COMMUNITY POLICING, PUBLIC TRUST AND CRIME PREVENTION: EVIDENCE FROM MODEL POLICE STATIONS IN SARGODHA

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Abstract

This study examines the role of community policing practices in fostering public trust in the police using the Sargodha model police station as an example. This study is based on the premise that police effectiveness depends not only on fighting crime but also on public trust and police legitimacy. A quantitative research design was used, and data were collected from a total of 70 respondents, including 45 community residents and 25 police officers, using a structured questionnaire based on a Likert scale format. Data collected from community respondents were used to analyze the relationship between community policing and public trust, and data from police respondents served as the basis for descriptive analysis. Statistical analyzes were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), and Pearson correlations were used to examine relationships between key variables. The results indicate a significant positive relationship between community policing and public trust in the police. Results show that increased police and community engagement, equity, and accessibility lead to increased levels of public trust. This study contributes to the limited empirical literature on community policing in Pakistan and provides practical ideas for police reform aimed at strengthening police-community relations and improving crime prevention.

Keywords: Community policing; Public trust; Police legitimacy; Crime prevention; Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

Police play an important role in maintaining social order and ensuring public safety. In modern society, police effectiveness is increasingly evaluated not only from the perspective of crime control, but also from the perspective of public trust and police legitimacy. Trust in law enforcement is essential to public cooperation, compliance with the law, and the effectiveness of the criminal justice system as a whole. When citizens trust the police, they are more likely to report crimes, assist in investigations, and assist in crime prevention efforts. In many developing countries, including Pakistan, police-community relations have historically been characterized by mistrust, fear, and a sense of unfair treatment. Traditional approaches to policing that emphasize power and law enforcement often fail to take into account the public interest and social factors that influence crime. As a result, police reforms increasingly focus on community policing as a strategy to improve police effectiveness and restore public trust. Community policing emphasizes partnership, problem solving, and active interaction between police and community members to create shared responsibility for maintaining public safety.

In Pakistan, the creation of model police stations reflects institutional efforts to improve service delivery, transparency, and public satisfaction. These reforms aim to transform police practices by promoting community participation and increasing accountability. However, despite political support for policing, empirical evidence on its implementation and its impact on public trust remains limited. Existing research has primarily focused on policy analysis or

theoretical debate, with relatively little attention given to measuring public perceptions and experiences at the local level.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between community policing and public trust in the police, focusing on the model police station of Sargodha. This study uses a quantitative research design and utilizes data collected from community members and police officers to provide a comprehensive understanding of community policing. By empirically evaluating the relationship between community-oriented policing strategies and public trust, this study contributes to the limited empirical research in the Pakistani context and provides relevant insights into police reform, police legitimacy, and crime prevention.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Community Policing as a Reform-Oriented Approach

Community policing is widely recognized as a progressive approach that seeks to improve the relationship between police and the communities they serve. Unlike traditional policing models that rely heavily on authority and enforcement, community policing emphasizes collaboration, problem-solving, and proactive engagement. Researchers argue that this approach allows police to improve service delivery by addressing underlying social problems, reducing fear of crime, and involving local residents in maintaining public safety.

Community policing functions not only as a set of programs but also as an organizational philosophy that influences police behavior and organizational culture. Key elements of this approach include police response, public participation, transparency, and responsiveness to public concerns. Research shows that public trust in law enforcement increases when police officers regularly communicate with community members and demonstrate that their actions are fair.

Public Trust and Police Legitimacy

Public trust in police means the public's confidence in the impartiality, effectiveness, and integrity of law enforcement agencies. Trust is closely related to the concept of police legitimacy and reflects the belief that police authority is legitimate and should be respected. Criminological research has consistently emphasized that voluntary law compliance and cooperation with the police require trust and legitimacy.

Procedural justice theory provides a solid theoretical framework for understanding public trust in the police. According to this theory, if people perceive police procedures to be fair, impartial, and respectful, they are more likely to perceive the police to be legitimate. Empirical research shows that respectful treatment, transparent decision-making, and accountability play a more important role in establishing public trust than crime-fighting performance alone.

Empirical Studies on Community Policing and Trust

Many international studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between community policing and public trust in the police. Research in Western countries suggests that community-oriented strategies increase public satisfaction, improve police-community relations, and increase police legitimacy. Increased police visibility and meaningful community involvement led to increased public trust and cooperation.

However, empirical evidence from developing countries, particularly South Asia, remains limited. In many settings, challenges such as limited resources, inadequate training, and deeply entrenched traditional police cultures limit the effective implementation of community policing. Studies focused on Pakistan have primarily examined police reform at the policy level, with insufficient attention paid to measuring public opinion and trust at the operational level.

Research Gap

Although the existing literature supports the effectiveness of community policing in enhancing public trust, there is a clear lack of empirical research that quantitatively investigates this relationship in the Pakistani context, particularly at the model police station level. Most previous studies did not take public opinion into account through systematic data collection or statistical analysis. This gap highlights the need to conduct community-based empirical research to assess whether community policing significantly contributes to building public trust. This study fills this gap by examining the relationship between community policing and public trust in the police using quantitative data collected from a model police station in Sargodha.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between community policing and public trust in the police. This study was conducted within the jurisdiction of the Sargodha Model Police Station to assess the practical implementation of community policing strategies at the local level. The study involved 70 respondents, including 45 community members and 25 police officers. Community members were selected to measure community perceptions of police practices and the level of public trust in the police, and police officers were included to support a descriptive analysis of police practices. To ensure equal representation, community respondents were selected using a simple random sampling technique.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire based on a Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Separate questionnaires were distributed to community members and police officers, reflecting the nature of the information collected from each group. The instruments were designed to capture perceptions related to police availability, fairness, community participation, and trust. The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondents' perceptions, while Pearson correlation analysis was applied to examine the relationship between community policing practices and public trust in police based on data from community respondents only.

