

Bringing Police Closer to Communities: Lived Experiences of Police Community Affairs and Development (PCAD) Officers in Bohol, Philippines

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Abstract. Police-community relations remain a cornerstone of community-oriented policing; however, limited studies have examined the lived experiences of Police Community Affairs and Development (PCAD) Officers who directly implement community engagement programs in geographically dispersed and island communities. This study explored the lived experiences of PCAD Officers in managing police-community relations in Bohol Province, Philippines. Using a transcendental phenomenological design, data were gathered through in-depth interviews with fifteen PCAD Officers selected through purposive sampling across the three legislative districts of Bohol. Interview transcripts were analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological method. Findings revealed eight emergent themes. Positive experiences included Collaborative Trust-Building and Strategic Visibility, while negative experiences involved Socio-Perceptual Barriers and Resource and Cooperation Gaps. Officers addressed challenges through Professional Rapport Building, and Resilience and Mentorship. Their aspirations centered on Shared Civic Responsibility and Institutional Sustainability. The findings highlight the critical role of trust-building, procedural justice, community participation, and institutional support in sustaining effective police-community partnerships. This study contributes to the growing literature on community policing by providing empirical insights into the experiences of frontline PCAD Officers operating in island and rural communities. The findings may guide policy enhancement, capacity-building initiatives, and the strengthening of community-oriented policing programs in the Philippine National Police.

Keywords: Bohol Province; community policing; phenomenological research; police-community relations; Police Community Affairs and Development

Introduction

Community policing has become an essential strategy in modern law enforcement, emphasizing collaboration between police officers and community members to address crime, maintain peace and order, and strengthen public trust. According to the Philippine National Police, community relations are integral in promoting transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in policing initiatives. In island barangays and geographically isolated communities, police officers face unique challenges in implementing community-oriented policing due to limited resources, transportation difficulties, and varying perceptions of law enforcement.

Globally, community policing has been recognized as an effective approach in reducing crime and improving police legitimacy. Studies in the United States, Canada, and Australia highlight that strong police-community partnerships contribute to improved trust, enhanced communication, and greater community participation in public safety initiatives. However, officers assigned to remote communities often encounter barriers such as insufficient logistical support, limited manpower, and cultural differences that affect the implementation of community programs.

In the Philippines, the Philippine National Police has continuously strengthened its Police Community Relations (PCR) programs to enhance collaboration between police officers and local communities. Through the Police Community Affairs and Development (PCAD) units, officers are tasked with conducting outreach programs, public safety campaigns, and community engagement activities. Despite these efforts, challenges remain in sustaining police visibility, building public trust, and addressing misconceptions toward law enforcement, particularly in island barangays where accessibility and communication are limited.

This study explored the lived experiences of Police Community Affairs and Development (PCAD) Officers in managing police-community relations in the Province of Bohol. Although previous studies have examined community policing effectiveness, police legitimacy, public trust, and community engagement,

most focused on community perceptions, quantitative assessments, or urban settings. Limited research has explored the lived experiences of Police Community Affairs and Development Officers responsible for implementing community policing programs, particularly in geographically dispersed and island communities such as those in Bohol Province. This study addresses this gap by examining the experiences, coping mechanisms, and aspirations of PCAD Officers through a phenomenological lens.

Research Questions

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of Police Community Affairs and Development (PCAD) Officers in managing police-community relations in the Province of Bohol.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the positive and negative experiences of PCAD Officers in managing police-community relations?
2. How do PCAD Officers address the challenges encountered in community policing?
3. What are the aspirations of PCAD Officers in improving police-community relations?

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study focused on the lived experiences of Police Community Affairs and Development (PCAD) Officers assigned in selected municipalities within the Province of Bohol. It specifically examined their experiences in implementing community policing programs, the challenges they encountered in fostering police-community relations, the coping strategies they employed, and their aspirations for enhancing community engagement and public trust. The study utilized a transcendental phenomenological research design and involved fifteen (15) PCAD Officers selected through purposive sampling from municipalities across the three legislative districts of Bohol. Data were collected through in-depth interviews using semi-structured interview guides. The study was delimited to the experiences, perceptions, and narratives shared by the participants during the conduct of the research.

