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## **POLICE PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE ON CITIZENS' TRUST: A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED POLICING PROGRAM IN SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Human Rights-Based Policing is a framework that guides police officers in executing their duties, providing a balance between law enforcement and the safety of individuals' rights. This study assesses the correlation between police professional competence and citizens' trust in police officers in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat, Southern Philippines. The data collection methods included a survey questionnaire focusing on police professional competence and citizens' trust towards police officers, encompassing factors such as community policing, police behavior, operational procedures, and human rights preservation, as well as response time, active investigation, citizen contact, and promotion of public safety and security. The data was analyzed using frequency distribution, percentage, measures of central tendency, and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. The analysis revealed a significant relationship between police professional competence and citizens' trust in police officers, indicating a strong positive correlation. This refutes the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between police professional competence and citizens' trust. The findings hold substantial implications for the human rights-based policing program in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat, enhancing trust between civilians and law enforcement officer's individuals' rights.

**KEYWORDS:** Human rights, Police officers, Professional Competence, Citizens, Trust

### **INTRODUCTION**

Do police officers effectively demonstrate measurable outcomes about their engagement in community policing, adherence to appropriate operational procedures, and commitment to upholding and protecting human rights? The PNP Guidebook (2009) provides a lens for human rights-based policing programs in the Philippines. Accordingly, it is the comprehensive, systematic, and institutional compliance with international human rights standards and practices in the conduct of police or law enforcement functions. This concept pertains to the interplay between individual citizens and diverse organizations or sectors within society. The lens of human rights-based policing also aligns with the prescribed duties of police officers, which include enforcing laws, criminal prevention and control, maintaining peace and order, and safeguarding public safety and internal security. Furthermore, it encompasses the jurisdiction and obligations bestowed upon law enforcement personnel during the processes of apprehension, inquiry, examination, confinement, liberation, interaction with civilians,

random inspections, and the act of searching and confiscating items (PNP Human Rights Affairs Office 2008).

According to Adu-Takyi et al. (2013), there is a scholarly consensus that the implementation of human rights-based policing program can enhance the legitimacy of police personnel and contribute to the establishment of international and social order. The term "justice and security" encompasses a wide range of rights, including those of nations, communities, and victims (Alemika, Ruteere, and Howell 2018). Therefore, human rights-based policing program enables the general populace to comprehend the conduct of law enforcement officials concerning their obligations and the various individuals, principles, objectives, and frameworks that can contribute to more robust and targeted human rights-based policing (Green 2010).

Police personnel are required to uphold professionalism to carry out their duties properly, serve as competent frontline protectors, and aid citizens in assessing their requirements and engaging with the public in various ways. Still, many real-world studies have shown that it can be hard for police officers to build relationships with the community. This is especially true when people do not trust the police, and there is a history of corruption, instability, racism, or colonialism (Gill et al. 2017, 4). Additionally, examples of these problems include a disregard for the rights of the general public (Loria 2018), instances of police misconduct (Eduardo and Gabriel 2017), impatience on the part of law enforcement towards citizens (Fischer et al. 2022), and the adverse effects of police officers' unproductive and unprofessional behavior on community trust and confidence (Lewis 2022).

The Philippine National Police (PNP) is a prominent governmental organization in the Philippines that plays a crucial role in upholding the law, preventing and addressing criminal activities, and maintaining societal harmony. According to the 1987 Philippine Constitution, it is stipulated that the Philippine National Police possess national jurisdiction and exhibit a civilian nature. Furthermore, it should be noted that Republic Act No. 6975 explicitly mandates the Philippine National Police (PNP) to uphold the law, preserve societal tranquility, and guarantee the well-being and protection of local communities.

In the province of Sultan Kudarat, community policing is a crucial strategy employed to effectively uphold public order and safeguard the welfare of its residents. However, to sustain an effective social structure, law enforcement officials are required to uphold public order while simultaneously upholding the fundamental human rights of individuals. This would enhance the level of engagement between community citizens and law enforcement officials. In recent times, the province has seen a multitude of challenges with incidents of bombs, drug-related activities, instances of homicide, and various breaches of human rights.

