

Strengthening Police-Public Relationship in Kamrup(M) District, Assam: A Comprehensive Analysis

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Abstract

Kamrup(M) District, Assam is known for its diversity, where cultural and historical factors add complexity and so building trust and cooperation between the police and the public is crucial in the region. As we all know, the police-public relationship is a cornerstone of a well-functioning society, impacting community safety, trust as well as it is also a critical component of a functioning democracy. Hence, The State and Law Enforcement Agencies are more focused on community policing and to strengthen it they are trying to get police involved into proper training and cultural awareness, and a commitment to transparency and accountability to the overall well-being and security of the region. This study intended to explore the relationship between the two entities: police and public in the region and to provide a comprehensive analysis of the current state of police-public relationships in Kamrup(M) District, highlighting the challenges, opportunities, and potential strategies for improvement.

Key Words: Accountability, law enforcement, police-public relationship etc.

1.1. Introduction

Police-public relations play a significant role in maintaining law and order within a society as a strong and positive police-public relationship can lead to increased trust and cooperation between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve. When the public has confidence and trust in the police, they are more likely to report crimes, share valuable information, and work together with law enforcement to prevent and solve criminal activities. This cooperation can lead to safer neighborhoods and a more effective criminal justice system. Additionally, a proper and strong police public relationship can be also helpful in the promotion of community-oriented policing, which have emphasis on the collaboration with community members to address local issues and ensures fair policing to improve the overall quality of life for residents.

On the contrary, tense police-public relations can have damaging consequences in society as it leads public confidence in police down. A lack of trust in law enforcement can lead a decreased willingness to cooperate with police, which may results to reduced reporting of crimes. This can

hinder the ability of law enforcement to effectively battle crime and maintain law and order in the region. Together with a tense and negative relationship between police and public can also result in increasing tensions, protests, and even civil unrest, which can undermine the stability of the community. Thus, a society needs a healthy and positive police-public relationship, which may shape the overall safety, security and quality of life within the society and may promote a sense of shared responsibility in maintaining the law and order. Regarding police-public relationship, many scholars and researcher have given their views some of them have been mentioned in the section.

If we talk about police public relationship in Kamrup(M) District, Assam, we find unique challenges for law enforcement agencies as the region has been inundated by various insurgent movements, ethnic tensions, and a diverse socio-cultural landscape, and the challenges have been for decades. These challenges have tense the police-public relationship and have contributed to mistrust and a lack of cooperation among them (Ahmed, 2015). The historical context of Assam's insurgencies has played a significant role in shaping public perceptions and the approach of the police.

Other aspects that create mistrust between police-public relationships are lack of transparency and accountability within law enforcement agencies (Tyler, 2005). Transparency involves providing the public with access to information about police activities, their policies, and decision-making processes. Accountability, on the other hand, entails holding law enforcement officers responsible for their actions, while these have been lacking in India policing and has been a persistent concern in the police-public relationship in India (Jacob & Mallik, 2015). Addressing these issues by adopting transparent practices, such as body-worn cameras and public reporting mechanisms, could go a long way in strengthening trust.

Another reason for such mistrust is the lack of public awareness. It's state responsibilities to ensure public awareness to policing and should conduct such campaigns as such activities can play a vital role in educating citizens about their rights, the role of the police, and the importance of cooperation with law enforcement. Public education initiatives can ease the policing process and promote a more informed and engaged citizenry. These campaigns can chase away misconceptions and stereotypes, fostering a better understanding of the police's challenges and responsibilities (Chavis & McDonald, 2018).

At present, the states in the globe advocate for community policing, which has gained recognition as an effective strategy for enhancing the police-public relationship as it is rooted in the idea of building trust and collaboration between the police and the communities they serve (Mastrofski et al., 1998). Many researches, in their findings, have shown that community policing initiatives can foster a sense of partnership, improve communication, and enhance police legitimacy in the eyes of the public (Kelling & Moore, 1988). Implementing community policing programs tailored to the specific needs and cultural context of Kamrup(M) District could be instrumental in bridging the existing gaps between police and public and can bring police more closure to public but such activities initiated by police are rarely seen in the society.

