

Article

Implementing community policing practices to manage conflict resolution in Galeshewe, South Africa

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Abstract: Community policing has emerged as a vital instrument for combatting crime and enhancing public safety in South Africa. As a result, it has the capacity to go beyond traditional law enforcement functions as a mediator in disputes, fostering improved relationships between the police and the communities where they work. This paper analyses the implementation of community policing strategies by the South African police with the purpose of resolving conflicts. This study aims to address social crime prevention-related concerns through community policing methods in the Galeshewe police area within the Francis Baard policing regions of the Sol Plaatje Municipality, South Africa. The paper examines the tactics that community police employ to enforce the law, avoid social issues, and manage conflict resolution in the communities. A qualitative method and descriptive design were employed. Comprehensive document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and observations were employed as data collection strategies. An inductive reasoning model was used to analysis data. The findings of the study demonstrated that community policing plays an important role in optimizing problem mapping and it increases public knowledge of the importance of upholding security and order in the different police operations that support the community policing program.

Keywords: community policing; Galeshewe policing area; social crime prevention; conflict resolution

1. Introduction

The South African Police Service has the responsibility of upholding law and order, carry out law enforcement activities, and provide community services and protection (Skogan and Hartnett, 2019). Community policing is characterised as a collaborative endeavour with the community to recognise security and public order concerns and devise solutions (Shearing, 2018; Sunargo and Hastuti, 2019). SAPS (South African Police Service) has implemented several bureaucratic reform measures to enhance its performance as a law enforcement agency (Sugiharto et al., 2020). SAPS is responsible for establishing and maintaining security, ensuring safety, and enforcing the law in compliance with the relevant rules and regulations (Kalionga et al., 2023). The implementation of regional autonomy and developmental advancements will lead to the establishment of new cities, villages, sub-districts, provinces, and regencies, resulting in the formation of new police units to uphold public safety and maintain order (Karim et al., 2021). Consequently, Braga et al. (2019) and Asmirah et al. (2023), assert that the concepts of safety and security are fundamental prerequisites for fostering sustainable and uninterrupted development. They argue that without adequate measures to ensure the protection of

individuals and communities from harm, as well as safeguarding societal stability, it becomes challenging to achieve continuous progress across economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Furthermore, Antiraksawan and Mustofa (2020) and Hidayatullah et al. (2023) argue that community policing is fundamentally about the execution of police duties through a deep understanding of the specific needs, challenges, and dynamics within a given community. They emphasize that effective community policing requires more than just law enforcement; it entails building trust, fostering open communication, and actively involving community members in the co-creation of safety solutions.

Policing is a highly important formal mechanism for regulating and controlling behaviour within a community (Fajar et al., 2023). Hence, in cases where societal disapproval and alternative social mechanisms prove ineffective in curbing criminal activity, substance use, and abnormal behaviour, the police are expected to serve as the primary safeguard against offenders and individuals exhibiting psychopathic tendencies (Widayani, 2020). In Western countries, the police are essentially tasked with not only controlling crime but also upholding public order. South Africa has historically stood out for the steadfast commitment of its citizens to the ideals of personal freedom (Kalionga et al., 2023). However, as social unrest intensifies and the situation becomes more volatile, there is often a growing demand from the public for law enforcement to adopt more assertive, intrusive, and sometimes even undemocratic tactics in an effort to restore order.

