
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Police Public Image through the Lens of Community Stakeholders

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| ABSTRACT

Police community relation is meant to combat citizen mistrust of the police force. This strategy was developed in the mid-20th century to help officers work more collaboratively with the communities they are assigned to. The hope was that activities such as town hall meetings and “meet and greet” foot patrols would create a partnership between citizens and the police force, increasing trust and ultimately leading to reduced crime. This study explored the views of community stakeholders on the police public image in the province of Southern Leyte through a qualitative research method. The informants of this study were ten individuals from different sectors of society within the province of Southern Leyte. All informants were subjected to an individual in-depth interview. The findings of this study are described in emergent themes. Six (6) emergent themes described the positive and negative views of the informants regarding their current views on the public image. For the positive views, three (3) emergent themes were developed, namely *Community Engagement and Cooperation*, *Trust in Police and Public Safety*, and *Commitment to Duty and Profession*. For the negative views, three (3) emergent themes were also developed: *Use of Excessive Force and Violence*, *Negative Stereotypes and Public Distrust*, and *Malfeasance and Inconsistent Law Enforcement*. Meanwhile, two (2) emergent themes were formulated to explain how the impact of the police public image affects the community stakeholders, namely, *Police as Protector* and *Police as Public Defender*. Finally, four (4) emergent themes were formulated to explain how police activities promote community confidence and trust, namely *Enhanced Police Visibility*, *Community Outreach Program*, *First Responders in Calamities*, and *Proactive Information Campaigns*. Based on the emergent themes identified, it is recommended that the Philippine National Police (PNP) enhance the efficacy of law enforcement officers by developing stronger relationships with the public and addressing the issues pointed out in the study to restore public confidence. Essential measures may include improving community engagement through transparent communication and enhancing officer training in ethics and accountability.

| KEYWORDS

Police Public Image, Current Stakeholders Views, Phenomenology, Southern Leyte, Philippines.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

In contemporary society, the police are expected to symbolize the difference between ‘good’ and ‘evil,’ bestowing upon the police an important symbolic power for many citizens (Loader & Mawby, 2013). This is closely related to the increased needs of the public for protection against risks, danger, and insecurity (Boutellier, 2015). However, police officers on the beat perceive that they command ever less respect, which complicates their work (Terpstra & Trommel, 2019). For the police, the entire matter of maintaining or building trust, therefore, appears to have become considerably more difficult than it was several decades ago (Schaap, 2018). It is essential for the police to be trusted by the public. A range of studies have found that trust in the police increases citizens’ compliance with the rule of law, is related to the willingness to cooperate with the police and report crime, and improves the readiness of citizens to intervene in cases of crimes and social disorder (Schaap, 2018).

In the Philippines, 17,786 members of the PNP were subject to sanctions as part of the organization's efforts to discipline, reform, and purge its ranks (Caliwan, 2021). Administrative offenses include involvement in the illegal drug trade, flagrant disregard of duty, major misconduct, abuse of power, and even human rights breaches are to blame for this. These infractions were committed from July 2016 to March 2021. The sanctions were as follows: dismissal from the service (4,974 personnel), suspension (8,806 personnel), reprimand (1,973 personnel), and demotion (943 personnel). As regards administrative cases, 716 were sanctioned with forfeiture of salaries, 132 were restricted to quarters, and 242 were withheld privileges. Of the 617 rogue cops involved in the illegal drug trade, 617 were dismissed, including the 462 who tested positive for drug use.

However, policing practices are under scrutiny by the media, the public, politicians, the Department of Justice (DOJ), private litigants, and police departments. On the other hand, the events surrounding each incident are different; they give rise to some common questions of whether or not the Police are protector of the people and state. The community stakeholders and the Police have a common interest in public safety, which requires effective Police-Community Relations. The approach to reforming policing to improve both effectiveness and police-community relations is not one-size-fits-all. However, Police departments have varying tactics to meet local priorities and evolving public safety challenges. Although there is no uniform approach to enforcing the law, many police leaders have recognized that avoidable uses of force erode "Public Trust" and, in turn, make communities less, not more, safe (Keane et al., 2019). The PNP shall be a community and service-oriented agency responsible for the maintenance of peace and order and public safety. The PNP shall be so organized to ensure accountability and uprightness in the police exercise of discretion as well as to achieve efficiency and effectiveness of its members and units in the performance of these functions (Republic Act No. 8551, 1998).

Police use of force, however, is not the only area of police-community relations facing scrutiny. Legally circumscribed stops are an essential police tactic, but aggressive stop-and-frisk policies that reach outside the bounds of lawful limits increase the frequency of citizen-police confrontations. Some of these practices have been the subjects of legal challenges. The impact of these practices on police-community relations can be pronounced, particularly in some minority neighborhoods. A high volume of unjustified stops can quickly build resentment toward law enforcement and escalate tensions between the community and the police. Additionally, the event of confrontation between the police and the civilians poses some danger, which may somehow result in crimes or erosion of public confidence.

Apparently, the undying issue of extra-judicial killings, corruption in police service, and grave abuse of authority foster fear and create doubts in the general public and eventually question the integrity of the police. No study was conducted in a rural setting that attempted to describe community stakeholders' confidence in the public image of the police in the Province of Southern Leyte.

2. Literature Review

This study is primarily anchored on the Trust Theory by Gibbs (1968) and supported by the Attribution Theory by Heider (1958) and Broken Windows by Wilson and Kelling (1982).