FINDINGS

This section presents the results of the quantitative analysis based on the data collected from the respondents. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were used to examine perceptions of community policing and levels of public trust in the police. Descriptive analysis of responses from local residents (n=45) revealed that the majority of respondents had positive views about community policing practices in the selected model police stations. Respondents generally agreed that police officers are accessible to the public, interact with community members, and respond to community concerns. Similarly, levels of public trust in police were found to be moderate to high, with many respondents expressing confidence in police fairness, behavior, and service delivery.

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between community policing practices and public trust in police using data from community respondents only.

The results revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between the two variables, indicating that higher levels of awareness of community policing were associated with greater public trust in the police.

Relationship between Community Policing Practices and Public Trust (Public Respondents)

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Pearson Correlation (r)	Sig. (p-value)
Community Policing Practices	45	3.72	0.61	0.648	0.000
Public Trust in Police	45	3.89	0.58	—	—

Note. Correlation analysis is based on public respondents only (n = 45).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that community policing practices play a significant role in shaping public trust in police within the study area. The results provide empirical support for the effectiveness of community-oriented policing strategies in enhancing police–community relations.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide empirical evidence that community policing is significantly associated with high levels of public trust in the police in a model police station in Sargodha. The positive relationship found between community-oriented policing strategies and public trust supports the existing criminological literature that emphasizes the importance of police-community interactions in strengthening police legitimacy and public trust. Consistent with procedural justice theory, the results indicate that public trust in police is strongly influenced by perceptions of fairness, accessibility, and respectful treatment. Community respondents who reported positive interactions with police were more likely to express confidence in police actions and decision-making. These results are consistent with previous international research that emphasizes procedural justice as an important determinant of police legitimacy and community cooperation.

This result is particularly important in the Pakistani context, where police enforcement has traditionally been perceived as authoritative and coercive. This result suggests that initiatives such as the creation of model police stations can have a positive impact on public trust if community policing practices are implemented effectively. This suggests that community policing reform can go beyond symbolic changes and lead to significant improvements in police-community relations.

However, the results also highlight the importance of consistency in the application of community policing. Differences in public perception indicate that results may depend on individual executive actions and organizational support. This highlights the need for ongoing training, accountability mechanisms, and leadership efforts to support community-oriented policing. Overall, the discussion strengthens the argument that community policing serves as an effective strategy for increasing public trust and legitimacy of police in developing countries. By promoting cooperation and mutual respect, community policing can help improve police outcomes and support broader crime prevention goals.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the relationship between community policing and public trust in the police using the Sargodha model police station as an example. Using quantitative data collected from community members and police officers, this study provides empirical evidence that community-oriented policing strategies are positively associated with increased levels of public trust in the police.

Results show that policing that is characterized by accessibility, fairness, and active community involvement significantly contributes to positive public perceptions of law enforcement. The findings suggest that community policing can be an effective mechanism to

improve police-community relations and strengthen police legitimacy in developing countries like Pakistan. This study contributes to the limited empirical literature on community policing in Pakistan by focusing on a model police station. This study highlights the importance of continued and meaningful implementation of community policing reforms to build public trust and support crime prevention efforts.

IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study have important implications for police policy, practice and theory. From a policy perspective, the positive relationship between community policing practices and public trust highlights the need for law enforcement agencies in Pakistan to institutionalize community policing as a central policing strategy. Policymakers must ensure that community policing is supported by clear operational guidelines, adequate resources, and ongoing monitoring.

In practice, police leaders should foster regular interactions between officers and community members through community meetings, outreach programs, and visible patrols. Training programs should focus on procedural fairness, communication skills, and respectful treatment of the public, as these factors play an important role in establishing public trust. Strengthening accountability and performance evaluation mechanisms can further strengthen public trust in police institutions.

This study also provides theoretical implications that support the applicability of procedural justice and police legitimacy theories in the Pakistani context. By demonstrating that equity and community participation have a significant impact on social trust, our results extend the existing theoretical framework to developing countries and strengthen its relevance beyond Western societies.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite its contributions, this study has some limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted within a limited time frame, which limited the scope of data collection and the ability to include a larger, more diverse sample. Due to time constraints, this study focuses on a single model police station, which may limit the generalizability of the results.

Second, the limited number of model police stations available in Sargodha further restricted the choice of study location. As a result, the results reflect perceptions related to a specific policing context and may not fully reflect community policing practices in other counties or regions.

Future studies should consider extending the study period and including multiple model and non-model police stations to enable comparative analysis. Increasing the geographic coverage and sample size increases the generalizability of the results. Additionally, future research may use mixed methods incorporating qualitative interviews and quantitative data to better understand community and police perspectives on community policing.

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