1.2. Research Location

The present study has been conducted in Kamrup(M) District, Assam, India. It is a prominent administrative region located in the northeastern state of Assam, India. The district is surrounded with a diverse landscape ranging from the sprawling Brahmaputra River plains to the green hills of the Meghalaya border. A renowned ancient temple the Kamakhya Temple is situated in the district, which draws pilgrims and tourists from across the country. The district is home to a vibrant mix of communities, including the Assamese, Bodo, and many indigenous tribes, contributing to its cultural tapestry. Kamrup district is not only a cultural and religious hub but also a hub of economic activity, with industries, agriculture, and commerce playing a vital role in its development.

1.3. Aim of the Present study

For the present study, the researcher has chosen to see police-public relationship in Kamrup(M) district, Assam, India as it is instrumental in fostering better policing as well as its helpful in maintaining law and order. A strong and trusting relationship between the police and the local community enhances cooperation, transparency, and the flow of critical information, which is helpful in crime prevention and resolution. Since the research is empirical in nature, the researcher has collected data from lower police official and public to know their opinion regarding police-public relationship in Kamrup(M) District, Assam, India. If we see the number of the data collected in the present study, the researcher managed to collect data from 112 respondents; 33 police and 79 accused/victims. For analysis of the data, the researcher has used two types of statistical tests: t-test and Pearson chi-square test because the questionnaire contains questions either on the basis of five point scale or binary in nature. At the end, the observed

values of 't-test' and 'chi-square test' have been compared with critical value at 0.05 level to know whether the results are significantly different or not. The results found in the tests have been statistically summarized in tables. The table includes Means, Std. Deviations, t-value, degree of freedom and p-value to see whether there is significant difference in their opinion or not.

1.4. Data Analysis

This section of study contains some statement/question seeking information regarding police-public relationship in Kamrup(M) District, Assam, India. The research has taken view of both police as well as public to know their opinion with regard to police-public relationship, and the data collected through the questionnaires have been interpreted further for discussion and to dive into the depth of the context.

With regard to the statement "Community and civil society participation is essential if the police want to be effective and accountable", the researcher has also included accused for their response because understanding the perspective of the accused is crucial in recognizing the significance of community and civil society participation for effective and accountable policing. The insights gleaned from the accused provide a comprehensive understanding of their experiences and interactions with the police, shedding light on potential biases, abuses of power, or procedural irregularities. Incorporating these viewpoints ensures a balanced assessment of police conduct, which is essential for building trust and legitimacy within the community. By actively involving civil society, the police can tap into a broader spectrum of perspectives, fostering transparency, accountability, and cooperative efforts to create a safer and more just society. In response to the statement, accused has been graded a little higher than police, as the mean values for police as well as accused are 4.3333 and 4.2025 respectively. The researcher has also conducted an independent sample t-test so that she may find whether they differ in their opinion or not. The t-value ($t=-.526$, $p=.637$) calculated in the test is far below the critical value of 1.962 at 95% level of confidence with 110 degree of freedom. The null hypothesis can therefore not be rejected. Both the groups of respondents agree with the concept of community and civil society participation. The respondents' views have also been presented in the form of percentage in the **Figure- 1.1 & Table-1.1.**

Respondent: Police vs. Accused/victim * Q-12: Community and civil society participation is essential if the police want to be effective and accountable. Cross tabulation								
			Q-12: Community and civil society participation is essential if the police want to be effective and accountable.					Total
			Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Respondent: Police vs. Accused/victim	Police	Count	0	1	2	15	15	33
			0.0%	3.0%	6.1%	45.5%	45.5%	100.0%
Respondent: Police vs. Accused/victim	Accused/victim	Count	3	7	0	30	39	79
			3.8%	8.9%	0.0%	38.0%	49.4%	100.0%
Total		Count	3	8	2	45	54	112
			2.7%	7.1%	1.8%	40.2%	48.2%	100.0%