Trust theory by Gibbs (1968) proposed that trust is a multi-dimensional construct influenced by various factors within interpersonal relationships. Gibbs (1968) conceptualizes trust as comprising three essential components: predictability, dependability, and faith. Predictability refers to the ability of an individual to anticipate the actions and behaviors of another party based on past experiences and observed patterns. Dependability relates to the consistency and reliability of the trusted party in fulfilling their obligations and promises. Faith involves the emotional aspect of trust, characterized by a belief in the goodwill and benevolence of the trusted party, even in situations where explicit evidence may be lacking.

Within Gibbs' framework, trust develops through a process of social interaction and exchange, wherein individuals assess and evaluate the behavior and characteristics of others over time. As individuals engage in repeated interactions, they gather information about the trustworthiness of the other party, gradually forming perceptions of predictability, dependability, and faith. This process is iterative, as trust is dynamic and subject to change based on ongoing interactions and new information. Additionally, Gibbs (1968) emphasizes the role of risk in trust formation, suggesting that individuals weigh the potential benefits and risks associated with trusting another party before deciding to do so.

Gibbs' trust theory has significant implications for various interpersonal and organizational contexts. In interpersonal relationships, understanding the components and dynamics of trust can facilitate the development of stronger bonds and more effective communication. Within organizations, trust plays a crucial role in promoting collaboration, cooperation, and organizational effectiveness. By recognizing the importance of predictability, dependability, and faith, individuals and organizations can work towards building and maintaining trust, ultimately fostering healthier and more productive relationships and environments (Gibbs, 1968).

Attribution Theory, proposed by Heider (1958), seeks to understand how individuals interpret and explain the causes of behavior. At its core, Attribution Theory suggests that individuals are motivated to make sense of the world around them by attributing causes to events or behaviors, whether those causes are internal (within the individual) or external (outside of the individual). Heider (1958) posited that people are inherently inclined to seek explanations for why things happen as they do, and these explanations influence their subsequent thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Central to Attribution Theory are two types of attributions: internal attributions and external attributions. Internal attributions relate to factors within the individual, such as personality traits, abilities, or intentions. External attributions, on the other hand, pertain to factors outside the individual's control, such as situational circumstances or environmental influences. Heider (1958) suggested that individuals tend to make attributions based on a combination of these internal and external factors, depending on the specific context and available information.

Furthermore, Heider (1958) proposed two key principles that underlie attribution processes: the principle of covariation and the principle of consensus, distinctiveness, and consistency. The principle of covariation suggests that individuals attribute causes to behavior based on how it covaries or correlates with potential causes in the environment. Meanwhile, the principle of consensus, distinctiveness, and consistency posits that individuals consider the consensus (whether others behave similarly), distinctiveness (whether the behavior is unique to a particular situation), and consistency (whether the behavior occurs consistently over time) of the behavior when making attributions. Attribution Theory serves as a foundational framework for understanding how individuals make sense of the causes behind behavior. It highlights the importance of internal and external attributions in shaping our perceptions of others' actions, ultimately influencing our interactions and relationships.

The Broken Windows theory by Wilson and Kelling (1982) suggests that maintaining and monitoring urban environments to prevent small crimes such as vandalism, public drinking, and fare evasion can create an atmosphere of order and lawfulness, thereby preventing more serious crimes from occurring. The central idea is that visible signs of disorder and neglect, such as broken windows, graffiti, or litter, signal to potential criminals that a community lacks social control and that deviant behavior is tolerated. In such environments, individuals are more likely to engage in criminal activities since they perceive a lower risk of being caught or punished.

Wilson and Kelling (1982) argue that by addressing minor infractions promptly and consistently, authorities can prevent the escalation of crime and disorder. They liken the maintenance of public order to tending a garden: if a single broken window in a building is left unrepaired, it signals a lack of care and invites further vandalism or neglect. Similarly, ignoring minor offenses in a community can lead to an increase in more serious crimes as individuals become emboldened to commit larger transgressions. Thus, the Broken Windows theory advocates for proactive policing strategies that prioritize the maintenance of order and the enforcement of laws, even for minor infractions.

Critics of the Broken Windows theory argue that it oversimplifies the complex social factors that contribute to crime, such as poverty, inequality, and lack of opportunity. They contend that focusing solely on policing minor offenses can lead to the over-policing of marginalized communities and exacerbate tensions between law enforcement and residents. Additionally, there is debate over the effectiveness of aggressive policing tactics, such as stop-and-frisk or zero-tolerance policies, in reducing crime rates. Critics also highlight the potential for racial profiling and discriminatory practices within law enforcement agencies when implementing Broken Windows strategies.

Despite its controversies, the Broken Windows theory has had a significant influence on law enforcement policies and practices in many cities around the world. It has been credited with contributing to the decline in crime rates in some urban areas, although its role in this decline is a subject of ongoing debate among criminologists. The theory continues to shape discussions on crime prevention and the role of police in maintaining public order, prompting communities and policymakers to consider the balance between proactive policing and respecting individual rights and liberties.

The important policy statement and legal basis of the PNP's thrust towards adopting community-oriented policing is prescribed by the law that created it, to wit: It is hereby declared the policy of the State to establish a highly efficient and competent police force that is national in scope and civilian in character, administered and controlled by a National Police Commission (Republic Act No. 8551, 1998).

