

Maritime Policing: Experiences of Coast Guard Personnel During Covid-19 Pandemic

Randall Lyn B. Blasco

Research Director, CCJ, BISU

Abstract

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of Coast Guard Personnel in Maritime Policing during Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, sought answers to the following sub-problems: experiences of the informants in maritime policing during Covid-19 pandemic, addressing the problems encountered in maritime policing, and aspirations of the informants to improve their performance in maritime policing. This study employed a qualitative approach grounded in a phenomenological perspective, specifically utilizing an existential design. In gathering primary data, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted to explore the lived experiences of the informants. A total of ten (10) coast guard personnel, each with a minimum of three years of service, were purposively selected as informants. The research was conducted at the Tubigon Coast Guard Sub-Station in Tubigon, Bohol, and the Talibon Coast Guard Sub-Station in Talibon, Bohol. A validated interview guide, along with a voice recorder, was used to document the informants' responses for transcription and analysis. To interpret the data, Colaizzi's method—a rigorous phenomenological analysis procedure—was applied to extract themes and insights from the informants' narratives.

Findings revealed both positive and negative experiences during the pandemic. Positive themes included Skills and Knowledge Enhancement and Favorable Outlook, while negative themes highlighted Rigors in Decision-Making and Difficulty in Dealing with People. In addressing the problems, the themes of Collaboration with Agencies and Open Communication Lines emerged. For performance improvement, the informants aspired for Up-Skill Trainings, Upgraded Equipment and Facility, and Expanded Alliance. Implications for practice emphasize the need for strengthened collaboration, increased training, enhanced resources, and structured institutional support. These findings call on stakeholders such as the Philippine Coast Guard, Philippine Navy, PNP, LGUs, DOT, MARINA, shipping companies, and local communities to reinforce capacity-building, inter-agency cooperation, and community involvement to ensure effective maritime safety, security, and law enforcement.

Keywords: coast guard personnel, maritime policing, covid-19 pandemic, phenomenological, lived experiences.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) is one of the country's maritime assets. The Coast Guard saves lives, patrols waterways, protects the maritime environment, responds to natural catastrophes, and much more (Hendrickson, 2020). The coast guard's position in the maritime sector has grown and changed over time, achieving a higher level of importance. This rising tendency can also be seen in the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), which has the same challenging issue of defending the marine industry within the framework of

the country's maritime jurisdiction and economic interests. As a result, enough personnel resources are required to carry out the Philippine Coast Guard's mandate, which includes maritime safety, search and rescue, security, and environmental protection (Manglicmot, 2019). Furthermore, in this modern and globally competitive world, higher technology fluency, human-centered talents, and the capacity to build new skills and competencies inside the force are also required.

In an era of widespread illicit fishing, coastal states have a significant issue in enforcing fisheries legislation, since they frequently lack the resources needed to adequately police their marine zones (internal waters, territorial sea, archipelagic waters, and exclusive economic zone). As a result, coastal states' enforcement efforts frequently result in insufficient "demonstration impact" (through monitoring, control, and surveillance) and "deterrence effect" (through enforcement and sanctions). This insufficient enforcement capability can be bolstered by inter-state collaboration and public-private partnerships with non-profit, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or other private entities such as for-profit private security firms (PSCs). Environmental law enforcement capabilities, such as search, questioning, arrest, and use of force, are often assigned to specialized governmental law enforcement authorities such as the coast guard, environmental government agencies, customs agencies, or the navy. This raises the question of whether and to what degree other states or private entities, such as NGOs and PSCs, might help in or take over law enforcement tasks (Schatz, 2018).

The Covid 19 pandemic has presented the Philippine law enforcement and public safety (LEPS) sector with a number of difficulties as well as new opportunities. The Philippine National Police (PNP), Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), and Bureau of Fire Protection are the LEPS agencies that were activated to participate in the National Joint Task Force (NJTf)-COVID SHIELD. The PCG and PNP were also assigned to supplement the current resources of the Department of Health (DOH) and local government units, which is what this task force is in charge of as part of the government's broader plan to manage the outbreak. However, as part of the country's attempts to combat disease, the pandemic has shown difficulties in conducting population control, port security, public affairs, and medical support. Additionally, a sizable number of Covid 19 infections among staff have been reported by both agencies. Additionally, both organizations have been pushed by the pandemic to restructure their units in order to handle a variety of tasks that are frequently incompatible with their LEPS mandates. The PNP and PCG's contributions to the national Covid 19 response are included in this policy brief. The significance of reevaluating its duties in light of the evolving national security environment is stressed while also addressing organizational difficulties and methods to improve capabilities (Ona et al., 2021).

