



Lived Experiences of Port Police Officers in Eastern Visayas, Philippines

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Banisa M. Tabuldan¹, ORCID No. 0009-0000-3732-2431
Paulino V. Pioquinto², PhD, ORCID No. 0000-0002-1009-6371
Daiselyn S. Palconit³, ORCID No. 0009-0005-2754-4854

¹Chairperson, Extension Services, School of Criminal Justice Education, Biliran Province State University, Biliran, Philippines
²Dean, Master of Science in Criminal Justice, University of Cebu - Main Campus, Sanciango Street, Cebu City, Philippines
³Associate Professor III, School of Criminal Justice Education, Biliran Province State University, Biliran, Philippines

Abstract

The role of Port Police Officers is described as essential yet “taken for granted,” reinforcing the argument that Port Police must be acknowledged not only for their operational contributions but also for the psychological pressures inherent in their role during moments of crisis. The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the lived experiences of port police as frontline officers in maintaining maritime safety and security at the Eastern Visayas, Philippines. It aimed to understand how these officers carry out their safety and security duties, the challenges they encounter in the performance of their functions, and the strategies they employ to address such challenges. Utilizing qualitative approach, particularly transcendental phenomenology, the study conducted in-depth interviews with 4 Port Police Officers, while 6 underwent focus group discussion (FGD) between April 2024 and November 2024. All participants have more than 3 years of working experience as Port Police Officers. The data was analyzed using Collaizi’s method, of which significant statements gathered were translated, identified their core meanings, and subsequently analyzed them to develop clusters and emergent themes that describe the phenomena under study. Findings revealed positive workplace morale and ethics, operational and structural limitations, and comprehensive management approaches in maintaining port safety and security of the Port Police Officer. Through the participation and contributions of the concerned agencies and community members, the enforcement of maritime safety and security was effective, at the same time, improved the quality of services of the Port Police Officers. However, there is still a need for the Philippine Ports Authority (PPA) to allocate funds for the port police officers and additional manpower to achieve smoother operations thus preventing unpredictable incidents.

Keywords: maritime safety and security, port police, port operations, port compliance, safety and security regulations, experiences



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INTRODUCTION

The Philippine Ports Authority (PPA) is essential to maintaining the country's commerce and transportation industries. This agency is in charge of overseeing the growth, management, and control of Philippine ports and port infrastructure. Since ports are essential entry points for global trade, the agency guarantees their smooth and effective operation by encouraging the prompt flow of goods, lowering logistics costs, and boosting the competitiveness of Philippine companies. In addition, the PPA also maintains a safe and

secure environment for trade and safeguards the interests of both domestic and foreign stakeholders, by ensuring the safety and security of port operations, including the implementation of measures to prevent smuggling, piracy, and other illicit acts (Philippine Ports Authority, 2024).

Moreover, the port police are the first line of defense that is essential in preventing theft, smuggling, terrorism, and other criminal activity that can endanger the security of port workers, infrastructure, and cargo. Within the port's premises, they also deal with crises like

fires, accidents, and natural disasters; control traffic in the port area to guarantee the efficient passage of cars, boats, and people; protect the port's significant assets, such as infrastructure, machinery, and cargo; and offer help and support to port users, staff, and guests. Currently, the PPA has 25 Port Management Offices (PMOs) scattered nationwide to manage the 115 ports under its system, including Western Southern Leyte and Biliran, and to bolster its current port police force, the port authority is hiring and deploying more staff. In keeping with its security measures, PPA also provides all of its officers with appropriate law enforcement training from reputable organizations such as the United States Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS). The agency is also in the process of adjusting its security procedures to conform to the ever-changing international and local port security norms and regulations. (Philippine Ports Authority, 2024).

However, the Philippine Port Authority, particularly the Port Management Office of Western Leyte/Biliran (PMO WLB), which has one base port located in Ormoc City and six (6) terminal management offices in Baybay, Hilongos, Maasin, Palompon, Isabel, and Naval, has only a few port police officers designated in the said terminal management offices, so it is found out that they are needing the cooperation of everybody in securing the safety and security in each port (Philippine Ports Authority, 2024). Furthermore, there is only one port police officer assigned to the Baybay, Hilongos, Maasin, Palompon, Isabel, and Naval who is carrying the heavy task of implementing port safety and security, as well as controlling and regulating the flow of vehicles and people within the terminal management port and other tasks attached to their work. The Ormoc Port Authority including the terminal management offices is encountering difficulties with manpower and resources in dealing with issues such as the buddy-buddy system, mobile x-ray, and counter drone measures during operations.

