

Research Article

EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS ON COMMUNITY POLICING AND CRIME PREVENTION IN MBARARA CITY

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ABSTRACT

Background: Old-style policing methods have tended to focus on controlling crime through enforcement of the law and largely on reactive responses. Community policing on the other hand, seek to identify environments which cause crime and consequently focus on prevention of crime whilst working with community members. This study sought to accentuate these collaborations between the police and community and how the partnership promotes crime prevention in emerging cities in Uganda, taking Mbarara city as a case. **Methods:** This study adopted a descriptive design with a qualitative approach. Data from 183 respondents was garnered through focus group discussion and direct interview from Uganda Police/sister security agencies and varied community members. **Results:** The study finds that people's perception is vital in the success of any intervention. Relatedly, people's existent beliefs and attitudes act as sieves in determining how they perceive information and consequently support or reject it all together. The study further finds that stereotypes, and negative perspectives about community policing can change through intentional interactions and meaningful engagements with community members. Albeit, there has not been any significant engagements, no trainings or serious sensitization about community policing in Mbarara City. This is also true among Police Constables who are supposed to be the first line officials in sensitizing the masses about the intervention. The relationship between the police and the community in Mbarara City is pitiable. Community policing could be estimable in reducing crime in the city if appropriate intervention avenues were adhered to. **Conclusion:** This study demonstrates that community policing is essential in creating trust and collaboration between the police and community members, especially in the process of preventing crime. This paradigmatic shift in law enforcement philosophy demands focused capacity building of all stakeholders involved in the chain of crime prevention.

Keywords: Crime prevention, Community Policing, Community perception.

INTRODUCTION

Modern-day policing appeals to improved cooperation between the police and community members to augment the latter's awareness in tackling crime and confidence to act as witnesses against criminals. Beyond policies and mechanisms, this transformation demands reforms that nurture incontestable trust between the police and local community members. This articulates some of the principles advanced by Robert Peel's nine Tenets of community policing (Tessa & Naomi, 2021; Bell, 2023). It is upon these foundations that the British Parliament instituted a novel police force with the intention of mitigating the escalating criminal activity within urban locales throughout the nation of England in the year of 1829 (Mutahi, Höglund, & Elfversson 2024). Since then, several governments across the globe have embraced the emergence of community policing as the most prominent concept in law enforcement and crime prevention.

Community policing was established in Uganda as a proactive policy in 1980s to curb down rampant crimes that were then witnessed in the capital city of Kampala. The concept of community Policing (CP) was formally recognized by the Uganda Police Force (UPF) in 1989, shortly after the Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM) assumed power in 1986, and in 1993 CP was formally introduced as a national program in Uganda. Since then CP has been partially implemented in selective locations in Uganda.

The new Strategy for Community Policing issued in 2017 is a comprehensive attempt to move the UPF towards embracing both the philosophy and practice of CP in the entire country (UPF, 2017). In this same year the Uganda Police Force (UPF) issued a Strategy for Community Policing (CP). The aim of the strategy is to provide a framework for the operationalization of CP in the country (Divon, 2021). Uganda's Community Policing has since 1989 focused on image construction, trust and confidence building for the police within the community and underscoring police relevancy in a transitional democracy while crime remained steadily high. The introduction of crime preventers and Local Defence Units (LDUs) to back-up police in handling crime, patrol neighbourhoods and gather intelligence has instead attracted accusations against law enforcers for excessive use of force, human rights violations and involvement in crime (Sekamate, 2015; Abaho, 2023).

Astonishingly, criminal cases increase have been increasing in several parts of the nation of Uganda each year. Mbarara City falls under Rwizi region in South Western Uganda and has persistently been highlighted among the regions with high crime rates in the entire nation. According to the Annual Police Crime Reports (2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 & 2025) for all these consecutive years the region has been among the top places with high crime rate. In 2020 Rwizi region topped the entire nation registering 12,117 reported crimes, while in 2021 the region registered 12,130, which was second only to Kampala Metropolitan- North. Other sources like The Independent, (2022); Mutesi, (2023), Turyakira (2023) have similarly indicated high cases of crime in the region and citing Mbarara city as the most hit. Considering that the key purpose of community policing

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is to prevent crime and anarchy by working with community members, this paper explores this cooperation through community support.