The researcher was interested in learning about the positive and negative experiences encountered as well as acquiring a thorough understanding of the coping techniques used in addressing problems in maritime policing. As a criminologist, it is critical to connect with coast guard personnel in order to learn more about their lives on the maritime sector. This is to broaden the range of alternatives accessible to coast guard personnel for boosting work performance and improving the quality of maritime policing. This could also be used as an empirical study for the researcher to come to a conclusion that would also aid in the reduction of crime at sea. Furthermore, as a faculty, the researcher would be able to include the experiences of coast guard officers as one of the law enforcement professions in her lectures. This would allow the learner to expand his or her understanding of the Philippine Coast Guard.

2. METHOD

This study was a qualitative approach and utilized a phenomenological perspective, particularly the exist-

ential design. The research problem was to explore the lived experiences of coast guard personnel in maritime policing during the Covid-19 pandemic in the Island Province of Bohol with the hope to propose recommendations to maintain the effectiveness and efficiency of Tubigon and Talibon coast guard personnel in the performance of their duties. The researcher conducted an in-depth study that will necessitate a personal interview with each of the informants.

The researcher used Colaizzi's method. Colaizzi's data analysis process has seven phases. Colaizzi stated that researchers should be flexible in these processes; the quest of the meaning and substance of a phenomena should not include a rigorous set of rules stages, but a profound and complete examination of meaning.

The interviews were transcribed by the researcher. In the first phase, the transcribed interviews were read and reread many times over several days to obtain a global sense of the phenomenon. This ensured participants' statements remained the focus of the analysis. Second, a significant statement is one made by a participant that is directly related to his or her experience of the phenomenon. Care was taken when extracting such statements from transcripts to preserve the context of each statement. Each statement was contextualized by attaching the participant number (thus preserving anonymity), the page number of the transcript and the number of the paragraph in which the statement was made. The next step is the formulation of meaning, the process of attributing meaning to significant statements. Step four is the creation of theme clusters and themes. To explicate themes, significant statements with similar terms and their formulated meanings were grouped together to form theme clusters. Related theme clusters were then aggregated together to establish themes such as a different place creates a different experience. Step five is created by integrating all the findings. Re-examination of the transcripts, thematic clusters, and themes should occur many times, to study any contradictions or different perspectives and ensure the interpretation of the exhaustive description is thorough. Then, the sixth step is a description of the fundamental structure of the phenomenon. The purpose of this step is to remove any redundant or misused descriptions. After a rigorous analysis and removal of extraneous information, the fundamental structure of the phenomenon was revealed. Finally, using participant validation, the exhaustive description and fundamental structure of the phenomenon can be revised to confirm it accurately depicts the participants' experiences of the phenomenon (Wirihana et al., 2018).

3. Result and Discussion

1. Result

Consistent with the methodology of this study, I transcribed and translated the responses, and the significant statements were extracted. I formulated core meanings out of the significant statement and classified them into cluster themes from where I created the emergent themes.

For a clear context of this study, each life experience of the informant was taken mostly in a dialect known to them, so that they may express their thoughts liberally.

The following are the emergent themes:

I. Experiences of the Informants in Maritime Policing during Covid-19 Pandemic

A. Positive Experiences

1. Skills and Knowledge Enhancement
2. Favorable Outlook

B. Negative Experiences

1. Rigors in Decision-Making

2. Difficulty in Dealing with People

II. Addressing the Problems Encountered in Maritime Policing

1. Collaboration with Agencies
2. Open Communication Lines

III. Aspirations of the Informants to Improve their Performance in Maritime Policing

1. Up-Skill Trainings
2. Upgraded Equipment and Facility
3. Expanded Alliance

2. Discussion

The researcher applied Colaizzi's method in the phenomenological inquiry approach in analyzing the data. It allowed the researcher to reveal emergent themes and their interwoven relationships.

This study is anchored in three theories, namely: Self-Efficacy Theory by Albert Bandura, Routine Activity Theory by Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson, and Team Role Theory by Meredith Belbin.

