



Criminal investigation in Nigeria: Awareness level on the relevance of forensics

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Abstract

The main goal of forensic science is to gather intelligence to enable judges to make credible and logical decisions in court using a scientific approach to evidence evaluation for the administration of justice, and forensic methodology is now considered the gold standard for criminal investigation by countries all over the world. As a result, the current study looked into the level of awareness in Nigeria about the importance of forensics in criminal investigations. The survey research design was used in this study, and the sample size was a total of one hundred individuals from law enforcement and the judiciary. The study used descriptive statistics, which included frequency and percentage. The findings of this study revealed that the participants were dispersed socio-demographically as follows: male participants (68 percent) outnumbered female participants by a significant margin (43 percent). According to the age distribution, 62 percent of the participants were over the age of 40, while 18 percent were between the ages of 35 and 39. On an educational level, the current study's findings revealed that 81 percent of the participants have a bachelor's degree as the greatest level of educational qualification, out of a total of 100 percent. The current study also looked at replies to questions about the importance of forensics in criminal investigations, and the results revealed a lack of awareness about the importance of forensics in criminal investigations. As a result, the report suggests that the Nigerian Police Force and the Judiciary partner with universities that offer forensics programs for training.

Keywords: forensics, forensic in Nigeria, forensic evidence, relevance of forensics and crime in Nigeria

Introduction

The application of natural, physical, and social disciplines to legal issues is referred to as forensic science. Regardless of their profession, most forensic scientists believe that investigation begins at the scene ^[1]. Appropriate evidence inquiry, gathering, and preservation are critical for establishing facts and ensuring proper appraisal and interpretation of evidence, regardless of its nature.

Forensic science is an interdisciplinary field that draws on chemistry and biology, as well as psychology and social sciences. Its importance in the criminal justice system cannot be overestimated, because the need for a crime-free, peaceful, habitable, and developed society is always present ^[2]. The forensics team's actions DNA profiling or matching, fingerprint analysis, blood spatter analysis, crime scene investigation, and a variety of other techniques are used by scientists. However, the major goal of forensic science is to provide knowledge to judges so that they can make credible and logical judgements in court using scientific methods and evidence evaluation for the administration of justice ^[3].

The need for a modern approach to criminal investigation continues to beckon in a country like Nigeria, where criminal activities have been reported to be on the rise, and the government appears helpless in part due to the sophistication in terms of how such crimes are conducted ^[4]. In Nigeria, severe crimes such as murder are still unsolved by the criminal justice system, owing in part to a lack of forensics. Eye witness testimony or confessions are heavily relied upon by Nigerian security professionals, and if either fails, a combination of the two is regarded a methodical and thorough inquiry ^[5]. Meanwhile, forensics, which is a reliable, authentic, concrete, and productive source of evidence, is underutilized ^[5]. The Nigerian police and other security forces' forensic investigative capacity has been severely harmed by the current scenario.

Identifying murder suspects is still a crucial part of forensic inquiry ^[5, 6]. The identification and recovery of tangible evidence begins the function of forensic scientific services in the administration of justice at the crime scene. It then moves on to conducting an investigation and analyzing the evidence in a laboratory, as well as presenting the findings to judges, prosecutors, lawyers, and others in order to expedite the administration of justice. A maximum chain of custody must be maintained to ensure the integrity of the evidence, and all parties involved, from the first responder to the end-users of the presented evidence, must be properly informed on the forensic process and the specialized services provided by forensic laboratories ^[7, 5]. Forensic science offers a variety of options for tracking down and apprehending criminals via criminal justice system agents. In several

categories of criminal investigation, forensic science is transitioning from an auxiliary to a major role, offering fast, unbiased, and credible information on crimes and suspects [8].

