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Public Perception on Police Service in Matalam, North Cotabato

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the perceptions of community members regarding their police department due to continued issues of trust and accessibility to the police, lack of fair treatment, and delays in police response. The national reforms which aim to increase transparency and support community-based policing through national reforms have not solved the local problems which include delayed police responses and public doubts about police fairness and inconsistent service quality in rural and semi-urban areas. The national surveys produce overall statistics that don't capture the individual experiences of the residents of the municipalities in Matalam. Based on the concepts of the Procedural Justice Theory and current academic sources, the research focuses on public opinion in six different dimensions, namely: accessibility and competence, fairness and manners, reliability and responsiveness. The research generates real data from the local area, which will inform evidence-based recommendations that will enhance police service operations in Matalam by using better working practices and building trust and engagement with the community.

INTRODUCTION

Police service is a central public institution responsible for public safety, law enforcement, and assistance to community members. Effective police-community relations require communication, accessibility, and public confidence. Evidence from Ghana found that positive experiences of community policing were associated with greater public trust, psychological safety, and community well-being, although findings from another national setting should not be assumed to apply directly to Matalam (Hevi *et al.*, 2022).

National findings cannot be assumed to describe police service in every municipality. This study therefore provides a descriptive assessment of how adult respondents in the selected barangays of Matalam evaluated police service. It does not presume the presence of slow response, favoritism, political influence, or other local problems before such conditions are demonstrated by verifiable evidence.

Published Philippine research has examined national assessments of legal institutions, but it does not establish the level of police-service perception in Matalam. The present survey addresses this descriptive gap among its sampled respondents. Because only 18 barangays were purposively selected, the findings should be interpreted as representing the surveyed respondents and barangays rather than all residents of Matalam (Regalado & Sun, 2024).

This study assesses the level of public perception of police service among respondents in selected barangays of Matalam, North Cotabato, and examines whether mean perception scores differ by age, gender, educational attainment, occupation, and civil status. Public perception is operationalized through accessibility, competence,

fairness, manners, reliability, and responsiveness, using an adapted version of Maguire and Johnson's (2010) police-service measure. The study is guided by Procedural Justice Theory, which emphasizes the importance of fair, respectful, and impartial treatment in public evaluations of legal authorities (Tyler, 2006). Recent qualitative evidence also demonstrates the continuing relevance of procedural justice to public experiences with police (Pryce & Whitaker, 2023).

The findings may help identify perceived strengths and areas for improvement in police service among the surveyed communities. Recommendations should remain limited to the study's descriptive results and should not be interpreted as evidence that any demographic characteristic causes differences in public perception.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public evaluations of police are shaped by several factors, including perceived performance, fairness, prior experiences, and characteristics of the local context. A meta-analysis found that citizen satisfaction with police is associated with both individual and agency-level factors, while a recent study also found an association between strain-related experiences and satisfaction with police services (Bolger *et al.*, 2021; Ferdik *et al.*, 2022). These associations do not establish causation and may differ across communities.

In the Philippines, public trust in legal institutions remains an important area of inquiry. National survey evidence found generally favorable ratings of police trustworthiness, although strongly favorable trust ratings were considerably lower than broad favorable ratings (Regalado & Sun, 2024). Local studies are therefore necessary because national patterns cannot determine

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how residents in a specific municipality evaluate police service.

Local evidence from Cotabato further demonstrates the importance of communication and participation in residents' engagement with public institutions. In a qualitative study involving ten residents, Osumo *et al.* (2025) found that engagement with local-government programs and policies was supported by access to information, collaboration, cooperation, and available communication channels. Participation was hindered by inadequate communication, time and financial constraints, limited interest, and political partisanship. Although their study did not specifically evaluate police services, it provides relevant local context because policing is a public-facing institution whose accessibility, fairness, reliability, and responsiveness are partly experienced through interactions between residents and service providers. Examining these dimensions in Matalam can therefore clarify whether residents perceive the police as accessible, respectful, dependable, and responsive within their particular community setting.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

This study included 397 adult respondents from 18 purposively selected barangays in Matalam, North Cotabato. The sample size was computed using Yamane's formula with a 0.05 margin of error and a reported sampling-frame population of 48,484. Within the selected barangays, systematic sampling was reportedly used to recruit eligible respondents. Because barangay selection was purposive, the findings should not be generalized to the entire municipality as though all barangays and residents had an equal probability of inclusion. Only 18 of the 34 barangays were included. The barangays were purposively selected to cover specified geographic areas and community types. This approach improves coverage of selected settings but does not create a probability sample of the entire municipality; therefore, interpretations are limited to the surveyed barangays and respondents.