Self-efficacy theory (SET) is a subset of Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory. Self-efficacy theory emphasizes the importance of the individual and the individual's perceptions of his/her personal capabilities as key determinants of successful outcomes. Self-efficacy theory and the broader social cognitive theory in which self-efficacy is encompassed, therefore clearly endorses a democratic ideal that suggests that all individuals are competent and capable of being successful, provided they have the opportunities and self-efficacy necessary to pursue their goals. Self-efficacy theory explicitly focuses on how individuals and communities can be empowered with a sense of agency that will facilitate goal attainment (Gallagher, 2012). Perceived efficacy can influence behavior in a variety of ways, according to this concept. It has an impact on the activities that people choose to do as well as the environments in which they live. Any aspect that influences decision-making can have a significant impact on the direction of one's personal growth. Individuals who avoid enriching activities and situations do not realize their full potential and protect their negative self-concepts from change. Self-perceptions also influence how much effort people will put out and how long they will persevere in the face of hurdles or adverse experiences. Because knowledge and competencies need persistent effort, any element that causes people to give up easily might have individually limiting effects (Bandura, 1978).

Another theory that supports this study is Routine Activity Theory (RAT) by Cohen and Felson (1979). According to leading research at the time, changes in the structure of people's daily routines may explain the spike in crime that had occurred. They derived two seemingly simple ideas with significant implications: first, that the opportunity for crime may depend on a configuration of distinct elements of the aggressor or criminal; second, a correlate of the first, that the absence of either of the first two elements (aggressor and target) or the presence of the third (capable guardians) would be sufficient to prevent a potential criminal event. Routine activity theory is an attempt to identify criminal activities and their patterns through an explanation of changes in crime rate trends. It offers a frame of reference for concrete and individualized crime analysis and facilitates the application of real policies and practices aimed at altering the necessary elements that make the existence of a crime possible (Miro, 2014).

Finally, the Team Role Theory by Belbin (1981) was created as one of the most well-known and widely used team role frameworks in team composition development and management development in his theory. Belbin's team roles provide a useful model for improving team performance. Leaders can organize their teams in a way that utilizes everyone's talents and fosters productive, creative collaboration by taking into

account the strengths and weaknesses of each individual (Channell, 2021). When a team is performing well, each team member typically has distinct responsibilities. Just as importantly, you'll notice that every role required to achieve the team's goal is being performed fully and well. According to Belbin, by understanding your role within a specific team, you can develop your strengths and manage your weaknesses as a team member, and thus improve how you contribute to the team (Hackett, 2023).

I. Experiences of the Informants in Maritime Policing during Covid-19 Pandemic. I formulated the following themes reflecting the experiences of the informants.

A. Positive Experiences

1. Skills and Knowledge Enhancement. This theme shows

the informants' heightened talents and knowledge as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The crisis has provided opportunities for them to discover new things and acquire self-improvement that may be employed in the execution of maritime policing. Furthermore, it provided them with the chance to increase their self-confidence in dealing with individuals of various personalities. They have seen how people work together to combat covid-19. Individuals in the community have developed a sense of brotherhood in order to persevere in the face of the disaster.

A study spawned the psychological idea of self-efficacy. He identified a process that played a significant influence in people's lives but had not been characterized or thoroughly examined up to that time. Bandura hypothesized that perceived self-efficacy impacts what coping behavior is launched when an individual is faced with stress and problems, as well as deciding how much effort will be exerted to attain one's objectives and for how long those goals would be pursued. He proposed that self-efficacy is a self-sustaining attribute; when a person is motivated to solve issues on their own terms, they acquire pleasant experiences that enhance their self-efficacy even more (Ackerman, 2018).

2. Favorable Outlook. This theme depicts the events that

offered fulfillment, satisfaction, and joy to coast guard officers while performing duties in maritime policing during the Covid 19 pandemic. They are satisfied when they can carry out their tasks and obligations as members of the coast guard. They were overjoyed and delighted to be helping the people. During this difficult moment, coast guard personnel realized that the Covid 19 pandemic not only has bad consequences, but it also forces them to look at the bright side, where they may acquire and reinforce beliefs and actions that promote a positive state of well-being.

This theme is supported by Social Learning Theory which stipulates that a high sense of effectiveness improves human performance and personal well-being in a variety of ways. People who are confident in their capabilities see tough jobs as challenges to be conquered rather than dangers to be avoided. Such a positive viewpoint promotes intrinsic interest and deep involvement in activities. They create tough objectives for themselves and commit wholeheartedly. After failures or losses, they swiftly regain their sense of efficacy and blame failure on insufficient effort or a lack of experience. Such a positive approach leads to personal successes, relieves stress, and minimizes sensitivity to depression (Bandura, 1994).