A thorough examination of the literature indicated a scarcity of forensic research reports in Africa, notably Nigeria. However, a few studies have found that in some African countries, such as South Africa, Egypt, and Botswana, there has been significant progress toward the use of forensics technology in criminal investigation, resulting in a significant increase in the level of awareness about the importance of forensics in criminal investigation [9-11]. In Nigeria, it has been discovered that there is a lack of forensic capabilities, which has a negative impact on law enforcement agents' investigative abilities [4]. In this context, our prior study by Nwawuba and Akpata [12] demonstrated that there is a lack of awareness in Nigeria about the function of forensics in criminal investigations. However, in order to increase awareness of the importance of forensics and the need for the establishment of a forensic council in Nigeria, it became necessary to assess the level of awareness of forensics in criminal investigation, which would serve as a guideline for proposing bills to make forensics technology the gold standard in criminal investigation in Nigeria.

Methodology

Design of the study

This study used a survey research strategy, in which the complete study population was sampled by administering a questionnaire to randomly selected research participants from the overall population. This design was chosen since it is simple to implement and may readily reach a broad audience.

The study's population and sample size

The current study used a one-hundred-person sample population. The stratified random sampling technique was used to choose the sample population from two categories: the judicial branch and law enforcement. This is due to the fact that the specified categories are under criminal investigation.

Data analysis method

The study makes use of descriptive statistics, such as frequency and percentage.

Results

Information about socioeconomics and demographics

The results of the current study on socio-demographic data (Table 1) revealed that, among the 100 participants in the study, there were an observable higher number of male participants (68%) than female participants (12%) (32 percent). According to the age distribution, 55 percent of the participants were over the age of 40, while 15 percent were between the ages of 35 and 39. When the participants' educational backgrounds were examined, it was discovered that the bulk of them (75%) have a bachelor's degree as the greatest level of educational attainment, while 26% have less than tertiary education. In terms of career, the study indicated that 55 percent of the participants were law enforcement officers (Nigerian Police), whereas 45 percent worked in the judiciary (Lawyers and Judges).

The importance of forensics in criminal cases

As shown in Figures 1-6, the current study looked into the level of awareness about the importance of forensics in criminal investigations. Have you heard about the outcome? forensics (Figure 1) found that a larger percentage of participants (61%) from a pool of 100% had no knowledge of forensics, and just 39% of the population demonstrated appropriate understanding of forensics. Can forensic methods be utilized for criminal investigation in Nigeria (Figure 2) and does forensics give incontrovertible evidence for the administration of justice (Figure 3) showed the same pattern, with 56 percent (Not Sure) and 46 percent (Yes) respectively (Yes). According to the comments on whether Nigerian courts accept forensic evidence, as shown in Figure 4, the majority of the participants were unsure (79%), while only 21% (Yes) displayed adequate awareness of the role of forensic evidence in the Nigerian justice system.

Finally, as shown in Figures 5 and 6, responses on would forensics contribute to the reduction of crimes in Nigeria and can forensics be used to combat the upsurge of crime in Nigeria followed a similar pattern, with 64 percent of participants reporting (Not Sure) and only 39 percent reporting (Yes)

Table 1: Showing Socio-Demographic Information.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	71	71
Female	29	29
Age (Years)		
30-34	37	37
35-39	18	18
> 40	45	45
Educational Level		

Less than tertiary education	31	31
Bachelor	69	69
Occupation		
Law Enforcement	57	57
Judiciary	43	43

