

Lived Experiences of PNP Police Community Relations Officers in Samar 2nd District

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Abstract

This study delved into the experiences of Philippine National Police (PNP) police-community relations officers in the 2nd district of Samar province. Criticized for its underperforming economy due to insurgent threats, this district provided a backdrop for exploring the role of police in community relations, focusing on anti-insurgency programs. The research employed a phenomenological, qualitative approach to uncover deeper insights.

This study used a phenomenological research design. Ten (10) highly experienced policecommunity relations officers from various areas in Samar, including Catbalogan, Basey, Calbiga, San Sebastian, Hinabangan, Jiabong, Motiong, Paranas, Pinabacdao, and Marabut, were meticulously chosen as informants. These officers, with a minimum of two years of experience, were selected from the Samar provincial police records, ensuring the reliability and richness of the data.

Interviews, the primary method of data collection, were recorded using a smartphone application, ensuring detailed and accurate transcriptions. This meticulous approach to data collection, with most responses in English and a small portion in the local dialect, which was translated for clarity, further enhances the reliability and comprehensiveness of the findings.

The study identified nine emergent themes: Teamwork is the Key, The Risks Are There, It's All About the Funds, Education Helps, Consistency, Careful Planning, Self-Policing, and Hope for the Future. These themes highlighted the importance of teamwork between the police and community, acknowledged the risks in implementing police-community relations programs, and noted funding challenges and aligning with government initiatives. The officers expressed continuous effort and aspiration in their roles, emphasizing the need for collaborative planning and self-policing.

Keywords: Criminal Justice, Police Community Relations, Police Community Relation officers, Bridging gaps, Connecting People, Establishing Rapport, Phenomenological Research, Relationship, Involvement, Support

Introduction:

The relationship between law enforcement agencies and their communities is crucial for ensuring peace, safety, and social harmony. This relationship is particularly significant in the context of the Philippine National Police (PNP), where officers are often the primary point of contact between the police and the community.

Effective community policing rests on trust, mutual understanding, and strong relationships between the police and the community (Sun et al., 2019). Police-community relationships are essential for public safety, as they foster cooperation, facilitate communication, and promote collective problem-solving (Gill et al., 2017).

Despite the importance of this topic, more research is needed regarding the lived experiences of police officers working in community relations roles. These officers often face unique challenges and opportunities not adequately captured in traditional law enforcement research (Bradford, 2020).

One critical aspect often missing in traditional research is this work's emotional and psychological impact on the officers. They frequently navigate high-stress situations while striving to maintain a positive, approachable demeanor. Understanding how these dynamics affect their well-being and job performance could offer valuable insights into enhancing their support systems and training.

Expanding the body of research to include the lived experiences of police-community relations officers is crucial for developing a more comprehensive understanding of effective law enforcement strategies. This can lead to better-equipped officers, improved community relations, and a more harmonious and cooperative society.

Objective of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to explore and understand the lived experiences of Philippine National Police (PNP) police-community relations officers in the 2nd district of Samar Province. This district is notable for its underperforming economy, primarily attributed to persistent insurgent threats. By examining these officers' personal and professional experiences, the study aims to uncover the complexities and nuances of their roles in maintaining and enhancing community relations within a challenging environment.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to delve into the life experiences of Philippine National Police (PNP) police-community relations officers in the 2nd district of Samar Province. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the informants' experiences in implementing the programs against insurgency?
2. How are the programs against insurgency implemented?
3. What are the aspirations of the Informants to improve program implementations against insurgency?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological research approach, a type of qualitative research. As posited by Creswell and Poth (2017), qualitative research is exploratory in nature, delving beneath the surface to explore the intricacies of human experiences. Its primary aim is to gain insights into people's lived experiences, what they do, how they use things, and what they need in their daily or professional lives. In this context, the study seeks to explore the experiences of PNP chiefs regarding police-community relations in Samar's 2nd District, focusing on patrol activities, organizational work, and community interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Population and Sample of the Study

This study's population consisted of 10 selected police-community relations officers from different cities and municipalities of Samar. Informants should have at least two years of experience as police-community relations officers.

Instrumentation

As part of the research methodology, the investigator developed an interview guide, a standard tool used in qualitative research to facilitate in-depth exploration of participant experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This guide comprised open-ended questions designed to allow informants to express their perceptions and experiences about their life satisfaction through medical and welfare services.

Open-ended questions, as defined by Creswell and Poth (2017), are inquiries that enable respondents to describe and interpret the experiences and events that influence their life satisfaction. These questions allow participants to share detailed, nuanced responses that can yield rich data for analysis.