3. Negative Experiences

1. Rigors in Decision-Making. This theme illustrates the

informants' negative experiences, notably in decision-making as coast guard officers during the pandemic. They encountered moments when they were confused about what to do owing to the multiple executive orders issued from various sources and conflicts of interest they met in the midst of the crisis. The contents of executive orders differ from one another, affecting decision-making.

This theme is supported by the study of Rhinard (2019), which states that phenomenon of the crisis room in Brussels turns our attention to the crisisification of decision-making. Perhaps the most intriguing trend is the adoption of special procedures for crisis situations – and the practice of these procedures in EU-wide exercises. Most directorates-general (especially those with crisis experience) have procedures for abbreviated decision-making. Procedures vary, but they generally stipulate the steps to be taken in the event of an unexpected, urgent event that requires the DG to respond quickly. This response may include close monitoring of a situation if it implicates European infrastructures, or it may include taking critical decisions.

2. Difficulty in Dealing with People. This theme illustrates

how difficult it is for coast guard officers to communicate with civilians, particularly while implementing safety protocols. They found it difficult to deal with people, particularly some who were so stubborn that even after executive orders were issued, some refused to cooperate. Despite this fear, they tried their utmost to educate and help people comprehend the regulations that should be observed throughout the pandemic. Furthermore, they ensure that they do not cause confrontation with members of the community. The prevalence of mask wearing in the community increased

as Covid-19 spread globally. In the US and Canada, which were the counties in which the present research was focused, mask wearing in the community increased dramatically in the months following the formal declaration on March 11, 2020 that Covid-19 had become a pandemic. Despite the importance of masks, some people object to wearing them. During the so-called Spanish flu pandemic (1918–1920), for example, opposition to wearing masks occurred in San Francisco in 1919, when authorities attempted to make it mandatory to wear masks in public places (Taylor and Asmundson, 2021).

III. Addressing the Problems Encountered in Maritime Policing

1. Collaboration with Agencies. This theme was created to

demonstrate the informants' experiences with how various community agencies assisted them throughout the epidemic. Various sectors assisted and aided the coast guard officers. This greatly helped in the accomplishment of their responsibilities, particularly during the pandemic.

Although comparably small, mandated agencies are unlikely to be able to achieve essential maritime capacity, opportunities exist for supportive agencies, such as the Navy and Coast Guard, to achieve law enforcement capability if supported by purpose-friendly policies and practices. It is impossible and inefficient for each required agency to operate independently in this broad geographical region, restricting the law enforcement role solely to its specified tasks, when mechanisms for delegation of power exist. There is a great potential for establishing a cooperation mechanism comprised of mandated and supported agencies to increase the presence of competent individuals at sea and assist effective law enforcement in the marine environment at sea. This could be accomplished by delegating the necessary legitimate authority to all relevant agencies, as well as developing and implementing comprehensive training programs encompassing all functions related to marine law enforcement of all agencies, allowing for optimal utilization of both maritime capacity and law enforcement capacity of all agencies (Prasada et al., 2019).

2. Open Communication Lines. This theme emphasizes the

need of coast guard officers to communicate with appropriate persons who may assist in addressing challenges and concerns faced while performing duties in the middle of the covid-19 outbreak.

Communication, such as seeking advice from a more experienced colleague, was really beneficial in being more productive.

Productivity on the site depends on effective communication among the workers. Communication is effective if the receiver understands the information as intended by the sender. At every stage of the construction lifecycle, information (in the form of drawings, specifications, notes, letters, memos, models, catalogues, instruction manuals, and pictures) needs to be stored, retrieved, and communicated. Effective communication is fundamental to project success. Effective communication facilitates proper planning and scheduling of the construction works and adequate information guides the clients towards appropriate financial planning, and ensures effective availability of material and labour when required (Olanrewaju et al., 2017).

IV. Aspirations of the Informants to Improve their Performance in Maritime Policing

1. Up-Skill Training. This theme depicts the instruments required

to increase the potential and skills of coast guard personnel in order to give a higher level of service. The informants truly emphasized their desire for seminars, schooling, and training in order to develop themselves holistically. They believed that it could lead them to acquire greater knowledge and wisdom than can be applied at work. Furthermore, they saw it as a helpful instrument for self-improvement, which would help them perform better in maritime policing.