In recent years, South Africa has experienced significant surges in “street violence,” along with an escalation in drug consumption and the illicit drug market among the population. There has also been an upswing in domestic violence, including spousal assault and child abuse (Widayani, 2020). Additionally, there is a prevailing perception among the public that crime in South Africa is rampant and beyond regulation (Kalionga et al., 2023). Many South Africans have adjusted their lifestyles due to concerns about crime, even though statistics indicate that the public’s perception of the “crime problem” is often exaggerated. In response to pervasive dissatisfaction with the police and the initiatives of state and local governments to combat crime, many wealthy communities in South Africa have turned to private security solutions. The SAPS allocated a total of 35 billion in the 2022/2023 financial year for crime prevention activities. This budget was distributed as follows: 156 million for mounted units, 903 million for the dog unit, 1.2 billion for rail police, and 271 million for detainees’ meals and medical expenses (SAPS Annual Report, 2024). Notwithstanding the substantial financial investments allocated to law enforcement, particularly for police operations in major urban areas, there is an increasing consensus among the public and police officials that traditional policing strategies, aimed at apprehending offenders and preventing future crimes, are ineffective (Widayani, 2020). Conventional notions of policing are under increasing scrutiny, especially about the focus on the police’s reactive function, the widespread deployment of officers for arbitrary vehicle patrols, and analogous tactics.

1.1. Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to explore the implementation of community policing practices in Galeshewe, South Africa, and assess their effectiveness in managing and resolving conflicts, while identifying strategies to improve community-police partnerships for enhanced conflict resolution.

1.2. Objectives

- To examine the effectiveness of current community policing practices in managing and resolving conflicts within the Galeshewe community.
- To identify the challenges and opportunities for improving community-police partnerships in enhancing conflict resolution mechanisms in Galeshewe.

2. Literature review

2.1. Collaboration between law enforcement agencies and community

The collaboration between law enforcement and the community has the potential to empower the community (Daga et al., 2024; Dubham et al., 2020). This collaboration is essential for them to jointly identify signs that may lead to challenges within the community, formulate proactive solutions for these issues, and uphold a safe and orderly environment (Friedman, 2020; Menne et al., 2022). Although SAPS is physically close to communities, most individuals are reluctant to engage with or make use of the services offered by the organisation (Miller and Blackler, 2017; Salim et al., 2024). Individuals avoid interacting with the Police because to internal dysfunctions within the institution, including difficulties in resolving intricate cases, collecting fees, and delivering unsatisfactory public services (Shapland and Vagg, 2023).

2.2. Community policing and Un-policy-worthy practices

The adoption of community policing is expected to shift the police away from “un-police-worthy” practices and toward authentic policing strategies that align with the needs and expectations of the communities they serve (Gustiadi, 2023; Surya et al., 2021). The Polmas model represents an exemplary approach to policing, as it emphasizes a more community-centered framework for law enforcement (Alim, 2020; Iskandar et al., 2023). This model fosters collaboration between the police and local communities, encouraging proactive engagement, trust-building, and shared responsibility in maintaining public safety. More specifically, in this model, the community takes on an active role as co-producers of safety and security, working alongside law enforcement to identify problems and develop solutions (Wahab, 2021). Rather than simply enforcing the law, the police assume the role of facilitators, guiding and supporting community efforts to address crime and social disorder. Yoserwan (2023) asserts that a democratic process should be established based on principles of accountability, openness, and public participation in an equitable partnership, while also upholding human rights.

2.3. Human rights and security

The attainment of actual security and a sense of safety are vital for the growth and prosperity of both communities and the nation, as outlined in the SAPS Act (No. 68 of 1995) and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996). The Indonesian National Police, a government agency that receives support from the community and consistently upholds human rights, is responsible for carrying out various police activities. These functions encompass ensuring security and public order, enforcing laws, providing protection, and delivering services to the community (Widayani, 2020). The National Police cannot fulfil the responsibility of maintaining public order and security unaided. SAPS need assistance and support from several sources, primarily the community and key stakeholders, in order to fulfil its commitments (Ardilestanto, 2023; Kappeler et al., 2020). Social conflict arises from a lack of concern and disregard for established regulations, resulting in various disputes among different community groups (Fajar et al., 2023). According to a sociological perspective, social conflict is inevitable when different groups of people with unique identities and interests live in close proximity to each other (Hamid, 2023). Social conflict spans a wide range of understanding, from little disputes between people, families, or communities to large-scale conflicts involving multiple major organisations. These disputes can occur within regional or group relationships due to a range of variables, including ideological, political, economic, socio-political, and fundamental concerns. South Africans are aware of global issues, particularly those related to the environment, human rights, and the establishment of democratic systems (Purba et al., 2021). According to Hasniati et al. (2023), a crucial realisation for the nation and state to achieve a transition into a democratic civil society is the need to strengthen the community's police services through the use of information technology. A community policing approach was established with the aim of fostering collaboration between law enforcement agencies and the local community. This paradigm provides support for community policing in the villages and sub-districts (Cox et al., 2023).