Table-1.1

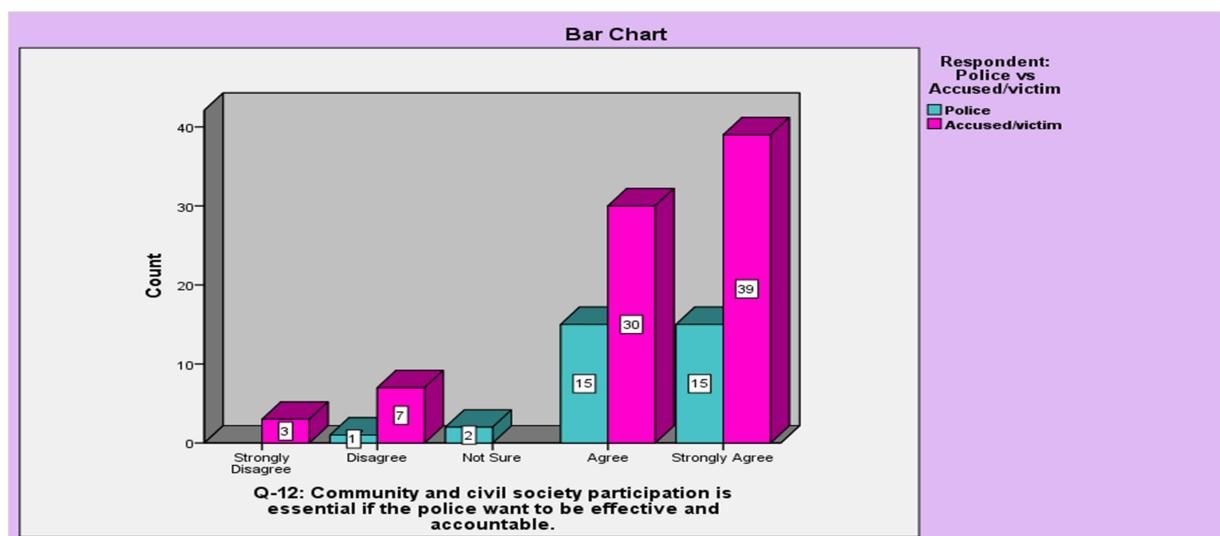


Figure-1.1

The statistical presentation shown in the table and figure mentioned above reveal that 3.0% (1 out of 33) of the police responded as ‘disagree’, 6.10% (2 out of 33) of them answered as ‘not sure’, 91.0% (30 out of 33) of the police respondent answered as either agree or highly agree. None of the police responded as ‘highly disagree’. The response given by the accused is nearly similar to the respondent given by the police respondent, the analysis shows that 12.70% (10 out of 79) of the accused responded as either highly disagree or disagree, 87.40% (69 out of 79) of the accused responded as either agree or highly agree. The statistical presentation therefore

reveals that most of the respondents whether they are or police want community policing, as Community policing holds paramount importance for the residents of Kamrup(M) District, Assam, as it forges a collaborative partnership between the police and the local community, enhancing public safety and well-being. In a region where social cohesion and mutual trust are pivotal, community policing facilitates open communication, proactive problem-solving, and the joint development of strategies to address local concerns such as crime related to environment, theft, drug abuse, child trafficking and public order. By empowering residents to actively participate in their own safety and providing a platform for dialogue, community policing not only strengthens law enforcement's effectiveness but also fosters a sense of ownership and shared responsibility, ultimately creating a safer and more harmonious living environment.

In the section, the researcher has also included the opinion of accused for the question "Is there any good example of community policing and civil society participation in Assam?" to make comparison between police and accused opinion. In response to the question, a wide gap can be seen in their opinion, as 93.90% (31 out of 33) of the police responded as positively. They agree that community police are functional in Kamrup(M) district as well as in Assam. Only 6.10% (2 out of 33) of police responded as negatively, while accused opinion is quite different 2.50% (2 out of 79) of the accused answered positively and 97.50% (77 out of 79) of them responded negatively. The researcher has also conducted 'Pearson chi-square test' to see whether the respondents are significantly different in their opinion or not. The calculated value of Pearson chi-square test is 93.580 for 1 degree of freedom at 95% level of confidence. While for the same degree of freedom, the critical value is 3.841. The calculated value, therefore, is far above the critical value of 3.841. On the basis of the value calculated through the test, we can reject the null hypothesis. Majority of police agree that there is community policing in the District. At present, community policing is of paramount importance as it fosters a symbiotic relationship between law enforcement agency and the community, cultivating trust, enhancing public safety, and collectively addressing local issues. By actively involving residents in crime prevention, problem-solving, and decision-making processes, community policing not only deters criminal activity but also creates a resilient environment where collaboration and communication lead to safer neighborhoods and improved quality of life for all stakeholders.