This theme is supported by the study in enhancement of cadets' practical training at the national academy of the state border guard service where cadets' practical training is performed in order to enrich and improve knowledge acquired during lectures, and to improve practical skills in performing duties in border guarding units under real conditions. Enhancement of cadets' practical training simulating practical actions (general military, military-engineering, fire and medical trainings; courses on border control, border guard service tactics, personal security, administrative proceedings) were introduced at the border guard academy for seniors; implemented and conducted during the first hour of independent study at the following departments of the academy: border guard service tactics; border control; combined scouting; combined scouting; combined scouting; combined scouting; combined scouting. Thus, cadets' practical skills are mastered through the introduction of trainings, educational practice, field training, and role plays, as well as the practical component of education and professional training programs (Bloshchynskyi, 2017).

2. Upgraded Equipment and Facility. This theme discusses other

aspects of maritime policing that need to be addressed in order to deliver a higher level of service. The informants require upgrades in terms of equipment, such as floating assets for response and patrols, as well as an increase in the number of employees who can assist with safeguarding persons and property at sea. This would also give them more opportunities to deter illegal activities and maintain peace and order. This theme can be explained using the study of data gathered from

2015 to 2017 which states that there is considerable growth in overall Coast Guard of the Republic of Croatia (CGRC) operations. Given the evidence, fresh investments in equipment and human resources are critical for sustaining the attained level of marine safety at sea to modernize and boost efficiency. An additional goal is to enable authorized CGRC personnel to perform navigation safety inspections independently as soon as possible, to improve the protection of passengers, crew, resources, and the marine environment in the eastern Adriatic Sea (Sunko et al., 2018).

3. Expanded Alliance. This theme highlights the necessity of

cross-sector collaboration in enhancing maritime policing. According to the informants, teamwork is a helpful technique that may aid in the fulfillment of duties amidst a crisis. This claim is evident when the coast guard troops from Tubigon and Talibon joined forces with other agencies like PNP, BFP, LGU, and RHU to offer better service to residents in the neighborhood during the pandemic. Furthermore, the informants viewed these agencies as force multipliers in providing safety and security because they lacked the manpower and resources in carrying out their duties, especially with the covid-19 outbreak.

In order to effectively protect the community, law enforcement agencies should work to form effective and meaningful partnerships with local hospitals, public health departments, and other local police agencies to pool their knowledge and resources. These partnerships can foster the cross-training of personnel, as well as improve community education and public messaging. Using the recommendations of these partnerships, agencies should also specifically outline their protocols on the enforcement of social distancing, isolation, quarantine, and any other public health restrictions. These protocols should indicate specifically how these measures will be enforced and what the associated penalties will be (Jennings & Perez, 2020).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The researcher is forever grateful to the people who helped her realized the song lyric “spread her wings and learn how to fly” in this beautiful journey.

Atty. Dodelon F. Sabijon, her research adviser, who never allowed the researcher to procrastinate. His words of wisdom and inspiration gave the necessary push to start and finish this endeavor;

To the panel members, Dr. Yolanda C. Sayson, Dr. Paulino V. Pioquinto and Dr. Esmeraldo Damuag, for all the valuable inputs that led the study on the right path and gave it depth;

To Maam Jessica de la Cerna, for being a caring and kindhearted person by lending a helping hand;

To the Coast Guard Personnel of Tubigon and Talibon, for their enthusiastic participation in this study and for accommodating the researcher at their sub-stations;

To her college dean, Mr. Avelino N. Lofranco, for being understanding and considerate of her schedules and other concerns;

To her friend Klea, for her unwavering support and aid all throughout this adventure;

To her family, who have always been an inspiration and a great source of joy;

Mr. Christopher Asuncion L. Arcay, for contributing valuable materials that helped in shaping this research;

To her Mulaag friends, who keeps on pushing her to continue and never give up; special acknowledgement to Dr. Haydee C. Cabasan for being kind and thoughtful;

To Mater Dei College, Mother of God, who consistently instills her core values: wisdom through scholarship, charity through service, and prayerful life through living the gospel.

To Mama Mary for her grace, intercession and guidance;

Finally, to the Almighty Father, source of infinite wisdom, for the constant enlightenment that made the researcher find her way through life's ever-changing byways.

Laudate Dominum!

Randall Lyn B. Blasco

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