



Effectiveness of Community Policing of Sri Lanka

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Abstract- Community Policing (CP) is a strategic approach that bridges the gap between police officers and the communities to address public safety concerns collaboratively. This study mainly focuses on investigating the effectiveness of community policing initiatives in Sri Lanka, while identifying their challenges and successes through comparative insights from other countries. The study employs a mixed-method approach to provide a comprehensive understanding of challenges related to CP. The findings reveal that countries such as the United Kingdom, United States of America, and India have established strong frameworks for community policing, characterized by decentralized law enforcement systems and higher levels of public trust. In the Sri Lankan context, surveys conducted in the Gampaha and Kurunegala police divisions indicate that nearly 85 percent of participants maintain a good relationship with police officers. In addition, approximately 80 percent of participants stated that they were aware of community policing, while the remaining participants stated that they were unfamiliar with the concept. The study further identifies historical distrust between the community and police, limited public awareness, resource constraints, and political interference as major factors hindering the effectiveness of CP. These findings highlight the need for improved training, institutional reforms, and stronger community engagement to enhance the effectiveness of community policing in Sri Lanka. Ultimately, this study provides important insights for policymakers, law enforcement institutions, and community stakeholders to strengthen Community Policing programmes reduce crime rates, and rebuild public trust.

Keywords- Community Policing, Public Trust, Law Enforcement, Public Safety, Sri Lanka

I. Introduction

Community- Oriented Policing (COP) originated in 1829 when British statesman Robert Peel introduced the principles of democratic policing. These principles emphasized crime prevention and promoted cooperation between the police and the public. Community policing later emerged as a response to the perceived gap between communities and police officers. The approach aims to broaden the role of the police in addressing wider security concerns such as fear of crime, social and physical disorder, and neighbourhood problems. It also encourages police officers to work collaboratively with the public to identify priorities and solve community problems.

In some situations, police departments implement a hybrid approach that combines community- oriented policing with crime- oriented policing. This approach is known as order- maintenance policing and focuses on preventing disorderly and disruptive



behaviour in public spaces. Such strategies help reassure the public by demonstrating the limits of unacceptable behaviour while reducing the likelihood of more serious crimes occurring (Wilson and Kelling, 1982).

When analysing gender issues in community policing, Miller (1998) emphasized that policing may create gendered divisions of labour and construct different police images for male and female officers. The “female voice of justice” particularly emphasizes values such as care, connection, and relational concerns.

An effective partnership between the police and the community is essential for solving public safety problems. Community policing encourages public participation in developing problem-solving strategies and improving community safety (Aberathne, 2017).

This study is closely related to the fields of social science and criminology. The research is guided by Social Contract Theory, Crime Triangle Theory, and Broken Windows Theory as the main theoretical foundations for analysing community policing practices. Although community policing has gained increasing attention in Sri Lanka, limited research has examined its effectiveness across police divisions and the challenges faced during implementation. Previous Sri Lankan studies mainly focused on public awareness and general policing reforms, while limited attention has been given to evaluating the practical effectiveness of community policing initiatives in selected police divisions. Therefore, the main research problem of this study is “Why is the concept of community policing ineffective in certain police divisions in Sri Lanka?”

The main objective of this study is to identify the factors that reduce the effectiveness of community policing in selected police divisions in Sri Lanka. The specific objectives are to identify the concept and characteristics of community policing, to examine how community policing is implemented in other countries, to identify the differences between traditional policing and community policing approaches, and to investigate the roles and responsibilities of police officers and the public in community policing.

The findings of this study may contribute to improving crime prevention strategies through community policing in Sri Lanka. The study also provides insight into the practical challenges faced during the implementation of community policing programmes. Therefore, the findings may be useful for policymakers, law enforcement authorities, and community stakeholders in strengthening community policing initiatives in Sri Lanka.

II. Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method research approach combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. The research follows a naturalistic and inductive approach in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of community policing practices in Sri Lanka.



Primary and secondary data were collected for the study. Qualitative data were gathered through observations, interviews, and discussions with selected participants, while quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires. The study mainly focused on understanding participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes regarding community policing.

The research utilized several data collection methods, including observation methods, case study analysis, survey questionnaires, key informant interviews.

The target population of the study consists of police officers and community members in selected police divisions in Sri Lanka. Two police divisions, namely Gampaha and Kurunegala, were selected using stratified sampling techniques. Five police stations from each division were selected through simple random sampling.

The study included 150 police officers and 300 civilian participants who were actively involved in community policing activities. Quantitative data were analysed using percentages and descriptive analysis, while qualitative information was interpreted through thematic analysis.

III. Results and Discussion

Many countries have accepted the concept of Community Policing (CP) as an important strategy for controlling social disorder and reducing the fear of crime within society. Sri Lanka has also adopted community policing approaches for several decades to prevent crime and maintain public order. However, despite these efforts, the practical implementation of community policing has not fully achieved its expected goals in Sri Lanka. In contrast, countries such as the United Kingdom, United States of America, India, and China have implemented community policing systems successfully for many years and have gained significant benefits through strong police- community relationships and effective crime prevention strategies. Therefore, it is important and timely to examine why the concept of community policing has not been fully effective in the Sri Lankan context.