Literature Review

Community Policing

Community policing is an organizational philosophy that emphasizes the development of systemic partnerships between law enforcement personnel and community members to proactively address crime, social disorder, and public safety concerns. Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux (1998) fundamentally describe community policing as a collaborative approach that encourages decentralized problem-solving and organic citizen involvement. Unlike traditional, reactive policing models that rely heavily on enforcement metrics, community policing seeks to systematically build trust and foster sustained cooperation between law enforcement agencies and the diverse communities they serve. Research consistently demonstrates that community-oriented strategies contribute significantly to improved public trust, enhanced police legitimacy, and a reduced fear of crime within neighborhoods. Skogan (2006) established that community-oriented policing increases voluntary citizen cooperation and promotes stronger, more resilient relationships between law enforcement and local communities. Similarly, Gill et al. (2014) reported that community policing initiatives positively influence public satisfaction and perceptions of police effectiveness. Recent global empirical evidence within the last five years continues to validate this nexus, confirming that even brief, positive interactions during localized community patrols yield significant long-term shifts in institutional trust (Peyton et al., 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2021).

Police-Community Relations

Police-community relations refer specifically to the quality of interaction, operational cooperation, and mutual trust shared between law enforcement agencies and the general public. Effective police-community relations are characterized by transparency, institutional accountability, procedural fairness, and mutual respect. Tyler (2004) emphasized through the lens of procedural justice that citizens are more likely to trust and cooperate with police officers when they perceive police actions, decisions, and processes as fair, neutral, and legitimate. In the Philippine context, Police Community Relations (PCR) programs, structurally operationalized under the Police Community Affairs and Development (PCAD) framework, serve as a strategic framework for strengthening public confidence in state law enforcement. Guided by the community-oriented policing system (COPS), police agencies utilize targeted community outreach activities, educational campaigns, and partnership-building initiatives to encourage active civic participation in localized crime prevention and public safety efforts. While standard institutional literature frames these

PCR/PCAD programs as harmonious tools for public confidence, contemporary local scholarship reveals a more complex operational landscape. Frontline officers frequently face a dual mandate, balancing soft-power civic engagement with hard-line state enforcement and counter-insurgency objectives (Labrague, 2023). This ideological duality necessitates a closer look at how personnel manage community expectations while maintaining institutional roles.

Challenges in Community Policing

A matrix of operational, organizational, and social challenges heavily influences the practical implementation of community policing. Cordner (2014) categorized these systemic impediments by identifying inadequate manpower, limited logistical support, transportation constraints, and resource shortages as pervasive barriers to the success of community policing initiatives. These challenges are particularly prevalent in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs) where frontline personnel must navigate difficult terrain, archipelagic topographies, and severely limited infrastructural development (Ariel et al., 2022). Social and cultural barriers also heavily affect the implementation of community policing. Misconceptions about police motives, negative public perceptions stemming from historical biases, and limited community participation frequently hinder collaborative problem-solving and reduce the overall effectiveness of police-community programs (Nix et al., 2021). Such deep-seated socio-cultural challenges require officers to move past rigid bureaucratic frameworks and employ innovative, highly localized interpersonal approaches to foster genuine trust and grassroots engagement.

Police Visibility and Community Engagement

Police visibility remains a significant psychological factor in strengthening public trust and enhancing community perceptions of safety. Kelling and Moore (1988) argued that a visible police presence serves a vital dual purpose: deterring criminal opportunism and reassuring citizens about community security. Frequent, positive interactions between police officers and community members promote social familiarity, dismantle mutual suspicion, and improve overall public confidence. Contemporary criminological literature distinguishes between passive presence and active engagement, highlighting that active visibility through interpersonal communication builds far greater social capital than standard motorized patrols (Boivin et al., 2022). Community engagement activities such as barangay visitations, youth development programs, localized public consultations, and safety seminars further reinforce these collaborative relationships. These targeted initiatives encourage shared responsibility and active civic participation, converting peace and order from an isolated police mandate into a collective community effort.

