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Revisiting Public Perception towards Police Behavior: Role of Media in Maintaining Law and Order in Pakistan

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Abstract

The core objective of the current study was to dig out the public perception of police behavior from students of Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan-Pakistan. A cross-sectional survey was conducted from n=385 university students through a systematic sampling technique. Data were collected by adapting Mastrofski's model (1999) based on six dimensions i.e. attentiveness, reliability, fairness, manner, responsiveness, and competence. Findings showed that overwhelming respondents had negative perceptions towards police behavior due to their biases. Moreover, a large majority was of the view that though the role of the police department is pivotal and undeniable in maintaining the law and order situation in the country however Pakistani media is not playing its due role in this regard and this could be a pertinent contributing factor in creating such a negative public perception. This study concluded public perception of police behavior is complex, with significant implications for law enforcement.

Keywords: Law and Order, Police Behavior, Public Perception, Media, Survey, Systematic Sampling

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Revisiting Public Perception towards Police Behavior: Role of Media in Maintaining Law and Order in Pakistan

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Abstract

The core objective of the current study was to dig out the public perception of police behavior from students of Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan-Pakistan. A cross-sectional survey was conducted from n=385 university students through a systematic sampling technique. Data were collected by adapting Mastrofski's model (1999) based on six dimensions i.e. attentiveness, reliability, fairness, manner, responsiveness, and competence. Findings showed that overwhelming respondents had negative perceptions towards police behavior due to their biases. Moreover, a large majority was of the view that though the role of the police department is pivotal and undeniable in maintaining the law and order situation in the country however Pakistani media is not playing its due role in this regard and this could be a pertinent contributing factor in creating such a negative public perception. This study concluded public perception of police behavior is complex, with significant implications for law enforcement.

Contents:

- [Introduction](#)
- [Objectives of the Study](#)
- [Material and Methods:](#)
- [Measurement](#)
- [Sample Size](#)
- [Data Analysis](#)
- [Discussion](#)
- [Suggestions and Recommendations](#)
- [Conclusion](#)
- [References](#)

Introduction

The police system of Pakistan is inherited from the British law of 1861. Since then police force has faced multifaceted scarcities i.e. lack of resources, inadequate intellectual capacity, and inefficient

governance within the institutes. This deprivation of the police system is due to various reasons such as lack of basic needs, the discrepancy in operational administration due to political ins and outs, derelictions of institutes, and unforeseen



safety. Security threats are another important factor that is increasing local crime statistics on a regular basis. The rotation policy of officers implemented in 2000 is used for the transfer of police officers on political grounds instead of merit (Aman, 2022).

It would not be wrong to say that the police system of Pakistan is frozen during contemporary times because of inappropriate and inefficient governance. As a result, this institute is losing its credibility with every passing day. Instead of praised the problem has reached such an extent that the police department itself has become a target of controversies during small and large-scale crimes. As a reaction to these allegations, the attitude of the police force becomes quite questionable towards the public. That is a latent factor in building public perception towards police departments (The Express Tribune, 22 March 2022).

Rout (2017) said that exposure to police's unethical behavior during a crisis increases distrust of police among the public. This distrust makes the public hide facts and information from the police. As a result, the public's belief in the criminal justice system of the country decreases and the crime rate will increase. The behavior of police is not the only factor to develop the distrust of police among the public. There are other factors too as mentioned by Miethe, Venger, and Liberman (2018) media coverage regarding police brutality, violent content related to police activities on social media, and incidents of corrupted behavior in newspapers play significant roles in developing negative perceptions about police among the public (Cox, 2017). Intravia, Thompson & Pickett (2020) conducted research on police image on social media and empirically proved that consuming negative content on social media leads to negative perceptions. Oglesby-Neal, Tiry & Kim (2019) through their research on 'public sentiments of police on Twitter' identified that sometimes after some particular incident public attitude towards police becomes more negative.

Some incidents during the past years have shown police actions where they are violating public rights, misusing their power, and putting the public in trouble. Two of the most recent incidents of police brutality receive acute limelight one in Quetta and the other in Mingora. In Quetta, police officials directly fired on two car-borne

youngsters killing one and injuring the other by calling them dangerous. During the other incident that took place in Mingora five police officers, after a traffic accident whacked a man for arguing with them. They were daring to the extent that they were not even afraid of the crowd around them (ANI, 2021).

Another incident happened on January 19th, 2019 on Sahiwal (Pakistan) highway, where four citizens were encountered by six police officers (Dawn, 2019). Similarly, in 2019, Salahuddin was encountered after attempting an ATM robbery on August 30th, 2019 right after his arrest. Later he was identified as an abnormal person who was trying to retrieve his stuck ATM card. In another incident that took place in 2017, 14 citizens were murdered including two pregnant females and hundreds were injured by the police force (Ashraf et al., 2020). Due to all these incidents, the distrust of the public police became twofold.