The United Kingdom can be identified as one of the most successful examples of community policing in the Western world. The concept of community policing was developed and institutionalized in the UK, where several community-based policing activities continue to operate effectively. The UK has a long history of decentralized law enforcement, consisting of 43 regional police forces that serve different areas of the country. These police services are supported by the Home Office and various professional policing networks and associations (Baker, 2008).

Furthermore, the Crime and Disorder Act of 1998 and the National Policing Pledge introduced in 2008 formally strengthened community policing practices in the UK. The country has historically maintained comparatively low crime rates and high levels of



public trust in policing. According to the World Values Survey (2005-2008), approximately 70 percent of the public expressed confidence in the police system. For example, police reports indicate that the number of murders recorded in 2009 was among the lowest reported during the previous two decades. These achievements demonstrate the importance of strong cooperation between police officers and local communities in crime prevention.

The UK model of community policing has also influenced other countries facing serious crime and security challenges. One such example is Nigeria, where community policing programmes were introduced with support from the UK Department for International Development. These initiatives aimed to improve police-community relationships, strengthen public security, and encourage cooperation between law enforcement authorities and local communities (Petersen & Rudes, 2022). The Nigerian case demonstrates how community policing can be adapted to address local crime issues while building public trust in law enforcement institutions.

India and Sri Lanka share several cultural, social and administrative similarities. Both countries follow comparable criminal justice systems and civil administrative structures. Community-oriented policing concepts also be traced back to ancient India, where policing systems were closely connected with community participation and local governance. Historical evidence indicates that organized policing systems with preventive, investigative, and prosecutorial functions existed during the Mauryan period.

Following independence, India introduced several reforms and community-based policing initiatives to strengthen trust between the police and the public. These included the Karnataka Village Defence Party Act of 1964, service-oriented schemes in Delhi, voluntary organizations in Bangalore, and neighbourhood security programmes in various states. Delhi became one of the leading regions implementing community policing initiatives. The Delhi Police introduced neighbourhood watch programmes in several residential colonies, established police information centres, and increased police visibility through foot patrols and mobile patrol systems in order to reduce public fear of crime (Bayley, 1998).

In addition, several Indian states implemented localized community policing programmes. For example, West Bengal established “Village Resistance Groups” to address rural banditry, while Gujrat and Maharashtra introduced “Gram Rakshak Dal” programme to improve local security. Karnataka also implemented the “Karnataka Village Defence” programme. These initiatives demonstrate the flexibility of community policing approaches in addressing local security concerns while promoting community participation.

Similarly, in the United States of America, the Dallas Police Department introduced important reforms during the 1970s to strengthen police-community relations. In 1971,



the leadership of the Dallas Police Department attempted to redefine the role of police officers by identifying the needs of local communities and restructuring police services accordingly. The department increased the recruitment of minority police officers and assigned them to minority communities to improve communication and trust between the police officers developing interpersonal skills and delivering community-oriented services.

In the Sri Lankan context, The Asia Foundation has played a major role in promoting community policing since 2009. The organization collaborated with local leaders, community groups, and the Sri Lanka Police to introduce community policing programmes aimed at improving police-community relationships and identifying the root causes of security problems.

During the armed conflict period in Sri Lanka, trust between communities and police officers significantly deteriorated, particularly in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, which were heavily affected by violence and ethnic tensions. Dissatisfaction regarding police-public interactions was also observed in the southern parts of the country. As a result, community policing initiatives were introduced in two pilot locations in 2009 with the support of the Sri Lanka Police. By 2012, these programmes had expanded to ten additional locations across the Northern, Eastern, and Southern Provinces.

A basic community policing training manual was developed in 2011 and incorporated into the training programmes of the National Police Academy. Several community policing strategies were introduced to move community policing from theory into practice in Sri Lanka (Ngoveni, 2022).

Sri Lanka continues to face several complex criminal activities, including abduction, burglary, street robbery, rape, child abuse, trafficking, homicide, grievous assault, and organized gang-related crimes. These crimes occur not only in urban centres but also in rural communities. Factors such as urbanization, unemployment, drug abuse, economic instability, and increasing social inequalities have further contributed to the rise of complex crimes in the country.

Recognizing the importance of community policing, the Government of Sri Lanka established the Ministry of Community Police Services on 03 May 2021 under Extraordinary Gazette No. 2226/17. Under this system, two police officers were assigned full-time to each public security committee, and several structural reforms were introduced to strengthen community policing activities nationwide.

These structural reforms included,

- Appointing senior officers to supervise community policing activities;
- Establishing public security committees and advisory councils;
- Appointing officers responsible for public relations; and
- Strengthening coordination between divisional police units and local communities.



Public security committees were established at village and police division levels to support crime prevention, drug prevention, environmental protection, disaster management and social harmony. These committees include advisors, presidents, secretaries, and community representatives who work together with police officers to identify local problems and develop practical solutions.

