

Approaches used by Police Officers Towards Maladaptive Behaviors of Law Offenders in the First District of Camarines Sur

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Abstract

This study examined the approaches used by police officers in dealing with maladaptive behaviors of law offenders in the First District of Camarines Sur and proposed an intervention program to enhance these approaches. It was anchored on Procedural Justice Theory, Social Learning Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and Rational Choice Theory, which explain police behavior, decision-making, and interactions with law offenders. A descriptive-comparative research design was employed involving 116 police officers from five municipalities in the First District of Camarines Sur. Data were collected using a validated researcher-made questionnaire and analyzed using frequency count, percentage, weighted mean, ranking, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The findings revealed that the respondents were predominantly middle-aged male Police Non-Commissioned Officers with college degrees and moderate years of service. Among the maladaptive behaviors encountered, disinhibition was the most prevalent, followed by antagonism and detachment, all of which were observed to a neutral extent. Police officers frequently applied appropriate approaches in managing these behaviors, particularly those emphasizing respectful communication, procedural fairness, emotional regulation, conflict management, and de-escalation. Significant differences in the approaches used were found according to sex, educational attainment, civil status, position/rank, and years in service, while age showed no significant difference. Based on these findings, a three-year intervention program was proposed to strengthen police officers' competencies through continuous professional development and evidence-based policing strategies. This study supports Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions by promoting ethical, accountable, and effective policing, and SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being by encouraging safe and humane interactions between police officers and law offenders. The findings contribute to institutional, governance, community, and public safety sustainability by providing evidence to improve police training, strengthen community trust, and support evidence-based law enforcement practices.

Keywords: Antagonism, Detachment, Disinhibition, Law Offenders, Maladaptive Behaviors, Police Officers, Procedural Justice

1. Introduction

Police officers are responsible for maintaining peace and public safety while dealing with individuals exhibiting maladaptive behaviors. Effective policing requires approaches that balance law enforcement with respect for human rights, procedural fairness, and public trust. Incidents involving excessive use of force, including issues surrounding the Philippine anti-drug campaign and the George Floyd case, have emphasized the need to examine police approaches in managing maladaptive behaviors. This study determines the approaches used by police officers in dealing with maladaptive behaviors of law offenders in the First District of Camarines Sur and proposes an intervention program based on the findings.

1.1 Background of Police Officers' Approaches to Maladaptive Behaviors of Law Offenders

Police officers frequently encounter law offenders displaying maladaptive behaviors that require appropriate, ethical, and effective responses. Although programs such as "Tokhang" aimed to address illegal drug activities, concerns regarding police brutality and human rights violations highlighted the importance of improving police practices (PNP, 2016; PNP, 2020). Guided by constitutional guarantees of due process and human dignity, this study examines police officers' approaches in managing maladaptive behaviors to support fair and accountable law enforcement.

1.2 Themes and Insights from Related Literature on Maladaptive Behaviors and Police Approaches Literature shows that maladaptive traits, particularly detachment, antagonism, and disinhibition, are associated with functional impairment, aggression, impulsivity, substance abuse, and criminal behavior (Keeley et al., 2014; Wygant et al., 2016; Krueger et al., 2012; Skodol et al., 2015; Carlotta et al., 2015; Sleep et al., 2017; Ellis and Walsh, 2018). Trauma, mental health issues, family dynamics, stress, and emotion regulation also contribute to maladaptive behaviors, indicating the need for comprehensive interventions (Desmarais et al., 2016; Bell et al., 2005; Vaughn et al., 2014; Benzi et al., 2017; Wu et al.,

2019; Pickett et al., 2021). Studies further emphasize that communication, de-escalation, procedural justice, community policing, and organizational support improve police effectiveness and public trust (Brandl and Strohshine, 2012; Florendo, 2011; Johnson et al., 2015; Montoya et al., 2018; Lersch et al., 2016; Terrill et al., 2012; Skogan et al., 2014; Terrill et al., 2019; Garner et al., 2017).

1.3 Local, National, and Global Context of Police Officers' Approaches

Globally, policing reforms emphasize procedural justice, accountability, and community-oriented approaches to strengthen public trust (Terrill et al., 2019; Garner et al., 2017). In the Philippines, controversies surrounding police operations have underscored the need to evaluate officers' approaches while protecting human rights (PNP, 2016; PNP, 2020). Locally, limited studies have examined police approaches toward maladaptive behaviors in Camarines Sur, making this research valuable in developing context-specific intervention programs.