Police officers are given different behavioral pieces of training but the incidents quoted above have put a question mark on the quality of police training because such incidents are badly impacting the image of police and as a result public's distrust of them. Due to the risen distrust, people have started taking charge of their own hands. Previous research conducted by Ashraf et al. (2020) emphasized the socio-psychological analysis of public perception of police behavior. The current research will be significant for police departments as it provides the quality of their image in public eyes and explains the reasons for distrust. This study will also be helpful for policymakers to increase behavioral training for police officers and help them learn about anger management and coping mechanisms. Furthermore, it will open new horizons of research for researchers, academicians, and other concerned officials.

Objectives of the Study

The following are the objectives of the study;

1. To analyze the public's perception of police behavior
2. To investigate the real cause of unethical police behavior in public perception.
3. To analyze the role of media in constructing an image of the police department in the public eye.

Material and Methods:

Procedure

A cross-sectional survey was conducted from the university students of Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan. By following the de facto approach method researcher selected those respondents who were present on the day of data collection by using a systematic sampling technique.

Measurement

A questionnaire based on a demographic profile inquiring about the age, gender, education, employment status, and residential area and a non-western Matroski model (1999) scale based on nineteen items and six dimensions i.e.

attentiveness, reliability, fairness, manner, responsiveness, and competence was used to determine public perception towards police behavior. The seventh dimension of the role of media was added to the questionnaire.

Sample Size

N=385 sample size was determined by using the Krejcie and Morgan table (1970) for sample size determination.

Data Analysis

For coding, decoding, and recording the responses, the researcher used a statistical package for social sciences version 22. Responses were presented through frequency and percentage.

Statistical Analysis

Table 1

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Items	Categories	F (%)
Age	18-25	201(52.2)
	26-32	90(23.4)
	>32	94(24.4)
Gender	Male	235(61)
	Female	150(39)
Education	BS	181(47)
	M.Phil.	109(28.4)
	PhD	95(24.6)
Residential area	Rural	188(48.8)
	Urban	197(51.2)
Employment status	Employed	121(31.4)
	Unemployed	264(68.6)

N= 385, f=frequency, %= percentage

Table 2.1 shows the demographic profile of the respondents. The first item is about the age of the respondents, the majority 52.2% reported their age span between 18-25 years, while 24.4% mentioned their age as more than 32 years and the remaining 23.4% had an age range of 26-32 years. The second item is about the gender of the respondents; more than half 61% of the respondents were male while 39% were females participated in the study. The

third item is about the educational level of the respondents, 47% were BS students while 28.4% and 24.6% were M.Phil. and PhD scholars. The next item is about the residential area of the respondents, 51.2% were from urban areas and the remaining 48.8% were from rural areas the last item is about the employment status of the respondents, 68.6% were unemployed and 31.4% were employed.

Table 2

Presentation of Public Perception towards Police Behavior

Items	Yes %	No %
Do the police listen to your problems?	48.8	51.2
Do the police comply with the complaint calls in a timely manner?	45.7	54.3
Is it easy to contact the police?	81	19
Are the police officers knowledgeable about rules?	84.9	15.1
Do the police resolve citizen’s problems?	35.8	64.2
Are the police staff members well trained?	41.6	58.4
Is the behavior of the police fair towards the general public?	9.4	90.6
Is biased police attitude a problem?	93.8	6.2
Do the police treat people equally?	7.8	92.2
Are there free decisions while issuing citations?	14.8	85.2
Do the police address citizens in an appropriate tone?	7.3	92.7
Do the police pay attention to the citizens?	13	87
Are the police services consistent?	25.7	74.3
Do the police maintain a safe environment?	34.8	65.2
Do the police follow up their commitment towards citizens?	20.5	79.5
Are the police responsive towards citizens?	24.9	75.1
Do the police meet perceived aspirations?	20	80
Do the police take action towards solving the problems?	46	54
Are the police neutral?	61.1	38.4
Do the news media present the police in a positive manner?	39.54	60.46
Do the entertainment media present the police in a positive manner?	11.62	88.38
Does social media present police in a positive manner?	21.11	78.89
Is the mistrust of the public of police responsible for bad law and order situations?	90.13	09.87
Better police image presentation through media will improve police image and eventually lead to better law and order situations.	85.41	14.59

N=385, %= Percentage

Table 2.2 shows the presentation of public responses towards police behavior. About 48.8% of the respondents said that the police listen to their problems while 51.2% responded contrary to this. The next item is "police compliance to the complaint calls in a timely manner", about 45.7% said that police answer their complaints on time but 54.3% said that they do not comply on time. Next, the respondents were asked about contacting the police. 81% reported that it's easy to contact the police while 19% said it's not easy. Furthermore, the respondents were asked about police officers' knowledge of rules. The majority of the respondents 84.9% reported that police officers are knowledgeable about rules but 15.1% said no they are not. The next item on the questionnaire is the resolution of citizen's problems by the police. Around 64.2% mentioned that the police are unable to resolve citizen's problems while 35.8% said the

police resolve their problems. The next item is about police pieces of training, more than half 58.4% said they are not well trained while 41.6% said they are trained.