The population of each barangay included in the study was as follows: Poblacion (6,819), Manubuan (2,771), Taculen (1,057), Central Malamote (3,385), Lower Malamote (1,246), Dalapitan (3,437), New Pandan (1,823), Kibia (4,185), Kidama (2,091), Marbel (3,589), Kibudoc (1,385), Salvacion (1,856), Kilada (5,076), New Bugasong (2,223), Kabulacan (2,226), Lampayan (3,290), Sta. Maria (1,814) and Linao (4,612). Collectively, these barangays had a population of 48,484, which served as the basis for determining the sample size.

Qualified participants were residents aged 18 years old and above who had lived in Matalam for at least one year, were mentally and emotionally capable, and had provided informed consent. Excluded from the study were active-duty police officers and their immediate family members, individuals with cognitive or communication impairments, and temporary residents who had lived in the area for less than one year.

Instrument

Data were collected using a questionnaire adapted from Maguire and Johnson's (2010) measure of public perceptions of police service. The instrument covers accessibility, competence, fairness, manners, reliability, and responsiveness. Item wording was contextualized to Matalam. The paper does not report the pilot-test sample, the identities or criteria of expert validators, item revisions, or Cronbach's alpha coefficients; therefore, it should not claim that validity or reliability was established unless these details and results are provided.

The final questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part I gathered the demographic profile of the respondents, including age, Gender, educational attainment, and Occupation. Part II assessed public perception of police service using a 5-point Likert Scale across six indicators: Accessibility (ease of contact with police), competence (perceived knowledge and skill), Fairness (equal and impartial treatment), Manners (respect and professionalism), Reliability (trustworthiness and consistency), and Responsiveness (promptness and effectiveness in addressing concerns).

Table 1: Instrument

Range of Means	Verbal Meaning	Descriptive Interpretation
4.20 – 5.00	Very High	Police services consistently meet or exceed public expectations.
3.40 – 4.19	High	Police services often meet public expectations.
2.60 – 3.39	Moderate	Police services sometimes meet public expectations.
1.80 – 2.59	Low	Police services seldom meet public expectations.
1.00 – 1.79	Very Low	Police services rarely or never meet public expectations

Method of Data Analysis

The following statistical tools were used:

Frequency and Percentage: These were used to describe the demographic profile of the respondents, including age, Gender, educational attainment, and Occupation.

Weighted Mean: This was used to assess public perception of police service across six dimensions:

accessibility, competence, fairness, manners, reliability, and responsiveness.

ANOVA: This was employed to determine significant differences in perception across variables with more than two categories, such as age, educational attainment, and occupational status.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile

Table 2 shows the demographic profile of the 397 respondents. The age group with the highest proportion was 18–24 years, at 30.5%, while the lowest was among respondents aged 65 years and above, at 3.5%. For Gender, male respondents had the highest percentage at 52.9%, compared to female respondents at 47.1%. In terms of educational background, the highest percentage was recorded for those at the college level (41.8%), whereas the lowest was 0.3% for respondents at the elementary level. Regarding Occupation, the largest group was employed individuals at 35.8%, while the smallest group was the unemployed at 15.4%. For civil status, the category with the highest proportion was single respondents at 53.4%, and the lowest was widowed at 2.5%. Overall, the demographic distribution indicates that the respondents were generally young adults, largely male, with relatively high educational attainment, and diverse occupational and civil status backgrounds.

The distribution further shows notable patterns across demographic groups. The age categories revealed that younger adults (18–34 years old) accounted for more than half of the population, indicating a predominantly youthful respondent group. The slight dominance of male respondents suggests a near-balanced gender representation. Educational attainment was mostly concentrated among those with college exposure, either at the undergraduate level or as graduates, indicating a generally well-educated sample. Occupational status showed that a considerable portion were either employed or students, representing active members of the workforce or academic environment. Meanwhile, civil status results highlighted that more than half of the respondents were single, with married individuals following at a substantial proportion. Despite variations across categories, the overall demographic profile shows a diverse yet predominantly young and educated group of respondents.

Table 2: Demographic Profile.