The port serves as a local gateway for global trade, yet its significance is often

underestimated and underappreciated by the public. The heroic efforts of the port police in keeping the safety and security of the people in ports need to be given attention because they are always left behind, unnoticed, and unappreciated by the people (Eski, 2011). This idea is strongly supported by the findings of Silvano and Bagaipo (2023), who conducted a qualitative investigation on the lived duties and responsibilities of port security personnel in a Philippine port. Their study revealed that although port police and security officers serve as the first line of defense in preventing theft, unauthorized entry, smuggling, and other security breaches within port premises, their work remains largely invisible to the general public. This invisibility stems from the nature of preventive security that when officers are effective, nothing happened like no incidents occurred, no threats materialized, and no disruptions seen. As the study notes, such preventive success often results in their contributions being overlooked because the public tends to recognize security only when failure or crisis becomes visible.

Indeed, port police officers perform critical but undervalued work, with their daily vigilance preventing incidents that could endanger lives and disrupt port operations. Since, their efforts manifest in the absence of negative events, their heroism remains unnoticed. People have only known those men and women in uniform who are working at the Philippine National Police, Bureau of Fire Protection, Bureau of Jail Management and Penology, and other known law enforcement agencies. Furthermore, their role is described as essential yet "taken for granted," reinforcing the argument that port police must be acknowledged not only for their operational contributions but also for the psychological pressures inherent in a role where visibility comes only in moments of crisis. Aside from that there is no study being conducted as to the work, experiences, and contribution of the port police in maintaining the safety and security of the country. A published study on port security observes that criminological interest on the subject remains "remarkably scarce," despite ports functioning

as critical nodes in crime prevention and control. The article further characterizes port security as an emerging but under-researched domain in criminology (Eski, 2011). Thus, recognizing this gap prompted the interest of the researcher, who is a criminologist and a faculty member of the School of Criminal Justice Education at Biliran Province State University, to discover the gallantry of the port police in facing all the lawless elements and how they were able to secure the safety and security of the ports despite limited resources and heavy tasks assigned to them.

This study explores the experiences of the Port Police Officers in maintaining port safety and security in Eastern Visayas, Philippines. This research provides information on the various experiences of the Port Police Officers, specifically on their positive and negative experiences, and strategies to maintain port safety and security of their assigned ports.

Conceptual Framework. Husserlian phenomenology is the basis in exploring the experiences of the Port Police Officers, particularly in maintaining port safety and security. Furthermore, it aims to find the basic essence of this phenomenon, which in turn runs through all other experiences on this phenomenon. Smith (2003) described phenomenology as the study of the functioning of consciousness, particularly how intentionality operates and how consciousness is directed toward objects, thereby shaping experience. Similarly, Creswell (2013) explained that phenomenology seeks to distill the essential meaning of a phenomenon from the varied lived experiences of individuals or groups. Moreover, Qutoshi (2018) emphasized that phenomenology, when applied in the social sciences, offers a rigorous approach to examining human phenomena at a profound level of consciousness. The primary objective is to achieve a clear and unfiltered description of how phenomena appear within intentional consciousness. Originating as a philosophical movement, phenomenology subsequently developed into a systematic research methodology. In human science research and

professional practice, a phenomenological inquiry centers on lived experiences, demonstrating the method's capacity to meaningfully examine and illuminate learning experiences (Yee, 2019).

Transcendental phenomenology (TPh), primarily developed by Husserl, is a philosophical foundation of qualitative research that aims to understand the essence of human experience (Moustakas, 1994). In its pure form, TPh is anchored in the principle of bracketing or *epoche*, which requires the deliberate suspension of all preconceived assumptions. By setting aside prior judgments, the researcher is able to view phenomena with clarity, allowing their inherent meanings to emerge authentically and be understood within their own context and identity (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl's (2012) transcendental phenomenology is well-suited for this study because its core purpose is to describe the essence of lived experience necessary for understanding the complex and largely undocumented realities of port police officers in Eastern Visayas. The nature of port policing involves continuous exposure to operational risks, resource limitations, and public safety pressures that cannot be fully captured through quantitative indicators. By employing transcendental phenomenology, the study systematically brackets the researcher's prior assumptions through *epoché*, thereby allowing the voices of the officers to surface without interpretive distortion. This approach ensures that the resulting descriptions authentically reflect how port police personnel perceive, interpret, and give meaning to their daily duties and challenges. The method is further justified by the absence of empirical research on Philippine port police, whose contributions to maritime safety and security remain understudied compared to other agencies.