Moreover, the respondents were inquired about the police's treatment towards the general public, a great majority 90.6% of the respondents said their treatment towards the public is not fair while 9.4% said that their treatment is fair. Likewise, they were asked whether they consider biased police attitudes as a problem. Around 93.8% consider it a problem while 6.2% consider it otherwise. The next question was somewhat similar where they were asked about the treatment of police towards people. The majority of the respondents 92.2% said that the police officials do not treat the public equally while 7.8% said that they do. In addition, they were asked about the free decisions while issuing citations, more than a

quarter 85.2% said they do not provide free verdicts while 14.8% said they do.

Next, the respondents were asked to report about police's tone while addressing the public, 92.7% said they do not address in an appropriate tone while 7.3% said they do. The next item was about police's attention towards the public, about 87% said they do not pay attention to the citizens while 13% said police pay proper attention to the public. Furthermore, they were asked about the consistency of police services, about 74.3% said police services are not consistent while 25.7% said they are consistent every time. The next question was about the maintenance of a safe environment 65.2% said that they do not maintain a safe environment while 34.8% said they provide a safe environment to the public. When the respondents were asked about the police's follow-up regarding their commitment toward citizens, 79.5% said they did not follow their commitment while 20.5% said they did. The next item was about police's responsiveness towards citizens, about 75.1% said they were not responsive towards citizens while 24.9% said they were responsive.

The next item was about the perceived aspirations of police, 80% said the police does not meet perceived aspirations while 20% said it does. The next item was about their perception regarding police's action toward solving a problem, 54% of the respondents said police do not take problem-solving steps while 46% said they do. The next item was about the neutrality of police, about 61.1% public said police are neutral while 38.4% said they are not neutral in any way.

Talking about the role of media in the construction of the image of police when the respondents were asked about their perception of police presentation on news media 39.54% said that it is positive but 60.64% said that it is not positive. In response to a question about the presentation of police on entertainment media, a great majority of respondents 88.38% said that their presentation on entertainment media is not positive likewise presentation of police on social media was also reported positive by 21.11%. The rest of the respondents 78.89% found it not positive.

When the respondents were asked about the relationship between the mistrust of the public of police and law and order situations, 90.13% said the

mistrust of the police is responsible for bad law and order situations. In the last question respondents were asked whether better police image presentation through media can lead to improved police image and eventually better law and order situation, 85.41% agreed.

Discussion

The public perception of police behavior is crucial in maintaining the trust of the police force among the public but it can only be achieved through a positive relationship between the police departments and the community they serve. The way people perceive the police can impact how they interact with the police officials, and how much they trust them, and eventually lead towards their willingness to cooperate with law enforcement. Trust is a very pivotal factor in public perception of police behavior. If the public perceives the police as respectful, trustworthy, and accountable, only then they would be able to trust them and work with them to solve crimes and maintain public safety. Conversely, if the public perceives the police as untrustworthy, corrupt, or abusive, they may be less likely to cooperate with them or report crimes. The second factor is legitimacy; public perception of police behavior is also closely tied to the legitimacy of the police as an institution. When people consider the police as fair, just, and in service of the public interest, they are more likely to accept and respect their authority and ultimately comply with them. Community relation is another very important factor. The police are part of the community they serve. If the police's attitude is perceived as abusive or discriminatory towards the public, it would create a gap between the police and the community but behaving contrary to this would erode trust, and reduce cooperation. Another important factor in this regard is officer safety: When the public has a positive perception of police officers, they are more likely to be safe on their job. If the public views the police as an adversarial force or aggressive or abusive, officers may be at a greater risk of harm. In summary, the public perception of police behavior is crucial for maintaining trust, legitimacy, community relations, and officer safety. It is essential that police departments work to ensure that their officers behave in a manner that is

respectful, accountable, and in line with community expectations.

In terms of attentiveness, findings of the present study showed that about half of the respondents were positive about police attitude regarding listening to problems and compliance with complaints but approximately four-fifths of the respondents were of the view that it is very difficult to contact the police. These findings are consistent with the results of Ashraf et al. (2020) which discovered that police do not respond in time. Establishing contact with the police is the first step that is taken by the public in time of need. If the public remains unable to contact the police they will not be able to register their complaint and it will lead to mistrust of the public on the police department.