The paradigm of public service is a guiding principle adopted not only by the PNP but also by the greatest leader who has ever lived. He said, "I came not to BE served, but TO serve," and, "He who would be greatest among you must be the servant of all." The PNP believes that to restore the public's trust, there is a need to change police culture and commit to a community policing paradigm built on honor, service, and responsibility. This includes the following: a) An interactive partnership between the police

and the community, in which citizens have input into the setting of local police department priorities; b) The return of community police officers who patrol in a manner that no longer isolates them from citizens; c) Human resources, both within and outside police departments, will be more emphasized than the hardware and high technology; d) Police organizations will be adaptable to changing environments and will confront the emerging issues of the day, whether they be criminal, legal or political; e) Police organizations will operate much like private organizations, with a greater emphasis on quality service, core values, accountability, and cost effectiveness; and f) Partnership with the community will be a central focus (Revised Police Community Relations Manual, 2012).

Police managers will recognize the interconnectedness between their activities and those of other public services, such as housing, welfare, and employment agencies. The police of the future will view themselves as one part of a community-wide effort to not only deal with crime but also improve community life in general. With the above premises, the PNP deemed the reinvention urgent. It has started programs to reorient the mindset of police officers through the development of a transformation ideology that reflects the character of every police officer as a well-rounded PCR man, as a good father to all the kids, as a friend to the working adults, and a loving son to the elderly. Community policing, a philosophy emphasizing collaboration and partnerships between law enforcement and the communities they serve, has gained traction globally. While the specific implementation models vary across countries, the core principles remain consistent: fostering trust, promoting transparency, and addressing community concerns through shared responsibility. Examining international perspectives on community policing can offer valuable insights into its effective implementation and adaptation in different contexts (Revised Police Community Relations Manual, 2012).

A police department can take many steps to teach its officers the value of maintaining a positive public image for the force. On a personal level, though, each police officer needs to realize the significance. Although professionalism is often overused, it is crucial to the police' career and the public perception of law enforcement. A police officer either projects an image of intelligence, strength, knowledge, and thoughtfulness or an image of incompetence, weakness, foolishness, and stupidity (Baker, 2006). Police have long played a significant role in the community. Maintaining order, responding to crises, and assisting in civil emergencies are some of the numerous responsibilities within the community that the police are required to perform. The public's confidence-building is a part of the police's duties. In addition, police support and promote community involvement and participation.

Nowadays, people call the police to help them with their social issues. Owing to this function, law enforcement is adopting novel police approaches, such as community policing. One of the most significant contributions law enforcement can make to the community is through relations with the community. Although interactions between the police and the community are generally positive, they nevertheless require mutual understanding and trust (Smithson & Young, 2014).

The public's perception of the police is influenced by the different ways they portray themselves to the public. Over the past three decades, the predominant presentation of their work has changed from a "professional" image to one that is more "community oriented." The latter portrays police as responsive partners with the public who care about the general quality of life, whereas the former portrays police as impartially competent law enforcement specialists. However, these prevalent, popular perceptions diverge somewhat from the actual role and function of the police and may have an impact on the services that the public expects from the police. Examining the function and effects of police in a democratic society requires taking public image into account. The legitimacy of police power and citizen compliance with the law can be ascertained by the public's perception of the police. It also affects how much and how well citizens cooperate with the police and engage with them. People who hold an unfavorable perception of the police may be less inclined to cooperate with the police during ordinary and otherwise benign interactions with the public and may also be less willing to engage in investigations or community meetings (The Crankshafts Publishing, 2017).

In America, perceptions of police-community relations among Americans are frequently influenced by not often yet widely reported tragic events. However, research from the Gallup Center on Black Voices shows that people's impressions of policing are also influenced by their own experiences with interactions with the police. Nearly all of those who report having pleasant interactions with police expect similar experiences in the future (95%) and believe they can rely on police to treat them properly (91%). Less than half of those who report having had unpleasant encounters recently, however, make the same statement. Perceptions of general relations between the police and the community also mirror these expectations. Every interaction between the public and the police is significant. Even encounters that appear ordinary have the power to inspire confidence and safety, or they can inspire distrust and suspicion. Shifting more of these encounters from negative to good might completely alter the discourse surrounding policing (Maese & Lloyd, 2023).

In the contemporary concept of policing, the trust and confidence of the community towards law enforcement agencies serve as the cornerstone of social cohesion and public safety. Community stakeholder perceptions of the police have been identified as directly related to police relations with communities (Donnelly et al., 2019). Community interaction with police and the community's

willingness to cooperate with law enforcement depend on the Police Public Image in the community (Schafer et al., 2020). In homogeneous societies, theories about policing by consent are highly applicable since failure to seek public support will likely hinder attempts at effective and efficient police service delivery. In addition, research conducted in large nation states suggests police-citizen relationships are affected by perceptions of police legitimacy typically constructed around notions of trust and confidence in the police (Hunter, 2019).

Safety is still a major obstacle to progress (Ray, 2023). In the Philippines, amidst the coronavirus pandemic, three brutal point-blank killings of ordinary Filipinos further damaged the public's perception of the Philippine National Police, beset by years of corruption, extrajudicial killings, and misbehavior. On April 21, 2020, Winston Ragos, who was mentally challenged, was shot dead by policeman Daniel Florendo Jr. in Quezon City because of an alleged violation of the quarantine protocols. The said policeman is currently facing administrative and criminal probes. On December 20, 2020, Sonia and Frank Gregorio, mother-and-son, were also shot dead by Jonel Nuezca, an off-duty police officer in Paniqui, Tarlac, because of their dispute over the use of boga, which is a locally made noisemaker. The said police officer surrendered, was charged with murder, and eventually pleaded not guilty. Then, on May 31, 2021, Hensie Zinampan, a drunk cop, shot Lilybeth Valdez in the neck in Barangay Greater Fairview, Quezon City. Being enraged after Valdez' sons disrespected him as a policeman motivated him to shoot the victim.