Szanto and Moran (2015) emphasized that intersubjectivity and shared experiences of existing in the world constitute a fundamental dimension of sociality and are essential to the human experience. This is reflected in the personal accounts of port police officers, who

recognize that their shared maritime interactions and experiences shape how they understand their roles and responsibilities.

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative method, with specific application, of the descriptive phenomenological approach, was utilized in this study. A total of ten (10) participants were purposively chosen to participate in the study. All participants are Port Police Officers with more than three (3) years of working experience in maintaining port safety and security. To collect qualitative data, the researchers used a verified, approved, and validated interview guide to obtain the necessary information from the participants.

In-depth interviews were conducted with six (6) participants, while a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was held with four (4) participants, totaling ten (10) Port Police Officers. In-depth interviews provided a private setting for officers to share detailed, personal narratives of their daily duties, challenges, and coping strategies, yielding rich data essential for a phenomenological analysis. Complementarily, focus group discussions facilitated the exploration of shared experiences, group dynamics, and organizational context, uncovering collective perceptions and operational insights that individual interviews alone might not reveal. These approaches were employed by the researchers to ensure the validity and reliability of the interview process, as well as the credibility of the participants' responses, resulting in accurate and trustworthy research findings.

It is noted that the collected data or information was through interviews and focused group discussions. Before the start of data gathering, the researcher first asked for the names and addresses of the port police officers from the Eastern Visayas Port Authority through a letter request. Upon the receipt of the approved letter request from the Eastern Visayas Port Authority officer-in-charge, the researcher coordinated with the Eastern Visayas Port Authorities who

know the informants so that the researcher may ask permission from the informants to be part of the study. The researcher, with the help of the Port Authorities, met the informants as they agreed to participate in the interviews and focus group discussion. An individual interview and a focused group discussion were scheduled at a time that was convenient for the informants. The researcher distributed the informed consent form to the informants and explained to them the contents and purposes of the study. After the forms were signed, the interview and discussion started and were documented via the audio recorder. The interviews were done in a language known and comfortable for the informants in their residences for privacy purposes. The focus group discussion was held in a venue agreed upon both by the researcher and the informants. Immediately after the completion of the interview, the recorded conversation between the researcher and informants was transcribed accordingly and translated, as well. To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the transcriptions, audio recordings were made available for necessary verification by any concerned examiners/panel members. The results of the transcriptions were presented to the informants, and they were signed by them as proof of their acknowledgment to avoid bias.

Table 1
Profile of the port police officers who have experienced in maritime safety and security in Eastern Visayas, Philippines

Participant No.	Gender	Length of Service
Participant 1	Male	4 years
Participant 2	Female	8 years
Participant 3	Female	8 years
Participant 4	Female	3 years
Participant 5	Male	3 years
Participant 6	Male	3 years
Participant 7	Male	3 years & 10 months
Participant 8	Male	3 years
Participant 9	Male	4 years & 4 months
Participant 10	Male	3 years

The researcher utilized Colaizzi's approach to analyze the data. Transcription and translation of languages and the experience of the

informants were carefully taken. The interview transcripts were read and analyzed multiple times. The next step that was done by the researcher was the coding of significant statements from the interview transcript of the informants. These significant statements were translated, and formulated meanings were created. These formulated meanings were grouped and analyzed to form cluster themes. From these cluster themes, emergent themes were identified. Emergent themes were the final themes that describe the experiences of the informants about the current phenomena being studied.

RESULTS

The Experiences of the Port Police Officers. The experiences of Port Police Officers reflect both fulfilling and challenging aspects of their profession. On one hand, these experiences contribute to increased job satisfaction, motivation, service quality, and overall well-being. On the other hand, they also involve difficulties that can lower morale, diminish job fulfillment, and impact well-being. A comprehensive examination of their experiences revealed three prominent themes, which encapsulate both the positive and negative facets of their duties, as well as the strategies employed to overcome challenges in ensuring port safety and security.

