

Preserving Community Peace and Order: Experiences of Chief of Barangay Public Safety Office (BPSO)

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the experiences of Chiefs of Barangay Public Safety Offices in maintaining community peace and order, focusing on the challenges they face and the strategies they employ.

Their roles involve demanding responsibilities and personal risks, including handling intoxicated individuals, managing nighttime disturbances, and enforcing curfew regulations, which require composure, vigilance, and resilience. The themes created were: Team Work makes the Dream Work, Quiet Night, Safer Street, Law Ignored, Enforcement Struggles, Defiance Disrupts Peace, Vigilance Prevent Violence, and Calm in Chaos.

The recommendation drawn from this study is as follows: emphasizing collaboration between officers and the community. Highlighting strategic patrols and visibility: Persistent operational challenges, such as limited equipment, training, and community support, underscore the need for skill development, proper tools, and inter-agency coordination.

The informants also expressed aspirations for evolving enforcement strategies and investing in protection to improve their preparedness and public trust. Overall, sustainable community peace relies on personal resilience, professional competence, strategic coordination and active community engagement.

Keywords: criminal justice, transcendental phenomenology, community peace and order, barangay public safety offices, Baybay city, Leyte, Philippines.

Introduction

Rationale and Literature Review

Peace and order serve as foundational elements for global social stability, political governance, and economic growth. In the Philippine governance framework, the *barangay* acts as the primary political unit responsible for maintaining localized public safety. Under the Local Government Code of 1991 (Republic Act No. 7160), local government units are mandated to decentralize powers and establish community brigades, specifically through the operationalization of the Barangay Public Safety Office (BPSO) and Barangay Tanods. These civilian volunteers function as frontline force multipliers for the Philippine National Police (PNP), expanding law enforcement visibility into vulnerable residential sectors.

Despite these frameworks, grassroots peacekeeping faces dynamic operational hurdles. In recent years, local jurisdictions like Baybay City, Leyte, have experienced notable shifts in criminal activity including

property theft, illegal gambling violations under PD 1602, illicit drug proliferation, and violent crimes. Understanding the lived experiences of BPSO Chiefs is critical, as they navigate structural issues such as scarce resources, evolving security threats, and community resistance.

Theoretical Framework

This study is theoretically anchored on three core models:

- Safety Culture Theory (Wiegmann, 2002): Explains how shared safety values, norms, and formal/informal organizational commitments shape individual risk management behaviors.
- Team Performance Theory (Tuckman, 1965): Outlines the developmental progression of groups (forming, storming, norming, performing, adjourning) toward achieving collaborative goals.
- Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1977): Focuses on an individual's assessment of their own capacity to execute performance objectives and exercise environmental agency.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to investigate how BPSO Chiefs implement localized anti-criminality efforts by answering three primary questions:

1. What are the positive and negative experiences of the informants in implementing anti-criminality programs?
2. How do the informants address the problems encountered during program implementation?
3. What are the aspirations of the informants to improve their operational performance?

2. Methods

Research Design

A qualitative transcendental phenomenology research design, derived from the philosophical traditions of Edmund Husserl and refined by Clark Moustakas (1994), was employed. This design focuses on capturing the core essence of human experiences regarding a real-world phenomenon through exhaustive, open-ended dialogues.

Research Environment and Informants

The study was conducted within the urban center (Poblacion) of Baybay City, Leyte, a coastal component city. Ten (10) highly specific Poblacion barangays (Zones 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 15) were selected due to their high commercial density, dense populations, and elevated crime monitoring requirements. The research informants consisted of ten (10) male BPSO Chiefs selected based on purposive criteria:

- Must be an active male BPSO Chief.
- Must possess a minimum of three (3) years of continuous leadership experience in the role.
- Participation was entirely voluntary, depending on formal consent.

Instruments and Procedures

Data collection relied on face-to-face, semi-structured interviews utilizing an open-ended interview guide validated by a university panel. Questions were framed using layperson terminology to encourage descriptive, uninhibited responses. Interviews lasted at least one hour, were audio-recorded with structural consent, and were subsequently transcribed verbatim for participant validation (member checking).

Data Analysis

The collected qualitative text underwent inductive thematic analysis following a five-part model:

1. Familiarization: Transcribing audio records and reading transcripts alongside field notes.
2. Coding: Rigorous, systematic identification of meanings across 144 extracted significant statements.
3. Developing Themes: Grouping core meanings into 17 distinct clustered categories.

4. Defining Themes: Shaping the structural narratives and mapping them out into 8 overarching emergent themes.
5. Producing the Report: Interpreting the final data matrix against existing criminological literature.

Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

Ethical acceptability was maintained by observing the guidelines of the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (RA 10173), securing institutional review approval, providing optional anonymity clauses, and signing non-disclosure protocols. Trustworthiness was established through credibility (triangulation and member checking), transferability (rich contextual background descriptions), dependability (independent audit trail of records), and bracketing (setting aside subjective researcher biases).

Results and Discussion

The qualitative analysis yielded eight primary emergent themes categorized across the three main sub-problems.

I. Lived Experiences in the Performance of Duties

A. Positive Experiences

Theme 1: Teamwork Makes the Dream Work

Informants emphasized that localized peacekeeping success relies on internal synergy and community cooperation. Collaborative efforts between tanod (watchmen), barangay officials, and residents directly improved situational awareness and lowered monthly crime rates. Informant 10 highlighted that when team dynamics are harmonious and respectful, residents actively step in to help preserve neighborhood safety. This confirms Tuckman's (1965) view that overcoming storming phases leads to high-performing collective execution.

Theme 2: Quiet Night, Safer Streets

Proactive nighttime visibility acts as a strategic deterrent against criminal intent. Implementing strict evening curfews for minors and monitoring dark public hotspots directly reduced property theft and street-level disturbances. This operational reality aligns with Cohen and Felson's (1979) Routine Activity Theory, which states that visible guardianship disrupts the convergence of motivated offenders and suitable targets in time and space.

B. Negative Experiences

Theme 3: Non-Compliance with the Rule

A central point of friction is public disregard for local ordinances. Informants detailed regular infractions regarding curfew bounds and public intoxication. A unique dilemma arose when community leaders or barangay officials themselves violated policies (e.g., street drinking), creating social embarrassment and compromising the chief's authority. This behavior reflects Cornish and Clarke's (1986) Rational Choice Theory, where actors bypass regulations if they perceive low risks of formal sanction or high immediate benefits.

Theme 4: Defiance Disrupts Peace

When confronted, intoxicated individuals or chronic violators frequently exhibit open resistance, hostile arguments, and verbal mockery. BPSO chiefs highlighted that defiance drains local enforcement resources and risks escalating minor encounters into violent physical altercations. Applying Tyler's (2006) Procedural Justice Theory, the data indicates that public compliance improves when officers maintain neutral, transparent, and respectful procedural communication during field confrontations.

II. Strategies for Addressing Operational Problems

Theme 5: Vigilance Prevents Violence

To address safety issues without permanent detention facilities, BPSO chiefs enforce highly dynamic, unpredicted patrol schedules to throw off criminal observation patterns. Informants emphasize staying hyper-alert to unfamiliar individuals wandering within their sectors, gathering intelligence, and calling the PNP for swift structural interventions when weapon usage or serious felonies are imminent.

Theme 6: Calm in Chaos

Managing volatile situations requires absolute emotional composure. Informants stated that responding to altercations with matching anger worsens confrontations. BPSO chiefs utilize a strategy of active listening by allowing agitated or intoxicated individuals to vent completely before rendering field judgments or issuing formal barangay summonses for the following morning. This application of Hirschi's (1969) Social Control principles highlights the role of authoritative self-control in modeling community stability.

III. Aspirations to Improve Performance

Theme 7: Evolving for Enforcement

The informants expressed a clear desire to move from purely reactive protocols to standardized, proactive enforcement systems. BPSO Chiefs actively seek ongoing capacity-building seminars hosted by government agencies to update their knowledge on evolving human rights frameworks, illegal drug control measures, and judicial blotter documentation processes. This reflects the principles of Transformational Leadership (Riggio, 2006), where leaders intentionally pursue personal development to inspire operational growth within their units.

Theme 8: Investing in Protection

Informants pointed out a significant operational vulnerability regarding the lack of standard logistical equipment and basic security guarantees. The chiefs identified critical logistical deficiencies, such as the absence of durable two-way communication radios, heavy-duty flashlights, and defensive batons. Furthermore, given the physical dangers of their roles (e.g., encountering armed individuals), they aspire for institutional protection, including hazard pay, health benefits, and personal security measures for their immediate families. This aspiration maps to Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory, which states that satisfying the core psychological need for competence requires proper tools, logistical backing, and institutional security.

Conclusion

The Barangay Public Safety Office remains a vital, frontline force multiplier in the Philippine criminal justice system. The lived experiences of BPSO Chiefs reveal a complex balance between successful community collaboration and the physical risks brought on by public defiance and institutional resource scarcity.

Ultimately, achieving sustainable community peace and order does not depend solely on strict law enforcement. It requires a balanced combination of BPSO operational resilience, standard logistical investments from local government units (LGUs), institutional training updates, and an active culture of compliance and cooperation from the community members themselves.

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