1.4 Theoretical and Conceptual Basis of Police Officers' Approaches

This study is anchored on Procedural Justice Theory, Social Learning Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and Rational Choice Theory. Procedural Justice Theory explains that fair, respectful, and transparent police practices encourage cooperation and trust (Reisig, Holtfreter, and Morabito, 2018). Social Learning Theory and Social Cognitive Theory emphasize that police officers develop appropriate approaches through observation, training, experience, and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Akers et al., 2011; Van der Heiden et al., 2016). Meanwhile, Rational Choice Theory suggests that police interventions can influence offenders' decisions by increasing the perceived costs and reducing the benefits of criminal behavior (Adam Smith, 1776). Collectively, these theories provide the framework for understanding police officers' approaches toward law offenders exhibiting maladaptive behaviors.

1.5 Research Gaps and Rationale

Although numerous international studies have examined maladaptive behaviors and policing strategies, research focusing on the approaches used by Philippine police officers remains limited. There is also insufficient evidence regarding the consistency between prescribed policing approaches and actual practices, as well as the influence of officers' demographic characteristics on these approaches. Moreover, community participation in developing policing strategies has received limited attention. This study addresses these gaps by examining police officers' approaches toward maladaptive behaviors of law offenders in the First District of Camarines Sur and by proposing an intervention program based on the findings.

1.6 Alignment with Relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

This study supports SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) by promoting fair, accountable, and effective policing through improved approaches in managing maladaptive behaviors among law offenders. It also contributes to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) by encouraging safe, humane, and evidence-based interactions that reduce violence and support the well-being of both police officers and the community. These SDGs are consistent with the study's emphasis on procedural justice, public safety, and human rights.

1.7 Importance of the Study to Multidisciplinary Sustainability

The study contributes to institutional, community, governance, and public safety sustainability by providing evidence that can strengthen police training, improve law enforcement practices, and support the development of intervention programs for managing maladaptive behaviors. The findings may assist policymakers, police administrators, and communities in promoting ethical policing, enhancing public trust, and fostering safer and more resilient communities through evidence-based law enforcement practices.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

This study employed the descriptive-comparative research design. The descriptive method was used to describe the demographic profile of police officers in terms of age, sex, educational background, civil status, rank, and years in service. It also determined the maladaptive behaviors commonly encountered by police officers along detachment, antagonism, and disinhibition, as well as the approaches they used in dealing with these behaviors. The comparative method was utilized to determine whether significant differences existed in the approaches used by police officers when grouped according to their demographic profile.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in the First District of Camarines Sur in the Bicol Region during calendar years 2022–2023. The research covered five municipalities: Cabusao, Del Gallego, Lupi, Ragay, and Sipocot, where police officers served as the study respondents.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents consisted of 116 police officers assigned to the five municipalities in the First District of Camarines Sur during CY 2022–2023. Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents across the participating municipalities, with Sipocot having the largest number of participants, followed by Lupi, Ragay, Del Gallego, and Cabusao.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study employed purposive sampling to select police officers who had direct experience in dealing with maladaptive behaviors of law offenders. This technique ensured that the respondents possessed relevant knowledge and experience necessary to address the objectives of the study.

2.5 Research Instrument

The study utilized a researcher-made questionnaire, developed from various sources and modified to suit the objectives of the study. The instrument consisted of three parts: the first gathered the respondents' demographic profile; the second assessed the maladaptive behaviors commonly encountered by police officers along detachment, antagonism, and disinhibition; and the third determined the approaches used by police officers in dealing with these maladaptive behaviors. To establish content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by the research adviser, panel members, police officers from the five municipalities, a psychologist, and a registered guidance counselor, particularly for the indicators of maladaptive behaviors. After incorporating their recommendations, the questionnaire was administered to the respondents and personally retrieved by the researcher.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection began with the preparation and approval of the research proposal. After obtaining permission from the adviser, panel members, and the Chiefs of Police of the participating municipalities, the researcher prepared and refined the questionnaire through expert review and validation. Following validation, the instrument was personally administered to the respondents. Upon retrieval, the collected data were organized, tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted to address the research objectives.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The study employed frequency count and percentage to describe the respondents' demographic profile. Weighted mean and ranking were used to determine the maladaptive behaviors commonly encountered by police officers and the approaches used in dealing with law offenders. One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was applied to determine whether significant differences existed in the approaches used by police officers when grouped according to their demographic characteristics.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Demographic Characteristics and Maladaptive Behaviors Encountered by Police Officers