The following are the themes that described the experiences of the Port Police Officers, to wit:

1. Positive Workplace Morale and Ethics
2. Operational and Structural Limitations
3. Comprehensive Management Approaches

These three themes highlight the varied experiences of Port Police Officers in maintaining port safety and security within their designated ports in Eastern Visayas. Furthermore, they reflect the officers' dedication and commitment to their duties, the challenges they have faced, and the strategies they employed to overcome these challenges in the implementation of safety and security measures across the region.

Theme 1. Positive Workplace Morale and Ethics.

Theme 1 described the positive experiences of the Port Police Officers while performing their duties. The study's results exposed the Port Police Officers' job satisfaction and appreciation, compensation and benefits, work dedication and commitment, professional ethics and public service. These sub-themes elucidate the participants' positive workforce dynamics.

Job Satisfaction and Appreciation. One of the positive experiences of the informants in the enforcement of maritime safety and security was job satisfaction and appreciation because findings came out that most of the participants find great fulfillment in assisting passengers, especially those with special needs, and appreciate the gratitude they receive for their services. They also consider their work enjoyable despite the challenges on their job.

Furthermore, following the responses of the participants, Participant 1 wholeheartedly stated that he finds it most fulfilling to assist passengers who are Persons with Disabilities (PWD), pregnant, or have special needs, especially when helping them embark or disembark from the fast craft. He unveiled that:

"What I find most fulfilling while performing my duty is being able to assist passengers who are Persons with Disabilities (PWD), pregnant, or have special needs, especially when helping them embark or disembark from our fast craft." (Participant 1)

Afterward, the researcher also heard the response of Participant 7, affirming the statements of Participant 1, who derived satisfaction from assisting PWDs and elderly passengers. He mentioned that:

"It's fulfilling to assist PWDs and elderly passengers who need help with their belongings or anything else in public service." (Participant 7)

Participant 6 also finds fulfillment in assisting passengers and receiving gratitude for the services provided. He said that:

"Favorable experiences, ma'am. Like my colleague said earlier, when we help port users and passengers, they appreciate it, ma'am." (Participant 6)

Participant 10 also added that he found his job enjoyable and satisfying in executing his duties and responsibilities and at the same time weighing and giving considerations in every decision that he made.

Compensation and Benefits. The second positive experience that encouraged the participants to serve their daily duties was the compensation and benefits they received. Participants shared how higher compensation and additional benefits could potentially be a motivating factor for them to stay in their roles, and women informants are also eligible for maternity leave benefits. According to Participant 1, he felt more motivated due to the potential for extra compensation for overtime and holiday work compared to other law enforcement agencies. He enthusiastically stated:

"Even though there might not be assigned duties, like in the police force where we have a fixed term, we still get paid for the full month as if we had worked regularly. Compared to other agencies, our morale is higher because even when they have days off and are called to duty, our pay remains fixed, but we receive double pay for holidays and double pay for overtime on days off." (Participant 1)

Participant 2 confirmed that she had the same experience as Participant 1, that high compensation is what makes them stay in the organization and maintain high morale. She stated that:

"We should also invest in our people, like giving higher salaries to keep morale high." (Participant 2)

Furthermore, Participant 4 stated that they found their job fulfilling, satisfying, gratifying and rewarding especially with the given the maternity leave benefits provided. She mentioned that:

"So far, there's nothing here. There was a port police assigned before, but you probably didn't meet her as she's on maternity leave now." (Participant 4)

Work Dedication and Commitment. Motivation and dedication are crucial for boosting morale and ensuring safety and security. It was inspiring to hear the participant describe their commitment to their work and how they persevered through difficulties. They found their roles and new opportunities exciting and fulfilling. They see to it that their customers are satisfied with their services. So, they implement initiatives to gather feedback, meet standards, and utilize acquired skills to ensure that they can offer the best services for them despite the challenges they encounter.

Participant 3 said that unwavering commitment to safety and security triumphs over obstacles and yields rewards and happily expresses that:

"So, no matter what challenges come along the way, fight on despite challenges and complaints about the system. If you love your job, you'll persevere through the negativity. Additionally, you can't give up because of your many loans." (Participant 3)

Participant 6 also described the satisfaction he derives from using his acquired skills and knowledge from his undergraduate studies. He happily stated that:

"When I became a port police officer, ma'am, I was really happy because every day, I could apply what I learned in school to real situations. It's related to my field, and I can say I'm really happy." (Participant 6)

Furthermore, participants overcame initial shyness and built confidence through experience. This was supported by the statement of Participant 9 that:

"Initially, you might feel shy or unsure when facing new situations like communicating with others. However, through experience and facing challenges alone, you become more confident"

and used to interacting with people." (Participant 9)

Professional Ethics and Public Service.

