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Citizen-Centric Policing: Citizens' Expectations of Police in Punjab

Abstract: *Police are an important component of all modern societies and play their role in maintaining law and order. The police-public partnership is crucial for maintaining police legitimacy and peace in society. Conceivably, understanding the people's expectations of police is an important aspect of police legitimacy. To promote citizen-centric policing, it is important to understand the expectations that citizens have from their police. Previous research demonstrates that youth have more frequent contact with police as compared to other sections of society. A positive youth-police contact requires to understand the youth's expectations of their police. The present study aims to explore the youth's expectations of police in the Lahore district of the Punjab province. In-depth interviews were conducted with 40 University students in Lahore. Thematic analysis revealed that students expect the police to be honest, accountable and fair in their duty. The findings of the study indicate that police legitimacy is characterized by the fair conduct of its personnel.*

Key Words: Police, Public Expectations, Youth, Accountability, Fairness

Introduction

The role of police in modern society is one that has been debated for a long time. The earlier concerns revolved around the jurisdiction of the police, its importance in maintaining social control and upholding the values of the society that it represents (Cain, 1973). However, it was realized quite early in the discourse that without establishing the legitimacy of police, its functions cannot be fulfilled. This was reflected in the nine principles of Sir Robert Peel, who is known as the founder of modern police in Britain (Noppe et al., 2017). Although the principles are not exactly laid down by Robert Peel point by point, the philosophy of 'public acceptance' as a pre-requisite for the observance of the law (Grieve, 2015) was proposed by him. Force was only to be used when persuasion or warning fails (Home Office, 2012). With the strong emphasis on public co-operation, it became imperative that the perception of police among the general public was favorable.

Unfortunately, police use has become one of the major causes of the decline in the popularity of police from Asia to America (Chazkel et al., 2020). Police brutality cases have been on the rise in the past decade, which represents the police culture, a term used loosely used for everything that is wrong with police and policing (Martin, 2019). The developing world has been no exception to this. It is observed in the literature that the police in developing countries indulges in more use of force and is not generally held accountable (Michael Akinlabi, 2020). Countries like Pakistan and India have witnessed some of the worst cases of police brutality in almost all political parties' regimes. The infamous Model Town incident was one that was covered widely across media, but the use of force specifically against protestors has prevailed in Pakistan for decades before that (Shah Kazim Syed & Mubarak Asma, 2018). It is postulated that such incidents lead to a lack of trust among the public regarding police which might, in turn lead to non-cooperation in controlling crime in the society (Michael Akinlabi, 2020). Therefore, in this context, it is important to understand not just the institutional and organizational roles of the police but also the expectations that citizens have from the police.

Roch & Poister (2006) have highlighted that expectations greatly affect the experience and satisfaction with any service. The extent to which a service positively or negatively disconfirms the expectations of the citizens determines its level of satisfaction among them. In their study, they suggested that the services with which the public has high expectations may be difficult to prove satisfactory as compared to those services with which the expectation attached are low. They, however, recommended that the link of expectations with service satisfaction is well established, but an enquiry must be carried out regarding the factors which

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encompass the expectations of citizens. This is the aim of the present study. Its purpose is to ask the following question

What are the expectations that citizens have from their police?

The answer to this question will highlight the specific factors that contribute to the formulation of expectations from police of citizens in an underdeveloped country like Pakistan. It is important to understand that, as is the case of police legitimacy discussed by [Tankebe et al. \(2016\)](#), the expectations around police are also strongly influenced by cultural context. The present study aims to carry out an investigation of the factors which combine to produce expectations from the police.

Methodology

The present study aimed to understand the expectations of young citizens from the police. For this reason, a total of 40 male and female students of social sciences from university students in Lahore were asked to respond to an unstructured interview guide. The students were enrolled in undergraduate and graduate degree programs. The students were recruited using a convenient sampling approach. They were informed about the objective of the study, and their consent was obtained before conducting the interview. During one-on-one in-depth interviews, the students were asked about the expectations they have from police and which factors influence these expectations. The students gave detailed responses as part of the qualitative methodology. Thematic analysis [\[Braun & Clarke, 2006\]](#) was carried out to analyze the data and generate themes. The themes that resulted from the analysis are presented in the next section.

Findings

The following themes were observed in the responses of the students. The detailed findings are presented below.