According to a report from the Inquirer in December 2022, three adolescents were fatally shot by law enforcement authorities after allegedly failing to comply with a checkpoint inspection in the

Municipality of Lambayong, Sultan Kudarat. The police officers subsequently pursued the individuals involved. Furthermore, the recent explosion that occurred at Isulan Public Terminal led to the injury of seven passengers. Isulan, situated on Mindanao Island, serves as the administrative center of the Sultan Kudarat province. Unfortunately, the municipality has had a series of terrorist incidents in recent years, posing significant risks to public safety and security. These examples call into question the trust that individuals have in police officers in the aforementioned province. This issue is also widely prevalent and raises concerns regarding the efficacy of the police operation and investigation of the aforementioned crime, as previously discussed. The trust that the citizens establish in police officers is essential since they are called upon to find solutions to both evolving and societal issues. When police officers are trusted, they are able to perform their duties with more effectiveness and efficiency. At that point, the community they serve can sense the police's credibility and sense of security.

To address these concerns, my study examines police professional competence on citizens' trust in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat. The main goal is to examine the relationship between the level of police professional competence and the level of trust that locals in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat, have in it. Specifically, it seeks to answer the question, "Is there a significant relationship between police professional competence and citizens' trust in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat?"

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The research study employed a descriptive correlational research design and was conducted in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat, in the Southern Philippines. The sample size comprised 100 participants selected from four specific barangays: Dansuli, Kalawag I, Kalawag II, and Kalawag III, with each barangay contributing twenty-five (25) respondents. Participant selection criteria included an age range of 25 to 64 years and a residency duration of at least two years. A systematic sampling method, specifically the interval sampling method, was utilized for the selection of respondents for the survey.

The main hypotheses that are tested are as follows:

H0. There is no significant relationship between the police professional competence and the citizens' trust.

H1: There is a significant relationship between the police professional competence and the citizens' trust.

To obtain the necessary information, a questionnaire was employed, which was adapted and modified from a validated instrument developed by Gagnon (2020) and Mabutot and Hermosa (2017). The questionnaire consisted of eight sections, each containing five questions, and utilized a 4-point Likert-type rating scale.

The aforementioned study utilized various data analysis techniques, including frequency and percentage distribution, measure of central tendency (mode), and spearman's rho. These techniques

were employed to analyze the results pertaining to factors classified under two categories; a) police professional competence variable and b) citizens' trust variables.

In a more formal manner, these statistical tools can be expressed as:

a.  $P = \frac{f}{N} \times 100$

Where P is the percentage;  $\frac{f}{N}$  is the matrix where f is the number of times that the sociodemographic variables occur, and N is the number of respondents; and 100 is the constant number used in the formula.

b. In the context of ungrouped data, the mode can be determined by organizing the data in ascending and descending order and identifying the value that appears with the highest frequency. ("Calculating Mode of Grouped and Ungrouped Data" 2023).

c.  $r_s = 1 - \frac{6 \sum d^2}{n(n^2 - 1)}$

Where  $r_s$  is the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient  $d^2$  represents the relationship between police professional competence and citizens' trust, and the number of observations is denoted as n.

## FRAMEWORK

Tom Tyler's Procedural Justice Theory focuses on how the behavior of police officers influences public trust. The theory emphasizes the importance of police legitimacy, fairness of police actions, and adherence to the law in improving police-community relations. When people perceive police actions as "illegitimate," they are less likely to accept police authority, obey police orders, or refrain from illegal behavior. To support this theory, a study uses two key variables: police professional competence and citizens' trust. The study examines indicators related to human rights-based policing to assess police professional competence and measures citizens' trust based on response time, active investigation, citizen contact, and public safety promotion.

The following sections illustrate the police professional competence and its factors; and citizens' trust towards police officers and its factors to examine the central argument presented in this chapter that citizens have very high trust in police officers.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The area consists of seventeen (17) barangays, and Isulan, Sultan Kudarat serves as the provincial capital covering 545.87 square kilometers, which accounts for 10.81% of the province's total surface area (Isulan, Sultan Kudarat 2022). The respondents for this study are residents of selected barangays

of Isulan, Sultan Kudarat, namely Dansuli, Kalawag I, Kalawag II, and Kalawag III. Specifically, the study includes residents living in each of these four barangays for at least two years and aged between 25 and 64. The demographic profiles of the respondents will be discussed accordingly.