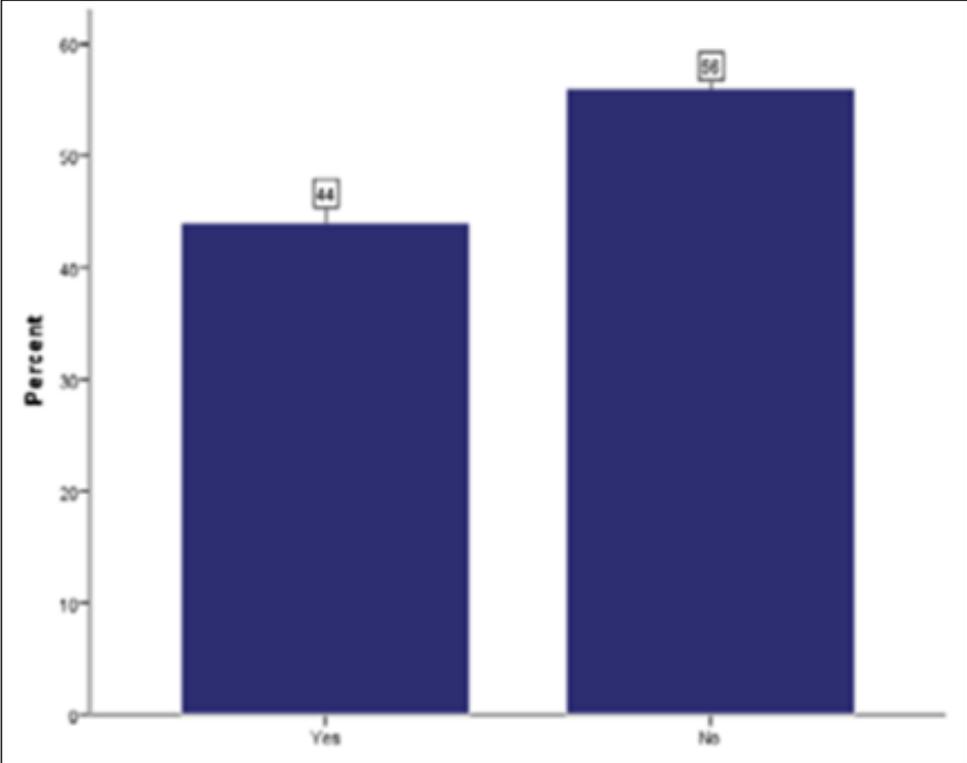


Fig 1: Showing responses on have you heard about forensics. Irrefutable evidence for the administration of justice.

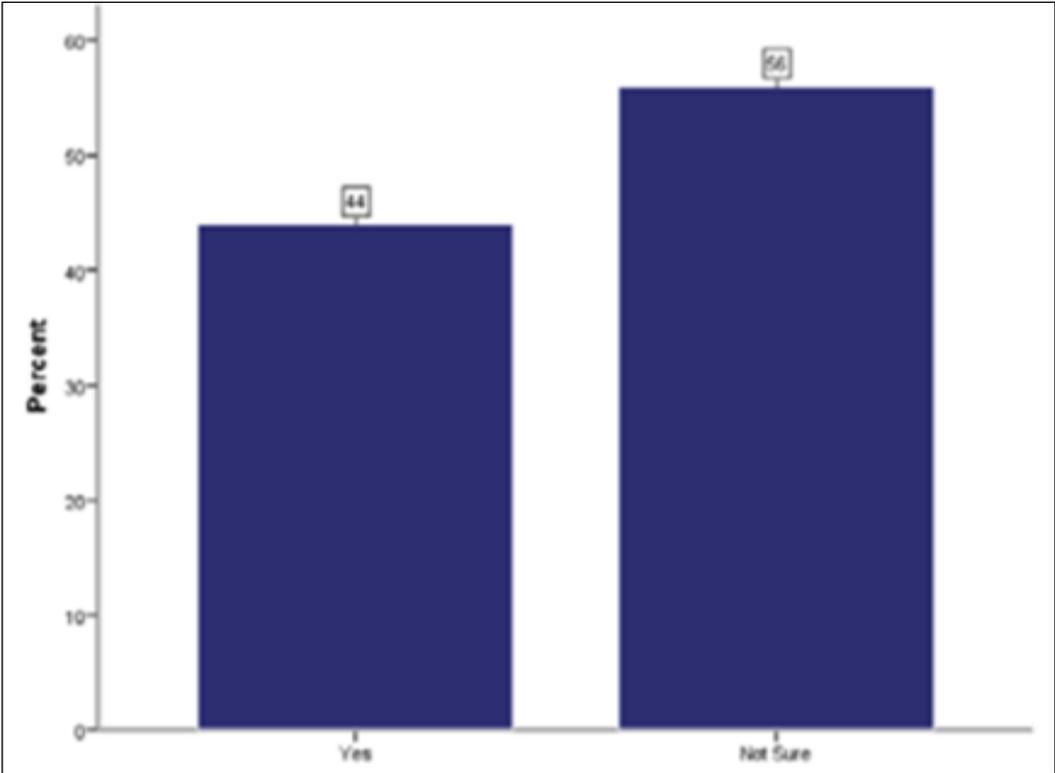


Fig 2: Showing responses on can forensics methodology be used for criminal investigation in Nigeria.

