of laws and also in the enforcement of judicial order and judgments. Their role is very crucial in the administration of criminal justice as they are usually the first point of contact, an accused person may have with the operation of the law (Okeke, 2014). The police handle sensitive issues such as search, arrest, bail, conduct investigation, gathering evidence, prosecution of offenders in the lower courts and the remand of accused persons in custody etc. (Police Acts, 2013).

Ministry of Justice

Generally, the federal government and all states in the country have functioning ministers of justice. The ministry is under the direct supervision of the Attorney General which is also the Minister/Commissioner for Justice currently headed by Mr Abubakar Malami (SAN).

The Attorney General is an important figure in the administration of justice, especially criminal justice as he is constitutionally authorized to exercise the power of *"nolle prosequi"* (a formal notice of abandonment by a plaintiff or prosecutor of all or part off a suit). This enables him and authorizes him to undertake and institute criminal proceedings against any person prior to any court of law in Nigeria, as

well as to continue and take over criminal proceedings that may have been instituted by any other authority or person; and to terminate at any stage, prior to delivering judgment to any such criminal proceedings instituted or undertaken by him or any other authority or person (DFID, 2010).

Also, the Attorney General is supported by the Director of Civil Litigations and the Director of Public Prosecutions. It is notable that many cases have been stalled while people have been denied access to justice on the basis that the police are awaiting the report of the DPP, advising them on whether or not they have enough or justifiable reason to prosecute the accused person.

The Prison/Correctional Service

President Muhammadu Buhari changed the name of Nigeria prison service to Nigerian Correctional Service, signing the Nigerian Correctional Service Act 2019 into law. This Act signed has repealled the prisons Act Cap. P29 law of the Federation in 2004. The Prison Act was an enabling law that created, governed and stipulated the organizational structure, functions, duties and responsibilities of the Nigeria prisons. The prison/correctional service agency takes into custody accused persons who are awaiting trial and also serves as a remand post for those who have been convicted. Apart from its custodial role, the prison is also expected to be a place of reformation and rehabilitation for the inmates as they are expected to drop the antisocial behaviours that landed them there in the first place.

Nevertheless, these expectations are usually not met as the prison service faces numerous challenges notably; overcrowding and underfunding. Ojukwu, et al noted that the over 400 prison facilities spread across the 36 states holds about 39,763 prison inmates. The breakdown shows that 25,648 prison inmates are awaiting trial (ATI) while about 14,115 inmates have been convicted. It is submitted that some of the ATI's might have been in prison for periods exceeding that which they would be sentenced to if found guilty of the crime preferred against them (Ojukwu as cited in Adekunle, 2016).

Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanisms

Fundamentally, as substitute to litigation, Nigerians also explore the mechanism of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) in order to resolves their disputes. ADR is a means of contending without being contentious whose major aim is the attainment of justice between the belligerent parties. It avoids the interfering nature, rules and procedures of litigation, saves times and cost and is usually non-binding on the parties, save for arbitration. The Arbitration and Conciliation Act governs Arbitration. The modes of ADR currently being practices in Nigeria include negotiation, mediation, conciliation and arbitration. Rhodes – Vivour noted that ADR at its broadcast encompasses any method of resolving a dispute other than by a binding dispositive decision imposed by a judge or arbitrator, generally but not necessarily involving the intercession and assistance of a neutral third party who helps the parties to reach a settlement.

Legal Aid Council of Nigeria

The Legal Aid Council of Nigeria was established over three decades ago to cater for the need of the poor members of the society by providing them with legal aid. The major purpose of its creation is to ensure that people who cannot afford the service of a legal practitioner are given sufficient representation, advice and counseling as the case may arise, especially in criminal matters. The council kicked off with staff strength of one lawyer in 12 states and is currently powered by over 276 lawyers.

