Constructing A Moral Development Framework Based on the Experiences of Police Officers in a Station in Cavite, Philippines: A Grounded Theory Approach

Kyle Russelle P. Paredes[1]* and Angelito B. Meneses[2]
[1] Cavite State University – Imus Campus
[2] Philippine Women's University
*kylerusselle.paredes@cvsu.edu.ph

Abstract - Police work is a profession that is very complex as it is associated with an individual's values, which impacts the way they accomplish their task. It is a moral endeavor where decision-making from different ethical perspectives clashes with the individual's development of practical ethical awareness with their everyday activities. As morality is a variable that is not studied closely with police work, the authors, using a grounded theory approach, intended to construct a moral development framework of police officers by examining their experiences. This includes the officers' perception on what the duties of police officers are, their concept of morality, factors that may influence their morality, and considerations when making a moral decision. Data were gathered through a one-on-one interview with 14 respondents using a researcher-made interview guide through face-to-face and phone call interviews. Profile sheets were also provided. Results showed that officers perceived that their duty is to maintain peace and order being a role model and building good interpersonal relations to the people and its community. It was also found that their concept of morality is based on a standard which are divine law, positive law and moral law. Moreover, the following factors have appeared to have an effect on police officers' concept of morality which includes police authority, acknowledgment of one's responsibilities as an officer, experiences while in the service, knowledge about the law and possible expectations from the environment. Lastly, officers have two considerations when making a moral decision, a police standard operating procedure and based on their own discretion. In conclusion, morality formation of police officers is not rigid. As they continuously interact or expose themselves to the standards or values of those around them, their concepts of morality could undergo transformation or modifications.

Keywords - grounded theory; morality; police officers

Introduction

Morality is the distinction of an individual's intentions, decisions, and actions between those that are considered as appropriate and those that are inappropriate. Without these principles in place, societies cannot continue to progress for a long time. Moreover, "to know the good, is to do the good." Socrates (Cahn, 2000) believed that knowledge is an individual's guide to proper actions, but for him that is not the only guide. He finds connections between knowledge and virtue to show that people cannot perform in a wrong way knowing that it is wrong but continues doing the action thinking that what they are doing are good in some way. In today's world, morality is often thought to belong to a particular religious perspective, but based on its meaning, it is evident that this is not the case (All about Philosophy, 2019). While some moral values seem to transcend time and culture, morality is not fixed. It reflects the values of a specific group at a specific point in time and it affects the decisions one has to make in their daily life, and these choices are grounded on what one's conscience teaches.

As police officers, being the respondents of the study, carry out their vision and mission, they are entrusted to carry out their preaching. They are expected to abide by the rules, laws and ethical principles that apply to them. De Schrijver and Maesschalck (2015) identified that police officers are frequently confronted with moral dilemmas in the course of their job. There is always a grey area of internal struggle that they must deal with. They may be required to sacrifice their own short-term interests for the benefit of society and there will be situations where things may get out of hand and a judgment must be decided about what must be done even if an officer must betray moral ideas to perform their duty. Deputy Director General Alan Purisima stated that the police need to be a good model to the people because they are always facing the public. That in every action or decision they make, they must put into consideration its possible consequences, placing emphasis on an officer's moral standard. He indicated how important the role they play because they are what the community often follows. That as role models, they should not do anything that violates police principles as well as moral standards (Antalan, 2012).

The notion above now points the authors to the questions that aid in developing the research problems of the study. Morality is assumed by the authors to be a variable that can explain police officers' behavior and how they execute their duties as part of the community. Therefore, it is important for those in the academe and police administrators to get a better understanding of why police personnel engage in their work and possible moral development, which will be addressed by the findings of this research.

Purpose of the study
The study attempted to create a moral development framework based on the experiences of police officers under one of the Philippine National Police (PNP) stations in Cavite, Philippines. In line with the main goal stated above, the research aimed to achieve the following:

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of age, gender, rank, years in service, socio-economic status, and religious affiliation?
2. What are the experiences of the police officers in terms of perception of police officers' duty; personal concept of morality; factors that may influence the respondents' concept of morality; and important considerations when making a moral decision in the execution of duty as police officers;
3. What moral developmental framework can be formulated based on the findings?
4. What is the implication of the findings of the study to social development?

Trying to understand their concept of morality and its development through their experiences will be vital to lay down the foundations for change and growth. The police can assure a better relationship with the community if they can ensure recruits are predisposed to behaviors that are appropriate and expected to be followed by the police. Moreover, when the police officers can effectively execute their duties of enforcing and upholding law and order, this can safeguard the existence of peace in the society. As peace and sustainable development go hand in hand, it is necessary that different sectors in the community are able to contribute positively to all aspects and factors (political, social and economic) in order to attain sustainable development, something that is reflected in a peaceful society.