These instances differ from the ones that came before them in three ways. Initially, all the victims were citizens with no authority over the police officers they opposed or the organizations these officers were affiliated with. Second, they were all captured on camera, circulated online, and witnessed by the public, provoking a great deal of resentment. Third, the individuals in these three incidents were ordinary citizens who were caught in unfavorable circumstances; they were not activists, dissidents, or accused drug users or pushers.

These unfortunate events opened the door for inquiries into the police's continued applicability and reignited calls for reform or police abolition (Commoner, 2021). The perception of police officers as "kotong" (extortion) cops has always been problematic, even if the six years of the Duterte administration solidified the culture of violence among them, with the previous president encouraging them and promising to defend them. In light of the numerous instances of police violence, purported judgmental errors, violations of procedures, and pervasive corruption, the PNP leadership's present reform efforts to cleanse the organization are clearly insufficient. Rebooting the PNP's strict accountability system is also necessary. It appears that the decision to release incompetent police officers or place them on a floating status is a planned ploy to trick the public into believing that the offenders are being held accountable.

These officers are either reassigned to different units or are merely transferred. As numerous instances of impunity have demonstrated, this is insufficient. Administrative sanctions appropriate to their transgressions and, if necessary, legal proceedings should be brought against them. The PNP needs to set an example by demonstrating that members of their own ranks are subject to the law. Trust will be withheld from the PNP, and its rogue image will never be restored as long as the public believes it is defending its own. The organization's bad apples will carry on with their immoral behavior since they know they will always get away with it (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2023).

Nevertheless, the recent Tugon ng Masa Survey held by OCTA Research shows that most Filipinos have their trust and are satisfied with the performance of the Philippine National Police, especially in maintaining peace and order. According to the survey, eight out of ten Filipinos (80%) in the country trust the PNP, and nearly eight out of ten (79%) are happy with the PNP Personnel's performance. Although levels of satisfaction and trust differ between areas and socioeconomic groups, the PNP is still supported by the population in general. The PNP is pleased with the survey's outcome. This demonstrates unequivocally how confident and trusting the majority of Filipinos are in their police. This also shows that, despite certain problems plaguing the PNP, most people still value the daily sacrifices made by police officers as they patrol every street corner, investigate crimes, take down criminal organizations, and help those in need (Philippine National Police, 2023).

In a most recent activity of the Philippine National Police in Camp Bado Dangwa in the celebration of the 122nd Police Service Anniversary, Philippine National Police Chief Benjamin Acorda, Jr. encouraged the men and women of the Police Regional Office-Cordillera to carry on the excellent practice of integrating the community in its anti-criminality and community. The PNP has five key areas of priority for improving the quality and effectiveness of its police force: community involvement, information and community technology development, integrity enhancement, employee welfare, and honest law enforcement operations. In addition, the goal of the community engagement agenda is to provide more transparent communication between the public and the police so that the latter can contact their local force without fear and request assistance or even participate in police initiatives (Baguio Midland Courier, 2023).

The public image of police, shaped by a multitude of factors, significantly influences the trust and confidence of community stakeholders towards law enforcement agencies. This research study delves into the intricate dynamics of community stakeholders' perceptions of police public image, aiming to unravel the factors that bolster or erode confidence in law enforcement agencies (Khosa, 2019).

In New York, Eric Garner was killed by a New York City Police Department (NYPD) officer who applied a chokehold while attempting to arrest Mr. Garner for selling loose cigarettes (Keane & Bell, 2019). In another study conducted in South Carolina, a police officer shot Walter Scott in the back and killed him when Mr. Scott attempted to flee on foot following a car stop (Adorjan & Lee, 2019). Likewise, In Texas, Yvette Smith was shot and killed seconds after opening her door for police officers who were responding to a call (Keane & Bell, 2019).

In a research study that includes an examination of how British and Australian policing has evolved and provides a comparative review of the literature on specific issues identified, an analysis of the research data taken indicates that society looks to the police to uphold both the idealized "best of both worlds" that is, integrity and effective enforcement. People would view these idealized police forces as strong and moral. In general, police departments in Australia and Britain have been successful in communicating this notion to the public, at least in terms of public perception and the comfort it offers (Keane & Bell, 2013).

Hence, in both Britain and Australia, police must carefully balance upholding the community's confidence and respect by being a personable, moral, and communicative force while offering policing with confidence and firmness, unafraid to be criticized by some as being overly harsh at times. Democratic policing is not and has never been, a practice that enjoys great support among those who carry it out. Perhaps a better way to put it is as a fight to assure the public, through actions as much as words, that not only will their rights be upheld but also their lives and property (Keane & Bell, 2013).

According to a research study conducted to explore and analyze the causes of trust and distrust in the police in selected urban areas in Ghana, most Ghanaians' views toward the police are determined by how well people think the police are carrying out their responsibilities. The Ghana police force has been receiving constant ratings of ineffectiveness across several performance domains. Yet, when Ghanaians perceive that their local police force effectively combats crime (theft, assaults, and break-ins) and offers support and services to the community, they place a high value on the police. Moreover, this study has shown that procedural justice has an equal role in understanding the trusting connection that exists between the Ghanaian public and the police, in addition to performance theory. Ghanaians desire law enforcement to treat their constituents properly, both effectively and with respect in carrying out their responsibilities (Boateng, 2015).

Furthermore, in a study that aimed to explore the antecedents of public confidence in police in a conflict zone, the security forces' impartiality is the most important factor in determining public trust in law enforcement in a conflict area. In decreasing order of significance, community policing, the media's role, and public perception of the police came next. The study revealed that the citizens' perceptions and officers of the law are in consonance. Both parties considered the impartiality of the Police to be the primary factor influencing the public's trust in the police (Sharma et al., 2021).