According to Bob-Manuel, the council has handled 11,000 cases in 2013 and Nigeria is currently ranked second in Africa on the provision of legal aid. This is after South African that has 2,000 lawyers for its over 50 million population. Though this ranking is good news, it is alarming. The analysis of the above shows that South Africa has one pro bono lawyer per 25,000 of its citizens while Nigeria with over 190 million population has one pro bono lawyer per 579, 710 citizens. The United Nations Survey noted that:

> *"The numbers of practicing lawyers in African countries are low in proportion to the overall population. Further, the large majority of these lawyers reside in urban areas, whereas the majority of the population lives in rural or peri-urban areas. Thus, most people live outside of the reach of lawyers who can provide them with legal aid services" (Adekunle, 2016).*

Nevertheless, the effort of the council is been supported by some sister organizations as will be shown below, it is submitted that the total contribution of the government to legal aid in Nigeria is minimally

inadequate. Being ranked second in Africa is only an issue of a one-eyed man becoming king in the domain of the blind. The provisions of section 14 of the Legal Aid Act also require lawyers undergoing youth services to give free legal aid. This accounts for the establishment of Legal Aid Clinics as a form of community development service among Youth Service Corps members. This implies but does not guarantee that an average of 2,000 fresh lawyers is engaged one way or the other in the provision of free legal services. Most of the Youth Corp members are attached to private chambers and the Ministry of Justice; hence, it is only few of them that have the needed time for legal aid related works.

Furthermore, some states of the federation have established other initiatives such as the Office of the Public Defender to ameliorate the gaping needs of the penurious citizenry. Finally, some non-governmental organizations and religious/faith based advocacy groups also contribute their quota towards the advancement of the access to justice project. Omotola Rotimi, the DG of OPD in Lagos state stated that they have handled about 44,000 cases since inception and they have handled 2,000 cases in the year 2014. Source: *Weekend File, a Nigeria Television Authority's News Programme,* 4th October 2014. For example, Christian Lawyers Fellowship of Nigeria (CLASFOON) and Muslim Lawyers Association of Nigeria (MULAN).

ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN NIGERIA

The existence of numerous justice service providers presupposes that justice is not only available but accessible and also attainable by the teeming population of Nigeria citizens. It implies that there is unfettered access to the mechanisms of achieving justice. Therefore, if there is any crack in the access to justice roadmap, the event must have been instigated by the masses

On the contrary, there are many factors that bedevil the accessibility of justice in Nigeria. These militating elements are numerous and have been classified and reclassified by sundry organizations, scholars of criminology, victimology and learned pundits. Adekunle (2016) asserts that there are three central categories that can limit an individual's ability to access justice, which are:

a. Inadequate legal protection, including gaps in the legal framework, and institutional barriers;
b. The lack of capacity to provide justice remedies, barriers within court systems and informal justice systems, and lack of enforcement; and
c. The lack of capacity to demand justice remedies, which includes external obstacles, internal obstacles, and lack of legal awareness.

Social Factors

Ignorance: Access to justice can be hindered socially by the ignorance of the citizens. When the majority of a country's population is unlettered, they will be incapable of reaping the benefits that accrues from accessing justice. Most people, especially those in the rural communities are not even aware that they have certain rights and thus will not be bothered if and when such rights are violated. If laws are made to enhance justice, such as the Freedom of Information Act, they will be unused as the inability of the people to read and write will preclude its effective utilization. Constitutional safeguard such as rights to counsel, right to interpreters at no cost, presumption of innocence etc. (Freedom of Information Act, 2011). According to the Holy Bible in (Hosea 4:6) "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."

The solution to this situation is for the government to sponsor awareness and enlightenment campaigns using all the available news and social media to publicize the fact that Nigerians have access to justice and also enable the citizens to identify the mechanisms available for obtaining justice. The National Orientation Agency (NOA) is expected to wake up to its task of not only orientating Nigerians but also educating and re-orientating them as the need arises. Adult literacy programs should also be encouraged to increase the literacy level of Nigerian adults.