Bribery and Harassment

The majority of the students mentioned that bribery was very common among the police in Pakistan. Therefore, one of the leading expectations that many students had from the police was that bribery should be rooted out completely. One of the female respondents remarked:

The crimes can't be controlled by police in Pakistan because they are the ones who take bribes from the criminals and set them free. I expect that the police should be professional enough to avoid any illegal incentive offered to them, especially a monetary one.

Another female respondent reflected the same sentiment saying:

Situations can get good if the police department focuses on the protection of citizens instead of coming under political pressure or getting bribery from people having influential contacts.

Students also believed that legal incentives such as pay raise and allowances should be given to the police so that they do not get attracted to illegal ones. For example, one student was of the view:

They [the police] should be given promotions, allowances and other facilities. If they are provided with facilities and resources, they will not take a bribe or register false reports, and there would be a great change in society, and we can expect better results.

Bribery was associated with dishonesty and corruption by the majority of the students. Morally corrupt police, in their view, cannot be trusted with enforcing the law. This finding is in line with a study conducted on the perception of students regarding police corruption in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. [Ullah et al. \(2015\)](#) have highlighted that the perception of the police being one of the most corrupted institutions is prevalent among students. [Osawe \(2015\)](#) has highlighted the same issue in Nigeria, where a lack of welfare package is believed to have forced police towards illegal means of monetary gain.

Another flaw of the police culture is the prevalence of harassment by police officers. The students have highlighted this, and in line with 'accountability', they believe that police should not be allowed to harass the citizens in any way. One male student explained this in detail in the following words:

I think harassment is linked to accountability. Police in Pakistan threatens people to drop their cases against powerful people. Sometimes to gain their illegal ends, they threaten people to obey or go to jail. Common people are not aware of what does or do not lie in the jurisdiction of the police, and so they become terrified of such threats. The same fear of courts is prevalent regarding police stations, and people tend to

avoid police stations at all cost. I think that such a terrorizing nature of police should be changed. Police should be cooperative and not threatening.

A female student highlighted another form of harassment, saying:

As a female, I consider the police station just as unsafe as the streets, maybe more. What we have seen in the motorway incident is the living example of all that needs to be changed. In most cases involving women, victims are blamed, and on top of that, they are harassed by police through inappropriate gestures and verbal abuse. In my country, I would like to have a police station where I can go easily to report a crime without having to worry about my safety.

Another female student voiced the same expectation:

Sexual harassment by the police is not something new. It is like an open secret. I am not saying that all policemen harass women, but we cannot turn a blind eye to the fact that it is quite prevalent. The police stations should be more accessible to women because they cannot report many crimes out of fear of the treatment they might receive at the hands of the police.

This finding resonates with a study conducted in Kasur regarding the general perception of police among people. [Shabbir et al. \(2018\)](#) highlighted that people perceive the police to misuse its power for illegal means. Harassment is one severe form of this misconduct, be it psychological or sexual.

Fair and Equal Treatment

Another theme that emerged from the data was the expectation of police that treats everyone alike. Police that does not discriminate on the basis of social class or gender is expected by the students. A male student remarked:

As a citizen of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, firstly, I expect justice from the police. Unfortunately, now the tragedy of the police is that they work for the rich people. If one-man shows his power in front of the police, they leave him unharmed. On the other hand, the police treat the poor and needy people very badly. If the poor people want to lodge an FIR against the powerful party, the police start to threaten them. So, from my point of view, the police should stop this kind of attitude and help the middle-class community to bring them justice and peace. And I expect that police practices fairness in their treatment of poor and rich alike.

A female student also expressed this saying:

In my view, I think their behavior with every kind of person like poor and rich should be equal. The punishment of a crime should be equally applied to both rich and poor, and the law should be enforced with fairness.

Critical sociology delineates the use of power in detail. It postulates that power is used by the rich in society to maintain their hegemony ([Lawson, 2014](#)). This appears to be the general perception of the police among the respondents of the present study. This finding is congruent with that of a study conducted in Pakistan on juveniles. [Khosro & Yew \(2015\)](#) highlighted that poor and rich are not treated in the same manner, and if a rich child is involved in any illegal activity, he/she has higher chances of being released by the police than a poor child. In this light, the expectation of students to be treated fairly irrespective of their social class seems justified.