On the other hand, another research study that determines and measures factors that influence public opinion of the Police says that for officer community interactions, disorderly communities and neighborhoods with little social coherence and control pose a problem. Police can use local community surveys to identify and address the circumstances and worries of the locals. Additionally, strategies for community policing that boost casual interactions between local law enforcement and the public can benefit the community. Particularly, whether a citizen lived in a disorderly neighborhood, talking to police officers during patrol, or at community events was linked to a favorable impression of police performance in this study. It's possible that those who are more favorable are more likely to approach officers informally (Maxson et al., 2013).

In the Philippines, the visible presence of the police in the community when doing foot patrol, checkpoints, or other policing activities symbolizes social order (Wakefield, 2020). On November 21, 2011, Philippine National Police Director General Nicanor Bartolome issued the Letter of Instruction widely referred to as "Pulis Nyo Po sa Barangay," pursuant to the directive of the Chief PNP to win the community by assigning one policeman in every barangay who will serve as a conduit between the community and the unit or office of the assigned police personnel.

PNP-Memorandum Circular 009 was issued on April 30, 2015, known as the Barangayanihan (Revitalized Barangay Operations Peacekeeping Operations), which strengthens the implementation of the community-oriented policing programs which is a firebrand of shared responsibility of maintaining peace and order between people by applying the doctrine of reciprocal responsibility. According to Quah (2018), strong political will and the adoption of a comprehensive anti-corruption strategy are

necessary for minimizing police corruption. However, these two elements are lacking in the Philippines. The existing anti-corruption measures are undermined by politicians and corrupt elements within Napolcom and the PNP.

A study conducted by the Philippine National Police found that the community accepts that police officers are morally honest and follow the rules set forth by their profession when doing their jobs. Individuals' perceptions of police professionalism and morality vary significantly depending on their role within the community; however, the sex and religion of the community have no bearing on these perceptions. Furthermore, the public authorities, the media, personal observation, documentaries, social media (friends, family, coworkers), and the police themselves were frequently the sources of perception of PNP personnel. The study's findings demonstrated that there was a substantial difference between the way the community saw the police and how the police thought of themselves (Celay-Sagpaey, 2012).

According to research entitled "Public Perception on Job Performance of PNP Personnel," enough information about the citizens' complaints was obtained by the police officers. Additionally, the police were able to respond to people's calls, particularly during emergencies. Regarding the dependability of police performance, it can be said that officers consistently provide solutions to people's problems. It also demonstrates how equitably police officers handle everyone. Furthermore, they approach cases without prejudice and are skilled at handling public concerns without changing their behavior (Pelayo et al., 2019).

3. Methodology

The researcher prepared a letter request before conducting the dialogue. The letter request was addressed directly to the informants as part of this study. The substance of the letter request was a request for permission to grant the researcher access to interview community stakeholders in individual in-depth interviews. Additionally, the letter contained a request to disclose pertinent issues for those who met the inclusion criteria of this study. The researcher submitted the research protocol to the University Ethics Committee Board for ethical review.

Once the request letter was approved, the researcher conducted a courtesy call either at the informants' respective offices or individually, where the informants were under the researcher's observation, before arranging interview sessions. Subsequently, the researcher met each informant in a place where they felt safe and comfortable. If the informants agreed, the interview sessions began. Before the interviews, the researcher discussed and explained the objective of the study to each informant.

The researcher also discussed the procedure of the interview, the privacy of the proceedings, and the identity and rights of the informants. When the informants agreed to be interviewed, the researcher requested each informant to affix their signature on the informed consent form. The signed informed consent served as proof that the informants agreed to be interviewed. A series of interviews were conducted as part of the actual data gathering procedure. The informants were informed that an audio recorder would be used during the interviews.

In addition to the audio recorder, diaries were prepared and signed by each informant after the recorded interviews were transcribed. The researcher informed the informants that the audio-recorded interviews and diaries were for record purposes only. The researcher then transcribed the audio-recorded interviews of the informants. Additionally, the data gathered was analyzed and interpreted with the assistance of the research adviser. Finally, coding was done to secure the identity and confidentiality of each informant.

Before the interview began, the willing informants who met the inclusion criteria were explained the objectives of the study. They were also informed that participation in this research study was voluntary and that they could interrupt or end the interview at any time. Informants did not receive any kind of reward for their involvement, as mentioned in the informed consent. The researcher asked the informants about their available schedules for the interview sessions. Once the schedule was arranged, the researcher introduced the informants to the semi-structured interview guide before conducting the interview sessions. Before this interview guide was used, it was first subjected to checking and validation by a panel of experts and approved by them as well.

The researcher analyzed the data gathered using Colaizzi's (1978) strategy of descriptive phenomenological data analysis. Using this method, themes were extracted and analyzed following the seven steps. The information gathered was coded for easy identification and management by the researcher. The responses were put into categories and themes. These cluster themes were created from the formulated meanings extracted from the significant statements. Lastly, from the cluster themes, the researcher created emergent themes that answered the sub-problems of this study.