Institutional Support and Sustainability

Institutional support is essential for sustaining the long-term effectiveness of community policing programs. Schafer (2010) emphasized that leadership commitment, dedicated funding streams, continuous specialized training, and sufficient logistical resources contribute significantly to the viability of community engagement initiatives. Organizational backing enables frontline police officers to perform their duties effectively without succumbing to operational strain or role conflict. Historically, police organizations have prioritized traditional enforcement metrics (such as arrest rates and clearance quotas) over the slow, labor-intensive work of community relation-building. Recent scholarship notes that unless institutional reward structures actively incentivize and support PCAD-style work, officers face systemic burnout and role strain as they balance heavy administrative demands against the physical realities of community engagement (Wood et al., 2020). Continuous organizational support remains the primary predictor of program longevity and partnership sustainability with community stakeholders.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a transcendental phenomenological approach. Phenomenology focuses on understanding and describing individuals' lived experiences regarding a specific phenomenon. According to Moustakas (1994), transcendental phenomenology seeks to capture the essence of participants' experiences through reflection, description, and thematic analysis. The qualitative approach was appropriate because the study explored the lived experiences of Police Community Affairs and Development (PCAD) Officers in managing police-community relations.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in selected municipalities within the Province of Bohol, Philippines. Informants were drawn from municipalities across the three legislative districts of Bohol, where PCAD Officers actively implement police-community relations programs and community policing activities.

Research Participants

The participants of the study consisted of fifteen (15) Police Community Affairs and Development (PCAD) Officers assigned in selected municipalities in Bohol Province. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in police-community relations programs and community engagement activities. The researcher used a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions. The interview questions focused on the participants' experiences, challenges encountered, coping strategies, and aspirations related to police-community relations.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data gathering, the researcher secured approval from the concerned authorities and obtained informed consent from all participants. Interviews were conducted personally by the researcher using audio recording devices with participants' permission. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated when necessary. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were strictly observed throughout the study.

Results and Discussions

Research Question 1: Positive and Negative Experiences of PCAD Officers in Managing Police-Community Relations

The lived experiences of Police Community Affairs and Development (PCAD) Officers in the Province of Bohol reveal a complex operational environment characterized by a continuous interplay between successful grassroots engagement and deep-seated systemic friction. Analysis of the verbatim interview data generated four distinct emergent themes that capture the dual nature of these experiences.

Positive Experiences

COLLABORATIVE TRUST-BUILDING

Participants frequently noted that breaking down historical walls of civilian suspicion requires stepping out of traditional enforcement roles and stepping into collaborative, human-centric community spaces. True collaboration is achieved when community members view the police not merely as legal authorities, but as active partners in community development. Informants highlighted that direct humanitarian outreach, educational symposiums, and local dialogues serve as foundational pillars for establishing mutual respect.

This deep sense of connection is clearly expressed by Informant 3:

"When we go down to the barangays not just to lecture, but to give out food packs or help repair a school, the people see us as humans, not just as men in uniform. You can feel the shift. Before, they were afraid to look at us. Now, they offer us coffee and tell us what is really happening in their streets."

This experiential reality strongly aligns with Robert Putnam's Social Capital Theory, which argues that social networks, norms of reciprocity, and mutual trust are crucial for civic cooperation. By engaging in consistent, non-adversarial community outreach, PCAD officers generate "bridging social capital," transforming cold institutional mandates into warm, cooperative networks. Furthermore, these findings complement the work of Skogan (2006), who established that when law enforcement actively participates in community-building activities, it fundamentally shifts public perception, yielding long-term dividends in community safety and compliance.