		Frequency	Percent
Age	18-24 y/o	121	30.5
	25-34 y/o	112	28.2
	35-44 y/o	90	22.7
	45-54 y/o	33	8.3
	55-64 y/o	27	6.8
	65 above	14	3.5
	Total	397	100.0
Gender	Male	210	52.9
	Female	187	47.1
	Total	397	100.0
Educational Background	Elementary Level	1	0.3
	Elementary Graduate	3	0.8
	High School Level	23	5.8
	High School Graduate	82	20.7
	College Level	166	41.8
	College Graduate	103	25.9
	Post Graduate/Professional	19	4.8
	Total	397	100.0
Occupation	Student	113	28.5
	Employed	142	35.8
	Self-Employed	81	20.4
	Unemployed	61	15.4
	Total	397	100.0
Civil Status	Single	212	53.4
	Married	156	39.3
	Widowed	10	2.5
	Separated	19	4.8
	Total	397	100.0

Level of Public Perception on Police Service

Table 3 showed the level of public perception on police service in the Municipality of Matalam, with an overall mean of 4.46, interpreted as very high, and a standard deviation of 0.684. This indicates that respondents held a very positive perception of police service, reflecting strong community trust and satisfaction across key areas, including accessibility, fairness, competence, manners, reliability, and responsiveness.

The three statements with the highest mean scores demonstrated exceptionally strong public approval of police responsiveness and service quality. The highest-rated item was “Police officers in Matalam pay attention and listen to what citizens say to them,” which had a mean of 4.65 and a standard deviation of 0.569, classified as very high. This was followed by “Police officers in Matalam meet or exceed the expectations of citizens in responding to requests for assistance,” with a mean of 4.61 and a standard deviation of 0.543, likewise very high. Next was “Police officers in Matalam attend to the safety and welfare of citizens,” with a mean of 4.57, also very high, and a standard deviation of 0.566. These

results suggest that citizens are highly satisfied with the officers’ attentiveness, responsiveness, and commitment to community welfare.

In contrast, the three statements with the lowest mean ratings—though still classified as very high—indicated areas where respondents observed slightly lower, yet consistently positive, performance. “Police officers in Matalam are consistent in the services they provide to citizens” received the lowest mean rating of 4.46, with a standard deviation of 0.600, suggesting minor opportunities to enhance consistency and follow-through. This was followed by “It is easy to contact the police officers in Matalam,” which had a mean of 4.47 and a standard deviation of 0.592, indicating room for further improvement in accessibility. Similarly, “Police officers in Matalam resolve problems effectively” had a mean of 4.52 and a standard deviation of 0.593, still very high but lower than the top-rated items. These findings highlight specific areas where continuous improvement in accessibility, consistency, and problem resolution could further enhance the overall quality of police service and strengthen public trust within the municipality.

Table 3: Public Perception of the Police Service.

	Indicators	Mean	Deviation	Interpretation
A.	Accessibility			
	The Chief of the Municipality of Matalam is willing to speak with citizens who have concerns about the police.	4.74	0.508	Very High
	Police officers in Matalam answers the phone calls in a timely manner.	4.60	0.567	Very High
	Police officers in Matalam, when handling calls for service, advise citizens of a hotline numbers where they can be reached should the citizen need follow-up assistance.	4.57	0.567	Very High
	It is easy to contact the Police Officers in Matalam.	4.47	0.592	Very High
	Category Mean	4.60	0.559	Very High
B.	Competence			
	Police Officers in Matalam appear to be knowledgeable about police procedures.	4.53	0.562	Very High
	Police Officers in Matalam resolve problems effectively.	4.52	0.593	Very High
	Police Officers in Matalam are knowledgeable about	4.59	0.599	Very High
	Category Mean	4.55	0.582	Very High
C.	Fairness			
	Police Officers in Matalam remain neutral and fair.	4.52	0.562	Very High
	Bias-based policing is not a problem in the Municipality of Matalam.	4.55	0.591	Very High
	Police Officers in Matalam use fair and impartial decision making when resolving disputes in the community.	4.55	0.599	Very High
	Police Officers in Matalam treat people equally.	4.56	0.607	Very High
	Police Officers in Matalam use fair and impartial decision making when issuing citations.	4.60	0.580	Very High
	Category Mean	4.56	0.588	Very High
D.	Manners			
	Police officers in Matalam address citizens in a respectful manner and appropriate tone.	4.58	0.542	Very High
	Police officers in Matalam take into consideration the feelings of citizens with whom they have had contact.	4.64	0.535	Very High