The prepared questions were then used to conduct individual and focus group discussions with selected informants. While most interviews were conducted face-to-face, some were conducted online via Google Meet, offering flexibility and convenience to the informants (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Hypothesis of the Study

The practical implementation of police-community relations programs by PNP policecommunity relations officers in the 2nd district of Samar is significantly influenced by factors such as teamwork, funding, education, and careful planning. These factors impact the officers' ability to engage with the community, mitigate insurgency threats, and improve public safety and trust in law enforcement.

Results and Discussion

This study is presented through qualitative method and thematic analysis, which identifies, analyzes, and reports patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2020). The six phases of thematic analysis were used to analyze the collected data.

The researcher was able to extract one hundred (100) significant statements from the informants' responses and formulate the same number of core meanings. Most of the informants answered professionally in plain English to allow them to express their part freely, and some answered in a combination of English and Filipino.

After meticulous data collection from the informants, nine distinct themes emerged. These themes were crafted to encapsulate the informants' experiences, aspirations, and strategies for implementing programs against insurgencies.

The first set of themes addresses the informants' experiences as police-community relations officers. Among these, teamwork is the Key, The Risks Are There, it's All About the Funds, and Education Helps. Three themes were generated regarding strategies for implementing programs against insurgencies: consistency, Careful Planning, and SelfPolicing. Finally, regarding the informants' aspirations for program improvement, a single theme was crafted: hope for the Future.

I am unfolding the life stories of the informants as police-community relations officers, as shown below in the presentations and elucidations of emergent themes.

I. Experiences of the Informants in the Implementation of the Programs Against Insurgency

Unfolding the lived experiences of Police Community Relations Officers (PCRO) based on the interview made me realize that being in that position requires great dedication and sacrifice to implement such programs against insurgency. I have generated five (5) emergent themes that focus on the informants' positive and negative experiences. The following themes are:

A. Positive Experiences

1. Teamwork is the Key. The first theme reflects the fulfillment of police-community relations officers in terms of a positive relationship with the community. It focuses on the importance of having an excellent teamwork-type relationship between the police and the citizens of the community. Informant 1 said that:

Working as a police community relations officer is easy whenever the people cooperate. Despite the sensitivity of the issue, there are barangays that cooperate with us. This may be because they no longer want rebels present in their barangay (I1:SS1).

The education sector is also a contributing factor to a good community relationship with the police. Informant 8 stated that:

In our KKDAT (Kabataan Kontra Droga at Terorismo) drive, we visit schools, especially those with students coming from upland barangays. We hold symposiums specifically on drug and terrorism awareness, though some are hesitant to cooperate in this program. We also give out flyers and meet with teachers and school facilitators to help us with this matter (FGD 8:SS5).

Recognition of their cooperation and support for police-community programs also boosts the morale of those who volunteer to participate in police-community relations programs. Informant 2 said:

We organize youth and other community groups and interact with other existing community groups that volunteer to join our program on drugs and terrorism. In appreciation of their support, we hand out certificates and other tokens of appreciation. By doing so, this program is usually well accepted (I2:SS2).

B. Negative Experiences

1. The Risks Are There. This theme delves into the negative experiences of the informants regarding the risks of implementing police-community relations programs. Informant 7 stated that:

There are times when we feel discouraged when the community does not participate, even in just accepting informative flyers. We think that they are scared of the rebels visiting their barangays, so instead of participating or helping us, they often do not get involved (FGD 7:SS2).

Being a police community relation is stressful, especially when programs don't go about as expected. Informant 8 shared his experience and said:

In our area, many of the barangays are very cooperative, but in some areas, such as those far from the downtown areas, many are afraid to be involved in any program we do. Sadly, there are some areas that we cannot reach because they are occupied by the NPA (FGD 8:SS2).

2. It's All About Funds. This theme delves into the problems encountered by the informants about funding police-community relations programs. Informant 8 stated that:

Sometimes, I use my money to fund activities. For example, when we held a symposium with the barangay tanods, I knew they would not participate if we did not give them snacks (FGD 8:SS3).

Informant 10 also said funding for police-community programs takes much work. He stated that:

Aside from the orders coming from our superior officers, we usually plan before executing the program. We will check if we have the available equipment and funds to continue the programs (FGD 10:SS6).