Adhering to the highest standards of integrity and responsibility are always considered by the participants, even when confronted with potential challenges or pressure from influential individuals. Participants believe that public service offers rewards beyond financial compensation, emphasizing the importance of maintaining professionalism and providing exceptional service to the community. Their exemplary performance has consistently earned them recognition as top performers by the LGU of Ormoc. Furthermore, participants maintain a positive public image and exercise patience to avoid negative online attention.

Participant 3 shared that good public service is fulfilling on their part as public servants. Once a good public service is being offered, the public shows their trust and confidence and sometimes offers a simple reward to public servants as a way of showing their gratitude for making them safe and secure. She justified and articulated that:

"As a public servant, it's not just about economic gain or personal fulfillment. I studied Criminology to save lives and property. It's very fulfilling to practice my profession. Sometimes, people show gratitude with small gestures like snacks, even if you don't ask for it. That's the reality." (Participant 3)

On the other hand, Participant 5 explained that being a public servant is an opportunity, so in return, he will offer the best service and be responsible for their job and uphold integrity. He courageously disclosed that:

"Many want to be port police, but I was fortunate. You must be responsible and do your job honestly." (Participant 5)

Inspiration can still be found in new learnings, and one should be responsible even when alone at the port. This statement was supported by Participant 10, who said that:

"In that case, ma'am, about the X-ray in vehicles, you can still be responsible despite feeling overwhelmed. If you're alone, instead of complaining, you can find inspiration in new learnings, especially since I'm not in Criminology." (Participant 10)

Additionally, Participant 9 talks about how patience is crucial for port police to avoid negative online attention by saying that:

"As public servants, we need to have more patience. If we react to provocations, it could lead to misunderstandings, especially since everything can spread quickly on social media these days." (Participant 9)

Theme 2. Operational and Structural Limitations. The findings of the study also revealed the operational and structural limitations encountered by the Port Police Officers in performing their duties. Four sub-themes were found to describe the difficulties faced by Port Police Officers: the port user's non-compliance, time constraints and organizational barriers, insufficient public knowledge and limited resources.

Port User's Non-Compliance. One of the negative experiences encountered by participants while working at the port was port users' non-compliance with port rules and regulations. According to the participants, enforcing PPA regulations can be a challenging and frustrating task for them due to various factors, including non-compliance from port users, unpredictable situations, and organizational issues. Other than that, unattended items, security breaches, and workplace hazards can pose significant risks to port police officers and negatively impact their operations. They also become frustrated when dealing with port users who believe they are above the law or who demand special treatment.

Participant 1 revealed that he often felt exhausted from working late to correct others' mistakes, as many port users remained rude even after receiving polite explanations. He expressed this in a strained voice, saying:

"This expresses frustration about having to work late at night when mistakes are made during implementation. Even when we explain politely and maintain our courtesy, some people still react negatively instead of listening and understanding. We are frustrated with this behavior and questioning why people continue to get upset despite being corrected politely." (Participant 1)

Another participant 8 expressed frustration over someone demanding VIP treatment. He firmly stated that denying special treatment to certain individuals under port rules and regulations was necessary, saying:

"Some people don't want to follow the law and want special treatment, but we don't allow that, ma'am." (Participant 8)

Moreover, there are disruptive port users who blame port regulations for their misconduct which made Participant 3 upset, because she believed that her sole objective was to strictly enforce the port's rules and regulations. She expressed her frustration by saying:

"So I intervened and was called to the port, where I was also treated rudely. It turns out she's a lawyer from a prominent family in Ormoc. One of the excuses given was that no matter how well you explain the rules if people can't understand or accept them, the entrance policy is useless." (Participant 3)

While enforcing safety and security for port users, there are always challenges, particularly from pedicab drivers who disregard warnings and illegally enter through Gate 2. This caused frustration for participant 5, who experienced the situation firsthand. Participant 5 expressed his frustrations, stating that:

"At Gate 2, some pedicab drivers sometimes enter without permission. Even if you warn them, they don't listen, which can be frustrating." (Participant 5)