	Police officers in Matalam pay attention and listen to what citizens say to them.	4.65	0.569	Very High
	Police officers in Matalam readily identify themselves to citizens with whom they have contact by providing their name and contact information.	4.59	0.560	Very High
	Category Mean	4.62	0.552	Very High
E.	Reliability			
	Police officers in Matalam are consistent in the services they provide to citizens.	4.46	0.600	Very High
	Police officers in Matalam attempt to maintain a safe environment for citizens.	4.53	0.566	Very High
	Police officers in Matalam take the appropriate action when a citizen is in need of services.	4.56	0.611	Very High
	Police officers in Matalam follow through on commitments they make to citizens.	4.52	0.618	Very High
	Category Mean	4.52	0.599	Very High
F.	Responsiveness	4.55	0.542	Very High
	Police officers in Matalam attend to the safety and welfare of citizens.	4.57	0.566	Very High
	Police officers in Matalam are responsive to citizens who request services.	4.54	0.596	Very High
	Police officers in Matalam keep citizens informed and follow up with them when necessary.	4.58	0.565	Very High
	Police officers in Matalam meet or exceed the expectations of citizens in responding to requests for assistance.	4.61	0.543	Very High
	Police officers in Matalam take action when problems resources available in community.	4.57	0.562	Very High
	Police officers in Matalam are well trained	4.54	0.574	Very High
	Are brought to their attention			
	Category Mean	4.55	0.542	Very High
	Overall Mean	4.46	0.684	Very High Level of Perception

Comparison of Public Perception on Police Service when analyzed according to age

Table 4 presents a comparison of public perceptions of police service by age. The results revealed that the differences in mean perception scores across age groups were not significant, as indicated by the p-value of 0.287, which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. This suggests that respondents, regardless of age, shared generally similar perceptions of police service in the Municipality of Matalam.

The highest mean score was observed among respondents aged 65 years and above, with a mean rating of 4.72, indicating a very high level of perception toward police service. This was followed by respondents aged 35–44

years, who had a mean of 4.59, and those aged 25–34 years, with a mean of 4.58, both of whom were likewise classified as very high. Meanwhile, respondents aged 55–64 years had the lowest mean rating of 4.50, though still interpreted as very high. The next-lowest was the 18–24-year group, with a mean of 4.54, followed closely by the 45–54-year group, with a mean of 4.55.

Despite these slight variations, all age groups demonstrated a very high perception of police service. The absence of statistically significant differences indicates that age does not influence how citizens evaluate police performance, implying a consistently positive perception of police service across different generations within the municipality.

Table 4: Comparison of Public Perception on Police Service when analyzed according to age

	Gender	Mean	f	p-value	Remarks
Perception on Police Service	18-24 y/o	4.54	1.246	.287	Not Significant
	25-34 y/o	4.58			
	35-44 y/o	4.59			
	45-54 y/o	4.55			
	55-64 y/o	4.50			
	65 above	4.72			

Comparison of Public Perception on Police Service when analyzed according to Gender

Table 5 compares public perceptions of police service by Gender. The results revealed that the difference in perception between male and female respondents was not significant, as indicated by the p-value of 0.119, which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that Gender did not influence how respondents evaluated police service in the Municipality of Matalam. Female respondents had a slightly higher mean perception

score of 4.59, interpreted as very high, while male respondents reported a mean of 4.55, also very high. Although females rated police service marginally higher than males, the difference was too small to be considered statistically meaningful.

Overall, both male and female respondents demonstrated very high levels of perception, indicating a uniformly positive view of police service across gender groups. This suggests that the experiences and evaluations of police performance were consistent regardless of Gender.

Table 5: Comparison of Public Perception on Police Service when analyzed according to Gender

	Gender	Mean	f	p-value	Remarks
Perception on Police Service	Male	4.55	2.441	.119	Not Significant
	Female	4.59			

Comparison of Public Perception on Police Service when analyzed according to Educational Attainment

Table 6 compares public perceptions of police service by educational attainment. The results indicated that the differences in perception across the standardized educational groups were not significant, as reflected by the p-value of 0.089, which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. This suggests that respondents' level of education did not significantly influence their perceptions of the quality of police service in the Municipality of Matalam.