Loss of Confidence: If the people who require access to justice have lost confidence in the institutions established to issue justice, they will refuse any attempt to access justice. Corruption, abuse of power, mismanagement, maladministration and "presumed" bias among others are capable of making people lose confidence in the system designed to help them. This will lead to a situation where the people will prefer to take the laws into their own hands and measure justice by whatever parameters they deem fit (jungle

justice). The resultant effect of this hazardous course of action is anarchy and chaos capable of disrupting our nascent democracy.

In order to forestall this impending situation, the judiciary must ensure that justice isn't only done but should be manifestly and undoubtedly be seen to be done. There should be "sacred cows" among those selected or appointed to high offices and are charge with the responsibilities of enacting, executing or interpreting laws. The bad apples among officers should be fished out and brought to book to restore the confidence of the people and return the lost glory of the judiciary as the last mainstay of hope for the common being.

***Stigmatization*:** Stigmatization also affects access to justice. A lady who has been raped may decide to contain her shame rather than subject herself to ridicule and unnecessary scrutiny in the public glare and media victimization in the name of ensuring that justice is done to her assaulter. Some crimes remain unreported while certain issues are unsolved due to the way the society examines the subject matter (Nwabueze & Oduah, 2014).

Societal viewpoints must be changed via education, orientation and maturity in the way cases are handled. People should be encouraged to approach law enforcements officers on the basis that their privacy and confidentiality will be guaranteed. Thus, the need for victimologists with knowledge on forensic investigation to examine such victims.

Religion: Religion may also play critical roles. A Muslim woman undergoing Purdah (social gender seclusion) may be indisposed to the idea of undertaking the arduous formalism required to get justice done in certain cases. Additionally, most Nigerians, due to the passivity of their religious inclinations regards some crimes as minor offences that they "forgive and forget", "hand over to the court of God" or simply wait for the natural law of retribution "Law of Karma" and thus decide not to report such breakdown of law and order to the law enforcement agencies or seek any form of remedies. Karl Marx must have pictured this situation when he opined that "religion is the opium of the masses". Religious leaders and opinion leaders should champion the call for increased access to justice. The nexus between law and religion should be clearly explained by clergies and clerics as complements rather than disjunctive elements (Adekunle, 2016; Ritzer and Stepnisky, 2014; Karl Marx, 1850).

Furthermore, the location of the justice service providers determines the nature of those who will be predisposed to accessing the justice that such a system provides. The centralization of the courts in the urban areas has severally limited the opportunities of those residing in the rural areas from accessing justice. Unsurprisingly, like bees around a beehive, the lawyers have also succumbed to the aroma of urbanization as they are wont to reside where they can have quick access to the courts. Spatial distribution and location of courts and the offices of other key players in the administration of justice sector will help bridge this lacuna and provide a first step of access to justice; which is, access to the justice service providers (Adekunle, 2016).

Poverty: According to the World Poverty Clock, Nigeria was reported to have overtaken India as the country with most extreme poverty population (Vanguard, September 2, 2018). Poverty is a reality in Nigeria as an average Nigerian is poor. The high cost of litigation hinders most Nigerians from accessing justice. Optua JSC succinctly captures the appalling situation when he asserted that it is prevalent for people to condone breach of their rights simply because they cannot afford the cost of seeking remedies. The poverty issue also affects the number of lawyers that we currently have in the country as there have been complaints over the cost of legal education and the stipends that young lawyers are paid. It is submitted that new entrants to the profession discard the gospel notion of pro bono works (professional work undertaken voluntarily and without payment) not due to the facts that they are only interested in material accruals but because they are struggling to make ends meet. The decline in the number of lawyers, especially those ready to help the helpless substantially affects access to justice in Nigeria.

The government must ensure that the cost of legal education is highly subsidized. Incentives, recognitions and scholarships should be provided for legal aid workers. The welfare of the legal aid providers should be paramount on governmental agendas in order to make it attractive to members of the legal profession (Okobule, 2005).

Finally, the standard of living in the country must be greatly improved. A situation where majority of Nigerians live with less than a dollar per day is calls for urgent and drastic actions.