The informants of this study were (10) ten individuals from different sectors of society within the Province of Southern Leyte. The study employed individual interviews to maintain the confidentiality of the informants' identities. The inclusion criteria for the informants of the study were as follows: (a) Two representatives from the academic sector, with one coming from the College of

Criminal Justice at Southern Leyte State University and the other from the College of Criminology in Maasin City, Southern Leyte, each with at least two years of teaching experience; (b) two representatives from the business community, one being the President of the Leyte Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the other engaged in the extensive business industry; (c) two informants from the religious community, with one being a Catholic priest from the Padre Burgos Parish Church in the Diocese of Maasin, and the other a pastor of the Fundamental Baptist Church in the Municipality of Macrohon; (d) two elected officials from the province, one being the President of the Association of Barangay Chairmen (ABC) of Southern Leyte, and the other a Barangay Captain of Brgy. San Roque, Liloan, each with at least two years of experience in government service; and finally, (e) two individuals from the ordinary citizenry, one being a vendor and the other a carpenter from the province, both of whom were willing participants in the study, as indicated by the provision of a signed informed consent.

4. Results and Discussion

This chapter provides the presentation and analysis of data. The data that were presented are divided into three (3) parts, namely: the current views of the informants on the public image, the impact of the police public image on the community stakeholder, and the police activities that promote community confidence and trust. The researcher in this phenomenological study meticulously gathered all the data or information that was obtained from the informants during the in-depth interviews. As an outcome of these procedures, an exact quantity of data has been generated. The researcher ensured that an exhaustive record of the individual in-depth interviews, including words and actions, would be maintained. The researcher utilized an audio recorder, which was transcribed verbatim prior to data analysis.

To ensure a thorough comprehension of its contents, each transcript is scrupulously reviewed and reread at the outset. Subsequently, relevant statements concerning the phenomenon under investigation were extracted from each transcript and documented separately with their respective page and line references. After this, the significance of these statements was employed to generate meanings, which were subsequently categorized to offer a thorough explanation. The formulated meanings were classified into categories, clusters of themes, and emergent themes. The results will be incorporated into a comprehensive representation of the phenomenon in the study's conclusions. The fundamental structure of the phenomenon was identified, and the results were condensed to eliminate redundant, misinterpreted, or excessively detailed descriptions. Lastly, the validity of the findings was verified by the research informants' feedback, which guaranteed that the descriptive results were in accordance with their personal experiences.

These emergent themes are formulated as answers to the sub-problems and are summarized as follows: for the current views of the informant on the Police, Public Image consists of two areas: Positive and Negative perception. For the Positive views, Community Engagement and Cooperation are being highlighted by the informant. This means that trust and cooperation were fostered by the active role that police officers played in their communities, as evidenced by their community engagement. Informants expressed gratitude for the visible and supportive presence of police officers. This participation was regarded as vital in establishing positive relationships between the police and the public, as it not only improved safety and order but also enabled the community to perceive the police as approachable and integral members of their society. 2. Trust in Police and Public Safety. The informants conveyed their confidence in the police's dedication to their duties, observing that they were perceived as trustworthy protectors. The community is assured of the police's responsibility to maintain security and promote public welfare as a result of their visible actions and involvement, which foster trust. 3. Commitment to Duty and Profession. The informants emphasize that police officers consistently execute their responsibilities with diligence. This dedication is demonstrated by their regular participation in community events, checkpoints, and ongoing initiatives to improve their public image. This commitment cultivates a favorable perception of the police as professionals who are conscientious and reliable in their commitment to their societal responsibilities.

On the other hand, for the negative views, the use of (1) Excessive Force and Violence are being highlighted. Informants indicated instances in which police actions have resulted in negative perceptions of the police force. In situations where violence appears to be used unnecessarily or targeted disproportionately at specific demographics, these actions contribute to public distrust. (2) Negative Stereotypes and Public Distrust. The informants are apprehensive that the actions of a small percentage of police officers, particularly those who are involved in malfeasance, have the potential to tarnish the entire force. This results in a preconception that all police officers are corrupt or untrustworthy, despite the fact that a significant number of them are conducting their duties effectively. (3). Malfeasance and Inconsistent Law Enforcement. The informants underscore instances in which police are perceived to be engaged in unlawful activities, such as favoring specific individuals based on personal connections or accepting bribery. These actions contribute to the perception of law enforcement that is feeble and inconsistent. Public confidence in the police is undermined by such misconduct, as it implies that the law can be disregarded and that justice is not consistently administered.

Moreover, for the Impact of the Police Public Image to the Community Stakeholders. Emergent themes are being noted : (1). Feeling of Safety and Security. The informants reiterated that the community perceived a feeling of safety and security due to their

visible presence and effective performance of their duties. The police are observed patrolling public spaces and business establishments, ensuring the safety and security of the community. This contributes to a sense of protection among the members of the community. (2). Protecting the Rights and Welfare. The manner in which the police are perceived as their protector of the rights and welfare of the community is illustrative of their role as public defenders. Informants emphasized that the police are the primary source of protection and justice for the public, particularly in instances where legal enforcement is necessary. The police are also regarded as role models for younger generations, motivating them to maintain justice and serve the community. Lastly, for the last sub-problem, Police Activities that Promote Community Confidence and Trust. Four (4) emergent themes were being formulated. (1). Enhanced Police Visibility. The informants perceived the police visibility as a deterrent to crime and a means of assuring public safety. When the police are consistently observed patrolling and engaging in activities in their communities, community members experience a greater sense of security and trust in law enforcement. (2). Community Outreach Program. The informants observed that police initiatives that extend beyond enforcement activities, such as coordinating sports events, conducting educational symposiums, and participating in religious and cultural activities, contribute to the enhancement of their public image. These endeavors are intended to foster trust, enhance police-community relations, and establish a favorable perception of the police force. (3). First Responders in Calamities. The informants indicated the importance of police officers in the community's ability to respond to emergencies, incidents, and calamities promptly. Their active participation in such incidents fosters public trust. It reinforces the perception of the police as dependable and committed public servants who prioritize the safety and well-being of the community. (4). Proactive Information Campaigns. The informants conveyed the strategic utilization of media, particularly social media, by law enforcement to engage with the public. These campaigns involve consistent updates, press briefings, and posts on social media platforms to keep the community informed about police activities and initiatives. This transparency and openness contribute to the establishment of trust and the maintenance of public awareness.