RELATED LITERATURE

“Community policing is a philosophy and an organizational strategy that promotes a new partnership between people and their police. It is based on the premise that both the police and the community must work together to identify, prioritize, and solve contemporary problems such as crime, drug, fear of crime, social and physical disorder, and neighborhood decay, with the goal of improving the overall quality of life in the area.” Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux -1994:82

Community Policing (CP) is posited to have originated in 1829 with the dissemination of Robert Peel's nine Principles of community policing (Emsley, 2014; (Tessa & Naomi, 2021). The concept of community policing is to prevent crime and disorder as a substitute to use of suppression and force, usually employed by the police. Crime prevention as viewed by Tessa, & Stapele (2021); Divon, (2021); Nubani (2023); demands for citizen participation as a promising practice to reduce crime and disorder. This is executed through allowing citizen some level of representation and freedom of speech, both of which cannot operate under repression. There have been incidences in parts of Uganda where the masses have mobilized to protest against crime rates and disorder in their communities, only to be met by suppression from the forces.

It is crucial for law enforcement to acknowledge that their authority and strategies, particularly those aimed at minimizing or completely eradicating crime, rely not just on community involvement but also on the support of the public. In the realm of Community Policing, it is important to understand that police effectiveness hinges on the public's favorable perception of their conduct: The community's endorsement of a policy or individual by expressing a positive viewpoint is significant, as it often influences the sustainability of a mission (Brankamp, 2020; Zeljko, 2023). Essentially, police forces would do well if they sought community approval on the modus operandi of community policing for it to stand the chance of success. Community policing and traditional policing philosophies differ in how they view and address crime issues (Kappeler, Gaines & Schaefer, 2020). Traditional policing approaches, rooted in the crime-control model, mainly prioritize managing crime through law enforcement and responding reactively to calls for assistance. In contrast, community policing strategies aim to identify the environmental factors that lead to crime, emphasizing preventive measures and alternative responses to community issues instead of solely depending on enforcement (Kochel & Gau, 2021). Under community policing the relationship between citizens and the police is supposed to improve if they are to curb crime (Kocak, 2018; Kappeler, Gaines & Schaefer 2020; Kochel & Gau, 2021).

Globally the concept of community policing has been embraced to not only reduce crime but improve the relationship between police and the community. Earlier on in the United States of America (USA) community policing first appeared as call a for the police to involve regular citizens directly in their work by building channels of dialogue and improving police-citizen collaboration (Gaines, Larry, & Kappeler 2003; Hicks, Nasaskyia, Shanada, & Sianko, 2025). Community policing was emphasized as a collaborative and decentralized strategy created in the 1980s aimed at enhancing relations between police and the community, with studies demonstrating slight reductions in crime but notable effects on interactions between citizens and police as well as perceptions of officer roles. Although it entails recognizing and tackling community concerns, studies show that law enforcement agencies tend to adopt its practices slowly,

frequently falling back on conventional problem-solving approaches (Frank, 2023; Roberta, Dagmar, Wootton, & Davey 2023).

Given the social history of colonial policing, in Africa, especially South Africa, Community Policing was seen as an attempt by Western societies to implant specific models of policing in Africa. It is no surprise that from the African perspective, community policing is viewed as an extension of neo colonialism. For example, scholars like Supra, Anderson & Killingray (1991), Brodge (1991) look at Community Policing as an importation to Africa nations transmitted to cement colonialization and its brutal treatment of Africans. Brodge (1991) asserts that Community Policing in South Africa is another tradition such as economic and political influences as a wider export to Africa as a total imperial project.