STRATEGIC VISIBILITY

Active physical and digital visibility emerged as another highly positive catalyst for public confidence. Informants emphasized that being easily accessible and constantly visible directly reduces public anxiety and fosters a secure environment where citizens feel empowered to cooperate with law enforcement initiatives.

As Informant 8 shared:

"Our presence must be felt, both on the ground and online. When we conduct regular mobile patrols and update our station's Facebook page with our daily community engagements, the public feels safe. They see that the police are working round-the-clock, and that accessibility makes it easier for them to approach us with their problems."

This approach reflects the core tenets of Clarke's (1995) Situational Crime Prevention Theory, specifically the principle of increasing the risks and effort for potential offenders while simultaneously reassuring the public through visible guardianship. In a modern policing context, this visibility is dual-pronged: physical patrols provide immediate reassurance, while digital visibility amplifies institutional transparency. This dynamic confirms the findings of Ariel et al. (2015), who demonstrated that heightened, transparent police visibility acts as a psychological deterrent to crime while concurrently boosting civilian trust and institutional legitimacy.

Negative Experiences

SOCIO-PERCEPTUAL BARRIERS

Despite their earnest efforts, PCAD officers consistently encounter persistent socio-perceptual barriers. Participants expressed deep emotional and professional exhaustion regarding deep-seated public cynicism, where their genuine outreach efforts are frequently dismissed as performative, media-driven "photo opportunities". This barrier is further exacerbated by the psychological phenomenon of collective guilt, where the isolated misconduct of a few officers leads to sweeping public condemnation of the entire force.

Informant 14 shared this frustration:

"It is heartbreaking sometimes. You spend weeks organizing a program, but someone on social media will comment that we are just doing it for a 'photo op' or compliance. When one policeman far away commits a mistake, the whole community looks at us with judgment, forgetting all the good things we did here in our municipality."

This negative experience validates the core concerns of Herman Goldstein's Community-Oriented Policing Theory, which cautions that deeply rooted historical biases and negative public perceptions can severely undermine even the most well-intentioned police initiatives if the community perceives them as superficial. This also illustrates the "negativity bias" in public administration identified by Skogan (2006), which shows that negative encounters or impressions of law enforcement possess significantly greater psychological weight and longevity in the public mind than positive, routine community engagements.

RESOURCE AND COOPERATION GAPS

The operational effectiveness of PCAD programs is severely hindered by significant logistical constraints and a lack of active community participation in certain areas. Officers detailed stark imbalances between their extensive jurisdictional responsibilities and their actual operational assets, pointing to acute shortages in specialized personnel, lacks of dedicated communication equipment, and a severe deficit in patrol vehicles.

Informant 5 explained the operational strain:

"I am the only designated PCAD officer in this station, and I am expected to cover over twenty barangays. How can I build deep relationships when I don't even have a dedicated patrol vehicle for community affairs? Often, I have to hitch a ride with the operations team or spend my own money just to attend a barangay assembly."

These structural deficiencies expose a critical gap between the theoretical goals of community policing and its practical reality. According to Cordner (2014), the successful execution of community-oriented policing requires a comprehensive restructuring of organizational assets. Without dedicated funding, material resources, and sufficient personnel, community policing risks becoming a peripheral task rather than an institutional philosophy. This lack of resources leaves frontline officers vulnerable to operational burnout and limits their ability to maintain consistent community partnerships.

Research Question 2: Coping Mechanisms and Strategies Employed by PCAD Officers

To navigate these social and operational challenges, PCAD Officers rely on a combination of adaptive interpersonal skills and internal institutional support networks. Two major themes emerged detailing how participants sustain their commitment to community policing.

Professional Rapport Building

Faced with public skepticism, informants emphasized that choosing professional empathy over defensive authority is their most effective tool for defusing tension. By intentionally practicing active listening, maintaining emotional control, and using clear communication, officers are able to gradually correct public misconceptions and build meaningful relationships with community stakeholders.