5. Result and Findings

Based on the results, the researcher developed twelve (12) emergent themes. Six (6) emergent themes described the positive and negative views of the informants regarding their current views on the public image. For the positive views, three (3) emergent themes were developed, namely Community Engagement and Cooperation, Trust in Police and Public Safety, and Commitment to Duty and Profession. For the negative views, three (3) emergent themes were also developed, to wit: Use of Excessive Force and Violence, Negative Stereotypes and Public Distrust, and Malfeasance and Inconsistent Law Enforcement. Meanwhile, two (2) emergent themes were formulated to explain how the impact of the police public image affects the community stakeholders, namely, Police as Protector and Police as Public Defender.

On the other hand, four (4) emergent themes were formulated to explain how police activities promote community confidence and trust, namely Enhanced Police Visibility, Community Outreach Program, First Responders in Calamities, and Proactive Information Campaigns. The inquiry's findings have led to the formulation of the following recommendations, suggestions, and implementation: The public image of the police force is crucial within the criminal justice system as they serve as the frontline representatives of government authority and justice in the community. However, this study has highlighted a significant concern regarding police competency. Informants have provided compelling testimonies detailing firsthand experiences with police operations in their communities. These accounts often reveal instances of unfair treatment, corruption, and even allegations of involvement in illegal activities, such as drug trafficking among police officers in the province. Such revelations profoundly impact public perception and trust in law enforcement agencies.

To address these critical issues, it is imperative that the government allocates funds specifically aimed at enhancing the Philippine National Police (PNP). This investment should prioritize the development and implementation of comprehensive training programs for police officers both prior to and during their tenure with the agency. These training initiatives should not merely focus on imparting technical skills and expertise but must also emphasize the cultivation of ethical values, integrity, and a strong sense of accountability among law enforcement personnel.

By bolstering training efforts, the PNP can effectively mitigate the concerns identified in the study. Equipped with enhanced skills and a heightened ethical framework, police officers would be better prepared to uphold justice impartially and professionally within their communities. Such proactive measures not only serve to restore public confidence but also contribute to the overall improvement of law enforcement practices nationwide. Ultimately, investing in the professional development of police officers represents a crucial step toward ensuring a fair, transparent, and accountable criminal justice system that truly serves and protects all members of society.

Moreover, the National Police Commission (NAPOLCOM) plays a pivotal role in the administration and oversight of the Philippine National Police (PNP), holding authority over police entrance examinations and the investigation of irregularities within the force. This study advocates for stricter implementation of NAPOLCOM's responsibilities, emphasizing that leniency can lead to incompetence among police officers. Such inefficiencies not only compromise law enforcement effectiveness but also erode

community perception. Therefore, robust enforcement of NAPOLCOM's duties is crucial to ensure the PNP operates with integrity and competence, fostering greater confidence and reliance from the public. Additionally, character formation and lifelong competency are qualities that require extensive study and specialization. Therefore, this study recommends that the National Police Commission (NAPOLCOM) and Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), which are responsible for police officer recruitment, prioritize the employment of more criminologists. Criminologists undergo rigorous training focused on understanding and combating criminal behavior, making them valuable assets in law enforcement. By increasing the number of criminologists within the Philippine National Police, the agency can enhance its effectiveness in crime prevention and resolution, ultimately contributing to safer communities and improving public trust and perception.

Furthermore, the empirical findings of this study reveal a notable shift in how the community perceives the Philippine National Police (PNP), indicating an evolution in public opinion. Community stakeholders interviewed for the study emphasized that historically, the police were viewed with a mixture of fear and respect, which created a barrier to meaningful interaction. As a result, people often avoided socializing with law enforcement out of apprehension. However, contemporary perspectives from diverse community sectors illustrate a significant change: the police are now regarded as subjects open to criticism rather than figures to be feared.

This transformation in perception reflects a decline in the community's overall respect for law enforcement. The absence of fear has led to a more vocal and critical stance towards the PNP, contributing to low morale among the police officers and a diminished sense of authority and reverence. Consequently, there is a pressing need for the Philippine National Police to reassess their approach and conduct their duties with both competence and compassion. By demonstrating professionalism and a commitment to serving the community fairly and justly, the PNP can rebuild trust and cultivate healthier relationships with stakeholders.

The study underscores the importance of fostering successful partnerships between law enforcement and the community to effectively combat criminality. This entails not only upholding high standards of conduct and integrity but also actively engaging with community members to understand their concerns and needs. By prioritizing transparency, accountability, and responsiveness, the PNP can work towards restoring public perception and fostering a sense of mutual respect and collaboration. Ultimately, these efforts are crucial for enhancing public safety and promoting a harmonious relationship between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

It is also crucial for municipal and city police stations to strengthen their connection with the community, ensuring a deeper understanding of their roles and actions to prevent misconceptions. The study emphasizes the importance of active engagement on social media platforms, where community concerns are frequently discussed. By leveraging social media effectively, police stations can address community frustrations transparently and provide a platform to explain their activities comprehensively. This proactive approach not only fosters positive perceptions but also builds trust and mutual understanding between law enforcement and the community, ultimately enhancing overall public support and cooperation. Every police station shall appoint personnel dedicated to police-community relations who are trained experts in social media and modern technological platforms. This proactive step is essential for the Philippine National Police (PNP) to effectively engage with the community and achieve their organizational objectives. By leveraging these skills, the PNP can enhance communication, address public concerns promptly, and build positive relationships with the community through transparent and accessible online interactions. This approach not only fosters trust and understanding but also strengthens community support for law enforcement efforts across the country.