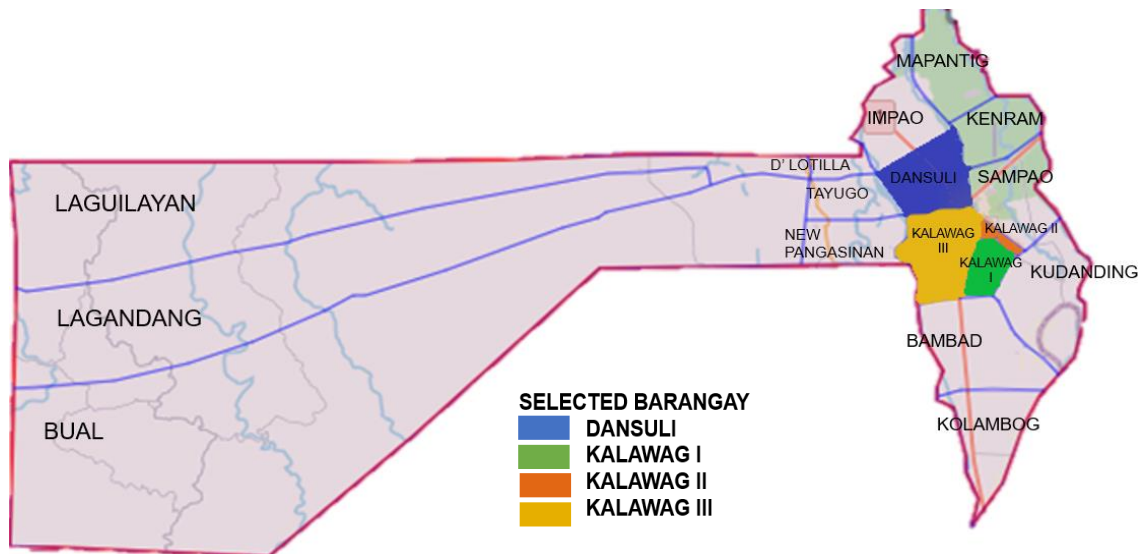
Firstly, among the 100 respondents, the prime working age group (25 to 54 years) constituted the highest number of participants, accounting for 65% (n=100). The mature working age group (55 to 64 years) comprised 35% of the total respondents.

Secondly, the majority of respondents, making up 60% (n=100), are female, while 40% (n=100) are male.

Thirdly, the respondents' demographic profiles based on years of residency are as follows: 22% (n=100) for 29-37 years; 19% (n=100) for 20-28 years; 18% (n=100) for 2-10 years; 17% (n=100) for 47-55 years; 13% (n=100) for 38-46 years; 7% (n=100) for 56-64 years; and 4% (n=100) for 11-19 years.

Fourthly, the four distinct barangays constituted 25% (n=100) of the entire sample population in their demographic profile based on address.

Lastly, the demographic profile of the respondents based on their highest educational background is as follows: 45% (n=100) are high school graduates; 26% (n=100) have completed some college-level education; 20% (n=100) have a college degree; 5% (n=100) completed elementary education; 3% (n=100) have vocational education; and 1% (n=100) have completed postgraduate education.



**Fig. 1 Map showing the location of Isulan, Sultan Kudarat from Arkipelago (2016) for the study, Police Professional Competence on Citizens' Trust: A Study of Human Rights-Based Policing Program in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat.**

### **POLICE PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE AND ITS FACTORS**

There is a need to examine the level of professional competence of police officers. Using its factors: community policing, behavior of the police, proper operational procedures, and uphold and protect human rights, this section argues that professional competency of police officers are on a higher level.

**TABLE I. LEVEL OF POLICE PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Community Policing</b>	54.00	54.00%	3.00	Well
<b>Behavior of the Police</b>	62.00	62.00%	3.00	Well
<b>Proper Operational Procedures</b>	57.00	57.00%	3.00	Well
<b>Uphold and Protect Human Rights</b>	61.00	61.00%	3.00	Well
<b>Overall Police Professional Competence</b>	<b>58.00</b>	<b>58.00%</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>Well</b>

**Legend:**

<b>Range</b>	<b>Description</b>
3.50-4.00	Superbly
2.50-3.49	Well
1.50-2.49	Not Well
1.00-1.49	Awfully

Table I identifies the level of police professional competence. It has four factors: community policing, the behavior of the police, proper operational procedures, and the upholding and protecting human rights. The first factor, community policing, garnered a frequency of 54, representing 54% of the total responses; and a mode of 3, which exhibits a description of "well" on the four-point Likert scale. The second factor, behavior of the police is recorded at a frequency of 62, accounting for 62% of the total response; and a mode of 3 which exhibits a description of "well" on the four-point Likert scale. The third factor, proper operational procedures has a frequency of 57, representing 57% of the total responses; and a mode of 3 which exhibits a description of "well" on the four-point Likert scale. Lastly, the factor, upholding and protecting human rights earned a frequency of 61, representing 61% of the total responses; and a mode of 3 which exhibits a description of "well" on the four-point Likert scale.

The overall level of police professional competence has a total frequency of 58, representing 58% of all responses; and a mode of 3 which exhibits a description of "well" on the four-point Likert scale. This indicates that they possess extensive knowledge regarding the challenges or issues present in their barangay and have direct experience regarding the proficiency of the police force.