Subsequently, results related to the reliability of the police system, the majority, five-sixth of the respondents reported that police officers are completely aware of rules. But when it comes to the resolution of citizen's problems by police only two third of the respondents believed that police can solve their problems. In response to a question about police training only two-fifths of the respondents were satisfied with the training that the police officers receive. These findings endorse the findings of Ullah et al. (2016).

Likewise, another dimension regarding the fairness of police, the majority of the respondents said that the police attitude was not fair to the general public. Only one-tenth consider it fair when asked about their thoughts about business as a problem. Approximately all considered it a problem. Similarly, when the respondents were asked about equal treatment of police with the public approximately all were of the view that they do not treat the public equally. In addition, they were asked about the free decisions while issuing citations, more than a quarter 84.2% said they do not provide free verdicts while 15.8% said they do. These results were in line with the results of Ashraf et al. (2020).

In the same way, responses in the dimension of Manners showed that almost all the respondents were of the view that the police do not address in an appropriate tone. Regarding the police attention towards the public, a tenth of the respondents were of the view that the police do not pay attention to

the citizens. Furthermore, in response to a question about the consistency of police services, about three-fourths responded that the services are not consistent every time. The next question was about the maintenance of a safe environment more than half said that the police do not maintain a safe environment for the public. These responses were somewhat similar to the results of Greene (2010).

In the dimension of responsiveness, approximately four out of every five respondents said that the police do not follow their commitment. The next item was about police's responsiveness towards citizens, whereas the fourth responded that they were not responsive towards citizens. In the next item, again a fourth of the respondents said that the police do not meet the perceived aspirations. In response to the question regarding the police's problem solving a little more than half of the respondents said that the police do not take problem-solving steps. The results of this dimension are consistent with the findings of Jamal (2011). Findings of the last dimension based on competence approximately six out of every responded that the police are neutral while the rest answered this question otherwise. The findings are consistent with the study of Perito & Parvez (2014).

Regarding the inquiry about the role of media in developing a positive image of the police, the questions were divided into three dimensions based on the nature of media i.e. news media, entertainment media, and social media. Three-fifths of the respondents said that news media does not present a positive image of the police, the response about the positive presentation on entertainment media was nine-tenth, and on social media remained four-fifths. The findings are consistent with that of Chan (2015). The majority of the respondents when asked, agreed that the presentation of a positive image of police in media will improve the trust of the public on police and eventually the law and order situation.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Improving public perception of police brutality in Pakistan is a complex issue that requires a multifaceted approach. Some steps can be taken to improve the situation.

1. Increased transparency and accountability: They expected that with the new

technological equipment implemented, there should be positive changes such as higher transparency and accountability in the police force. This can be done by establishing means like wearing body cameras, conducting internal investigations, and providing consequences for officers who misconduct on the police force.

2. Enhanced community policing: community policing is about establishing police and community members' interactions. This can be achieved through stationing of officers in friendly areas within the communities and acknowledging the residents in a polite manner.
3. Provision of better training and resources: it is critical to note that police officers require adequate training in conflict management, the use of restraint, and the understanding of cultural diversity. Besides, they should be endowed with enough raw materials, employees, and training.
4. Increased public awareness: the public is required to be informed of their rights and of the police in society as well. This can be achieved through awareness Creating awareness, meetings and educational programs to be conducted in the community.
5. Encouragement of citizen participation: more citizens should come forward and report cases of police brutality, complaints, or-if interested, in taking part in any policy on community policing affairs.
6. Implementation of legal reforms: there is need for legal changes in that manner that any police officer would be disciplined if involved in any misconduct. The scope of this can also involve changes in the police complaints system, the force used, and the disciplinary measures.
7. Creation of an accountability culture: It is highly imperative that there is a need to establish an accountability culture in the

police forces. This can be done through rewarding officers with ethical and professional standards and or admiring and or punishing officers with unethical conduct and corruption.

8. Positive image construction through media: There is an assertion that social and Other Media Platforms should be harnessed in painting a good image of the Police Department. Awareness programs should be carried out, and official accounts on social media should be opened in the police departments so that directly police can interact with people on social media.

Conclusion

Therefore, the understanding of the opinion of the public regarding the manner police conduct itself is a broad and significant issue that has an impact on the effectiveness of the police and the social stability of society. The negative perception can be a result of police Violence, racial Policing of justice, Biased Policing, and media portrayal.

Despite the efforts that have been employed to existential these problems, and the efforts such as the use of body cams and community policing, much more is still to be done. Policing requires the police, particularly the local law enforcement agencies to expand their techniques of engaging people in society and enhance the bond of trust between the public and police.

Lastly, it is important for law enforcement agencies to consider the expectations of the public and the behavior displayed by the police with the aim of maintaining and restoring or gaining confidence in the police by the public in order to enhance the safety and welfare of the public. Alone it would be possible only through sustained endeavors in these directions that could transform some of these issues that can enhance the police-community interface and foster a society that is secure and just for one and all.

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