2.4. Police duties in community policing

The primary responsibilities of the police are to offer guidance, detect issues at an early stage, and facilitate advantageous circumstances for the community through mediation or negotiation (Yoserwan, 2023). The police must have a keen ability to identify signs of vulnerability within the community that could lead to social unrest, as they play a vital role in maintaining public order (Gustiadi, 2023). Nevertheless, numerous barriers impede the implementation of the Community Policing model by the police. Consequently, the police are unable to effectively and harmoniously resolve conflicts that arise during community interactions (Salim et al., 2024). Police must possess the ability to seamlessly integrate into the community and establish transparent channels of communication with its members. To mitigate the risk of disturbances to public order and security, it is essential to establish a collaborative effort to address and overcome social challenges that pose a threat to the community's well-being and tranquility (Siregar et al., 2021).

2.5. Theoretical framework

Restorative justice theory

The Restorative justice theory is a unique approach to crime and conflict resolution which places more emphasis on mending relationships and healing harm than on typical retributive techniques that emphasize punishment. The theory was propounded by Howard Zehr who describes it as a method that aims to engage all relevant parties affected by a particular offence, with the goal of collectively recognising and resolving the harm, needs, and responsibilities involved, in order to facilitate healing and achieve maximum restoration (Zehr, 2002). Moreover, Braithwaite (2004) defines restorative justice as a procedure in which all those impacted by an act of injustice have the chance to engage in a dialogue about how they have been harmed and determine the appropriate measures to rectify the harm caused.

Restorative justice highlights the fact that crime affects not only the victim but also the perpetrator, the neighborhood, and even society at large. The approach highlights the need of holding individuals responsible for their actions, making amends for the harm caused, and reintegrating offenders into society. It also focuses on meeting the needs of victims and promoting their recovery process. This philosophy is based on the ideas of discussion, involvement, and mutual respect. It differs from traditional punitive justice models by prioritising the rehabilitation of relationships instead of just punishment.

3. Materials and methods

This study employed qualitative research methodology. In this form of descriptive qualitative research, the researcher serves as the main instrument used to explore the conditions of natural phenomena (Sugiyono, 2002). The study utilised purposive sampling to select Twenty (20) participants. Participants who possessed specialised knowledge and expertise in in community policing were deliberately selected with specific objectives and considerations in view. These included police officers from two local police station and community leaders such as local councillors. Therefore, fifteen (15) police officers took part in both in-depth interviews and focus group discussions while five (5) community leaders that are namely; a local government official, a religious leader, a traditional leader, a youth leader and women affirmative group representative took part in in-depth face to face interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted to engage participants in one-on-one conversations, allowing for a deep exploration of their experiences, perspectives, and emotions related to the research topic. Focus group discussions were organized to facilitate group interactions among participants, fostering a dynamic exchange of ideas and opinions. This method encouraged participants to build on each other's contributions, revealing diverse viewpoints and facilitating discussions that might not emerge in individual interviews. Researchers documented interactions pertaining to the application of Community Policing regulations since they consistently make the connection between context and information in their observations. Participant observation was also a key method used to gather data in a natural setting. The researchers immersed themselves in the environment, carefully noting behaviors,

interactions, and contextual factors that influenced the subject matter of the study. The study utilized in-depth interviews to gather data. Interviews were recorded using notebooks and audio recorders. However, the researchers often combined both methods, capturing the interview in real-time while simultaneously taking written notes.