After 1994, the newly established democratic government of South Africa embraced community policing as a fundamental principle, aligning with global law enforcement developments (Faull, & Rose, 2012). The shift towards democracy in South Africa after the end of apartheid is a widely held view. Given the nation's past marked by racial division and strained interactions between law enforcement and the populace, a clear need emerged to reshape the police into a service dedicated to all citizens of the country (Tyabazayo, 2023). This policing approach was deemed fitting for the nation, especially considering the disparities, racial biases in policing, and the absence of community engagement that characterized the apartheid era.

As observed by Sharkdam & Usman, (2021), in Nigeria, appeals for state policing and community policing (CP) have been entwined. Community and state policing proponents contend that this strategy may be essential in addressing the nation's numerous and growing security concerns, including the increase in farmer-herder conflicts, kidnapping, armed robbery, banditry, and cattle rustling. These demands are related to the alleged shortcomings of the Nigerian state, as embodied by its security forces, in carrying out their constitutional obligation to protect the welfare and security of the people, which forms the basis of governance. (Sharkdam & Ayegba 2021; Ejiogu, 2019). Throughout human history, Nigeria's crime problem has been a significant source of both public and private worry (Gbenemene, 2017). As a result, there is now a great deal of uncertainty regarding the safety and security of people's lives and property as well as that of the nation's general populace (Ikenga, 2023).

In Ethiopia, according to Tadege & Nigusie (2023) and Adugna & Italemahu (2019), community policing is essential for improving safety and security in Ethiopia by encouraging cooperation between the public and law enforcement. Positive community sentiments, efficient information exchange, and active involvement in local security management are all guaranteed by a well-designed community policing system.

However, there was a lot of variation in the study by Derese, (2025) which shows that on the ground there's a largely neutral to slightly unfavourable assessment of the community policing organization. The greatest level of agreement was given to community police officers, highlighting their crucial role; however, other components, such advisory councils and family police, were not as well recognized. The call to train, build capacity of all stakeholders involved in the cycle of crime prevention was called.

With in the East African Region, Community Policing in Kenya begun in 2001 with the establishment of community policing units in Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu especially in largely populated areas like Kibera slum among others (Kioko, 2017). The model later spread to

other areas in the country to improve the way police-maintained law and order (Diphoom, & van Stapele, 2020). As alluded to, Community policing in Kenya was preordained to create understanding between the police and the community about their roles in crime prevention by supplementing police patrols and neighbourhood watch. Later, the New York based Vera Institute of Justice, offered to support the community policing through the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) and Nairobi Central Business District (NCBD) association (Ruteere, 2017). In addition, the National Task Force Report on Police Reforms which was formed after the 2007-2008 post-election violence, made a strong case that community policing needed to be strengthened to ensure that the public participated in providing security services and public safety.

In a bid to fulfil their Constitutional mandate provided in Article 212, of the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (as amended), the Uganda Police Force (UPF) is assigned to keep law and order, protect people and their property. Accordingly, in joint networks with other security agencies in the nation, there has been numerous gendarmeries deployed for the protection of life and property, preserving law and order, and preventing crime among the community since 1986 to-date. Mohamed (2017); Kagoro (2019) outlined some of those gendarmeries introduced to back-up police in handling crime, patrol neighbourhoods and gather intelligence. This include; The Local Defense Force (LDU), Special Police Constables (SPC), Crime Preventers, and Home Guards (Abaho, 2023). These security agencies together with the UPF have been viewed as repressive and instead attracted accusations against law enforcers for excessive use of force, human rights violations and involvement in crime (Musime, 2012, Abaho, 2023).

The foundation for community policing in Uganda is both legal and doctrinal. According to Article 212(d) of the constitution, there is a strong emphasis on collaboration between the police, the public, other security organizations, and the general population. Furthermore, Article 17(f) of the Constitution states that it is the responsibility of citizens to cooperate with lawful agencies in the maintenance of law and order. The concept of community policing is now recognized as a second-generation approach to policing. This new paradigm in police work necessitates the integration of traditional police duties and functions into the everyday lives and activities of communities in order to combat crime. Community policing can be defined as the practices that exemplify effective police work, as noted by Ochola (2012).