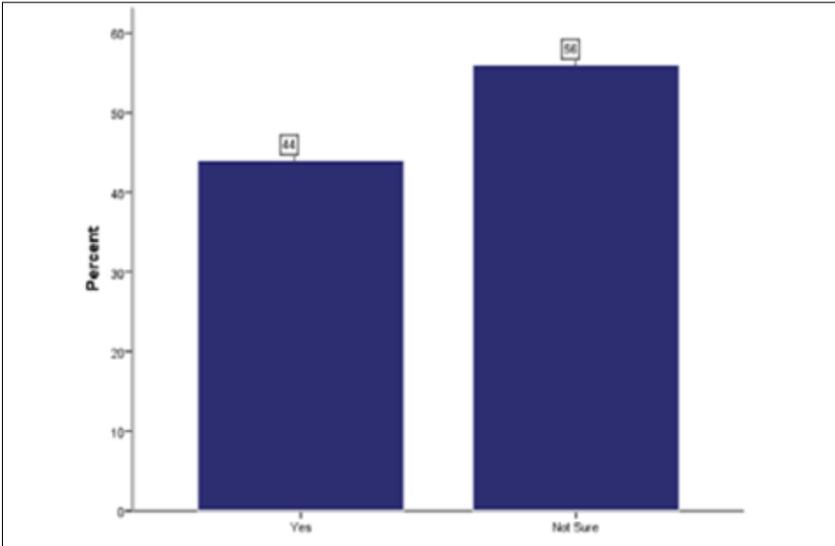


Fig 3: Showing responses on does forensics provide

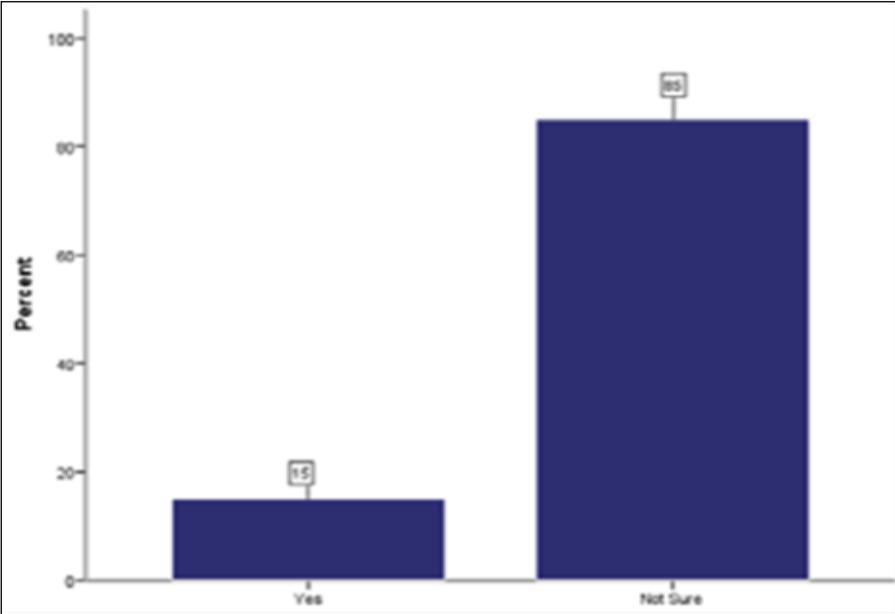


Fig 4: Showing responses on does Nigeria courts accepts criminal investigation in Nigeria.