Further, this aligns with the argument that the police exhibit a higher level of professional competence. The findings from Ansar (2020) support the idea that the performance of police officers is affected by factors like leadership, competency, and discipline. Likewise, the systematic collection of intelligence and evidence minimizes the inclination to get confessions by coercion and can help enforce the ban on torture and cruel treatment. This is supported by Gagnon's (2020) research demonstrating that when police officers display satisfactory and polite conduct towards people, it boosts public well-being by cultivating trust and confidence in the law enforcement agency. Citizens expect the government to protect their human rights and put their interests first, according to research by Beshi and Kaur (2019, 338). They anticipate that police personnel and the administration will assure the fulfillment of their requirements. However, according to the research findings of Tiwana, Bass, and Farrell (2015), the acts of police officers might lead to conflicts with human rights, as some of them may feel compelled to get quick results and may resort to whatever methods are necessary to fulfill their tasks.

### CITIZENS' TRUST TOWARDS POLICE OFFICERS AND ITS FACTORS

There is also a need to examine the level of citizens' trust towards police officers. Using its factors: response time, active investigation, citizen contact, and promote public safety and security, this section argues that citizens' trust towards police officers are on a higher level.

**TABLE II. LEVEL OF CITIZENS' TRUST TOWARDS POLICE OFFICERS**

Factors	Mode	Frequency	Percentage	Description
Response Time	3.00	60.00	60.00%	Well
Active Investigation	3.00	52.00	52.00%	Well
Citizen Contact	3.00	57.00	57.00%	Well
Promote Public Safety and Security	3.00	55.00	55.00%	Well
<b>Overall, Citizens' Trust Toward Police Officers</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>57.00</b>	<b>57.00%</b>	<b>Well</b>

**Legend:**

Range	Description
3.50-4.00	Superbly
2.50-3.49	Well
1.50-2.49	Not Well
1.00-1.49	Awfully

The triumph of human rights-based policing depends on the satisfaction of the residents with the professional competence of police officers. The results shown in Table II indicate that citizens' trust in police officers is influenced by four factors: response time, active investigation, citizen contact, and promote public safety and security. The first factor, response time, receives the highest frequency count of 60, accounting for 60% of total responses; and a mode of 3 which exhibits a description of "well" on the four-point Likert scale. The second factor, active investigation, which has a frequency of 52, indicating that it comprises 52% of the total responses; and a mode of 3 which exhibits a description of "well" on the four-point Likert scale. The third factor, citizen contact, has a frequency of 57 and accounts for 57% of the total responses; and a mode of 3 which exhibits a description of "well" on the four-point Likert scale. Finally, the fourth factor, promote public safety and security, which has a frequency of 55, accounting for 55% of the total responses; and a mode of 3 which exhibits a description of "well" on the four-point Likert scale. The overall level of citizens' trust towards police officers has total frequency of 57, representing 57% of all responses; and a mode of 3 which exhibits a description of "well" on the four-point Likert scale. This indicates that citizens have confidence in their police officers regarding their conduct, inquiries, and safeguarding the well-being of individuals and the community.

The overall results of the level of citizens' trust also shows us that citizens are indeed satisfied with the performance of the police officers. As shown also in the overall results, citizens do agree that police officers follow their mandated and legal human rights-based policing program. Specifically in their response time, active investigation, citizen contact, and promoting public safety to the people.

Further, this aligns with the argument that the citizens exhibit a higher level of trust towards police officers. Yuksel and Tepe (2013) have demonstrated that individuals who express satisfaction with the police are less prone to experiencing fear of victimization, more inclined to cooperate with law enforcement, and less likely to engage in criminal activities. This aligns with the findings of Tengpongsthor's (2017, 40) research, which states that the effectiveness of police work in enhancing public safety and security depends on their role and authority in maintaining peace, ensuring public security and safety, and safeguarding the shared assets of society. These factors are directly linked to an improvement in job performance. Nevertheless, Melkamu and Teshome's research (2023, 13) found that low levels of trust among people can impede law enforcement authorities' ability to implement safety measures and advance public security effectively. According to Lewis's (2022) research,



individuals who are dissatisfied are less likely to report crimes due to their diminished trust in law enforcement agencies. The findings of the study by Mathura (2022,9) contended that numerous police personnel exhibited laziness and were uncooperative towards civilians. They exhibit discourteous behavior, lack of assistance, corruption, and incompetence.

