



**Pakhtun Culture and Policing: An Understanding of Pakhtunwali and Stereotypic
Image of Police and their Far-reaching Consequences in District Swat, Khyber
Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan**

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Abstract

Police service delivery is a cumbersome task which is often influenced by centuries old customs and traditions of Pakhtun culture. This study addresses the Pakhtun culture and stereotypical construct regarding police and their long lasting consequences in district Swat Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan. In this study, public perception, local understanding and folk wisdom about the desperate nature of police services have been explored. This study is qualitative in nature where data have been collected from community members belonging to different professions with the help of purposive sampling. The collected data have been analyzed with the help of narrative analysis. The study reflects the negative image of police among the local inhabitants of the Swat. Similarly, the cultural practices also intervene in their services. Police in the region are working under the influence of police rules and local culture, where, police feels themselves in the quagmire of century's old customs and traditions. In most of the cases police services are getting influenced by local culture and folk wisdom respectively. It is, therefore, recommended in this study to arrange different sessions and to promote the ethos of community policing in the region. Along with, different programs and schemes shall be lunched in respective community to develop positive image of police in order to ensure effective policing.

Keywords

Pakhtun Culture, Pakhtunwali Stereotyping, Police Services, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Introduction

Police as a permanent executive body of the government are charged with, to regulate and control public affairs (Harmon, 2015), in order to ensure peaceful co-existence (Newburn, 2012). Police are also responsible to control and prevent the different patterns of crime and criminality (Marenin, 1996; Ras, 2010). Therefore, impartial execution of the law, security to the masses and establishing law and order are the prescriptive norms of police (Higgins, 2020). But, in some cases, due to their distinctive cultural pattern of 'thana culture' police deviate from the standard as expected by common citizens.

As argued by Suddle (2003) the British legacy is still in practice and strongly embedded among police force. And therefore, police in Pakistan has been considered as a force instead of security agents (Khalid, 2017). Resultantly, police are inefficient to address the challenges of the modern world (Huda, 2009). Most probably, police are not empowered to take decisions regarding their work in an independent way due to the local cultural practices (Kumar & Verma, 2009). And majority of their services are influenced by the local traditions and cultural usages (Ullah, Hussain, Alam, & Akhundzada, 2016). Resultantly, police face different problem and challenges in respect of their services.

This study is one of the few studies that provide such insight from community point of view. Such a perspective will not only help us understand the phenomenon of policing but will also help to get an insight of the local stereotypical image about police and their services (Akhtar, Rafiq, Asif, Saeed, & Kashif, 2012). The stereotypical image is the result of the encounter of the public with police. The overall images of police in relations to local understanding or folk wisdom create distrust in the mind of people. However, in the current time, there has been an increasing international interest in the different sociopolitical context that has raises many questions about police legitimacy (Radburn and Stott, 2018).

According to Khan (2011), behind the countless efforts and sacrifices of law enforcement agencies, especially the Police, district Swat is still the victim of social unrest were local people feel unsecured. Consequently, major army operation has been taken by different governments time by time to ensure state writ and security in the region. However, and soon after the security insurance by military force, the security was once again handed over to local police and other agencies. The poor policing and inappropriate approach to security measures once again led to law-and-order situation in area. The public satisfaction from local police was very low resulted to poor police performance, lower morale level among masses as the minds of general people were filled with memories of the beheaded bodies of their fellow police officers. Having passed a decade, the police force has yet to do another introspection to see their reputation in the eyes of the local people. In this milieu, police in Pakistan and more specially in the research area lost their reputation, and they were labeled as the least resilient force according to local understanding and daily lives of general people.

Similarly, the most daunting challenge police ever faced due to its fragile and weak nature is the norms of Pukhtunwali. When, the state machinery; police is considered weak, where, they could not address the everyday conflict faced by the public. Then after, public pursue out their resident equal societies, such as, Pukhtunwali; rather than state intuitions to deal with everyday conflict, land and inheritance dispute, as well as domestic matters (Gauri, 2009). Ahmad (1983) also asserts that the indigenous “nang” (honor) and many others customs of Pakhtunwali creates multiple issue to formal institution, such as, police and so forth. The conflicting nature of modern law and the code of Pakhtunwali make the environment unfriendly for effective policing. In country like Pakistan, somewhere positive prescribed, national organizations are well-thought-out weak, there is often greater conflict with local institutions. This situation not only affects policing but also slows down development and peaceful coexistence.