1. Beware of the Scare. This theme depicts the fear inhibiting the communities cooperation and participation, as people worry about being labeled as police sympathizers and facing insurgent retaliation. Samar's difficult terrain, with many remote barangays only accessible by foot, further complicates these efforts. Informant 1 stated that:

In times like these, there would always be people that would not cooperate with us. Especially they are afraid that is why most of the time we don't get the cooperation we need (I1:SS2).

2. Education Helps. This theme depicts problems encountered by the informants concerning different points of view and having problems getting along with the government and its programs. Informant 2 stated that:

In areas where education from schools is far reaching and especially in areas where most of the insurgents reside, people are more hesitant with government services as if they feel that the government has failed them and is not obliged to help them. Some even resort to debates on political issues (I2:SS9).

The police station must recognize the importance of education in a good policecommunity relationship. Informant 7 revealed that:

We need help from the education sector, especially in introducing awareness of deceptive recruitment. We understand that children from far-flung areas are exposed to insurgents. We talk to teachers, especially in a symposium on drugs and terrorism (FGD 7:SS9).

II. How the Programs Against Insurgency are Implemented

Listed below are the three (3) themes of how the informants implemented policecommunity relations.

1. Consistency. This theme depicts the informants' experiences regarding the continuous effort in implementing police-community relations programs. Informant 4 stated that:

The provincial office is constantly monitoring our achievements. Raising awareness of drugs and terrorism may be as simple as doing information drives. There are follow-up programs that keep the community interested and encourage them to participate in these programs (I5:SS7).

With the community's support in participating and helping achieve the goals of such programs. It gives a sense of fulfillment on the police side. Informant 4 added a statement that:

Some areas are very hard to reach, and we sometimes resort to going on foot to these far-flung areas to conduct information drives. As police officers, we feel good knowing we are accepted, and the community feels secured if we are there (I4:SS7).

2. Careful Planning. This theme describes the meticulous planning of the police before initiating a community relations program on insurgents. Informant 7 stated that:

Most of the time, I have a conference meeting first with my men regarding the program or activity we are going to accomplish. This requires a solid plan because, to some, these are just simple programs. But we have to bear in mind that we are going to areas where there is a possibility of an attack, so we need to be prepared (FGD 7:SS6).

Informant 7 also has the same concept as the statement of Informant 6, stating that: Our chief of police orders all programs.

I am usually the one who plans and disseminates instructions to my men for facilitating the program (FGD 8:SS6).

Connecting with different community organizations also helps achieve such goals in policecommunity relations. Informant 8 of the mentioned:

We organized youth groups for symposiums and other activities related to drugs and awareness. These civilian groups are very important because the people look at them as examples of role models (I3:SS6).

3. Self-Policing. This theme depicts how the community helps implement this program as well. Informant 9 stated that:

We conducted an information drive against deceptive recruitments and the perils of becoming an NPA. We created a student organization whose goal is to encourage other students not to join the insurgents. That's basically most of it because now we are more focused on programs addressing this pandemic (FGD 9:SS5).

Tapping into community organizations, especially youth groups, may be challenging. Informant 3 recalled that:

This time, we had organized a symposium in school where participants were student officers. These students are very curious about the issues of terrorism, and they are well aware of the situation. There were feedback that they would help by advising their classmates not to pursue joining the CPP-NPA (I3:SS5).

Aside from the strategies mentioned above, Informant 3 also stated that the community needs to be involved in being aware and imparting knowledge gained to others. He stated that:

The police cannot stand alone without the help of the community. The civilians must be well aware of the importance of their role in police-community relations. Aside from the vital information that helps us in the investigation, they should also be involved in sharing their ideas on crime prevention awareness with their fellow citizen (I3:SS6).

III. Aspirations of the Informants for the Professional Growth

Below is a theme that describes the informants' aspirations for the progress of policecommunity relations against insurgents, for their office and the community as well.

1. Hope for the Future. This theme depicts the aspirations of police-community relation officers in their field of work. Informant 3 stated that:

My goal is to end this insurgency in my area of responsibility using PCR programs. If we encourage everyone not to join the NPA, then I will be a very happy police officer (FGD 9:SS8).

The local government should focus on funding to help the police on programs against insurgencies. Informant 10 mentioned that:

We need local government support and funding to improve our programs, especially in this modern age when the internet already plays a vital role in crime prevention (I4:SS7).

It is the informant's aspiration to foresee the continuous progress of the policecommunity relations program. Informant 8 also added that:

One goal is to have our community participate in helping us police officers. Another is to have an effective program that would lessen, if not stop, deceptive recruitment amongst our municipality's youth (FGD 8:SS8).