Police officers shall exhibit unwavering dedication to their profession, aligning themselves with the goals of the Philippine National Police (PNP). Even when not in the public eye, they should diligently fulfill their duties and responsibilities. This commitment ensures that law enforcement efforts are consistently executed with integrity and efficiency, contributing to a safer and more secure environment for all citizens. Subsequently, stakeholders such as the religious, academic, elected officials, and businesses across various sectors of the community should uphold integrity, cooperate with, and support the police during times when their full resources may be stretched thin by other obligations. Active engagement and coordinated efforts between stakeholders and law enforcement can significantly enhance community safety and effectiveness in combating crime.

The Local Government Unit (LGU) shall align its goals with those of the Philippine National Police (PNP). This alignment ensures coordinated efforts in maintaining peace and order within communities. By supporting and collaborating closely with the PNP, LGUs contribute to effective law enforcement, fostering a safer environment for residents, developing trust, and promoting overall community well-being.

The researcher shall disseminate the study's findings effectively to community stakeholders and law enforcement personnel, fostering mutual understanding and collaboration. By bridging the gap between these groups, both parties can explore ways to synergize efforts and contribute positively to their shared objectives. This approach not only enhances communication but also

strengthens community-police relations, ultimately leading to more effective and harmonious interactions for the benefit of all involved.

In conclusion, the study emphasizes the necessity of comprehensive reforms within the Philippine National Police (PNP) to restore public confidence. Essential measures include improving community engagement through transparent communication and enhancing officer training in ethics and accountability. The PNP can enhance the efficacy of law enforcement and develop stronger relationships with the public by addressing these issues. On the other hand, as to the implications for future researchers, this study suggests that future researchers should explore both quantitative and qualitative approaches or employ mixed methods to assess the effectiveness of PNP officers in addressing issues on social media platforms. This approach could enhance current findings and inform policy development. Second, this study proposes that future researchers conduct qualitative studies focusing on the lived experiences of police officers, particularly their hardships and obstacles. This could further illuminate deficiencies within law enforcement and provide valuable insights. Third, future research should evaluate the effectiveness of police-initiated programs that impact community confidence. This will help the PNP create evidence-based programs and effective initiatives across different stations. Fourth, this study recommends that future researchers quantitatively assess community confidence in police officers within the province. Fifth, research on the effectiveness of criminologists serving as police officers in fostering good community relations is also recommended. Finally, this study suggests incorporating these findings into the Criminology curriculum.

5.1 Significance of the Study

The outcome of this study would benefit the following persons or institutions: (1) Community Stakeholders. The study provides an opportunity for community stakeholders to voice their opinions and concerns regarding the police's public image. It can empower the community by giving them a platform to express their views and potentially influence future policing practices. By understanding the perspectives of the community, the study can contribute to enhancing the relationship between the police and the public, leading to improved safety and security within the community. (2) Municipal/City Police Station. By understanding issues relative to police public image, the Chief of the Municipal Police Station (MPS) could develop evidence-based guidelines and strategies that enhance the police public image in the Province of Southern Leyte. (3) PNP Advisory Group. The study provides expert advice in relation to the strategic direction of the PNP, including recommendations on policy formulation and implementation. This helps align the PNP's operations with national security goals and public safety priorities. (4) Philippine National Police (PNP). This study could offer valuable insights into how the PNP is perceived by the community stakeholders in Southern Leyte. Understanding the public image could help the PNP identify areas of strength and areas needing improvement in their community relations, policies, and practices. It could aid in fostering trust and cooperation between the PNP and the community by addressing any negative perceptions or concerns that may exist. (5) Police Officers. The study provides an opportunity for community stakeholders to voice their opinions and concerns regarding the police's public image. It could empower the community by giving them a platform to express their views and potentially influence future policing practices. By understanding the perspectives of the community, the study could contribute to enhancing the relationship between the police and the public, leading to improved safety and security within the community. (6) Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG). The findings of the study could inform policy-making and decision-making processes within the DILG regarding police-community relations and public image management. It could aid in the formulation of more effective strategies and initiatives aimed at improving police-community relations and fostering trust and cooperation between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve. (7) Business Community. Understanding how the business community perceives the police could shed light on the level of trust and cooperation between the police and community stakeholders. Positive perceptions might foster greater collaboration in crime prevention and safety initiatives. (8) Religious Community. Religious communities often advocate for social justice and equity. Assessing their perceptions of the police could shed light on issues such as racial profiling, discrimination, and the fair treatment of marginalized groups within law enforcement practices. (9) Local Government Unit (LGU). By understanding the peace and order situation of the province, LGUs Chief Executives could develop a comprehensive strategy on how to win back the eroding trust and confidence of the community in the police. (10) Elected Official. Elected officials are responsible for shaping law enforcement policies and providing oversight. Understanding their perceptions of the police public image could influence the development of legislation, budget allocation for law enforcement agencies, and oversight mechanisms to ensure accountability and transparency. (11) Academic Institutions. The study could contribute to the academic discourse, particularly on the formulation of syllabi emphasizing police community relations and public image management. It could serve as a valuable resource for researchers and scholars interested in understanding the dynamics of police-community relations in the Philippine context, particularly in the Province of Southern Leyte.

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