

CITIZENS' SATISFACTION WITH THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICES AND COMMUNITY POLICE FORUMS IN DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT:

Societies' views concerning the Criminal Justice System institutions are shaped not only by opportunities to interact with such institutions during normal work but also in part by efforts due to the larger mission (of these institutions) of encouraging and supporting such attitudes. After 1994, the new leadership in the South African Government promoted the importance of citizen-police relationships to enhance the quality of police services and, consequently, its impact on community policing. Moreover, in any democracy, the public's attitude strongly shapes the policies and decisions of Criminal Justice System institutions such as the police. It is precisely in this context that the primary objective of this paper is to explore the Durban community's satisfaction with the South African Police Services (SAPS) and the Community Police Forums (CPFs) in crime combating. A qualitative research approach was adopted to explore such perceptions in the study area. The findings collected through focus group discussions (FGDs) and semi-structured interviews with the community members suggest that citizens were less satisfied with SAPS and CPFs in the study area, partly owing to the perceptions of corruption and lack of trust. These findings may be used as a guide, especially by the community members and the police, to focus on issues which affect most of the community particularly those that may lead to worse results if not timeously attended to. This paper recommends that initiatives of building trust and combating corruption be jointly organised, as these can assist in police confidence by the society.

KEYWORDS: Criminal Justice System, community policing, community Police forum, South African Police Service, citizens, satisfaction, Durban

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1. INTRODUCTION

Adding to the role of traditional law enforcement, police are expected to facilitate public quality of life by being engaged in the community. The police draw closer to that objective by addressing the problems of fear and insecurity in communities. Hence, citizen support is essential for police work to succeed; it is necessary that the two co-exist to build a safe community and achieve mutual benefits. After 1994, the SAPS was required in terms of the South African Police Service Act 68 of 1995 (as amended) to form partnerships with the broader community to address crime problems in South Africa, hence the establishment of CPFs. Therefore, an increasing concern over the relationship between police and the community prompted scholars to examine the nature of citizen attitudes toward police service, policy, and performance.

The impact of crime on the social and economic life of a country urges for crime solutions that work. Moreover, there is scholarly agreement that cost-effective and efficient policing requires a joint approach by the police and communities, as well as a strong political will to deal with crime. Interestingly, few studies have compared public attitudes across varied community contexts ranging from rural areas, townships, small to mid-sized cities, and suburbs (Verma, Das & Abraham, 2013). It is precisely in this context that the primary objective of this paper is to examine differences in citizens' perceptions of SAPS and CPFs across the township and suburban areas of Durban, in a nation experiencing rapid increase of crime. Furthermore, this paper aims to suggest evidence-based strategies to improve the community-police relations in the area.

2. COMMUNITY-POLICE RELATIONS PERSPECTIVE

Ecological research on crime (e.g., Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; Sampson & Groves, 1989), as well as research on policing in social contexts (e.g., Reisig & Cancino, 2004) suggested that residential location affected attitudes toward police, due to the differences in levels of crime and disorder, informal social controls, and styles of policing. Moreover, Durkheim's (1933) mechanical and organic evolutionary societal typologies illustrated the distinctions between less developed rural areas and highly developed urban settings (e.g., familiarity versus complexity), suggesting that rural and urban areas generated the discrepancy in not only crime but public attitudes toward the police, as a result of environmental differences (Ashley & Orenstein, 1995; De Coppens, 1976; Durkheim, 1933). Societal differences in regard to the presence of social controls, cultural or philosophical dynamics in South Africa, especially in Durban may offer some comparative value.

3. COMMUNITY POLICING IN SOUTH AFRICA

The South African elections of April 1994 ushered in a democracy and redefined the political and social context within which policing in South Africa was revolutionised. As already indicated in the previous chapter, the South African Police Service (SAPS) was established on 27 January 1995 in terms of Section 214 of the Interim Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1993. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, consequently makes provision under section 205 for the establishment of a National Police Service that is transparent, accountable, representative, legitimate and impartial. The Constitution further prescribes in Section 222 community policing as the style of policing to be adopted by the SAPS as a “vehicle” to improve police-community relations and, in general, service delivery to all its citizens.