Analysis of Data

The researcher used Colaizzi's method within the phenomenological tradition to derive significant emergent themes from the re-grouped clusters through the formulated meanings (Pojanapunya & Todd, 2020). These themes were categorically simplified to narrate the unfolding life experiences of the police community relations officer in Samar's 2nd district.

This study is primarily founded on three theories. First, Transformational Leadership by Burns (1978), where the theory posits the importance of fostering autonomy in individuals, empowering them to innovate and problem-solve independently, thereby elevating collective efficacy and learner achievement (Bostwick, 2018).

The Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory which is a support theory by Graen and Uhl-Bien (2018) emphasizes the significance of the relationships between leaders and followers, which may be influenced by personal characteristics. Rather than focusing solely on the traits of effective leaders, LMX prompts a multifaceted view of leadership, highlighting the roles of the leader, the follower, and the dynamic relationship between them.

Path-Goal Theory by House (2018) is another theory outlines a leader's style or behavior that best fits the employee and work environment to achieve a goal.

I. Experiences of the Informants in the Implementation of the Programs Against Insurgency. The following themes were formulated unfolding the lived experiences of the informants:

A. Positive Experiences

1. Teamwork is the Key. These theme mirrors the fulfillment of a station police community relations officer in the performance of their duties. It basically focuses on one of the major goals of community relations, which is having a good teamwork like relationship with the community where the community heartily participates and supports the police community relations office on its programs. Despite the scare of insurgents present in their area but with the hope of attaining peace. The community resorts to aiding our police officers on programs addressed on the insurgent's issues and others.

This theme is anchored on the path-goal theory which can best be thought of as a process in which leaders select specific behaviors that are best suited to the employees' needs and the

working environment so that they may best guide the employees through their path in the obtainment of their daily work activities or goals (Northouse, 2013).

The police as well as the community should need to understand the importance of the fundamentals of policing especially in crime prevention. The community's support is the key to solve the insurgency menace in our country

B. Negative Experiences

1. The Risks Are There. This theme describes the negative experiences of the informant being a police community relations officer. The informants are hesitant on implementing police community relations programs on insurgency. Due to risks involved, safety and security not just by their fellow police officers but also the whole community as well. Because of present insurgents in there area, the community may resort not to participate in police community relations programs but to any government agency as well.

2. It's All About the Funds. This theme highlights the essential role of adequate funding for the success of Police Community Relations (PCR) programs addressing insurgency. Effective PCR initiatives need sufficient financial resources to ensure quality and efficacy. Without proper funding, these programs face significant challenges in planning, equipment procurement, and officer motivation, ultimately compromising their effectiveness. Thus, financial support is crucial for achieving meaningful and successful community relations and counter-insurgency efforts.

The theme aligns with the Path-Goal Theory of leadership, which emphasizes that leaders must provide necessary resources and remove obstacles to help followers achieve their goals. In Police Community Relations (PCR) programs, adequate funding is essential for developing and executing effective initiatives. Without sufficient financial support, PCR officers face significant barriers, similar to followers lacking necessary resources. Thus, the theme underscores the critical need for financial resources to ensure successful community relations and counter-insurgency efforts, reflecting the principles of the Path-Goal Theory.

3. Beware of the Scare. This theme explores the profound impact of fear on community engagement in areas affected by insurgency, particularly in Samar. The challenging terrain of this mountainous province, with many remote barangays only accessible by foot, exacerbates the difficulties in implementing Police Community Relations (PCR) programs. Fear of insurgents and being identified as police sympathizers significantly hampers community cooperation and participation. This pervasive fear, especially in designated red areas, often leads to reluctance not out of distrust for the police but due to concerns about potential repercussions from insurgents. Consequently, fear remains a major barrier to achieving effective community relations and cooperation in these high-risk regions.

The theme aligns with the Path-Goal Theory of leadership, which emphasizes removing obstacles and providing support to achieve goals. In Samar, fear of insurgency is a major barrier to community cooperation in Police Community Relations (PCR) programs. Leaders must recognize and mitigate this fear, navigating the challenging terrain and building trust to ensure community engagement. Thus, the theme underscores the importance of addressing fears to facilitate effective PCR efforts, reflecting the principles of the Path-Goal Theory.

4. Education Helps. This theme describes the negative experience of the informant in terms of the educational status of citizens in communities at far flung areas. Because of the lack of proper education, the ideals of the community may be easily swayed by the insurgents and may resort not to support such programs. Raising awareness on deceptive recruitment and others maybe cliché as it may seem but is at it utmost importance. This maybe the only education there getting specifically on issues on insurgency.

