

Assessing Ghanaian Police Officers' Perceptions of Wrongful Conviction: A Research Proposal



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Purpose, Aims, Objectives

This research proposal aims to investigate Ghanaian police officers' perceptions of wrongful conviction, examining their understanding of its causes, frequency, and impact on the criminal justice system. Despite growing international attention to wrongful convictions, limited research exists on this phenomenon in the Ghanaian context. The main objective of this research is to obtain a better understanding of Ghanaian police officers' perceptions of wrongful convictions. Specifically, we will explore how officers conceptualize wrongful conviction, their estimates of its prevalence, perceived systemic factors contributing to such errors, and their support for potential reforms. Drawing upon both wrongful conviction literature and studies of Ghana's police system, this study will address three key gaps in the literature: 1) Limited wrongful conviction research in African contexts, 2) Lack of studies on Ghana police perceptions of wrongful conviction, and 3) Need to test whether Western findings also apply in Ghana.

Background Information

Studies on wrongful conviction perceptions consistently show variations based on stakeholder position. Zalman et al. (2012) found demographic differences in public perceptions, while Smith et al. (2011) demonstrated that views on wrongful conviction vary between police officers, prosecutors, and defense attorneys.

Research on Ghana's police system provides necessary context. Boateng et al. (2018) demonstrated that officers discuss colleague misconduct openly when assured confidentiality. Importantly, Tankebe (2009) found that Western theories of procedural justice lack empirical validity in Ghana, where effectiveness matters more than procedural fairness in shaping public cooperation. Perceptions of wrongful conviction may also differ between police officers in the U.S. and those in Ghana.

Method

Design: This study employs a quantitative survey research design to assess the perceptions of Ghanaian police officers on wrongful convictions in the Ghanaian criminal justice system.

Participants: Ghanaian police officers in the Kasoa District of the Central Region of Ghana will complete the survey. The target population for this study comprises police officers of varying ranks, years of service, and educational backgrounds. The study will include officers from different divisions such as investigative units, patrol units, and administrative offices to capture diverse perspectives on wrongful convictions.

Materials: A structured questionnaire will serve as the primary instrument for data collection, allowing us to measure officers' awareness, attitudes, and experiences related to wrongful convictions. The survey will primarily consist of multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions.

Example questions:

- 1) In your opinion, how well are police officers in Ghana trained to prevent wrongful convictions?
 - Very well-trained
 - Adequately trained
 - Not well-trained
 - I am unsure
- 2) I would estimate that wrongful conviction occurs in Ghana in ___% of all convictions. Enter a percentage using the scale below.
- 3) Do you think changes need to be made to the criminal justice system in Ghana to prevent wrongful convictions?

Procedure: The study will take place online via Survey Monkey. Participants will read the informed consent form and complete the survey with the wrongful conviction questions and demographic questions. The study is expected to take 10-20 minutes to complete.

Discussion, Conclusion, Implications and Limitations

This research has significant implications for both theory and practice. Theoretically, it will expand understanding of how professional perspectives on wrongful convictions are shaped by cultural context, potentially challenging or confirming the applicability of Western-derived frameworks to the Ghanaian setting.

From a practical standpoint, findings could inform targeted police training programs addressing specific misconceptions about wrongful convictions. Additionally, identifying systemic factors that officers perceive as contributing to wrongful convictions could guide evidence-based policy reforms within Ghana's criminal justice system. The research may also reveal important insights about how professional identity and organizational culture influence attitudes toward system errors and reform initiatives.

This study faces several methodological constraints. First, access to a representative sample of Ghanaian police officers may prove challenging, particularly in remote regions. Second, social desirability bias may influence officers' responses, as they might be reluctant to acknowledge system failures or misconduct even with confidentiality assurances. Finally, cultural and contextual factors unique to Ghana's justice system may complicate direct comparisons with findings from Western contexts.

References

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