These requirements stipulated in the Constitution demand a fundamental reassessment and transformation of the nature and style of policing in South Africa from denying the human rights of most South Africans during the ‘apartheid era’ to gaining the trust and respect of all. This includes changing the basic assumptions of the individual police officer concerning the organisation and its environment. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 prescribes that community policing must be adopted so that the SAPS can obtain greater public legitimacy and acceptance and in general improve service delivery to all South Africa’s citizens. Through these provisions, the Ministry of Safety and Security developed and implemented several policies, plans and strategies to give meaning to the prescripts of the Constitution.

Community policing has generally been viewed as the responsibility of a particular function within the SAPS (Pelser, 2002:24). This responsibility is interpreted at various levels, primarily in terms of the establishment and maintenance of the Community Police Forums (CPF’s) and community policing has been interpreted by SAPS members as an add-on function to the other responsibilities of the police (Pelser, 2002). This is an indication why, in some police stations in South Africa, community policing is not regarded as an important component of policing. The result of this attitude is that community policing cannot be sustained in the long-term. Oliver (2004) opined that for community policing to be effectively implemented, there is a need to plan for its short, medium and long-term sustainability.

Koning (2000) argues that the government has the moral and constitutional obligation to guarantee a safe and secure living environment for the society by upholding law and order. This is usually done through the establishment and

implementation of policing structures, programs and strategies together with adequate delegated authority to implement these. Thus, community policing was established in the post-apartheid South Africa to help in acquiring a safe and secure environment for its people.

3.1. Some factors affecting community policing in South Africa

While community policing in South Africa was founded on the above values, its operationalisation has not been without challenges. Below are some of the challenges that are worth noting:

3.1.1. Police organisational culture

Police culture is best defined as the values, norms, perspectives and craft rules that inform police conduct (Verma, Das & Abraham, 2013). Culture is the foundation on which a social group functions (Palmiotto, 2011:35). Purpura (2001) defines culture as the system of values and meanings shared by a group or society. Police culture is also seen as an occupational culture as it provides a shared lifestyle (Stevens, 2003). The police subculture is marked by certain differences from the dominant culture, such as their occupation, training, knowledge of crime and caution when dealing with citizens when on duty (Purpura, 2001). The police subculture is an essential element of the police's reaction to crime, dealing with any other issues pertaining to their mandate, and the level of cooperation and partnership between the police and the community (Verma, et al, 2013).

Police subculture can either be positive or negative and has a significant influence on officer behaviour (Skogan, 2006). Studies indicate that officers who hold negative attitudes towards community members find the transformation process in the SAPS difficult to accept. According to Thibault, Lynch and McBride (2004), the police must overcome their resistance to change and turn the established police culture into a positive force through proper planning and training.

3.1.2. Resistance to change

Resistance to change appears to be a contributing factor in the slow transformation of the SAPS. Officials who resist change do not always understand what community policing means in relation to their current and future functions. There is the fear of the unknown, as they feel that their power and authority as police officials are being eroded. Some officials do not believe that community policing is the way forward, and often these officials act in contradiction to the spirit of community policing. These individuals will sometimes express their lack of support of community policing openly. In situations like these, police management finds it difficult to implement community policing (William, 2010).

According to Van Graan (2008), change is stimulated by rapid environmental change and uncertainty. Schwarz and Shulman (2007) argue that organisations of all kinds must deal with regulatory, cultural, economic, technological and physical environments that are potentially changing more rapidly than the organisations themselves. This means that the pressure on organisations to adapt and change structures and culture is a major challenge. The main objective for transformation and restructuring in the SAPS was to ensure a change of attitudes. The management of the SAPS can play a significant role in facilitating change by encouraging officials, particularly at the lower levels, to adapt to changes.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Wong (2008) offers a viewpoint community-police relations through the Social Resource Theory that addresses the following three main questions:

- (a) What is the role and function of the police?
- (b) What is the relationship of the police with the people, and
- (c) Why do people call the police?

The Social Resource theory repositions the idea of crime and policing from the angle of the state to that of the people. From the people's viewpoint, crime is a personal problem resulting from people's unmet expectation, scarcity of resources and police inefficiency. The police in effect are social resources, which are supposed to solve the problems of the people concerning crime. Therefore, the ultimate purpose of community policing is to ensure better, responsive and responsible efficient and effective police service. The theory is of the people, for the people and by the people, a theory of democratic governance, empowerment, and a theory of self-help (Wong, 2008). The social resource theory begins from observing that crime represents illegality but only from the state point of view. However, for the people, crime represents one of the experiences of life. The theory represents a radical shift in theorising community policing because it completely gives people the power and makes the police influence a social resource, which is made visible by the state by choosing within the citizens to address societal ills.

5. METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted a qualitative research approach. This approach used a phenomenological design that is both descriptive and exploratory in nature. For this study, the use of a qualitative research approach enabled an in-depth appreciation of the participants' responses and a detailed understanding of the citizens' views of the SAPS and CPFs on crime combating in Durban.

5.1. Study Population

The data for this study was collected in two locations in Durban namely: Glenwood suburb and Cato Manor Township. These chosen areas reveal a high crime rate and the manner in which police respond to community members influenced the decision to choose such areas. The sample consisted of Sixty (60) participants ranging from community leaders (ward counsellors), business and ordinary members of the communities. Their complex and detailed views of the SAPS and CPFs on crime combating in the study area was explored.

5.1.1. Table for selected study sample

Community Leaders: Ward Counsellors (KIIs)	Community Members: Business and Ordinary Citizens (FGDs)	Total
Cato Manor: 1 Glenwood: 1	Cato Manor: 29 Glenwood: 29	60

The total number of participants in both study areas was fifty-eight (58) for Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). In each study area, there were two (2) Community leaders- Ward Counsellors), one (1) from each area for the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). Participants included Africans, Whites, Indians and Coloureds, speaking different languages. Some were fluent in isiZulu and English, to be precise, and any language of understanding referring to selected residents of the study areas.

5.2. Sampling procedures

To select the participants of this study, purposive sampling was used. This sampling method is based entirely on the judgement of the researcher. Researchers rely on their experience, ingenuity and previous research findings to obtain participants deliberately to ensure that the sample obtained may be regarded as representative of the relevant population (Huysamen, 2001). The utilisation of purposive sampling involved handpicking participants from the target population (community members). This sampling was relevant to this study because the participants selected informed the researcher's understanding of the area of exploration. The information collected provided the appropriate and relevant data required to illuminate the researcher's understanding of community-police relations and community policing.

5.3. Data Collection Techniques

The study required the participants to be able to express their views and perceptions freely, therefore, it utilised interviews to collect data. Interviews are a method of gathering information through oral transformation using an interview schedule. Shneiderman and Plaisant (2005:314) highlight that using interviews has the following advantages:

- They allow for the obtaining of detailed information.
- Direct contact with the participants leads to specific and constructive suggestions.

The study used a focus group discussion and semi structured-interview schedules as it allowed the researcher to use the schedules that were pre-planned, and allowed for elaborate discussions between the participants and the researcher. The KIIs were in-depth and done on a one-on-one basis, and this was done to illicit detailed information. The interviews took place at locations that were chosen by the participants and the duration ranged from 20-40 minutes, this was dependent on how much information the participants were willing to share. FGDs were used in conjunction with KIIs. The selected FGDs involved discussions with the community members in the two study areas.

5.4. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data as it organises and describes data in detail (Braun and Clarke, 2006). At the core of thematic analysis, the familiarisation of data by the researcher is important. Data familiarisation was possible because the researcher personally conducted audio-recorded interviews and transcribed them. This process allowed the researcher to familiarise with the data for an expedited and insightful analysis.

Following this thematic transcription, the scripts were analysed using NVivo version 8 software. This software organised the raw data so that it was possible to link and compare thematic issues within and across documents. The list of “starter nodes” was generated from an initial entry in a project journal in the software where the questions and assumptions brought to the report were outlined. The software gave results that allowed for a deeper examination and management of the qualitative data that might not be possible in traditional coding. Two distinct types of coding were used in the analysis. The first was *descriptive coding*, which described the cases in the study. This process related both to the coding of information in categories and the creation of attributes to clarify them. The second type was *analytical coding*, which was done by selecting source content to interpret and reflect on the meaning of the data to arrive at new ideas and categories. The

process entailed gathering material that could be re-thought and reviewed given the growing understanding of the inter-relationship of the categories in the data.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Data interpretation was conducted with the purpose to establish how the citizens perceive the SAPS and CPFs on crime combating in the selected areas of Durban.