3.1.1 Demographic Profile of Police Officers

The respondents were predominantly male, college graduates, Police Non-Commissioned Officers, and had 2–9 years of service. Most officers were 32–38 years old, followed by those aged 39–50 years, while the fewest were 24–31 years old. Only a small proportion had graduate degrees or occupied higher police ranks, indicating that the respondents were generally experienced frontline personnel. These findings suggest that the respondents possessed sufficient educational qualifications and practical experience to perform police duties. The predominance of male and middle-aged officers is consistent with the observations of Brandl and Stroshine (2012) that age, sex, and education influence police use of force. Likewise, Wood and Alleyne (2010) emphasized that experienced and well-educated officers tend to demonstrate more positive attitudes toward community policing. The findings also support Social Learning Theory, which explains that less experienced officers develop professional behaviors through observation and interaction with experienced colleagues.

3.1.2 Detachment as a Maladaptive Behavior

Overall, detachment was encountered to a neutral extent across the five municipalities. The most common indicator was preferring seclusion over interaction with others, whereas thinking of suicide and exhibiting suicidal behavior was the least observed. Municipality A recorded the highest level of detachment, while Municipality D reported the lowest, indicating only a slight occurrence. The findings indicate that law offenders commonly display withdrawal and social isolation but rarely exhibit suicidal behaviors. These results are consistent with Wygant et al. (2016), who identified withdrawal and intimacy avoidance as key characteristics of detachment. Similar findings by Farrington et al. (2011), Wu et al. (2019), and Anestis et al. (2014) associate detachment with depression, victimization, and impulsive behaviors, emphasizing the importance of timely mental health interventions. The results also align with Social Cognitive Theory, suggesting that environmental experiences and social interactions influence the development of these behaviors.

3.1.3 Antagonism as a Maladaptive Behavior

Police officers encountered antagonism to a neutral extent across the five municipalities. The most frequently observed behavior was the belief that one is superior to others and deserves special treatment, while falsifying self-representation was the least encountered. Municipality A recorded the highest level of antagonistic behavior, whereas Municipality D reported the lowest. Overall, antagonism was present but remained manageable. These findings indicate that law offenders commonly exhibit arrogance, entitlement, and manipulative behaviors during police interactions. This supports Wygant et al. (2016), who described antagonism as involving manipulateness and grandiosity, and Sleep et al. (2017), who associated antagonistic traits with substance use. Likewise, Baskin-Sommers et al. (2014) linked these behaviors with Narcissistic Personality Disorder, while Farrington et al. (2011) and Laajasalo et al. (2017) associated antagonistic traits with delinquency and criminal behavior. The results are consistent with Social Cognitive Theory, which explains that social experiences and learned behaviors influence the development of antagonistic tendencies.

3.1.4 Disinhibition as a Maladaptive Behavior

Disinhibition was likewise encountered to a neutral extent among the respondents and emerged as the most prominent maladaptive behavior. Police officers most frequently encountered offenders who believed there was only one correct way of doing things and who prioritized correctness over timeliness, while lack of respect and failure to fulfill agreements were the least observed behaviors. Municipality A recorded the highest level of disinhibition, whereas Municipality E had the lowest. Overall, disinhibitory behaviors remained at a neutral level across the municipalities. The findings suggest that impulsivity, rigidity, and poor behavioral control are common characteristics among law offenders. These results agree with Wygant et al. (2016), who identified irresponsibility and impulsivity as core features of disinhibition. Similar studies by Vaughn et al. (2014), McHugh et al. (2017), Sleep et al. (2017), Ellis and Walsh (2018), Pickett et al. (2021), and Krohn et al. (2015) emphasized that substance abuse and impulsivity increase the likelihood of risky and criminal behaviors. The findings are best explained by Social Learning Theory, which proposes that impulsive and irresponsible behaviors develop through observation and reinforcement within one's environment.

3.1.5 Summary of Maladaptive Behaviors Encountered by Police Officers

Overall, disinhibition ranked as the most frequently encountered maladaptive behavior, followed by antagonism and detachment, with all three interpreted as occurring to a neutral extent. Municipality A recorded the highest overall level of maladaptive behaviors, whereas Municipality D showed the lowest. Across all municipalities, the respondents generally encountered moderate levels of maladaptive behaviors among law offenders. The findings indicate that maladaptive behaviors among law offenders are generally manageable but remain important considerations in police operations. The prominence of disinhibition, antagonism, and detachment supports previous studies linking these traits to impulsivity, criminal thinking, aggression, and substance abuse (Weissman, 2018; Bell et al., 2005; Vaughn et al., 2014; Ellis and Walsh, 2018; Pickett et al., 2021; Sengupta et al., 2018; Topcu et al., 2014). These results further support Social Learning Theory, suggesting that behavioral patterns are influenced by social environments and learned experiences, reinforcing the need for evidence-based interventions to improve police responses to maladaptive behaviors.