This theme conforms with transformational leadership theory which indicate that fearless leaders need the self-confidence and courage that allows them to reach out to others. That they are acutely aware that transformation is not a one-person performance, that they must take aim at their goals not as lone heroes but as members of a unified effort. The academic managers realize that their role is to be present, to show up for students, staff, and community, and then to get out of the way to allow students, staff, and community to take up the challenge. They make the structural and institutional arrangements that promote risk-taking and alter the culture of the school (Gunn, 2018). Transformational leadership begins by getting reflective. School leaders and teachers often rely on tried and true practices that may be comfortable, but ineffective. To truly transform a community, we must question and sometimes abandon habits, beliefs, practices, and mindsets that no longer work.

II. How the Programs Against Insurgency are Implemented

1. Consistency. This theme depicts the consistency on the implementation of police community relations program specifically on insurgency. This theme also discusses the motivation of the community realtion office in continuing such programs

The Path-Goal model, a leadership theory attributed to House and Mitchell (1974), is a fitting representation of this theme. This theory postulates that a leader's style or behavior should align optimally with the employee and work environment to realize a specific goal. The primary objective is to amplify employee motivation, empowerment, and satisfaction, thereby fostering productivity within the organization.

2. Careful Planning. This theme discusses the strategy of the police community relations officer in preparing for the programs to be implemented and working with other government agencies and other local community groups. Insurgency being a serious issue alone often times require two or more groups for a program to work.

This theme resonates with the Path-Goal theory. According to House and Mitchell (1974), leadership stimulates motivation by increasing the number and variety of rewards that followers glean from their work. Moreover, leadership bolsters motivation by delineating a clear and easy path towards the goal, achieved through coaching and direction. This involves removing obstacles and hindrances to goal attainment and making the work itself intrinsically satisfying (Mittal & Dhar, 2018).

3. Self-Policing. This theme reflects on the strategies applied on letting the community feel a sense of responsibility. That they also are responsible in preventing crimes. That the police alone cannot stand without their cooperation.

This theme is anchored on the theory of transformational leadership. It is when leader behaviors influence followers and inspire them to perform beyond their perceived capabilities.

Transformational leadership inspires people to achieve unexpected or remarkable results. It gives workers autonomy over specific jobs, as well as the authority to make decisions once they have been trained. This induces a positive change in the follower's attitudes and the organization as a whole. Transformational leaders are described to hold positive expectations for followers, believing that they can do their best. As a result, they inspire, empower, and stimulate followers to exceed normal levels of performance. Transformational leaders also focus on and care about followers and their personal needs and development (Riggio, 2009).

III. Aspirations of the Informants to Improve Program Implementations Against Insurgency

1. Hopeful for the Future. This theme reflects the aspirations of the police community relations officers in terms of foreseeing the continuous development of the community relation based programs on insurgencies, his desires for the improvement of the community and police relationship.

This theme is anchored on transformational leaders which focuses on transforming others to support each other and the organization as a whole. Followers of a transformational leader responds by feeling trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect for the leader and are more willing to work harder than originally expected.

Bass (1999) built on the work of Burns (1978) by elucidating the psychological mechanisms underpinning transformational and transactional leadership. According to Bass, transformational leaders exhibit four distinctive factors: individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence. Unlike transactional leaders, transformational leaders transcend self-actualization. They value the significance of transcending self-interests, a perspective often overlooked by those who perceive self-actualization as the pinnacle of development (Bass, 1999).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study revealed that most police community relations officers in Samar's 2nd district emphasize the significance of teamwork and community cooperation in successfully implementing anti-insurgency programs. Despite the inherent risks and challenges, such as insufficient funding and community fear of insurgents, these officers strive to foster positive relationships and educate the public on the importance of their involvement in maintaining peace and security.

To improve the effectiveness of these programs, all personnel within the police community relations offices must recognize the importance of their role and undergo advanced training in public relations and community engagement. Enhanced funding is essential for acquiring necessary equipment and conducting outreach programs, especially in remote areas lacking internet connectivity. The local government units should take a proactive stance by supporting these initiatives financially and organizing activities that promote community relations, mainly targeting the youth to prevent insurgent influence.

Moreover, active community participation is vital for the success of these programs. Encouraging residents to engage in these initiatives not only boosts the morale of the officers but also strengthens the collective effort against insurgency and criminality. Future studies should focus on the experiences of police chiefs in insurgency-prone areas, the impact on students living in such

regions, and the psychological effects on residents to further enhance the understanding and management of these challenges.

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