What are the local stereotypes about police in the research area? Such stereotypes are baseless exaggeration or it is workable in the field? Are local people expecting too much from the police? What is the influence of Pukhtunwali upon police services? Is it contradictory or supportive to policing in the region? How can we develop strategies to ensure effective policing? These are some of the questions that this paper seeks answers to the underperformance of police. This study investigates to pinpoint community perspective about police services along with their reservation about police and policing in District swat, *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa*, Pakistan.

Methodology

Qualitative research methods have adopted in this research paper. In this study attention has given to public narratives to unfold and contextualize police image in the special context of pukhtunwali and its impacts on policing. In this regard, narrative studies help the researcher to get insights into the phenomenon (Cresswell, 2007). The data has collected (with help of interviews, interview guide) from a sample of 28 respondents. Interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the research participants. During field visit, the researcher thoroughly followed the protocol of research ethics. After all, various themes and sub themes developed based on field data. According to Creswell (2007) narrative analysis is used when informants are willing to share their stories. Data has been analyzed to

explore all the possible dimensions of the problem. The data has been analyzed with the help of thematic analysis

Results, Findings and Discussion

After completion of primary information, the data was then analyzed thematically. Themes emerged from field information which helped to know about different aspects affecting policing in respect of public understanding. Below are the most prevalent factors that the researchers founded that have been affecting policing in the research area. The factors mentioned in this paper may not fully cover the issues and challenges faced by police in *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa* in general, as the data is collected in district Swat. Though several themes were identified from the data, however, this paper discusses the themes that were most significant and repeatedly discussed during field work.

Stereotypical Images of Police and Policing

In this study, it was founded that many local people of the area used to call police with bad names such as a corrupt, lazy, and inhuman force instead of security agents. Since, many of them had no personal experience and even interacted with police. But the exiting negative image of police has constructed the perception of the locals. This belief and set of serotypes are based on the public perception and it mostly results into the bad reputation of police. Generally, the issue is once raised by Lippmann (1992) and claimed that stereotypes are well fixed in a culture and mostly it is a baseless exaggeration to construct reality. As it is supported by Allport (1966) basically, stereotypes are an inaccurate beliefs and prejudice that contradicts and resist evidence in its connection. But all these stereotypes influence the functional aspect of a society and similarly police behavior ((Brooks, Dunham, & Alpert, 2015). Although, in most of the cases these beliefs have no relations with reality but the context and content intensify the severity of the problem. Therefore, in this investigation, the case is different for the police. Among these stereotypes, the researchers went through different channels in the field and observed a connection between local stereotypes and police roles. About the said dilemma, the scholars contacted different research participants in order to get a real picture of the images of police. Around the different stakeholders, an advocate narrates the story in such words:

“Our thoughts, feelings, and actions are usually based on what we hear and say. In most cases, we don’t have a concrete argument but solely depend on this. Interestingly, it spreads quickly, and they carry it forward”.

Traditional knowledge has a close connection with stereotypes and often it is an inaccurate beliefs and over generalization about a group or profession. Generally, this reality is based on limited information and traditional narratives. Keeping in view the said reality, during field investigation all the stereotypes were founded correct about police and policing. After all, police have been perceived as the most terrible force instead of service agents. There are multiple factors responsible for the said issue, as it is reflected in daily discussions in different circles and similarly in social media. In the research area, police have been perceived and observed as oppressors and suppressors of human rights, and a threat to the life, liberty, and dignity of the public. All these notions take on an intense shape when the local media back them in the form of short stories, movies, and dramas (Newman, 2009). Along with this, there are other stereotypes, as commented by a dispute resolution council chairman:

“Everyone know the way and level of respect of police on social media’s channels;.... The general public treat them as fun, and some others treat them as real portrayal of police. One cannot imagine and predict about the so made bad performance of police in public. They are no more trustworthy as they have their very bad face in front of public”

These persons think that involving the police in their issue will led to more trouble and many other complications. As an advocate projected the said issue in given view:

"Da police ghwa langa shwa (Local conflict is beneficial to police in many colors and flavors)".

It is a general perception on the part of the public that different conflicts in the locality have been considered a golden opportunity for police in order to get backdoor benefits. Along with, it is important to mention that stereotypes do not reflect the entire police force but most probably show the black sheep working in the department. Usually, the police get backdoor benefits in many contexts due to different loophole, such as, lack of transparency and accountability. Similarly, the local conflict butters the bread of the police on both sides and it is a general perception on the part of community and harsh reality about police. Police are bribed in various cases that have an everlasting impact on

the police proceedings and on their working protocol. It is observed in the field that all the available notions have a connection with police work due to their out of way activities.