6.1. Understanding of Community Policing

The meaning of community policing has seen a variety of interpretations. It was, therefore, important to have a common understanding of concepts related to community policing. The researcher attempted to find out the level of understanding by participants through the key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The legislative framework such as the SAPS Act and policy frameworks such as the NCPS guided the process of establishing their understanding of community policing. The SAPS Act provides for community policing and other related matters. According to the Act, the police are required to explain to role players what community policing entails. Similarly, the NCPS provides a framework for a multi-dimensional approach to crime prevention. It also defines community policing. The NCPS provides a means by which the SAPS and other government departments, the private sector and NGOs can integrate their approaches to community policing. In addition, the police are required in terms of the Republic of South Africa Constitution, 1996 to establish community policing, and the philosophy is defined in the Constitution.

Community policing encourages the community and the police to establish partnerships to address the issues of crime, fear of crime and disorder. Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux (1994) argue that police organisations should not rush into the implementation of community policing without a full theoretical understanding of the concept, community policing. They state that people jump on board without a full appreciation of what community policing is, and what the know-how is to make it work. Morale of police officers working in an environment where relations with communities are not good is often low (Makaudi, 2001).

In expressing their understanding of what community policing is, most of the participants in both study settings were clear about the theoretical aspects of community policing. They indicated that they have a very good understanding of the concept. For them, community policing means that the police and the community should establish a partnership. The participants believed when there is a partnership which is built on mutual trust, honesty and respect, then it will be easy to deal with issues of crime in both study areas. The participants' understanding of community policing appears to be in line with the definitions in

both the legislative and policy frameworks. The process of establishing the understanding of community policing was prioritised in the interviews because it is difficult to participate in crime prevention when a person does not understand the concept. Interview questions aimed to test participants' opinions, understanding and knowledge of community policing.

The participants from the FGDs and KIIs had the following to say concerning the understanding of Community Policing Phenomenon:

“Community policing is a partnership between the communities with their local police stations. The community must take ownership of what is happening in their community and together with their local police station, we form a partnership. Whereby we all look out for the interests and safety of the people in our community”

“It is actually a relationship between the community and the police. It is responsible for taking the issues of the community regarding crime to the police and visa-versa in order to bridge that gap between the community and the police”

6.2. Participation Model

This paper sought to understand participants' satisfaction with services rendered by the police in both study settings. It was noted that satisfaction levels differed among the participants interviewed. Satisfaction with service delivery refers to what the community expects from the police and whether the police are responsive to their needs. In a democracy, law enforcement agencies attempt to deliver unbiased services and the police are held accountable to the public they serve (Marx, 2001), but the nature of police work often results in citizens' dissatisfaction. When citizens are dissatisfied with the police, their confidence in the effectiveness of the police is eroded (Tyler & Yeun, 2002). For this reason, the police should regularly check whether they still meet their mandate. It was established that most of the Glenwood participants were not satisfied with the service provided by the SAPS in the area. It appears that, in most cases, the police are either slow to respond when a crime is reported or they do not respond at all. The police are seen to be inefficient, ineffective and unaccountable. Furthermore, it appears that the police often provide no feedback after cases have been reported. According to the Policy Framework and Guidelines for Community Policing (South Africa, 1997b), timely feedback is part of the accountability process. The police are generally not seen patrolling the area, except when their shifts end or when there is a crime reported in the neighbourhood.

“As residents, we are not safe as the community as the police themselves are also criminals. I have witnessed so many times police buying drugs our offering known drug dealer’s money in our area. I think they call that protection money. How do we work with the police when they are the ones working against us?”

“We once had an issue where the police refused to open a docket because we as the community watchers apprehended a suspect in the house where the owner was not there. They told us that they could not charge the guy because there was no complainant. The problem is that we caught the guy red handed by they refused to assist us. Also a couple of years ago I was nearly attacked by a guy who had a piece of metal in his hand, there was a whole lot of witnesses there at the scene. I was arrested that day for attempted murder because I drew out my firearm to protect myself. This issue went on for up to five or six months in court costing me a lot of money and the SAPS had not bothered to correctly ask me what had happened, nothing had been followed up correctly.”