4. Results and discussion

The study found that community policing is fundamental in returning law and order. A majority of the participants revealed that police officers are unable to independently cultivate the cognitive skills required to ensure community safety and uphold order. Some participants revealed that Galeshewe area has experienced a plethora of challenges that affect peace and security. One participant had the following to say;

“Police officers cannot develop the necessary thought processes to realize community security and order on their own. There are still issues, particularly in the Galeshewe policing area, which means that the Community Policing policy needs to be implemented in the era of social conflict prevention and optimized right away to spread understanding to other police personnel in their respective duty areas.”

[Participant 1; Male; Local Government official]

“Police officers alone cannot fully address the security needs of the community or maintain lasting order, especially in areas like Galeshewe, where challenges persist. As a youth leader, I see the critical need for the immediate implementation and optimization of the Community Policing policy. By actively involving young people and other community members in crime prevention efforts, we can foster a deeper understanding between law enforcement and the community. This collaborative approach will equip officers with the local insights and support needed to prevent social conflict, ensuring that these strategies are effectively adopted across all policing sectors.”

[Participant 8; Male; Youth Leader]

“As police officers, we recognize that maintaining community security and order is a shared responsibility that cannot be achieved by law enforcement alone. In areas like Galeshewe, where social conflict remains a challenge, the Community Policing policy is essential for fostering stronger relationships with the public. Immediate optimization of this approach would not only enhance our ability to prevent crime but also improve communication and trust with community members. By working closely with residents, we can gain valuable insights, making our policing efforts more effective and tailored to the specific needs of the communities we serve.”

[Participant 12; Male; Police officer]

Participants revealed that the established barriers in the law enforcement organizations aiming at creating a safer society cannot be solved only with individual

actions. Rather, it brings to the fore the need to put into active use the Community Policing policy, if all efforts are to be focused on averting social tugs. In such efforts, better realization of this policy would be crucial in equipping the officers with requisite knowledge and practices geared towards community-based approaches. In doing so, the information acquired should be more effective for use by police officers in different areas of functions thus enhancing community safety and order from different angles. Community policing refers to collaboration between the police and local communities to identify and address social issues within the community. In support of this finding, Muibu (2022), Johnson et al. (2021), Li (2021) found that the police serve as a catalyst to assist the community in developing and sustaining security in their surroundings. Community policing is a philosophy and strategy program that seeks to establish closer connections between the police and the communities they serve (Mazzola, 2023; Wantenaar and Govender, 2023; Wisler et al., 2019). The objective of the police is therefore to identify and eliminate the root cause of crime, rather than simply addressing it. Therefore, the effectiveness of community policing is assessed based on the absence of crime, rather than the frequency at which it happens (Dlamini, 2023).

4.1. Community policing and preventive tasks

Furthermore, this study has established that preventive tasks involve the systematic provision of services, protection, and direction to the community in order to guide and safeguard them. This measure is implemented to guarantee the community's sense of security, organisation, and tranquilly, while preventing any disturbances to its operations. One of the participants had this to say;

“Preventive tasks combine the process and pattern of guidance in the form of offering services, protection, and guidance to the community, so that the community feels safe, orderly, and peaceful and that none of its activities are disturbed.”

[Participant 2; Male; Religious Leader]

“Preventive policing efforts emphasize community engagement and collaboration, integrating educational programs, safety initiatives, and regular communication between law enforcement and residents. These efforts aim to build trust and foster cooperation, ensuring that communities not only feel secure but also actively participate in maintaining public order. By providing protection and support through continuous interaction, the police can help prevent disruptions to daily life, creating an environment where peace and order are sustained over the long term.”