Materials and Methods

Method

The authors used grounded theory as a method of inquiry for collecting and analyzing data. It was appropriate to use this design since existing theories do not address the problem and the respondents of this research. With the theory being grounded from the data, it offered a better explanation than a theory that is borrowed off the shelf. It will fit the situation, would work in practice, is sensitive to individuals in a setting and may represent all the complexities found in the process.

Respondents

There is a total of 187 police personnel consisting of three Police Commissioned Officers (PCOs) and 184 Police Non-Commissioned Officers (PNCOs). The number of respondents is 14 and was determined by theoretical saturation which happened as the data and analysis of additional interviews no longer produced new concepts and did not offer any new insights on the categories, themes, or relationship between the categories.

The authors utilized purposive sampling technique. Two things have been considered: the duration of their service to assure an increase in possibility of a vast reservoir of experiences; and they should have enough experience interacting with people in the community through their line of work which is different from desk officers.

Instrument

The authors utilized an open-ended interview guide to gather necessary data for the study. It is generated based loosely on the research questions. Using open-ended questions allowed the respondents an open and wider range of answers. Face-to-face and phone interviews were conducted based on the convenience and schedule of the police officers. This is in relation to the availability of the respondents as they were deployed in order to provide aid to different areas. This

includes deployment for law enforcing, assisting in vaccinations and in the distribution of the government subsidies, specifically the social amelioration program (SAP).

Items or questions were developed by the primary author based on the scope of the study. Using an existing theoretical framework or paradigm was avoided to assure that the responses, and possible formulation of theory or framework would not just replicate the theory or framework used as a basis for developing the questions. It underwent content and construct validity through the validation of five (5) experts which are all registered psychometricians.

Results and Discussions

RQ1. Profile of the respondents
Majority of the participants are categorized under the early adulthood group (21-39 years old). This may be attributed to new recruits replacing those who would be retiring, dismissed, deceased, and/or separated from their job, including those who are listed as absent without official leave. In addition, young officers, though lack experiences can be easily trained and have excellent mobility and energy to spare (Roufa, 2015). In terms of gender, Davis (2005) emphasized how of all the male dominated occupations; police work ranks among the highest for the public's perception of gender related tasks. This is reflected from the unequal number of males to female participants involved in the study (majority of the participants are male.

Police work seems to be a stable profession as perceived by people (Gaille, 2018) and is observed with a high job satisfaction. This is reflected as half of the participants have been in the service for more than 11 years. The job benefits are rather valuable in many communities as well as a career opportunity that offers professional growth while providing service and aid to the community.

All participants belong to the middle-income class (between PHP 20,962 and PHP 73,367) when grouped based on their socio-economic status. Being a police officer in the Philippines typically earns PHP 29,668.00 per month as a starting level that would have significantly greater access to education, health, and other services (PNP Salary Grade 2019 | Modified Base Pay Schedule, 2018).

In terms of their religious affiliation, the majority of the participants (12 or 85.7%) are religiously affiliated with Roman Catholic Christianity while a small number of individuals are affiliated with Protestant Christianity (2 or 14.3 %).

RQ2. Police Officers' Experiences

The following sections present the findings from the interview conducted with the participants after data analysis.

Participants' perceptions on police officer's duty
One of the most visible agencies that represents the civil authority of the government are police officers. In times of need, threat, emergency, and trouble, or if a civilian is not aware on what to do and who they should approach, the police officers happen to be the most suitable, available and interactive unit and person for them.

Police officers perceived that it is their duty to maintain peace and order in the community. This includes upholding and enforcing the law; capturing violators or lawbreakers and protecting civilians from harm and threat. When it comes to upholding and enforcing the law impartially, nine participants believed that police officers must both compel, keep, support and professionally obliged to the law to enforce it. While for seven of them, capturing violators or lawbreakers is part of police efforts to curb criminality, this includes preventing crimes, and reducing the opportunities for the commission of crimes by capturing lawbreakers or violators to maintain peace and order in the community. Lastly, eight of the participants stated that the government always has primary responsibility to protect civilians from harm or threat. As the visible representative of the government, police officers are considered peacekeepers and expected to aid with legal, material and physical protection and minimize potential threats of violence to all civilians under their jurisdiction.

Aside from this, three participants believed that they also have social responsibilities particularly by building good interpersonal relations to the people and its community. Developing a firm relationship between the police and the community is vital as stated by Jonson (2021), since a public that has a good discernment of the police is more likely

to collaborate and is less likely to strike back as well. Good police-community relations are important to develop trust between civilians and police officers. Without trust, police work becomes much less effective.