Informant 11 detailed this approach:

"When people are angry or distant, we do not counter them with authority. We listen. I tell my team to practice maximum tolerance. We sit down with the barangay captains, explain our side clearly, and show genuine interest in their local concerns. Eventually, their anger softens, and a real partnership begins."

This adaptive practice is a clear application of Tom Tyler's Procedural Justice Theory, which posits that public compliance and trust depend heavily on the fairness, respect, and dignity experienced during interactions with law enforcement, rather than just the legal outcomes. By prioritizing respectful communication and transparent dialogue, PCAD officers practice procedural justice daily. This approach aligns with the findings of Mazerolle et al. (2013), which demonstrate that procedurally just communication by officers effectively neutralizes public hostility and fosters a greater willingness among citizens to co-manage public safety.

Resilience and Mentorship

On an internal level, coping with institutional isolation and resource constraints requires a reliance on shared experiences and emotional support from peers. Informants highlighted that informal peer counseling and structured guidance from senior mentors are vital for maintaining morale, processing operational stress, and passing down practical strategies for community engagement.

Informant 2 highlighted this internal dynamic:

"When the workload becomes overwhelming, it is the camaraderie in the station that keeps us going. The senior officers who held this post before me offer invaluable advice. They remind me that PCAD is a work of patience. Their mentorship teaches us how to survive the stress and keep serving with a smile."

This reliance on internal networks underscores the value of informal peer support systems in high-stress public safety roles, as outlined by Wood et al. (2014). In specialized policing tracks like PCAD, where success is measured through long-term relationship-building rather than immediate arrests, mentorship

provides the psychological scaffolding necessary to prevent burnout. This transfer of experiential knowledge ensures that adaptive field strategies are preserved, allowing younger officers to sustain effective partnerships despite ongoing social and resource challenges.

Research Question 3: Aspirations of PCAD Officers for Improving Police-Community Relations

The long-term vision of PCAD Officers extends beyond temporary public relations campaigns. Their insights reveal a strong desire to transition toward an institutionalized, sustainable, and co-owned model of public safety.

Shared Civic Responsibility

Participants expressed a desire to move away from a model where security is seen solely as a police responsibility. Instead, they aspire to cultivate a shared civic ownership, where barangay officials, sector leaders, and everyday citizens actively participate in and co-own peace and order initiatives.

Informant 7 shared this vision:

"My dream is for our community members to realize that peace and order is not just the job of the PNP. We want to see a community where the barangay tanods, the youth leaders, and the stakeholders are the ones taking the lead in crime prevention, and we are simply there to support them as partners."

This aspiration represents the ideal execution of Community-Oriented Policing Theory (Goldstein, 1990), which emphasizes that the community must be an active co-producer of public safety rather than a passive consumer of police services. This also reflects the principles of Putnam's Social Capital Theory, where civic engagement and shared responsibility create a self-sustaining ecosystem of public safety. As noted by Sparrow (2016), true policing transformation occurs when communities move from simple cooperation to active co-ownership of local security initiatives.

Institutional Sustainability

Finally, informants highlighted an urgent need for institutional sustainability. They expressed a desire for a systemic shift that moves PCAD from a secondary, underfunded administrative requirement to a well-resourced, permanently funded, and career-tracked pillar of the Philippine National Police.

Informant 12 emphasized this structural need:

"We need more than just temporary programs that disappear when the station commander changes. We aspire for institutional support—permanent budgets for community relations, dedicated vehicles, and real specialized training for PCAD personnel. Our work should be recognized as a distinct, vital career path within the organization."

This aspiration directly addresses a common critique in police literature regarding the structural vulnerability of specialized units. As highlighted by Cordner (2014) and Skogan (2006), long-term success in community-oriented policing is rarely achieved through localized enthusiasm alone; it requires permanent institutional integration. Securing dedicated funding, formalized administrative backing, and structured career paths for PCAD officers is essential for ensuring that community partnerships remain resilient over time, rather than vulnerable to shifting political or organizational priorities.