It has been an intensive goal of the Uganda Police Force (UPF) to regain community confidence, image construction, trust building within the community and underscoring police relevancy in a transitional democracy (Shai, 2020). According to Sempagala (2017); and Kagoro (2019), establishing citizens' trust in state security institutions, especially the police, was essential in reducing crime and insecurity. In light of the above, Community-oriented policing (CP) is a popular approach to achieving this goal. In practice, Community Policing seeks to increase interaction between police and public and to establish a strategic maintenance of community peace and security. Uganda Police Force to perform in such an era, change must be embraced (Musime, 2012, Shai, 2020). Thus, underpinning the role of the police in the new democratic dispensation in Uganda, facilitating and encouraging civil society democratic oversight and accountability, capacitating the Ugandan police force to play a leading role in national development would necessitate undertaking strategies that bridge the gap between the force and the community (Sempagala, 2017).

Largely, it does appear that increased cooperation between the police and local residents increases satisfaction with police services on both

sides, although this is not universal. The community policing ideology now represents the dominant ideology of policing as reflected in a myriad of schemes (Brogden & Nijhar 2013). Presently, community policing has been a vehicle for transforming nation's world over. One of the main objectives of police reform initiatives worldwide is to (re)establish confidence in the state police and create relationships of trust between police officers and citizens (Tessa & Naomi, 2021). To achieve this, community policing initiatives are recurrently implemented across the globe. This position has been attested to by other scholars like Harring 1981; Moose 1993; Gaines, Kappeler, Vaughn 1999; and Diphoom, & van Stapele, 2021).

It does appear that increased cooperation between the police and local residents increases satisfaction with police services on both sides, although this is not universal. In a study done in St. Petersburg, Florida, 85 percent of those residents who lived in community-policing areas of the city reported being "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with their neighbourhood police services (Mastrofski *et al.*, 1999). Community policing promises that closer alliances between the police and the community will help reduce citizen fear of crime, improve police-community relations, and facilitate more effective responses to community problems. But there are also drawbacks associated with community policing including hostility between the police and neighbourhood residents, which can hinder productive partnerships, increases in officers' decision-making autonomy can lead to greater opportunities for police corruption and resistance within the police organization can hamper community policing's successful implementation (Wong, 2009; Meghan & Steven, 2020) Heilman, 2021). To recognize that obtain the respect of the public requires securing co-operation. Currently, community policing serves as a mechanism for the transformation of nations globally. A primary aim of police reform initiatives across the globe is to (re)instill faith in the state police and foster relationships of trust between law enforcement officials and the populace.

Community perceptions encompass a broad spectrum of attitudes, beliefs, and feelings held by community members towards the police and the concept of community policing (Kochel & Gau, 2021). Research by Corder & Scarborough (2010; Rupp *et al.*, 2020)) suggests that perceptions of community policing may vary based on factors such as race, ethnicity, age, and socioeconomic status. For example, minority communities may have different expectations and concerns compared to majority populations, leading to a diversity of views on the effectiveness and fairness of community policing strategies. This paper seeks to explore how these perceptions shape the relationship between the police and community members in the drive to prevent and or reduce crime in Mbarara City.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a case study of Mbarara City (covering the 2 Divisions of North and South). A sample of 183 respondents was selected using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Data was collected using Focus Group Discussions and interviews guides. The study being qualitative in nature, data from the field. Views of senior Police officers, Citizens, bodaboda riders, City officials, Hotel and Guest house owners and Managers, Police Constables, Religious leaders, Local Council (LC1), and city councillor's representing people at different levels in the district were pursued and documented. Data from was read and summarized according to emerging themes. The thematic analysis followed a six-step process; i.e. familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and then writing up. Examples and verbatim extracts from interviews and focus group discussions have been used to highlight the key Study findings

"Human behaviour flows from three main sources: desire, emotion, and Knowledge". Plato

Based on these Platonic standpoint, and to intensely situate community perspectives this paper looked at Desire; to represent the community's need for and longing for security. Emotion; embraced the community attitudes, appreciation, and views towards participating in Community Policing activities. Knowledge; encompasses the understanding, awareness of the concept or crime prevention strategy called community policing. These three shaped the discussion on community perspectives on community policing in Mbarara City. These lines of sought align with Kochel & Gau, (2021) who observed that community perceptions encompass a broad spectrum of attitudes, beliefs, and feelings held by community members towards the police and the concept of community policing. Additionally, the Principle Two of the Community Policing strategy as developed Robert Peel, notes that "Public (community) approval is essential- for the police to fulfil their duties and maintain public respect (Lentz, Susan & Chaires2007).