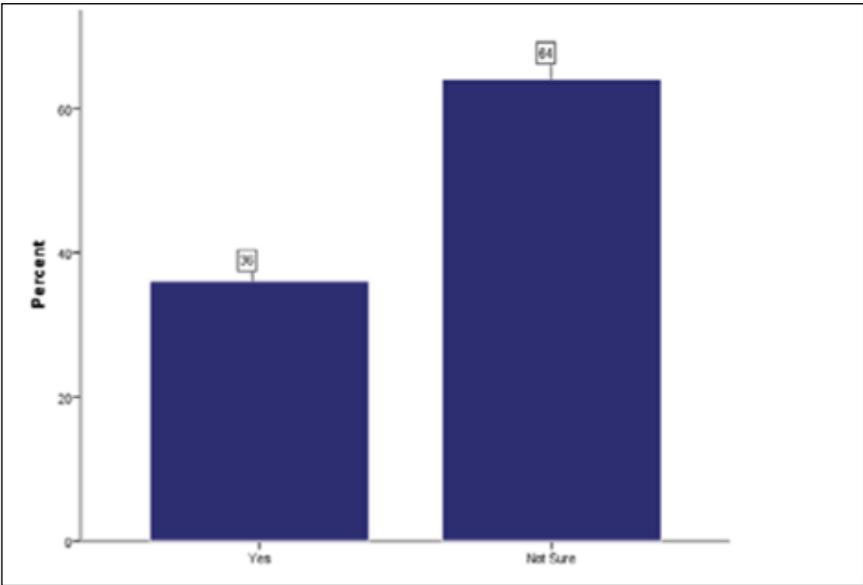


Fig 5: Showing responses on would forensics contribute to the reduction of crimes in Nigeria

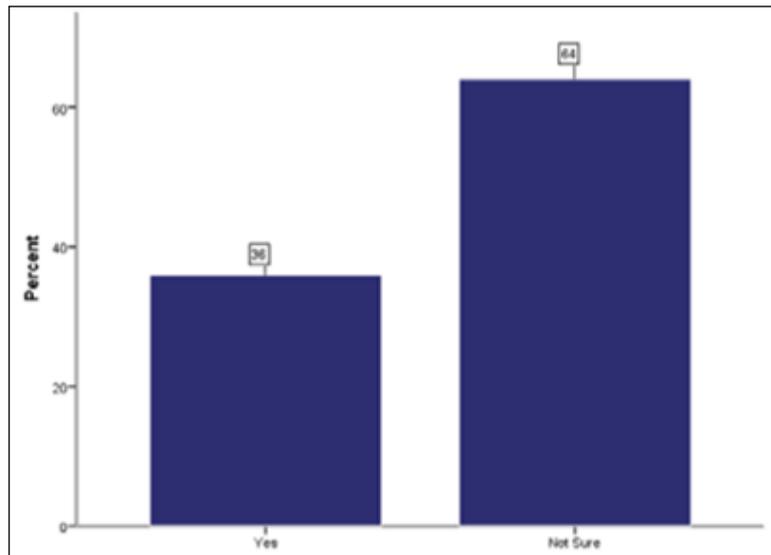


Fig 6: Showing responses on can forensics be used to tackle the upsurge of crime in Nigeria.

Discussion

One of the foundations of the criminal justice system is forensic science. It primarily focuses on the analysis of scientific and physical evidence acquired at the crime scene. The need for this science to be applied in criminal investigations came as a result of our society's rapid societal developments [13]. There has been a noticeable paradigm change from the old way of criminal investigation to a new approach throughout the years. Criminal elements are becoming increasingly competent at sophisticated methods, necessitating the use of forensics. It is critical since there is little chance of prejudices or injustices when scientific methods and approaches are applied [13]. As a result, the current study examined the level of awareness in Nigeria of the importance of forensics in criminal investigation, with a focus on professionals who have been shown to have adequate knowledge of the application of forensics in the Nigerian criminal justice system, as reported in the study of [12]. According to the findings of the current study on socio-demographic factors (Table 1), there were a significantly higher number of male participants (71 percent) than female participants (29 percent). Our gender distribution findings are consistent with those of Nwawuba and Akpata [12] and Oguntunde [14]. When it came to age distribution, it was discovered that the majority of the participants were over 40 years old (45%) and that the age group 35-39 years was the least represented (18%). On an educational level, the current survey found that 69 percent of the participants had a bachelor's degree as the highest level of educational qualification, while 39 percent have less than tertiary education as the highest level of qualification. The survey found that 57 percent of the participants were law enforcement personnel (Nigerian Police), and 43 percent were determined to be in the court (Lawyers and Judges). Participants' inclusion criteria (law enforcement and judicial) are based on their involvement in criminal investigations. Clearly, any civilized nation's criminal justice system (CJS) is necessary for ensuring justice, fairness, the rule of law, and the institutionalization of a democratic system [15]. A criminal justice system, in the future, will be made up of several agents charged with the responsibility of investigating and prosecuting criminal offenses, and the system will include law enforcement and the courts as components [15, 16]. In light of the fact that law enforcement and the judiciary interact with forensic scientists in criminal investigations [11, 12], the study focused on analyzing the two professions' levels of awareness of the importance of forensics in criminal investigations.