Misuse of Power

Police brutality is a common problem with police, but there are other forms of misuse of authority that have been highlighted by the respondents. One male respondent remarked:

I think police officials should pay for travel fare when they are travelling on public transport. The second thing that I noticed is that they misuse their authority. When they go out, they eat things without paying and take fruits from small shops without paying money. This misuse of power is not ideal and must stop. I expect that the police should be professional in this regard. They should not take undue advantage of their uniform. A female respondent shared her experience and expressed her view, saying:

In my opinion, the police should know the rights of the citizens as well. I was once on a bike with my brother, and another bike rider crossed us in the lane, almost hitting us. A police officer stopped him at the signal and started slapping him. This, in my opinion, is inappropriate behavior. He could find him or give a warning, but the police should not slap or physically abuse any citizen. I don't expect this as good delivery of service.

The respondents highlighted that the police understands their social position and misuse this authority to take their frustration out on people. Another study conducted in Pakistan voiced similar concerns. [Zubair & Khan \(2014\)](#) categorized travelling without fare and taking fruits and vegetable from vendors without paying the money for it as a form of violence. They also mentioned that the illegal use of the label 'police' is prevalent in Pakistani society.

Accountability

In developing countries like Pakistan, the role of the police is that of serving the government and not the general public (Chattha & Ivković, 2004); therefore, there is no accountability of the police towards the citizens. The respondents in the present study highlight that they expect that the police knows that it is accountable to them for their actions. One female student expressed this remarking:

I think the police should know that it is appointed to provide security to its citizens and not take undue favors from them. There should be a mechanism in which the common people or the public can hold the police accountable for their actions. Things like verbal abuse and physical violence on the streets are not allowed to them, but people remain silent because there is no empowerment among common citizens to hold the police accountable. Therefore I expect to see a policeman who knows that he cannot cross his jurisdictions or else he will be held accountable by the people.

A male student also expressed the same opinion:

I have often observed that the police in my city stop people without any reason. They start questioning them unnecessarily about where they are going and then let them go. I feel this all is just to maintain their fear and terror in the hearts of common people. I think they should not be allowed to stop anybody without any charge. We, as citizens, also have rights, and the police should be held accountable for acts that are done without any charge or proof.

Another female student conveyed her expectations over accountability, saying:

One thing I don't understand is that there are new forces being formed like the 'Dolphin' force in Lahore. Why are the police not effective in managing street crimes? The public should be able to ask such questions from the police department, and the police should be made liable to answer these queries.

Different forms of accountability are expressed by the students; accountability for misuse of authority, accountability for stepping out of jurisdiction and accountability for not doing their job. It is expected of the police to not terrorize its own citizen rather gain their confidence by answering their concerns. Accountability not only ensures fairness but also strengthen the partnership of the police with the citizens, and this partnership leads to mutual trust ([Jackson & Bradford, 2010](#)).

Discussion and Conclusion

The expectations that the respondents of the present study have do not just represent wishful-ideas, but also voice deep concerns and issues prevalent in the police culture in Pakistan. Throughout the world, police reforms have taken place in order to better situate police in the changing world. For example, the British police have made reforms due to the challenges arising out of the increasing racial diversity in their society. Similarly, the Japanese police made reforms to deal with juvenile offenders ([Srivastava, 1999](#)). In most developing countries, a lack of trust characterizes the relationship between the citizens and their police. Trust-building is important because the police are inherently in the position of privilege over the common people, and if there is a trust deficit, the police would not be considered worthy of that privilege ([Goldsmith, 2005](#)). This can have negative consequences for the police legitimacy and, eventually, maintain peace in a community. Since the police are not just involved at a local level and undertake matters of both national and international security such as counter-terrorism ([Bayley & Weisburd, 2011](#)), it is important to strengthen the police's image. The present study presents insights into the expectations that the respondents have attached to police, most of which are not met at their encounters. Accountability, reducing misuse of power, fairness and equality, and honesty are some of the qualities that individuals expect from their police. Meeting these expectations can increase police satisfaction and help create sustainable police legitimacy in cooperation with citizens.

Limitations and Recommendations

The present study is not without imitations. The study sample came from the students of one university only, which might reflect a social class that has a privileged position in Pakistani society. An inclusive sampling of students from both private and government universities can enhance the analysis. Future studies can focus

on police officers' perspective regarding the expectations that people have from them and, what expectations do police officers have from the citizens and which limitations refrain them from fulfilling their duties to the fullest.

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