Lastly, according to seven participants, police officers were given a basic task of being a role model in the community. Officers are thought to be the role models in the society and create the precedence so that other civilians will follow them and the laws willingly and cooperatively. They are not supposed to be breakers of the law or found wanting of any of the aforementioned (Antalan, 2012). This is shown through officers' being respectful and providing public service. For five participants, being respectful is necessary even if officers are given power and authority by the government to enforce the law. They must show kindness and courtesy to the civilians that they have sworn to protect and must have a basic awareness of other people's sentiments and a prioritization of their rights. For the remaining participants, providing public service is also part of their duty. Police officers are fine, dedicated, self-sacrificing public servants. It is a profession that requires someone to run into danger to save a perfect stranger and to put their lives in jeopardy to save someone they have never met before.

Participants' concept of morality

Morality was defined as the distinction between right and wrong. It is the determination of what should be done and what should not be done. The participant's concept of morality is based on a standard that can be divided into three main categories: divine, positive and moral law.

For two participants, they have a standard that is set by God on the actions of man which is called divine law. It comprises anybody of law that is perceived as deriving from a transcendent source, such as the will of God. This is deemed to be the true law for human behavior (Ward, 1993).

A total of 11 participants described a set of legal norms that regulate a certain state or location and are imposed by competent organizations with the sole purpose of achieving a specific goal which is called positive law. This includes all that is written in regulations or decrees.

Lastly, six participants discussed their conduct norms, which they referred to as a "system" called moral law. These rules may or may not be part of a religion, be written down, or be legally binding. Individual or group rules of behavior that are not necessarily part of the law but that an individual or a group may follow out of personal conscience.

Factors that influence moral concept

A person's concept is a dynamic attribute that can be characterized by being in constant feedback with the social environment, wherein the opinions and assessments of the person and those who they interact with can be a determinant factor (Rodrigo, 2016). From the several factors that influence an individual's moral concept, the focus will be directed towards the following five factors that appeared from the participant's responses:

First, a participant specified that police authority affects their moral concept. This is an authority which is bestowed to them through a governmental agency that clothes them with certain duties that gives authority to arrest and subdue criminals. Likewise, an officer without power can in no means subdue a criminal, it is vital. It can manage conflicts and seek agreeable settlements between parties. However, they can make use of authority and power in a coercive way, through repression, prohibition, or control.

Second would be the acknowledgment of one's responsibilities as an officer. A life as a civilian is very much different compared to a life being in the service as emphasized by five participants. It is necessary that an officer should both know and acknowledge the duties and responsibilities that are given to them. Thus, before an officer can be deployed, it is necessary for them to undergo rigorous training to ingrain the tenets of the Philippine National Police to serve and protect, and to change their so called "civilian mentality".

Third, for two participants it would be their experiences while in the service. Most officers that enter the workforce have insignificant experience in the field or even in handling moral dilemmas that police officers normally face. They gain knowledge or insight on how they should perform in their job or the norms in their profession from their peers and supervisors. Police officers also spend a vast amount of time socializing with other officers as well as the community under their jurisdiction.

Next is an officer's knowledge about the law. The law is a set of principles, rules and standards of conduct that have general application in society. It is used by the government as the standard for what is legally right or wrong. Knowing what is in the law affects an individual's decision-making on what behavior is deemed proper or not. As an officer, four participants are adamant that it is necessary to know the laws that presides in one's country in order to properly uphold and enforce it as well as making sure that the officers themselves will not violate any law they are trying to enforce.

Lastly, would be the expectations from the environment. Building relations with the community is an important task included in a police officer's line of work, as explained by three participants. This sometimes includes living up to the expectations of the public on how an officer should act, think, or behave as they interact with civilians in the community.

Things considered important when making moral decision
Individuals' actions are always guided by their perception of what is correct or right. Police officers are faced with ethical dilemmas as they proceed with their duty in the community every day. Receiving bribes or accepting free things from people or suspects are examples of these predicaments. When a person is deciding, they are expected to make rational and optimal choices even if risks and uncertainty exist. Different courses of actions need to be recognized as well as possible outcomes that might appear (Milburn & Billings, 1976). In some situations, officers must decide in haste that could affect the rest of their career and personal life. Based on the results of the analyzed data, police officers have two main considerations when making a moral decision: 12 participants elaborated a police standard operating procedure; while there are seven participants who shared experiences of relying on their own decision or police discretion.