For Cato Manor, most participants were satisfied with the services rendered by the SAPS in the area. It appears that, in most cases, the police promptly respond when a crime is reported and there is high police visibility in the area, even though they are under-resourced. The community expects the police to be always available when their services are needed and to assist them without delay. When these expectations are not met, the community loses trust in the police, and this has the potential to damage relations between the SAPS and their respective communities. It emerged that sometimes it takes hours before the police respond to reports of crime. This slow response has led some community members to take the law into their own hands. Consequently, suspects are sometimes badly assaulted and sustain serious injuries or even death. Safety of the community requires community participation in any safety and security initiative and in this regard, the participants in Cato Manor revealed that there is an element of criminal protection by some community members. Some participants felt that the community members hide the criminals from being arrested by the police.

“The police try their best to serve us as the community, sometimes, I think, us as a community tend to be unfair to them, especially when we engage in violent protest actions, etc. even when we do that, they still communicate with us”

“We are satisfied. However some of the police do not respect us as community members, the way that they speak or handle our matters can sometimes be disrespectful”

It is important to create an understanding and a relationship of trust among the police, the community and other role players. Trust is regarded as a cornerstone for effective community policing especially, within the South African context. Furthermore, where there is trust, there is less suspicion between role players and this provides an opportunity for collaboration. The police should treat citizens with respect, and the citizens have an equal responsibility to respect the police. Once there is trust, it becomes easier for the citizens to provide information about crime to the police. The relationship can be bad, indifferent or good, depending upon the attitude, action and demeanour of every member of the police both individually and collectively.

Community members, especially those in Glenwood, had no knowledge about the CPF in the area resulted in the lack of engagement (on the community's side) with the CPF and conceivably to high crime incidence in the area. The reviewed literature indicates that effective community participation/engagement and crime prevention include the following: community members' engagement in operational planning of crime fighting, community and police participation in patrols, providing police with information during the police investigation and community participation in making an arrest by the police. Due to a high number of crimes in the area, there is a need for community members' engagement in operational planning and participation to bring the level of crime down. One of the general principles of community policing is shared responsibility and decision making as well as sustained commitment, from both the police and community regarding safety and security needs.

Contrary to Glenwood's community, most of Cato Manor participants demonstrated having knowledge and understanding of the CPF in the area (Cato Manor CPF) and further indicated that as community members they engage more frequently with the CPF in operational planning of crime fighting. This is in line with the general principles of community policing as a strategy of crime prevention and combating together with the theoretical framework on community policing such as the Social Resource that repositions the idea of crime and policing from the angle of the state to that of the people. From the people's viewpoint, crime is a personal problem resulting from people's unmet expectation, scarcity of resources and police inefficiency. The police in effect are social and safety resources, which are supposed to solve the problems of the people concerning crime. Therefore, the ultimate purpose of community policing is to ensure better, responsive and responsible efficient and effective police service. The theory is of the people, for the people and by the people, a theory of democratic governance, empowerment, and a theory of self-help.

7. CONCLUSION

It is recommended that initiatives such as crime combating events be jointly organised, as they assist in bringing people closer together. In a democracy, law enforcement agencies attempt to deliver unbiased services and the police are held accountable to the public they serve. If this does not happen for any reason, the police should regularly check whether they still meet their Constitutional mandate. In conclusion, the aim of this paper was to explore citizens' views of the SAPS and CPFs on crime combating in the selected areas of Durban, South Africa. Community Policing scholars worldwide have recognized that one of the major hurdles for successful community-based programmes are misperceptions, as inaccurate as they may be, between the two major actors involved: police and citizens. The overall findings were that citizens in general have more favourable views of the overall mission and understanding of community policing. However, citizens showed less favourable attitudes towards SAPS and CPFs in the suburban area as compared to the township area. Finally, citizens in the suburban area were more cynical about perceived distrust on the police. This suggests that generally, the SAPS and CPFs in Durban must be encouraged to be always accountable for their actions and be made aware of the consequences of acting outside the law. This means that the police and CPFs must strive to generate positive perceptions among citizens. Merely avoiding appearances of corruption is not enough for citizens, who appear to have higher expectations for police. This is one argument for community policing strategies, which seek to strengthen the connections between the police and the community. Furthermore, trust between the SAPS members, CPF members and the community enables the police to gain greater access to valuable information from the community that could lead to success in combating crime.

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