The purpose of this study was to see how well people knew about the importance of forensics in criminal investigations. The results (figure 1) revealed that a majority of the participants (56 percent) from a pool of 100 had no prior knowledge of forensics, and just 46% of the population had adequate knowledge of forensics. Our findings support those of Nwawuba and Akpata [12], who found a lack of understanding of the function of forensics in criminal investigations.

However, studies from throughout the world show that industrialized countries are becoming more conscious of the use of forensics in criminal investigations [17-19]. Similarly, certain African countries, such as South Africa, Egypt, Morocco, Namibia, Botswana, and Sudan, have exhibited an understanding of the critical role of forensics in their criminal justice systems [9, 20, 21]. With 56 percent (Not Sure) and 46 percent (Yes), respectively, on can forensic methodology be used for criminal investigation in Nigeria (Figure 2) and does forensics provide irrefutable evidence for the administration of justice (Figure 3), the same trend of inadequate level of awareness was observed (Yes). One of the primary objectives of forensics appears to be the gathering of intelligence to enable judges to make credible and rational decisions in court using a scientific approach via evidence evaluation for the administration of justice, and forensic methodology is now considered the gold standard for criminal investigation by countries all over the world [3, 11, 22].

Furthermore, forensics aids criminal investigations in a variety of ways and plays a critical role in maintaining society's law and order, and in today's world, forensic evidence and the application of forensic sciences are an indispensable element of the criminal investigation system and prosecutions ^[23]. Moving forward, the results of the responses to the question of whether Nigerian courts accept forensic evidence (Figure 4) revealed that a majority of the participants were unsure (85%), while only 15% (Yes) demonstrated adequate knowledge of the position of forensic evidence in the Nigerian justice system. This finding supports the claim that there is a lack of awareness about forensics as well as the regulations that allow forensic evidence to be accepted in Nigerian courts ^[5, 24]. In practice, Nigerian courts are prepared to accept testimony relating to the use of scientific evidence, and the individual who is authorized to give such evidence is referred to as an expert witness under the Evidence Act of 2011 (section 68) ^[25, 26].

Finally, as shown in Figures 5 and 6, responses on would forensics contribute to the reduction of crimes in Nigeria and can forensics be used to combat the upsurge of crime in Nigeria followed a similar pattern, with 64 percent of participants reporting (Not Sure) and only 36 percent reporting (Yes) (Yes). The importance of forensics in criminal investigations cannot be emphasized, given the continuing need for a crime-free, nonviolent, livable, and developed society ^[2]. Regardless of the gravity of a criminal case, forensics has proven to be a reliable workhorse for criminal investigation, and the outcome of a forensic inquiry can be the difference between acquittal and conviction in a court of law ^[23]. It's incredible that, despite advancements in forensics in crime investigation, the Nigerian Police Force still depends on old investigative techniques for criminal inquiry to a large level ^[5]. Nigeria is currently facing security issues, and it has been discovered that criminals have gotten more skilled in their operations. The peculiarity of the many forms of perpetrated crimes in Nigeria is that they frequently involve or leave behind biological evidence at the crime scene. These biopsies are important samples for DNA profiling and subsequent storage in a forensic DNA database ^[26]. As a result, switching to a new technique to criminal investigation known as "forensics" has become critical in detecting, apprehending, and improving justice administration.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrated a lack of understanding of the importance of forensics in criminal investigations. As a result, the report suggests that the Nigerian Police Force and the Judiciary partner with universities that offer forensics programs for training.

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