The concept of community policing in Assam has been introduced long back since 1950, with the formal launch of the Village Defense Organization (VDO) under the initiative of the late Hari

Narayan Baruah. The VDO got institutionalized through the adoption of the Village Defence Act-1960. At present, 11,000 Village Defense Parties, each consisting of 10 members, are operating across Assam. These parties collaborate closely with the police and contribute significantly to crime prevention, detection, and maintenance of law and order. However, in response to the remarkable increase in population and associated rise in crimes over the past decade, Assam Police recognized the need for greater community involvement in policing to bridge the gap between law enforcement and the public, and so Neighborhood Watch Committees was formed in certain areas of Guwahati city, guided by the then SP City, Shri K. Saikia, and supported by Shri R. N. Mathur, IGP, with the aim of encouraging public participation in self-policing. (<https://police.assam.gov.in/portlet-innerpage/community-policing-in-assam>).

In Assam, Community Liaison Groups (CLGs) at the state, district, and police station levels was established in which respected and non-political figures from society were included. These groups arrange meetings with law enforcement officials and offer suggestions for enhancing policing services in their area. Distinguished individuals including retired judges, educators, journalists, social activists, and women's organizations attend these gatherings, resulting in valuable input that enhances police service. The initiative gained momentum through the joint efforts of the BPR&D and UNDP, launching the "Improvement of Organization and Management of Law Enforcement Agencies in India" project. This endeavor aims to reshape police officers' attitudes towards the public, fostering a more community-friendly approach while improving their work environment. The project's trial run in Assam, Rajasthan, and Tamil Nadu proved successful, with designated "Change Agents" from various ranks, trained by the BPR&D after exposure to international policing models, subsequently training their peer group. The positive outcomes of the project led to its expansion across all districts in Assam. (<https://police.assam.gov.in/portlet-innerpage/community-liaison-group-clg>)

A comprehensive strategy for fostering public engagement in policing in Guwahati City was effectively launched under the leadership of Shri Kuladhar Saikia, IPS, the then Superintendent of Police. The initiative commenced with the establishment of the first Nagarik Committee under the Panbazar Police Station during a meeting on 03/07/96 at the Police Control Room. This catalyzed the formation of multiple Nagarik Committees across various police stations in the city throughout the year and promoted a community-based approach to local policing through

the "Watch Thy Neighbourhood" strategy. The collaborative efforts of these committees came with positive outcomes and helped in preventing crimes and apprehending criminal groups. In 1999, a set of formal guidelines, compiled by B.J. Mahanta, IPS, the then SP of Guwahati City, further invigorated the committees' activities. Structurally, each municipal ward within Guwahati City hosts a committee, with sub-committees catering to specific ward areas. Committee members, around 10 in number, including the president, are selected based on their respected standing within society and absence of criminal records. The Police Station's Officer-in-charge assumes the role of the committee's ex-officio Secretary and participates in monthly meetings, while the Deputy Superintendent of the Division engages bi-monthly. The Superintendent of Police leads the Co-ordination Committee of the Nagarik Committees, convening quarterly meetings with representatives from all committees. The meetings address local civic and crime-related concerns, as well as they find solution for them.

(<https://police.assam.gov.in/portlet-innerpage/nagarik-committees>).

Further, the preamble of the Assam Police Act 2007 stated that the constitutional obligation of the state to provide impartial and efficient Police Service safeguarding the interests of people with due regard to the rule of law. One of the main objectives of the Act is to empower the police force to enable it to function as an efficient, effective, people-friendly and responsive agency.