3.2 Approaches Used by Police Officers in Dealing with Maladaptive Behaviors of Law Offenders

3.2.1 Approaches Used in Managing Detachment

Police officers consistently applied approaches in dealing with detachment-related maladaptive behaviors. The most frequently used approach was responding respectfully and non-defensively, followed by looking at problems rationally and observing offenders' body language. The least practiced approach was giving offenders the benefit of the doubt, although it was still used often. Municipality D demonstrated the highest level of application, while Municipality B had the lowest. Overall, officers always used these approaches when managing detachment-related behaviors. The findings indicate that police officers prioritize respectful communication, objectivity, and careful observation when interacting with law offenders. These approaches support effective decision-making while preventing unnecessary escalation. The results agree with Taylor and Woods (2010), who emphasized that decisions involving police action are influenced by situational factors, and Engel et al. (2015), who identified suspect behavior as a major predictor of police responses. Likewise, Florendo (2011) stressed that listening skills improve understanding and cooperation during police interactions. These findings support Procedural Justice Theory, which emphasizes fairness, respect, and impartial treatment in promoting cooperation between police officers and law offenders.

3.2.2 Approaches Used in Managing Antagonism

Police officers generally often used approaches in addressing antagonistic behaviors. The most common strategy was anticipating objections and addressing them proactively, followed by negotiating disputes between offenders. Municipality D showed the highest level of application, while Municipality B recorded the lowest. Overall, officers frequently employed proactive conflict-management strategies when dealing with antagonistic behaviors. The findings suggest that police officers rely on anticipation, communication, and negotiation to minimize confrontation and maintain control during interactions with antagonistic offenders. These proactive approaches encourage cooperation while reducing conflict. The discussion in the study indicates that communication and preventive interventions remain essential in managing aggressive

and manipulative behaviors, reinforcing the importance of conflict resolution and effective interpersonal skills in law enforcement.

3.2.3 Approaches Used in Managing Disinhibition

Police officers frequently to consistently applied approaches in managing disinhibition-related maladaptive behaviors. The most commonly used strategy was helping law offenders develop more effective social and relationship behaviors, whereas asking open-ended questions was the least utilized, although it was still frequently practiced. Municipality D demonstrated the highest level of implementation, while Municipality B had the lowest. Overall, officers often used these approaches when dealing with impulsive and poorly controlled behaviors. The findings indicate that police officers emphasize empathy, responsive listening, emotional regulation, and communication in managing impulsive behaviors among law offenders. These approaches help reduce conflict and encourage more appropriate behavioral responses. The findings are supported by Florendo (2011), who emphasized responsive listening as essential for mutual understanding; Johnson et al. (2015) and Montoya et al. (2018), who highlighted the value of prevention and intervention training; Lersch et al. (2016) and Terrill et al. (2012), who demonstrated the effectiveness of communication and de-escalation strategies; Skogan et al. (2014), Myhill et al. (2016), and Bueermann et al. (2014), who emphasized community-oriented policing; and Engel et al. (2015), who recognized training and supervision as important predictors of effective police practice. These findings support both Social Learning Theory and Procedural Justice Theory, emphasizing that positive behaviors are learned through training and that respectful, fair treatment promotes cooperation and effective policing.

3.2.4 Summary of Approaches Used by Police Officers

Overall, approaches for managing detachment ranked highest, followed closely by disinhibition, while approaches for antagonism ranked third. Municipality D consistently demonstrated the highest level of application, whereas Municipality B showed the lowest. In general, police officers often to always employed appropriate approaches when dealing with maladaptive behaviors of law offenders. The findings demonstrate that police officers consistently employ respectful communication, emotional regulation, conflict management, and proactive intervention strategies when interacting with law offenders. The frequent use of these approaches reflects the importance of communication, procedural fairness, and continuous professional training in improving police effectiveness and strengthening public trust.