Legal Factors

The major essence of law is the attainment of justice, though the law can occasionally become antithetical to the yearnings of the people in this regard. The legal factors that lead to this situation in the bid to ensure Victims access justice in their case will be briefly discussed.

***Duplicity of Organizations and Multiplicity of Laws in Nigeria*:** A ready example comes from our criminal jurisprudence. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) performs similar functions but have different laws that can confuse the citizens on what is actually right or wrong and under which law is an act actually permitted or unlawful.

The solution to this problem is to as speedily as possible, merge similar agencies and codify the laws on a particular subject matter, crime or offence in order to ensure clarity and preciseness in the body of Nigerian laws. This will inadvertently save the government money which can be redistributed towards the provision of free legal services for the indigent members of the society. (Abdulquadi and Abdullahi as cited in Udombama, 2014), (Adekunle, 2016).

Litigation: Moreover, the average Nigerian is accustomed to litigation as the only means of resolving dispute. The law has not helped in this regard as it usually proffers a one-way approach to most issues. It is noted that the introduction of the Multi Door Court house initiative in some states will help disabuse this notion and ensure the patronization of other means of dispute resolutions.

Legal Aid: Nigeria has a weak Legal Aid to indigent members of the society. Those who cannot afford the services of a legal practitioner remain hopeless as the Legal Aid Council of Nigeria is ill-equipped to cater for their needs due to several factors some of which have been adumbrated above. The framework for the provision of legal aid in Nigeria should be expanded. More offences should be catered for, under the legal aid scheme. The Legal Aid Council of Nigeria, Office of the Public Defender and other related governmental agencies should be given more incentives for optimal performances.

Right of Audience: Closely related to the above is the fact that it is only lawyers who have been called to the Nigerian Bar that have right of audience before the courts of law. This affects in no small measure the availability of legal care providers in the country. The Legal Aid Act is in need of dire amendment in order to move from the mere recognition of paralegals (especially law clinics where students are engaged) to a form of inclusion. If a students' practice rule is enacted in the country, it will open wide the gates of entrance and guarantee a greater number of people, access to justice.

Technicalities: Justice exist in two formats via; substantive justice and technical or procedural justice. The propensity of most Nigerian lawyers towards technicalities as a means of obtaining justice negatively affects access to justice. The principle of Locus standi (the right to stand or standing in a court of law, the right to sue) has been wielded as an unruly sword to shield many away from approaching the courts to obtain justice in their matters. Public interest litigators are often discouraged as they are termed meddlesome interlopers, officious bystander etc. The courts have luckily shifted away from the narrow connotation of the doctrine as adopted in **Abraham Adesanya v President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria** to the liberal approach enunciated in **Fawehinmi v Akilu.** It is appreciated that justice rushed is justice crushed, though it is also self-evident that just delayed is justice denied. Numerous cases that eventually get to court are unnecessarily delayed and thus result in congestion of the system (Udombana, 2014).

Technicalities, as discussed above amongst many factors can lead to delay in the administration of justice. Ojukwu noted that other factors include: the sheer number of cases to be processed, the limited number of courts and/or judges/magistrates, limited access to lawyers especially for those in rural areas, an inefficient court administrative system, frivolous requests for adjournment of proceedings, inability of judges and magistrates to deliver judgments on time, failure of the police or prison authorities to produce detained defendants in courts for trial and the rule that once a magistrate or judge is transferred and a new one takes over a case trial must start all over.

To buttress this point, in Rossek & Ors v. ACB Ltd & Ors, a case which was started in 1975, an order for retrial was given after 18 years of litigation. Also in Ogbuyinya v. Okudo, it took about 32 years before the matter was finally resolved. The Okotie-Eboh family has continued to adorn the law reports with their case which has lasted for over 40 years. This status quo can be limited if not totally eradicated if the judges avert their mind that the main essence of the judiciary is actually to do justice. There should be little or zero tolerance for incessant adjournments and technical faults that do not go directly to the root of the issue before the courts. The Chief Judges/Justices of our various courts may have to review their respective court rules to construct ways of minimizing situations where the lifespan of some cases exceed the judicial career of some of the Judges adjudicating on it (Adekunle, 2016).