The Need for Security and Crime free Community

The basic mission of the Peelian Principle is to prevent crime and disorder, as an alternative to military force and severe legal punishment. This fits well with Article 212, of Uganda's Constitutional of 1995 that mandate the Uganda Police Force (UPF) to keep law and order, protect people and their property. Mbarara became a city on July 1, 2020, after a decision by Uganda's Cabinet in May 2019 to grant it city status. In the voice of a Local Council 1 member, cities come with a lot of challenges;

"Since Mbarara became a city, we have seen an influx of people from across the region, we have Congolese from Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), from Rwanda, Burundi and Sudanese, Somali's and Eritreans. Most of these people are not known, have no Identity cards, they have 'godfathers' from big offices and us as Local Councils cannot force them to identify themselves. Some of them have a lot of money and pay rent on time, so landlords are comfortable and will not have anything to do with disturbing their tenants".

Several other respondents seem to agree with Local council member, albeit, senior security officials blame the LC1 committees for neglect of duty. Some of the voices of the voices from senior officers;

Local Council leaders are very weak and always look for an opportunity to play blame games, they have a 9 member committee with diverse roles, and they also chair the village security committee, where do you then get the audacity to blame others? It is clear, some of them have failed in their mandate. Senior City Security Officer X1-September 2025

I am new in this office, but my plan is not to sit and wait for problems to find me on my desk, I want to go on the ground where problems occur and stop them from there, LC1 members forget why they hold those offices, a village or cell is a very small area to monitor, visit and patrol, but when you sit and wait for problems to find you on your desk, you will be overwhelmed. Senior security Officer XII-September 2025

Further than the blame game between the local and senior city officials, crime is on the rise in Mbarara city and in every corner of the city that this study reached, for both North Division and South Division

that make up Mbarara city, there horrendous tales of crime. During a Focus Group discussion with Division councillors at the Headquarters of South Division in the hall, a participant pointed to the wall where their television used to be. It was stolen and the thief or thieves never apprehended. Next to the headquarters is a Police Post with armed police officers, the place is fairly lit, and it is surrounded by fine residential houses. The boldness of stealing from such a place is just an indicator of what happens to dark, dingy areas of the city.

In Kizungu Central Cell a lady respondent revealed that;

There are place here where you cannot pass at the wee hours of the morning and past 8:00PM at night. They will steal whatever you have and for women you could be raped. The police is well aware of all these things happening in our area, but we have both accepted the way things are, and security now is dependent on an individual or family. Bag snatching, break-in is daily news, we are only thankful to God, that there are no deaths resulting from these situations Lady respondent- Kizungu Cell July 2025

This paper has further established the common crimes in the area include; domestic violence, criminal trespass, aggravated robbery, cattle theft, theft of cash, theft of mobile phones, theft of motorcycles, obtaining by false pretence, malicious damage to property and murder by mob action. These findings are consistent with the Uganda Police Annual Crime Reports of 2022, 2023 and 2024.

As submitted by the Brocken Window Theory promoted by Ren, Zhao, & He, (2019), heightened perceptions of disorder, increased fear of crime and diminished community social control are significant inhibitors of public participation in crime prevention arising directly from concerns for personal safety and sense of futility associated with the effort required. This is evidently true among communities in Mbarara City, notwithstanding, there's hope, that when the Uganda Police Force and the city authorities engage all stakeholders, the situation is redeemable. The ability of the police to perform their duties depends on public approval of police, this then develops in a united force of preventing crime without intrusive policing force (Dempsey & Forst, 2008; Emsley, 2014).