A police standard operating procedure (SOP) is a standard operating procedure (SOP) and a step-by-step set of instructions that will aid the police officers to perform their tasks in a consistent manner. It was formed to make sure all processes can be replicated consistently across all stations and in every situation. These standard operating procedures are clearly observed through the following considerations: PNP mandate, leader-subordinate principle, prioritizing civilian welfare and equal treatment.

According to six participants, PNP mandate is an authorization to conduct operations in the public interest in accordance with prevailing laws and regulations with the full power and authority of the government to enforce and protect the public according to said laws, ordinances, and regulations. Generally, police are mandated by their controlling governmental entity to perform defined services mandatory upon police as a social and community agency.

Moreover, police officers work for the welfare of the civilians and to guard them from any sort of crime. To serve the civilians better, as shared by seven participants, it is quite imperative to establish a leader-subordinate principle, the police force in a well-knit structure. Hence, ranks of the police force are structured in a hierarchical arrangement, widely known as police career hierarchy where authority or power and decision making comes with the position an officer has.

Police officers also consider prioritizing civilian welfare. The primary duty of a police officer is to serve and protect the people and the community. Three participants shared that this may include arresting criminals and detecting and preventing crimes to maintain peace and order in the community, however, it is also a mandate for them to never forget an individual's human rights even if they are suspects to a crime.

Lastly, four participants believed that police officers should practice equal treatment and behave in a manner that does not differentiate based on race, religion, national origin, immigration status, age, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or other status. Every individual has the right to equal treatment, the protection of his or her constitutional rights, and the application of the rule of law.

There are also situations wherein police officers are forced to make decisions on the spot, thus putting all liability on the police officers' decision making or police discretion. When officers are placed in the position of making decision at the spur of the moment, the respondents replied that being flexible, minimizing casualty and making decisions based on experience is important when making a moral decision.

Once unexpected situations unfold while officers are deployed in the field, two (2) participants replied that they should be flexible and able to adapt, not only to the changing social climate and evolving technologies but also to individual situations as they unfold (Roufa, 2019). Conflict is sometimes faced by officers as they execute their duty. With the nature of their job to resolve problems or misunderstandings in the community, this would sometimes result in arguments and conflicts with the people involved in the incident (Roufa, 2019). Two participants, however, mentioned that it is also crucial that a police officer is able to minimize casualty, by gaining control of the situation and being able to reconcile it as quickly as possible in order to avoid irreparable damage or harm to others and the suspects themselves.

Lastly, officers base decisions on their experience. According to McLeod (2017), this type of learning can be defined as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combinations of grasping and transforming the experience." As shared by three participants, police officers can create possible solutions by harnessing what they have learned from their experiences by comparing certain cues and constructs and see if it is possible to apply in the present problem or situation.
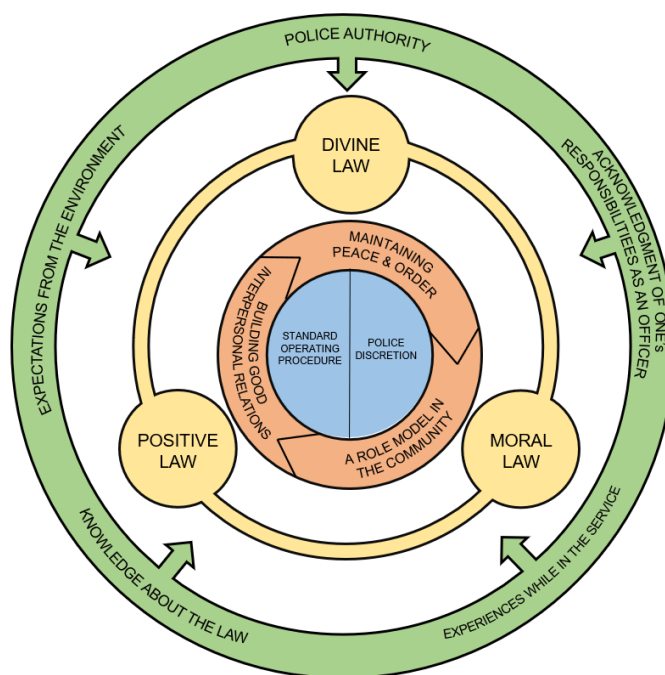
RQ3. Moral Development Framework

Figure 1. Initial Moral Development Framework (Paredes & Meneses, 2021)

Figure 1 reflects the moral development framework of the police officers in PNP Bacoor station formulated based on the findings of the study.

RQ4. Implications to Social Development

One of the proposed 17 sustainable development goals is promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, to provide access to justice for everyone and to build effective and inclusive institutions at all levels. It is a basic requirement in upholding economic development, social structure, and political stability because it encourages investment growth, creates more job opportunities, and attracts more tourists.