3.3 Differences in Police Officers' Approaches According to Demographic Profile

3.3.1 Differences in Approaches When Grouped According to Demographic Characteristics

The analysis showed that age did not significantly influence the approaches used by police officers in dealing with maladaptive behaviors of law offenders. However, sex, educational attainment, civil status, position/rank, and years in service demonstrated significant differences, indicating that police officers' approaches vary according to these demographic characteristics. These findings imply that professional experience, educational background, organizational role, and personal characteristics shape how police officers respond to maladaptive behaviors. This supports Joseph and Nagarajamurthy (2014), who found that rank, education, work experience, and stress influence officers' effectiveness and highlighted the importance of targeted training and mentorship. Similarly, McGuire et al. (2021) emphasized that continuous training, community engagement, mental health support, and inter-agency collaboration improve police responses to law offenders. The results are consistent with Social Cognitive Theory, which explains that police officers develop effective behaviors through observation, experience, and social interaction.

3.4 Proposed Intervention Program

3.4.1 Transforming Policing: An Intervention Program

Based on the findings, the study proposed "Transforming Policing: An Intervention Program to Improve Approaches Used by Police Officers in Dealing with Maladaptive Behaviors of Law Offenders." The program will be implemented in the municipalities of the First District of Camarines Sur for three years through the collaboration of the College of Criminal Justice Education–Naga College Foundation and partner institutions. It aims to strengthen police officers' competence in managing maladaptive behaviors through continuous professional development and evidence-based policing strategies. The intervention focuses on strengthening police officers' skills in de-escalation, communication, procedural justice, problem-oriented policing, trauma-informed policing, cultural awareness, crisis intervention, restorative justice, ethics, and professionalism. Quarterly training activities, including scenario-based role-playing exercises and specialized seminars, are designed to improve officers' decision-making, communication, and community engagement. The program also promotes collaboration among law enforcement, educational institutions, mental health professionals, and community stakeholders to foster effective, ethical, and community-oriented policing.

3.4.2 Program Implementation

The intervention will be implemented through quarterly training sessions over a three-year period. Activities include scenario-based role-playing exercises and seminars on maladaptive behavior, communication skills, crisis intervention, mental health first aid, trauma-informed policing, cultural competence, implicit bias, use of force, restorative justice, and ethics. The researcher will facilitate the implementation and recommend the program to police officers in the First District

of Camarines Sur and potentially to other police districts and the Philippine National Police. The study emphasized that continuous training and practical learning experiences can improve police officers' approaches toward maladaptive behaviors, strengthen professionalism, and enhance public trust. The proposed budget supports the implementation of these activities and aligns with the recommendations of Santos, Hernandez, and Cruz (2019), who advocated practical, interactive, and continuous training to address emerging policing challenges and improve professional competence within the Philippine National Police.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study found that the respondents were predominantly middle-aged male Police Non-Commissioned Officers with college degrees and moderate years of service. The maladaptive behaviors commonly encountered by police officers, particularly disinhibition, antagonism, and detachment, were generally observed to a neutral extent, while the approaches used in managing these behaviors were frequently applied. Significant differences in police officers' approaches were found based on sex, educational attainment, civil status, position/rank, and years in service, whereas age showed no significant difference. Based on these findings, the proposed intervention program was designed to strengthen police officers' approaches by considering their demographic characteristics and enhancing their ability to effectively manage maladaptive behaviors among law offenders.

Police organizations should implement customized training and intervention programs that strengthen officers' competence in managing maladaptive behaviors while considering differences in sex, educational attainment, civil status, position/rank, and years in service. Continuous professional development, gender-sensitive support systems, leadership and career advancement opportunities, regular psychological assessment, counseling services, mentorship programs, stress management activities, and strengthened community policing initiatives should be sustained to improve officers' effectiveness, well-being, and relationships with the community.

The study was limited to 116 police officers from the five municipalities in the First District of Camarines Sur during calendar years 2022–2023. It focused only on the respondents' demographic characteristics, the maladaptive behaviors of detachment, antagonism, and disinhibition, and the approaches used by police officers in dealing with these behaviors. Consequently, the findings may not represent police officers from other districts or regions, nor did the study examine other maladaptive behavior domains beyond those included in the research scope.

Compliance with ethical standards

The author declares no conflict of interest. This study received no external funding. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from the participating police officers prior to data collection. Permission to conduct the study was secured from the concerned police authorities, and data were collected through a researcher-made questionnaire, a non-invasive survey instrument, with all responses treated confidentially and reported without disclosing any identifying information.

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