Knowledge about the Community Policing Arrangement

One of the merits of knowledge is that it permits understanding, fosters acceptance and or rejection, informed decision and enables adoption. Zeljko(2023) counsels that understanding people's knowledge and perception deserves attention for in many instances it determines how a mission survives. It is imperative for the police to recognize the fact that their power and policies are known and appreciated by all stakeholders across the chain of community policing and crime prevention. Accordingly, findings of this study reveal diverse views and awareness levels about community policing and crime prevention.

Knowledge of Community Members

This particular category of respondents included residents or locals living within a Cell/Village and holding no leadership post within the Local Council 1 committee or beyond. These are commonly known as *wananchi*(ordinary people). Their acuity about community policing is quite diverse and includes inter alia;

"Pathway of government to educate her citizen about crime prevention." FGD Female participant- Kizungu Central Cell July 2025

"Community policing has potential to reduce crime if all players are working together towards the same goal. However currently it seems each agency is working in isolation which makes the process of community policing a failure. Today the police are working in isolation from other players with limited coordination. Our police have tried to avoid engaging community members and other security agencies in these areas which has reduced its usefulness among community members". Youth FGD Kizungu Central Cell July 2025

"This is where people mobilize themselves to protect their community and manage security affairs of their community, it is community member involving police in their security challenges, it means the process whereby community members work with the police jointly to ensure law and order Male participant"- Rugazi – Karooro July 2025

"On paper it is good because it involves everyone to play his/her role but today security has become an individual concern. Police no longer cares, why should I care? Community policing has remained on paper as the police has remained on top while community members at their level are also doing what satisfies them as individuals." Male participant - FGD Karooro July 2025

"Community policing helps us as citizens to be vigilant in particular issues concerning crimes happening in the community. It is knowing your neighbor and everything that is about him or her." Youth Respondent - Booma July 2025

"Community policing is when police have good working relationship with community members to end crime. Community policing is about how the community members work with police to protect people and their property. Yes, it is police working with wanayich to ensure people and their property is protected." Male respondent Kijungu Central Cell-July 2025

Knowledge of Hotel owners and Managers

This category is key because they host guests from varied corners of the region. Although they confess to have never had any training, sensitization or information about community policing, they had a fair knowledge of what the process entails as evidenced below;

"Community policing involves the community helping the police to keep law and order by informing them on crimes which are happening in our area. As citizens we have helped police to give them information when they come to us investigating some cases." Hotel OwnerRuharo July 2025

"The police are interested in cases that involve cash. We have drug abusers, people who have neglected their children, people who start business to cheat others by selling illegal items but security agencies never go for them because they do not have money, we are doing our part but the police is not". Hotel managerKatete Central Cell-July 2025

"The current security arrangement seems to be the opposite of what community policing is expected to be, police are working in isolation to resolve their own issues. It is the local leaders helping us to resolve cases which

include theft, fighting and debt collections. We contribute money to deploy our own security in the market because the police only work at the station" Guest House Manager-Rwebihuro- 2025

As evidenced in their voices, these responses approve of community policing as being essential in preventing crime because it changes the entire policing style. Different from traditional policing approach, community policing co-opts citizens as key players in crime prevention and reporting. This cooperation helps in early crime identification, response and aids in easy capture of criminals.

Knowledge of Boda-boda Riders

This category of respondents was earmarked as key stakeholders in community policing approaches because they know so much about their areas of operation, they know both the residents, visitors and also carry criminals for their clandestine missions. This study particularly regarded their perceptions on community policing and crime prevention as instrumental. Below are excerpts from the discussions on the subject.