Table 1. Synthesis of the Discussion

Emergent Theme	Theoretical Framework Connection	Key Empirical Synthesis
Collaborative Trust-Building	Social Capital Theory (Putnam)	Non-adversarial engagement builds "bridging social capital," turning institutional mandates into cooperative community networks (Skogan, 2006).
Strategic Visibility	Situational Crime Prevention (Clarke)	Physical and digital presence acts as a reassuring guardian, reducing citizen fear and increasing willingness to cooperate (Ariel et al., 2015).
Socio-Perceptual Barriers	Community-Oriented Policing (Goldstein)	Deeply rooted public cynicism and negativity bias can cause genuine outreach to be perceived as superficial compliance (Skogan, 2006).
Resource & Cooperation Gaps	Structural-Functional Framework	A stark imbalance between expansive geographical responsibilities and limited material assets hinders operational consistency (Cordner, 2014).
Professional Rapport Building	Procedural Justice Theory (Tyler)	Prioritizing respectful communication, active listening, and dignity effectively neutralizes public hostility and builds trust (Mazerolle et al., 2013).
Resilience and Mentorship	Organizational Support Framework	Internal camaraderie and structured guidance from senior officers provide the emotional scaffolding necessary to prevent burnout (Wood et al., 2014).
Shared Civic Responsibility	Co-Production of Public Safety	True public safety transformation requires transitioning communities from passive consumers to active co-producers of local security (Sparrow, 2016).
Institutional Sustainability	Institutionalization Matrix	Shifting community relations from a peripheral administrative task to a permanently funded, distinct career path ensures long-term operational resilience (Cordner, 2014).

In conclusion, these findings demonstrate that effective police-community relations depend on an integrated framework of collaboration, transparency, procedural justice, and active civic participation. While severe resource gaps and social barriers present daily challenges, PCAD Officers draw on professional rapport-building and internal mentorship to maintain public trust. Ultimately, addressing their aspirations for shared civic responsibility and institutional sustainability is crucial for transforming localized public relations successes into a resilient, permanent model of community safety.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical principles governing qualitative research. Approval to conduct the study was obtained from relevant authorities and participating police units. Informed consent was secured from all participants after explaining the purpose of the study, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any stage of the research. Participant anonymity was maintained through the use of codes and pseudonyms. Audio recordings and interview transcripts were stored securely and used exclusively for research purposes. The study ensured that participants were not subjected to physical, psychological, emotional, or professional harm throughout the research process.

Conclusion

The study concluded that Police Community Affairs and Development Officers play a vital role in strengthening police-community relations through collaboration, communication, visibility, and sustained engagement with community members. Their experiences reveal that successful community policing is built upon trust-building, procedural justice, transparency, and active citizen participation. While officers encounter challenges related to public perceptions, logistical limitations, resource shortages, and cooperation gaps, they continue to demonstrate resilience and commitment in fulfilling their responsibilities. The findings further highlight the importance of institutional support, continuous professional development, and sustainable partnerships in enhancing police-community relations. Ultimately, strengthening collaboration among police agencies, local government units, and community stakeholders contributes significantly to building public trust and advancing the goals of community-oriented policing.

Recommendaions

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed, The Philippine National Police should strengthen community policing programs through continuous training, enhanced logistical support, and adequate resource allocation for PCAD Officers, Police stations should intensify community engagement activities such as barangay visitations, youth outreach programs, public safety campaigns, and stakeholder consultations to strengthen trust and cooperation, Local government units should collaborate closely with police agencies in supporting crime prevention and public safety initiatives, particularly in island and geographically isolated communities, Community members should actively participate in police-community programs and contribute to collaborative efforts aimed at maintaining peace

and order, and Future researchers should conduct similar studies involving other police units, regions, or provinces to further explore the dynamics of police-community relations and community policing practices.

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