**POLICE PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE ON CITIZENS’ TRUST**

**TABLE III. CORRELATION BETWEEN POLICE PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE AND CITIZENS’ TRUST TOWARDS POLICE OFFICERS**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Overall Citizens' Trust Towards Police Officers</b>
<b>Community Policing</b>	.480** 0.000 100
<b>Behavior of the Police</b>	.501** 0.000 100
<b>Proper Operational Procedures</b>	.559** 0.000 100
<b>Uphold and Protect Human Rights</b>	.591** <b>0.000</b> <b>100</b>
<b>Overall Police Professional Competence</b>	<b>.597**</b> <b>0.000</b> <b>100</b>
<b>**.</b> Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).	

Table III shows that there is a significant relationship between police professional competence and citizens’ trust towards police officers ( $r=0.597$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) with a strong positive correlation at the 0.01 level of significance. Thus, this study rejects its null hypothesis, stating that there is no significant relationship between police professional competence and citizens’ trust towards police officers. Further, at a strong rate, the higher the police professional competency, the higher the level of citizens’ trust towards police officers.

This is consistent with Schlosser et al.’s (2021) study that developing trusting relationships makes both citizens and police officers safer—meaning fewer legal violations by citizens, less frequent use of force

by the police, and greater willingness to share information and cooperation by the citizens. The Rudhanto (2022, 162) study reveals that there is a significant and positive impact of police performance, whether accountability, competency, or alignment with moral values, on citizens' trust. The result serves as a purpose for fulfilling the responsible obligations of police officers towards the citizens and community.

Specifically, citizens' trust towards police officers has significant relationships with first the community policing with a moderate positive correlation of 0.480, such that at a moderate rate, the higher the level of community policing, the higher the level of citizens' trust towards police officers. Second, in the behavior of the police, there is a strong positive correlation of 0.501, such that at a strong rate, the higher the level of behavior of the police, the higher the level of citizens' trust towards police officers. Third, the proper operational procedures have a strong positive correlation of 0.559, such that the higher the level of proper operational procedures, the higher the level of citizens' trust towards police officers. Lastly, uphold and protect human rights has a strong positive correlation of 0.591, indicating that the higher the level of uphold and protect human rights, the higher the level of citizens' trust towards police officers.

These findings are supported by the study of Pidd (2012), which found that the overall quality of police services is rated as the most important measure for the public and creates a symbiotic relationship between the public and the police. Friday, Lord, and Khuns (2009) argue that citizens' awareness of community policing has been associated with stronger feelings of community attachment, positive perception of law enforcement, and maintaining high levels of efficient operations. Moreover, Lewis (2022) argued that trust in the police reflects trust in the institution as a whole. Trust includes the police's awareness of the community's needs and their ability to treat citizens with respect, fairness, and impartiality. Trusts maintain harmony, support, and are friendly to police and citizens.

The findings demonstrate a clear and noteworthy correlation between police professional competence and citizens' trust towards police officers in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat. These findings also establish a connection between the theoretical basis of this study, the Procedural Justice Theory, which highlights the importance of police officers' performance in gaining the trust and satisfaction of the public. Citizens acknowledge and comply with the authority enforced by the police, as well as the authority enforced by the human rights-based policing program. There is a belief that individuals have a greater tendency to align themselves with the police, express satisfaction with their acts, and have confidence in their professional ability. This aligns with the findings discussed in this particular portion of the paper.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study centers on human rights-based policing, which seeks to uphold public order while safeguarding individuals' rights. Despite facing challenges like police behavior and operational procedures, the findings indicate that residents have developed trust in the police's professional

competence. This trust also reflects that community policing, police behavior, operational procedures, and protection of human rights are all at a high level. The study reveals a strong connection between police professional competence and citizens' trust in police officers, underscoring the importance of procedural justice theory. The findings also highlight residents' satisfaction with the presence of police officers in their community.

However, the study is limited as it only focuses on one aspect of human rights-based policing, which is the professional competence of police officers. It is recommended to further explore other related aspects of human rights-based policing to obtain a more comprehensive understanding and enhance community relations. The framework utilized in this study can serve as a valuable tool for gaining insight into the perspectives of law enforcement personnel practicing human rights-based policing and for building trust among residents.

The study's implications are substantial, especially for implementing a human rights-based policing program in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat, to foster greater confidence between residents and police officers. Further research is needed to examine the professional competency of police officers beyond citizen satisfaction and trust, particularly in the context of changing PNP management and government administration. Additionally, it is crucial to compare traditional and modern approaches to police response in order to improve the effectiveness of policies and practices that promote greater trust among citizens.

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