"Community policing is where security agencies work with community members to provide security. Community policing involves working with common people to protect the areas and community policing is about people supporting police to identify criminals and arrest them. On the other hand, one asked is community policing about just arresting people. Because that is the only role police is doing, for me I have not had about community policing". Biharwe – Rubaya road stage July 2025

"As bodaboda, we participate in community policing by identifying the crimes which are happening in the community and informing the LC and police to act accordingly. However, where the police have not helped us, we can act ourselves by arresting criminals and taking them to police. Sometimes even when we report to police it never acts if there is no money involved, so we do it ourselves". Rubaya road stage- Biharwe July 2025

"Community policing is about reaching out to people to help them know what the police is doing and to seek for their support in this process. It is when the police come to us such that we can help them do their work of preventing criminality". Respondent at NyakiziKakoba- July 2025

"This is where police is able to act on the information from the community to prevent crime." Respondent at Rugazi Market Stage

Knowledge of Police Constables on Community Policing and Crime Prevention

Police Constables (PCs) are frontline law enforcement officers tasked with critical duties of arresting and detaining suspects, patrolling assigned areas responding to emergency calls, conducting investigations and bridging the gap between the Police and the community. Thus, their understanding and views about community policing is instrumental. Responses from the field about their knowledge and perceptions included the following;

"Community policing is where there is interactive working relationship with all stakeholder in the community to solve crime related challenges" Constable at Kyamugorani Station July 2025

I am deployed here to do police work, when community members come to me, I work on them, I believe that's what you mean by community policing- Constable at Nyakizi- Kakoba July 2025

Community policing is the approach of working with communities to prevent crime at the community level- Biharwe Police Station- July 2025

The police constables confessed to have never received any specific training in community policing strategy. Though their basic training involves protecting people and their property, and that is as much as they know.

Knowledge of Religious Leaders

Mbarara City is not only cosmopolitan in regards to her dwellers but also possesses diverse religious beliefs including Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Moslems, Pentecostals and Seventh Day Adventist believers among others. Each of these religious groups has a following of thousands of believers, who subscribe to their teachings. The religious leaders play a critical role in shaping behaviour, ethical living and directing moral turpitude. It was most definitely essential to include them in this study and benefit from their rich resources of experience in dealing with community members. Their views on community policing and crime prevention were documented.

"Community policing is partnership building among police and community members and essential institutions that help in reducing and controlling crime. Community members become active participants in ensuring their safety, through neighbourhood watch groups, community patrols, or liaison forums with local police". Imam – Kakoba" July 2025

"Community policing means coordination between the police and local council leaders and community in order to fight insecurity in the area. It also involves encouraging people to report suspicious activities or people. Community policing means strategies for achieving effective and efficient crime prevention in the community". Priest Katete July 2025

It is a strategy where we must inform police when we have conventions, missions, so that police can give us security personnel. Thugs will always think twice before committing a crime when police is around. Pastor - Ruti 2025

Knowledge of Local Council Members

The Local Government Act (2003), governance begins at the village/Cell level as the lowest political administrative unit in Uganda. An LC1 zone is governed by a chairperson commonly known as LCI Chairperson and an eleven-member executive committee, these are tasked among other things to;

- Oversee the implementation of policies and decisions made by its council
- Assist in the maintenance of law, order and security, as well as initiate, encourage, support and participate in self-help projects and
- Vet and recommend persons in the area who should be recruited into the Uganda Peoples Defense Forces (UPDF), the Uganda Police Force (UPF) and Uganda Prisons Services.

In the process of maintaining law, order and security, LC1 Chair and or his/her committee arbitrate in a myriad village case almost on a daily basis. This not only justifies their inclusion in the study but also treasure their perceptions on a subject of security and crime prevention.