Time Constraints and Organizational Barriers. Although information sharing offers significant

benefits, time constraints and organizational challenges can impede participants' ability to communicate effectively and enforce port rules and regulations. This was supported by the statement of Participant 1, who said that:

"The information is given to the barangay captain, who is then supposed to pass it on to the residents of their barangay. However, it might be challenging for us because they may not have enough time to effectively communicate the information to everyone under their authority, which makes the process difficult." (Participant 1)

Moreover, Participant 9 mentioned that manpower shortages hinder port police operations, especially during solo apprehensions. He suggested that dividing responsibilities between field and office personnel could enhance efficiency at the port. He further revealed that:

"Earlier today, I mentioned that our main issue is the lack of manpower, especially with just six of us. One of our current challenges is when we have to apprehend or be on duty individually. It would be better if there's someone in the field and someone handling the paperwork." (Participant 9)

Also, Participant 7 emphasized that they often face long wait times from PDEA in responding to drug-related situations due to distance hindering their operations. He articulated and voiced that:

"The challenge now is they're far away, so sometimes we have to wait 30 minutes or even an hour for our vehicles to pick them up." (Participant 7)

Insufficient Public Knowledge. This is one of the negative experiences of the participants in maintaining port safety and security because some of the community members are not aware of the presence of port police officers and their roles in safeguarding the safety and security of the public. This lack of awareness has negatively impacted the participants and made

them frustrated. This was proven by Participant 1 when he shared that people are often surprised by the PPA personnel's strict enforcement in the port. This was part of his statement:

"Things are quieter now, and people are surprised by the strict enforcement. I explain that it's because we didn't have port police before." (Participant 1)

Furthermore, Participant 2 also expressed her frustrations about why the public is unaware of their existence and their vital roles in maintaining public safety and security in the port. She stated that:

"So, what I've experienced is that many people don't realize they need a license for things like that. They're not aware of the Port Police force; they assume we're part of the PNP or the Coast Guard. But actually, the Port Police isn't widely known, even though they've been hiring for years now." (Participant 2)

Limited Resources. Limited resources, such as inadequate funding, personnel, and equipment, hinder the effectiveness of participants in fulfilling their duties in maintaining port safety and security. Additionally, human errors by stakeholders, equipment malfunctions, and security breaches pose safety risks and negatively impact the efficiency of port police operations. That is why Participant 2 expressed frustration when the government assigns tasks without allocating a budget for the office. A look of displeasure crossed her face as she conveyed her annoyance, saying:

"The most frustrating thing for me is when the government assigns a lot of tasks but doesn't provide enough budget to get them done. Honestly, there's no budget from the office." (Participant 2)

Participant 8's statement agreed with Participant 2 about budget constraints that are under resourced and need improved response times, technology, manpower, and enforcement of access controls. He disclosed that:

"This is about response time, which refers to how quickly someone reacts to a situation. In this context, it emphasizes the key areas of access control and investing in technology at gates for vehicles. It also highlights the need for adequate manpower to handle multiple concerns simultaneously, like managing issues at different gates and coordinating with the police." (Participant 8)

There are instances when individuals operate drones without permission, potentially entering the port premises illegally, which poses a threat to port authorities. Many participants have expressed concerns about addressing the issue of illegal drones, but limited resources hinder their ability to enforce strict security measures. Participant 3 was the most vocal about her frustrations, stating:

"Ma'am, before, our greatest challenge was that we shared the same difficulties as my colleagues. It's hard for us to counter drones, so we strictly control access to the port facilities. But we cannot also detect airborne threats." (Participant 3)

Moreover, the world is constantly evolving, with growing threats from terrorists and criminal syndicates surrounding us, and the port area is considered a high-risk zone where the movement of incoming and outgoing individuals is regulated. One major concern of the participants is the limited availability of bomb detection resources, which could pose a significant challenge during emergencies. Participants who seek a swift response often find themselves constrained.

Currently, port authorities rely heavily on collaboration with other agencies to address these challenges. This situation frustrates Participant 7 expressed his concerns by stating:

"That's right, ma'am. It's about collaboration. We lack resources like bomb-sniffing dogs here, and the port police aren't trained to handle them. So sometimes, we rely on other agencies like the Coast Guard, PNP's EOD, or the LGU because they have canines." (Participant 7)

Theme 3. Comprehensive Management Approaches. Three sub-themes describe the strategies the participants implemented in addressing challenges in maintaining port safety and security. These strategies helped them maintain the safety of their ports.