[Participant 5; Female; Women Affirmative Group Representative]

The finding emphasizes that preventive policing tasks integrate both structured processes and strategic guidance aimed at fostering community well-being. These tasks involve offering services, protection, and education to ensure that the community feels secure, organized, and at peace. By focusing on prevention, law enforcement not only addresses immediate threats but also works to create an

environment where people can engage in their daily activities without fear of disruption or harm. This proactive approach highlights the importance of maintaining public order and safety through constant engagement, support, and vigilance, ultimately contributing to long-term stability and trust between the police and the community. As part of community policing, the police collaborate with the community and the local government to form a police and Community Partnership Forum. This forum seeks to create an equitable partnership between the police and the community in managing the community environment. The Police and Community Partnership Center serves as the hub for activities at the urban village level. The objective of policing is to improve community security and quality of life (Muibu, 2022). Policing acts as the foundation for a collaborative endeavour between law enforcement and the community to address various concerns (Colvin, 2017; Giwa, 2018; Lamin et al., 2016).

4.2. Measures to combat crime

Various strategies have been adopted to reduce the prevalent high crime rate in Galeshewe. A plethora of measures have been implemented to prevent crimes from occurring and these measures hold a crucial position that must be actively pursued and strengthened. Efforts to address the lack of funding and dedicated vehicles for the implementation of Polmas operations have also been observed. Galeshewe officers expect to receive budgetary support from the police, as well as financial assistance for the operational expenses of the station from the District Commissioners. They also pursue financial support from business individuals by submitting assistance requests and aim to maximize the utilization of patrol vehicles provided by the relevant Sector Police within the Galeshewe Police jurisdiction. Some participants had this to say;

“Many measures have been implemented to lower the high rate of crime that exist our society. We have preventative strategies that entail taking action to stop crimes before they start and taking countermeasures against illegal activities. These non-penal measures have a very strategic position that has to be engaged and intensified.”

[Participant 3; Male; Senior Police officer]

“Police officers anticipate budget support from the police, as well as financial support for the operational costs of the officers’ activities from the District Commissioners office and local government through budget requests submitted in regional deliberations, and financial support from business people through assistance requests”

[Participant 5; Female; Senior Police officer]

The findings indicate a multifaceted approach to addressing the high crime rates prevalent in society, highlighting the implementation of various measures aimed at crime reduction. The emphasis on preventative strategies illustrates a proactive stance, where actions are taken to thwart criminal activities before they occur, as well as countermeasures to address existing illegal actions. These non-penal

measures are recognized for their strategic importance, suggesting that they require enhanced engagement and intensification to be effective in fostering safer communities. Additionally, the expectation among police officers for budgetary support from both the police and local government underscores the financial challenges faced in operationalizing these strategies. The reliance on financial assistance from the District Commissioners and local businesses through formal requests further highlights the need for collaboration between law enforcement and the community. This collective effort not only aims to bolster operational capabilities but also reinforces the significance of community involvement and resource allocation in the ongoing fight against crime. Together, these insights reveal a comprehensive strategy that intertwines prevention, community engagement, and adequate funding to create a more secure environment. The study found that the Galeshewe police's evaluation of social conflict prevention is not operating optimally. The Galeshewe police sector policing leadership has not effectively implemented the police strategy aimed at preventing social conflict. This lack of implementation has hindered efforts to address and improve the situation, and there has been inadequate evaluation of the challenges faced. These findings are consistent with Sudagiri and Purwanto (2020) who argue that the objectives of community policing are twofold: (a) to create a collaborative relationship between the police and the community, centred on a shared commitment to address and resolve issues that may disrupt security and order; and (b) to enhance legal consciousness and public and community awareness regarding potential threats to security and order within the community.

5. Conclusion

The study has established that community policing is built on the principle of collaboration between law enforcement and the community. Together, they work to identify and resolve issues that affect public safety and order. This approach emphasizes proactive problem-solving, focusing on preventing issues and finding solutions before problems escalate, rather than merely reacting to incidents after they occur. Effective community policing relies on mutual understanding and shared commitment between both parties to address community concerns. Additionally, it promotes public engagement and legal awareness, aiming to enhance residents' knowledge of laws and regulations so they can play an active role in maintaining safety and peace.

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