Hence, the government data with regard to community policing is good and shows that the government is conscious for community policing so that a good bond may be established between police and public but if we go through the analysis we found in the present research quite different. In spite of the some examples of community policing in Assam, it doesn't seem to be sufficient and that's why accused/victims are unfamiliar with them. 97.50% (77 out of 79) of them couldn't tell anything regarding community policing. Only 2.50% (2 out of 79) of them responded positively, which shows the indifference of the state regarding community policing and it can be attributed to various factors, such as inadequate policy frameworks, limited budget allocation, and a lack of prioritization within law enforcement agencies. When the state fails to provide comprehensive support, community policing initiatives often struggle to gain traction. Without a dedicated commitment to community engagement, resources, and capacity-building, the potential benefits of improved public-police relations and proactive crime prevention remain unrealized. The absence of a strong state-led push for community policing can result in missed

opportunities to foster trust, collaboration, and mutual understanding between law enforcement and the public, ultimately compromising the overall effectiveness of law enforcement efforts.

Crosstab					
			Q-13: Is there any good example of community policing and civil society participation in Assam?		Total
			Yes	No	
Respondent: Police vs. Accused/victim	Police	Count	31	2	33
			93.9%	6.1%	100.0%
	Accused/victim	Count	2	77	79
			2.5%	97.5%	100.0%
Total		Count	33	79	112
			29.5%	70.5%	100.0%

Table-1.2

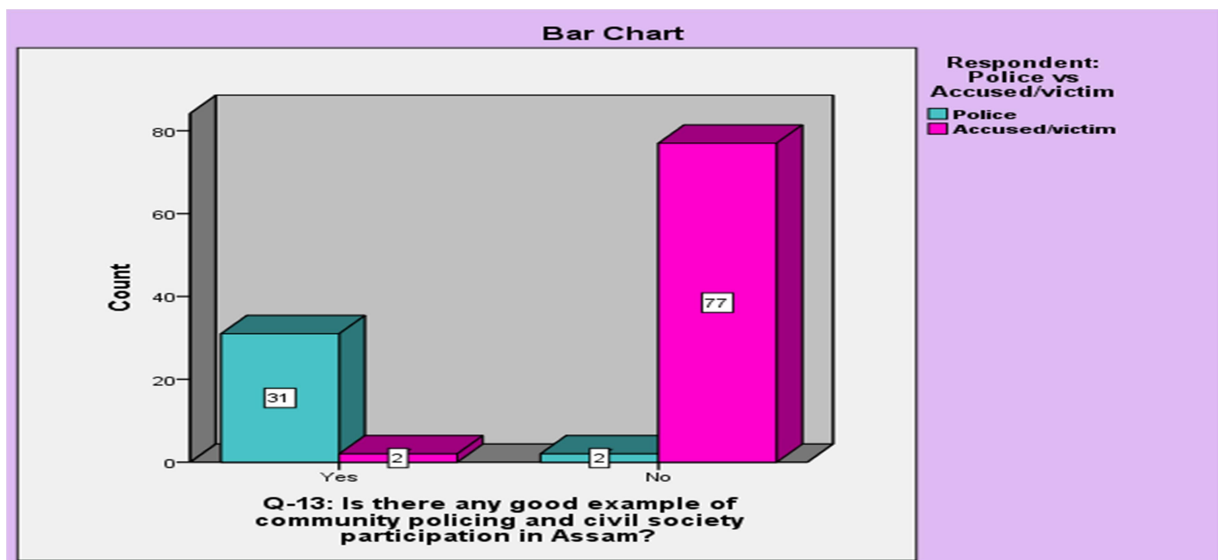


Figure-1.2

Community policing in any part of country has paramount significance to establish a collaborative and proactive approach to law enforcement between police and public. It's helpful

in promoting trust, transparency, and open communication between the police and citizens, ultimately leading to improved public safety and to reduce crime rates. In spite of such significance, community policing in Kamrup(M) district, Assam, India, faces several challenges. As analysis of the data shows that most of the people are not familiar with community policing or they have never encountered police functional in community as 97.50% (77 out of 79) of the public respondents answered negatively. They have never seen police involved in the promotion of community policing. For such indifference towards community policing, there may be many issues. Firstly, limited resources and funding hinder the implementation of effective community policing programs, resulting in a lack of trained personnel and necessary equipment. Additionally, the district's diverse situation and dense population make it more difficult. Another aspect that makes community policing poor in the area is state indifference, as the government is failed to prioritize and invest in community police initiatives. The government and police must take it at top priority so that they may engage local communities in policing.

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