Institutions: There are many institutions that are involved in the provision of access to justice. Most of them have been discussed earlier in this paper, but for the purpose of emphasis, three institutions deserve particular analysis.

Firstly, the judiciary is the institution primary vested with judicial powers and saddled with the responsibilities of dispensing justice. Hence, by the doctrine of separation of power, it is expected to be independent not just from the other arms of government but also from every other internal or external influence. The modes of appointments, dismissal, remuneration and security of judges in Nigeria leave much to be desired and require urgent attention as was the case of Justice Walter Onnogehen of the Supreme court. Also, the recurrent strike by administrative judicial staffs over welfare-related issues closes the gates of the courts and cripples the system.

Secondly, the Police as an institution also affect access to justice. In some instances, they may determine whether or not a person can access justice. Intermittently, the Police spend precious times and scarce resources in sloppy investigation, poor prosecution, planting and gathering of planted evidence at the expense of other meaningful engagements. They lock people up and prevent them from being able to contact their family members who may facilitate their access to justice.

Finally, an unenforced judgment is no judgment at all. The fact that there is no independent machinery for enforcement of court judgment leaves much to be desire. The case of **Attorney General of Lagos State v Attorney General of the Federation** has demonstrated for the umpteenth time that the Executive arm which is expected to enforce and execute the law may become lawless and treat such judgment with impunity, justice should not only be done but must be manifestly and undoubtedly be seen to be done should hold sway, judgments must be enforced (Adekunle, 2016).

CONCLUSION

This paper on victimology, victimization and victims' access to justice was targeted on examining and investigating the various problems that Victims confront in ensuring justice is done to their cases and relevant discussion on the administration Criminal justice in Nigeria. It examined the conceptual framework of the terms: victimology, victimocracy, victimisation, it looks at the meaning of the legal concept of "access to justice" and considered these meanings based on the narrow and broad understanding of the concept. Also, theories of victimisation were briefly examined. This study proceeded to analyze the numerous institutions involved in the dispensation of effective justice in Nigeria. These justice service providers were examined with the intent of pointing out their enabling laws, functions and responsibilities, strengths and weaknesses. The essential point of the paper was on the socio-legal barriers that stiffens the accessibility of victims' justice in Nigeria. These factors were identified basically as either social or legal while the subdivisions clearly show that it includes economic, political, procedural, geographical and institutional issues. The paper proposed some recommendations on how the malady can be remedied. Access to justice by victims should not be an exclusive preserve of a particular subset in the society as is the case of the Fulani herdsmen and farmers' crisis in Nigeria presently. Justice should be a flowing river with many tributaries, accessible and available to all and sundry in every nook and cranny of the society.

RECOMMENDATION

In view of the above, the following recommendations are hereby offered:

1) Government should sponsor awareness and enlightenment campaigns using available social media to publicize, conscientise and educate Nigerians on their right to access justice.
2) The judiciary must as a matter of urgency regain the confidence of Nigerian in the dispensation of justice to the common man without fear or favour. And ensure judicial cleansing of corrupt officials in the system.
3) Certain cases such as rape, needs the attention of psychiatrist and victimologist with forensic skills in relating to victims of crime.
4) Religious leaders and opinion leaders should champion the call for increased access to justice.
5) Government should create an enabling environment (health, education, security and infrastructure) to increase the standard of living of Nigerians as poverty bedevils victims' access to justice.
6) The legal aid system should be strengthened and made mandatory as a voluntary service to assist victims get access to justice.
7) Undue delay in the administration of criminal justice and reliance on technical rules should be discouraged.
8) The officials of criminal justice system should be trained and retrained on areas of criminology, victimology and graphology.

In the researchers' opinion, if the above suggestion is taken by the government, it is believed that the will be access to justice which will benefit victims of crimes and those who have been victimized or are likely to be victimized.

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