It is due to this depiction, the motivation level; self-image and performance of the trustworthy and professional police officers are decreasing day by day and ultimately result into police failure. Simultaneously, majority of the police in the research area are familiar for their off-the-record activities that result into their disrespect. Police presence in the surrounding is perceived negatively. In this context, majority of the respondents showed the same stance about police and policing. Among the respondents, one - advocate argued in such words:

“Matal dy chi Dvee aksar da khar pa zay klal dagi (Police usually targeting the innocents in place of actual offender in general way of their duty)”.

The picture mentioned above has been observed in Thana culture. Where in many cases, police want to show fake progress while entrap the innocent masses in different allegation and cases. And mostly police in their routines go against the due process. It is founded in this study that most of the stereotypes regarding police and policing are not only a hypothetical construct but it is practicable in the field. These situations led trust deficit and widen the gap between police and public and result into police failure. In this connection one of the media person and sample respondents replied in the following words:

“Da police mashran aksar pa jar lagya ve o da vena kave che dve da Hati na Mashy ao da Mashy na Hathi jorawaly she, o da hm chi zamung sara sok sa na shi kawly” (you cannot beat police for being guilty; and some of the policemen tell the visitors that they can do anything to prove a person as criminal or a criminal as respectable person)”.

In this regard, it is evident and reflected from the field information that in major cases police officers go against the established procedures of police as it is envision in police regulations. The majority of police deal with the public in inhuman and authoritative way.

It is crystal clear that the police will not do anything unless they are bribed. A senior advocate narrates it in such words:

“Police and dacoits are both considered similar in way and behavior; it realized when a person face them, a person then have to give them money. Despite the fact that you face them as defendant or actual suspect.

The manipulated construct of the police stereotypical image was thoroughly probed in this research investigation. It is deduced based on field information that the police in the research area have a bad image due to their lack of activism. Most of the police activities are doubtful, which negates the true spirit of policing. Thus, all the serotypes verified in the field and where the issue is one of the great significances influencing police and policing.

Pukhtunwali and Policing

The *Pukhtoon* way of life is the nexus of a number of socio-culture value and norms varied from general culture of the country. Specifically, the traditional traits like honor, family integration, code of conducts, the do's and do not norms, taboos and folkway are usually on the basis of reciprocal relationship among the people. Such mentioned code of conduct are the scale of *Pukhtunwali* and define the weak and strong *Pukhtoon* in area. In strong integration of *Pukhtunwali*, a person has to favor his/her family member and close friends despite the right and wrong. And those who don't follow the prescribed way of life are treated as weak *Pukhtoon* in local culture context. Further, such code of conduct is against the general way of life and law of the country. In such scenario, being a law enforcement agency, the Police has to abide law, follow law, and ensure the enforcement of law of the country, as to ensure peace in the region. The established ethos for such law enforcement agency is compulsory to go with them. Thus, it can be concluded that *Pakhtunwali* is one of the major hurdles to policing in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and then particularly in universe of the study. Both, *Pukhtunwali* and role of law of policing are contradictory to each other, where *Pukhtunwali* is considered a daunting approach in light of government rules and regulation. In this regards a potential respondents and chairman of the dispute resolution council (DRCC) argued:

“Panah is one of the valued codes of conduct of Pukhtunwali. You can notice so many examples of this Pukhtunwali. Even if someone is a killer, the large family shelters him under the shadow of panah. This is the strongest scale of traditional Pukhtunwali, not only sheltering their family members but their enemies too, whenever they seek panah. Behind the shelter, the tribe and caste of the criminal provide socio-economic as well as political

facilitation to save the criminal for the sake of the strong integration of Pukhtunwali. Additionally, if a person kills his sister, mother, or even sister-in-law or any other close female relatives, the male family members resist policing under the Pukhtunwali".

Similarly, another respondent and member of dispute resolution council (DRCC), further explains:

"In most of the cases, extrajudicial killings are reported and heinous punishments are inflicted. Therefore, Pakhtun, in many contexts, challenges the law of the state. In addition, women-related issues of honor are steady decide in shape of Swara; where no such space and chance are giving to policing intervention. Since, pending and except luggage of elopement, etc. are not registered formally and thus no ground remains for law enforcement and even court for intervention "

There are a large number of examples of how policing is beset with the practices that are the demand of *Pakhtunwali*. The community also shared their views on it. One of the respondents (a community member) commented in such words:

"Community members turn blind because it is the demand of Pakhtunwali to protect the criminals".