Police officers, who are participants of this study, are known to be one of the active bodies given the authority to promote and enforce peace and order in the society. They play a crucial role in combating crime, preserving peace, and maintaining public order. Thus, it is important that they can properly execute the duties and responsibilities that are associated with the title or position that they were given. They should be able to put into practice the rules

implementing the code of conduct and ethical standards expected of police officers: "to promote a high standard of ethics in public service. Public officials and employees shall at all times be accountable to the people and shall discharge their duties with utmost responsibility, integrity, competence and loyalty, act with patriotism and justice, lead modest lives, and uphold public interest over personal interest" (Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees (R.A. 6713, n.d.)

Considering that police officers are duty-bearers, it is necessary that they must reinforce the citizens' fundamental rights, to secure the freedom, well-being and dignity of all people everywhere, and not rule over people through fear or power. This would imply the importance of morality formation of these officers as without moral considerations, policing would be both ineffective and unbearable to a free society. Having moral ascendancy will help the one governing to connect with those they governed, it is what may cement their mutual appreciation and deference. This may persuade people to strictly follow policies, program implementation, and assure cooperation to their orders without hesitation.

In addition, if they can properly conduct their duties, though indirectly, it would aid in the satisfaction of one of the human needs indicated by Abraham Maslow, safety, and security needs. To cite an example, when an individual must walk down a dark alley at night, and feels unsafe, nothing else will matter. In that moment where one feels a lack of safety, they are unable to think about anything else. Other matters may be completely forgotten about as an individual tries to bring themselves to safety. Moreover, the community is necessary for the development of a society. If their need for safety and security is satisfied, it can aid in the betterment of their wellbeing, which is linked to efficient and effective execution of their duties as part of the society.

Conclusion

The morality of police officers in the study can be seen as a concept which is not rigid. It is in a constant flux, changes gradually, and can be influenced based on their work, their interpersonal relations, and their cognitive or personal factors. Considering the nature of the job of law enforcement, the author can come up with the idea that a vast number of occasions may arise where a police officer may face a moral dilemma repeatedly throughout their career. In most cases, officers can make decisions that would either build up or tear them down as an officer and this decision they make will either weaken or strengthen their moral values. This would mean proper training, coaching or monitoring is necessary to assure that officers can act in such a manner as to preserve the confidence and consideration that his duties require. They must be able to put into consideration how recruitment and training would be conducted to assure that developing a good moral compass is less of a training endeavor and more of an intrinsic part of the officers' learning development. Altogether, taking into consideration the findings of the study, it seems that morality does not only belong to religious perspectives. This may mean that integrating moral development as an aspect of social development can be a future direction to achieve sustainable development.

With a standard operating procedure and a leader-subordinate principle that is practiced in the agency, those with the higher ranks should create a moral culture within their agency. Instead of supposing that these police officers at present have a firmly embedded set of values as they become part of the workforce, it should be recalled that all officers have the capacity to perform righteously; but, when the environment allows misbehavior either implicitly or explicitly, the potential for abuse may rise. This may also imply special attention should be given in the implementation or development in moral training. Police officers should be able to familiarize the morals at stake in the situation, understand the principles and values involved, and choose the proper course of action. They should make choices based on a precise contemplation of all significant factors and the likely consequences of alternative courses of their action, respecting others, and taking accountability for their decisions.

However, the study was established within certain scopes and limitations to guarantee the accuracy of the collected and interpreted data from the participants. Though statistical tools were used for the analysis of the quantitative data, it is only limited to the use of descriptive statistics. The studies focus would still be on the analysis of the qualitative data. It is limited to the discussed variables and does not delve into the other possible relationships to the other factors or domains. The final goal of this study was to only formulate a framework and did not include cross-sectional analysis or comparison to an already existing theory or framework of socio-moral development. In addition, though the literature may seem to point on the police officers' who are involved in misconduct, the study's focus was not them but the experiences of police officers whether they shared the same experiences or not. This is reflected by the amount of literature pertaining specific misconduct of police officers in Bacoor, Cavite.

With that in mind, future researchers should use a wider scope for their locale and a bigger number of police officers as participants of the study. A quantitative study is recommended to gather data that can be used to generalize the results for PNP police officers and may look into participants who have reported cases of improper behavior and focus on their morality formation. As this study focused on the creation of a moral development framework of police officers, future researchers can focus on creating a scale or instrument to measure or classify police officers' morality. They may also develop programs or interventions that can aid or address in the monitoring, regulation, and maintenance of police officers' morality.

Acknowledgement

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