The findings of this study indicate that community policing is expected to improve information sharing between the public and the police, strengthen public trust, and reduce fear of crime. However, secondary data analysis revealed that the implementation of community policing has been successful only in certain police divisions, while in many other divisions the expected outcomes have not been fully achieved.

According to existing literature, the effectiveness of community policing can be evaluated through three major criteria- effectiveness, efficiency, and fairness. Effectiveness refers to the quality of police service delivery, community satisfaction, and the ability to solve local problems collaboratively. Efficiency relates to the proper use of resources, technology, and organizational coordination in addressing community issues. Fairness refers to equal access to police services, equal treatment under the law, and the equitable distribution of policing resources among communities.

The study further identified that awareness and participation remain major challenges in the Sri Lankan context. Although community policing aims to establish proactive engagement between police officers and the public, many citizens still lack sufficient awareness regarding community policing programmes and their objectives.

The questionnaire survey conducted among 300 civilian participants in the Gampaha and Kurunegala districts revealed important findings regarding public perceptions of community policing and police-community relationships.

According to the survey findings:

- 57.6% of participants rated the relationship between police and the community as “very good”
- 26.1% rated it as “good”
- 12% stated it was neither good nor bad
- 3.8% rated it as poor and
- 0.5% rated it as very poor

Participants emphasized that police officers must maintain strong relationships with communities to improve trust and public awareness programmes, and local problem-solving initiatives. Participants also highlighted the importance of professionalism, discipline, and ethical conduct among police officers.

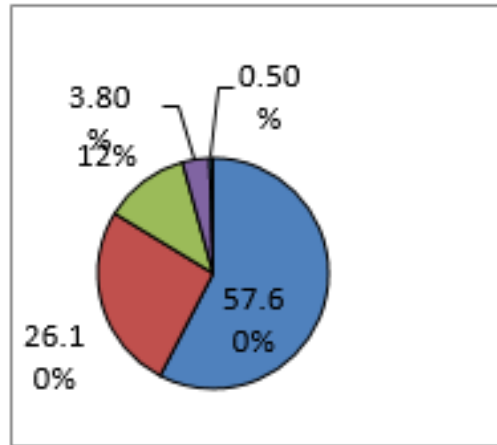


Figure 1: Relationship between police and community

The findings regarding awareness of community policing indicated that:

- 56% of participants were “very aware” of community policing
- 23.4% were “aware”
- 14.1% were neutral
- 6% were unaware and
- 0.5% were very unaware.

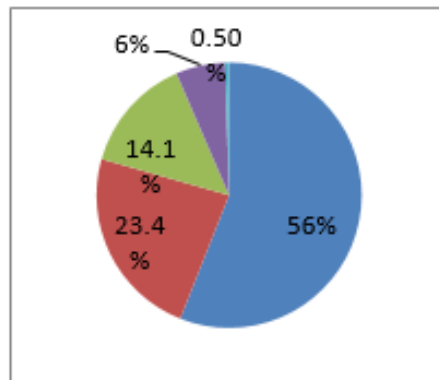


Figure 2: Awareness of Community Policing

Despite this relatively positive level of awareness, respondents identified several barriers affecting the effectiveness of community policing in Sri Lanka. Approximately 70% of respondents stated that police officers do not receive sufficient cooperation from public and institutional bodies. Participants also emphasized issues such as limited



resources, resistance to institutional change, lack of community participation, cultural barriers, distrust toward law enforcement, and political interference.

Political influence over policing activities was identified as a significant challenge, as some respondents believed that political actors influence policing priorities and decision-making processes. Such interference weakens public trust and reduces the effectiveness of community policing initiatives.

Overall, the findings suggest that while community policing has the potential to improve police- public relationships and reduce crime in Sri Lanka, several institutional, social, and political barriers continue to limit its effectiveness. Therefore, strengthening training programmes, increasing public awareness, improving institutional support, and minimizing political interference are essential for improving community policing practices in Sri Lanka.

IV. Conclusion

Community Policing (CP) remains an important strategy for strengthening trust and collaboration between law enforcement authorities and communities while promoting public safety and reducing crime. International experiences from the United Kingdom, India, and the United States of America demonstrate that effective community policing can improve police-public relationships, reduce fear of crime, and encourage community participation in maintaining social order.

The findings of this study reveal that the implementation of community policing in Sri Lanka remains inconsistent across selected police divisions. Although community policing initiatives have contributed to improving relationships between the police and the public in certain areas, several challenges continue to limit their effectiveness. Limited public awareness, inadequate institutional support, insufficient training for police officers, resource constraints, and political interference were identified as major barriers to successful implementation.

The study further highlights that effective community policing requires active cooperation between police officers, community members, and relevant institutions. Public participation, trust-building, and strong communication are essential for achieving the objectives of community policing. The findings also suggest that improving police professionalism, accountability, and community engagement can strengthen the effectiveness of CP programmes in Sri Lanka.

In conclusion, community policing has significant potential to improve public safety and reduce crime in Sri Lanka. However, achieving these goals requires continuous institutional reforms, increased public awareness, improved training programmes, and stronger collaboration between policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and local



communities. A sustainable and community-oriented policing approach is therefore essential for building public trust and ensuring long-term social stability in Sri Lanka.

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