It can be argued that the prevalence of local culture in the form of *Pakhtunwali* is a stumbling block to ensuring that justice is done all along. Under the force and influence of *Pakhtunwali*, the entire social order goes against the true performance of policing in KP. Honor, Asabia (in the words of Ibne Khaldoon), social stigma, *Swara*, etc., are the parts and parcels of *Pakhtunwali*, and police performance is highly impacted by the process and course of delivering policing duties dispassionately.

The dichotomy between the *Pukhtunwali* and policing never goes in the same direction in context of public problems and challenges and to solve the voices of the society. In response to this statement one an advocate and potential sample respondents replied in the give words:

"Typically, it happens to our attention that on each occasion police staffs plan to custody an illicit, the general community safeguard haven even in their houses while protecting the interests of the criminal instead of the legal department and government agencies for the sack of central trait of panah and badraga as it is intended in pakhtunwali".

In many other instances, folk wisdom and traditional context negate the modern controlling mechanism of police in most of their issues. Police, being security agents, are dependent on public support and information to ensure effective policing. *Pakhtun culture*, being influenced by conservatism, irrationality, and emotionality, also creates barriers in the way of effective policing. About the said issue, another respondent's a member of provincial assembly (MPA) comment in such words:

"Pakhtun, in major cases, challenges the writ of the government while not waiting for police intervention to address their conflict formally".

Overall, social capital and the core values such as *Badraga*, *panah*, *swara*, *ghairat*, *pighore*, and *badal* (core values of *Pakhtunwali*) are the main tenants that challenge the authority of police in the locality. Police, being the native in many cases, avoid the issue if it is concerned with the values mentioned above. In this respect, most of the police avoid intervention if the issues are related to women. Finally, *Pakhtunwali*, being the very basic code of life, has an everlasting impact on police service delivery. *Pakhtunwali* is an old concept that is guided and controlled by centuries-old customs and traditions while policing a modern concept of the modern world in many ways contrary to each other in multiple stances, strategies, and initiatives. It is evident, based on field information that the majority of the community members opined that *Pakhtun* culture and doing *Pakhtunwali* have an enormous influence on police and policing.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the conflicting nature of *Pakhtunwali* and the modern law of policing make the environment unfriendly and suffocating for effective policing. *Pakhtun* culture and society in many cases contradict with police rules and regulations. This contradiction creates confusion where many of the locals do not trust the police personnel and see their services ineffective. Police service delivery is a cumbersome task which is influenced by the centuries old customs and traditions of the study area. During field investigation all the stereotypes were founded correct. Many local people of the area used to call police with bad names such as a corrupt, lazy, and inhuman force instead of security agents. The existing belief and set of serotypes are based on the public perception and are

mostly result into the bad reputation of police. Police have been perceived as the most terrible force instead of service agents. Therefore, many of the stereotypes in the field project the police as oppressors and suppressors of human rights, and a threat to the life, liberty, and dignity of the public. This construct of stereotypes is highly influential and affects negatively the service delivery of police. Further, the over discussion concludes that *Pakhtunwali*, particularly *Badruga*, *panah*, *swara*, *ghairat*, *pighore*, and *badal* and policing are two contradictory approaches in Pukhtun culture and study population, leading thereby to a number of socio-culture and legal issues challenging the legal status of policing and the role in law and order in society. In many special occasions, like issues related to women, the police cannot intervene and all such cases are deal within the capacity of Pukhtunwali instead of law and policing. Moreover the primary information support that *Pakhtun* culture and doing *Pakhtunwali* have an enormous influence on police and policing in the region.

Recommendations

Police reform is one of the prioritized agenda of every government for peace loving motto, social order and crime free society. Since inception of Pakistan, many steps have been taken by the regimes in different time in order to reform police and policing. But the journey of the police reforms still on the way and the philosophy of the effective policing are subject to discussion in many content and context. Therefore, in this study the researchers, put forwarded a three pronged strategy is a measure to get the soft image and the philosophy of effective policing. At community level, the role of family and clergymen are important to socialize people and to internalize among them the soft and positive picture of police. It is also needs of the current time on the part of community to take different measures to enhance and develop civic sense, patriotism and the spirit of community engagement. At last but not the least, to get awareness of the law; rule of law and to abide the law instead of *Pakhtunwali* are the needed agenda in this modern time for the solutions of the communal problems and to ensure peaceful coexistence. Therefore, mass media, such as, social, electronic and printed media can play a detrimental role to project the positive picture of police as security agents.

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