"Community policing entails the process where the police work with community members to ensure law and order in the society. This means that the police must develop relationship with people such that they can participate and support the policies to ensure law and order". Chairperson Rwebihuro Cell- October 2025

"Community policing; It is the Involvement of police and community to ensure they forge way on how to improve security in community for example; issues related to vigilance". Chairperson Booma Cell July 2025

"Community policing is the policy where the policy is supposed to come from the top (stations) and engage the community members on how to prevent and manage crime". Katete Central Chairperson- October 2025

"Community policing involves the process of responding to crimes by police. Community policing is where the police is able to reach out to support the community that is experiencing insecurity whenever it is called up on by community members and the chairperson. The police should only go to the community when the Chairperson calls it or in case it identifies the need the chairperson should be informed before it comes to my community". Rwizi Cell – Ruti July 2025

It is remarkable that without due sensitization, training or any capacity building activities, across section of respondents have a reasonable knowledge about community policing. This is crucial for implementation of any program or policy. The Uganda Police Force (UPF) can ride on this raw knowledge to supplement it with a more structured information for a successful operationalization of the community policing approach, because it provides the foundational understanding, context, and insights needed for effective planning. Beyond this, the paper sought to establish the readiness of these stakeholders in supporting community policing when asked to.

Readiness to Support and Participate in Community Policing Activities

The need for security and a crime free community evidenced among respondents in this study, visibly points to the community's eagerness to support community policing activities in the city of Mbarara. A number of communities in several states in Africa incorporated community policing to improve security and fight criminal activities in their areas. Adugna & Italemahu (2019); Tadege & Nigusie (2023) reveal that in Ethiopia, communities embraced community policing through public and law enforcement that consequently led to a well-designed community policing system. In Nigeria, Sharkdam & Ayegba (2024) indicate that cooperation between police and community members was key in ensuring security through ethnically constituted groups. It is believed that all the security groups instituted, enjoyed varied supports of the communities where they operated. It is evident here that securing support from communities' is key to be gained through maintaining comprehensive community engagements, capacity building and community respect.

This paper has garnered information from across section of respondents including *bodaboda* (motor cycle riders), hotel and guest house owners and managers, Local Council members, religious leaders and there's overwhelming keenness to support community policing activities if contacted, trained and promised protection when

required. Considering that community members are willing to participate in community policing, it was imperious to venture into the existing relationships between the community and the police in Mbarara City.

The Relationship between Police and Community Members

Relationships between the police/security agencies and the community is the bedrock of community policing. This is the foundation upon which the community policing ideology was established (Gaines, Larry, & Kappeler 2003; Brogden, & Nijhar 2013; Kagoro, 2018; Zeljko, 2023). Field responses from the respondents that participated in this study indicate absence of a strategic, prescribed and functional relationship between the police and community in Mbarara. What presently exists is accidental and or adhoc relationship, which occur when a serious security concern happens, and the police is called upon to support. The other contact happens when a member of the community has a case at the police and in the process of seeking redress, a relationship chance. Article 212(d) of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda places a strong emphasis on collaboration between the police, the public, and other security organizations, and the general population. Furthermore, Article 17(f) of the Constitution states that it is the responsibility of citizens to cooperate with lawful agencies in the maintenance of law and order. This association has to be operationalized among all key stakeholders for actual outcomes.

Largely, it does appear that increased cooperation between the police and local residents increases satisfaction with police services on both sides, although this is not universal. The community policing ideology now represents the dominant ideology of policing as reflected in a myriad of schemes (Brogden, & Nijhar 2013). Mastrofski *et al.*, (1999). It has also been established that effective policing is not only about enforcing the law, but building trust, cooperation and understanding with the community.

It is an undeniable fact that the population of Mbarara city is growing exponentially beyond the capacity of the Uganda Police Force. Accordingly, community policing becomes a logical and an appreciated approach for modern-day security challenges in the city. Community policing nurtures trust and partnership between police and community members and this consequently breeds better communication and intelligence sharing which is key element in crime prevention and sustainable assurance of security. Albeit, this partnership demands for concerted community engagement strategies, mutual respect, capacity building, accountability, transparency, eventually enhancing the overall safety and quality of life in communities.

Author Contribution

The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: study conception and design: Author 1 (JB Tumusiime) and 4 (Jerome Bamugaya Barry; Author 1 & 4; data collection: Author 2 (Ogwang Tom); analysis and interpretation of results: Author 2 & 3 (Solomon Bachwa) supervised the process. Author 1 and 4; draft manuscript preparation, guided by Author 2 & 3. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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