The highest mean rating was observed among respondents with elementary-level education (combining Elementary Level and Elementary Graduate), who reported a perception mean of 4.70, interpreted as very high.

This was followed by respondents with postgraduate or professional education, with a mean of 4.63, and college graduates, with a mean of 4.62, both of whom were also classified as very high. Respondents at the college level recorded a mean of 4.57. In contrast, those in the high school level category (combining High School Level and High School Graduate) had a mean of 4.54, reflecting similarly very high perceptions.

Overall, despite slight variations in mean ratings across educational groups, all categories reported very high levels of perception. The absence of statistically significant differences indicates that public satisfaction with police service remains consistently positive regardless of educational background, and standardizing the categories provides a clearer comparison among education levels.

Table 6: Comparison of Public Perception on Police Service when analyzed according to Educational Attainment

	Educational Attainment	Mean	f	p-value	Remarks
Perception on Police Service	Elementary Level	4.70	1.863	.089	Not Significant
	Elementary Graduate	4.39			
	High School Level	4.41			
	High School Graduate	4.54			
	College Level	4.57			
	College Graduate	4.62			
	Post Graduate/Professional	4.63			

Comparison of Public Perception on Police Service when analyzed according to Occupation

Table 7 compares public perceptions of police service by Occupation. The results revealed that the differences in perception across the four occupational groups were not significant, as indicated by the p-value of 0.538, which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. This suggests that respondents' occupations did not meaningfully affect their evaluations of the quality of police service in the Municipality of Matalam.

The highest perception rating was observed among self-employed respondents, who reported a mean of 4.59, interpreted as very high. This was followed by employed

respondents, with a mean perception score of 4.58, likewise very high. Respondents in the unemployed group had a mean of 4.55, while students reported a mean of 4.54, both classified as very high.

Overall, although minor variations were present across occupational categories, all groups demonstrated very high levels of public perception toward police service. The absence of statistically significant differences indicates that satisfaction with police performance was consistent among respondents regardless of their occupational status, reflecting a uniformly positive evaluation of the local police service.

Table 7: Comparison of Public Perception on Police Service when analyzed according to Occupation

	Occupation	Mean	f	p-value	Remarks
Perception on Police Service	Student	4.54	.724	.538	Not Significant
	Employed	4.58			
	Self-Employed	4.59			
	Unemployed	4.55			

Comparison of Public Perception on Police Service when analyzed according to Civil Status

Table 8 compares public perceptions of police service across civil status groups. The results indicated that the differences in perception among the four civil status groups were significant, as reflected by a p-value of 0.049, slightly below the 0.05 significance threshold. This suggests that civil status substantially affected respondents' evaluations of police service in the Municipality of Matalam.

The highest mean rating was observed among widowed respondents, at 4.81, which is interpreted as very high. This was followed by separated respondents, who had a mean of 4.64, and married respondents, with a mean of

4.57, both of whom were also classified as very high. The lowest mean was recorded among single respondents, at 4.55, yet it was still interpreted as very high.

Overall, all civil status categories demonstrated very high levels of public perception toward police service. While slight variations were noted, the consistently positive ratings across all groups indicate that citizens, regardless of civil status, hold a strong and favorable view of police performance and community service. The statistically significant differences suggest that social and household roles may influence how different civil status groups evaluate police service.

Table 8: Comparison of Public Perception on Police Service when analyzed according to Civil Status

	Occupation	Mean	f	p-value	Remarks
Perception on Police Service	Single	4.55	2.641	.049	Significant
	Married	4.57			
	Widowed	4.81			
	Separated	4.64			

CONCLUSION

This study described public perceptions of police service among 397 adult respondents from 18 selected barangays in Matalam, North Cotabato. Respondents reported a very high overall level of perceived police service, with the highest displayed item ratings relating to officers' attentiveness, response to requests for assistance, and concern for citizen safety and welfare. The relatively lowest displayed ratings concerned consistency of service, ease of contacting officers, and effective problem resolution, although these items also remained within the very high range.

The analyses did not detect statistically significant differences in perception scores by age, gender, educational attainment, or occupation. A statistically significant overall difference was found across civil-status groups; however, post hoc comparisons are required before identifying which groups differ. The findings are limited to the surveyed respondents and barangays because barangays were purposively selected. They should not be interpreted as a municipality-wide estimate, evidence of causation, or proof of actual police effectiveness.

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