Resilient Leadership and Effective Management.

Leadership and management are some of the strategies employed by the participants in enforcing maritime safety and security to ensure the efficient, safe, and sustainable operation of vital transportation hubs. Based on the statements of the participants, PPA supervisors address the challenges in good leadership and management. They oversee office tasks, monitor the performance of subordinates, conduct inspections, and maintain a constant presence to ensure port safety and security. They also have contributed to the organization's adaptability and overall success as shared by the participants. Despite experiencing mistreatment, they maintain their professionalism and composure, maintain an organized and efficient workplace, drawing strength from the support of their colleagues. Furthermore, multitasking is a common practice in port environments due to the dynamic nature of operations and the necessity to manage multiple tasks simultaneously but despite that, they still maintain a work-life balance. The participants uphold their composure and professionalism by drawing strength from the support of their colleagues, ensuring that port operations remain unaffected and that safety and security for all are maintained. Participant 2 confirmed that team empowerment boosts morale.

She expressed it wholeheartedly by stating that:

"I want my team to take initiative and be confident in facing the public. They shouldn't rely on me for every question; they need to know how to handle things themselves. Asking questions is okay, but they should also try to find answers on their own." (Participant 2)

Participant 4 also shared that well-managed guards contribute to maintaining safety and

security in the port. She supported this statement by saying that:

"As a supervisor here in Baybay City, I handle the guards, even those who misbehave. How I manage them affects me, but so far, I've managed well." (Participant 4)

On the other hand, participant 5 also shared that constant supervision of guards and relay commander's orders is essential at the port, and this is his statement:

"You'll supervise your staff, like the security guards, and relay the commander's instructions to them for their duties and responsibilities." (Participant 5)

To further enhance port security, the participant strategically allocated security personnel to maximize efficiency. This was corroborated by Participant 7, who stated:

"In terms of security and our manpower, we place security personnel in strategic areas of the port, like entrances, X-ray areas, and the Passenger Terminal Building." (Participant 7)

Technological Integration and Operational Efficiency.

The second strategy applied by the participants is the adoption of modern technology and operational efficiency, which has significantly impacted their work, facilitating tasks, improving security, and streamlining operations. One of the innovative products is body-worn cameras, which provide participants with valuable evidence, enhance transparency, and help prevent complaints. Aside from that, the introduction of new terminal operators and the use of additional resources, such as guards and drones, can also help lighten the workload of port police officers and improve the overall experience for passengers.

Moreover, financial autonomy also allows port authorities to have greater control over their revenue and expenditure, enabling them to make strategic decisions and invest in improvements without relying heavily on government subsidies. The PPA's self-funded

status enables it to invest in projects and initiatives that improve its operations. This is supported by the statement of Participant 3, who explained that the Philippine Ports Authority (PPA) is self-funded, contributing billions of pesos and financing projects aimed at enhancing port police operations. He further revealed that:

(We operate as a GOCC, meaning we don't depend on the national budget. Instead, we generate our own funds, contributing billions annually to the national treasury. This allows us to approve projects when we have the budget, turning plans into reality, like installing 50 CCTV cameras across our facilities.) (Participant 3)

Besides, according to Participant 1, the presence of modern innovation can make things easier to control in the PPA, particularly for them. He said it calmly that:

"Yes. I have been assigned here in Naval for a while now. Currently, things have become more controlled because of the presence of CCTV cameras. It's clearer now, just routine." (Participant 1)

Additionally, Participant 4 positively shared his experience that security personnel always offer help to them and the port users, even when X-ray machines are out of service at the port. He smiled by saying that:

(Yes, earlier at your SSO area, no passengers now, the machine is off. But someone entered earlier. So, a man assisted you earlier, that's why, ma'am.) (Participant 4)

On top of that, Participant 10 proclaimed that body-worn cameras are a valuable tool for them to prevent complaints and ensure transparency in interactions with port users. He optimistically divulged that:

(Using body-worn cameras is very helpful for making apprehensions. They can prevent complaints and accusations of abuse of authority because everything is recorded. We can retrieve the footage to show there was no

police brutality or other misconduct. It's a big help!" (Participant 10)

Stringent Security Implementation and Community Partnerships. Ports play a critical role in international trade but also face distinct security challenges. With that, port authorities enforce strict regulations, conduct regular drills, issue monthly security alerts, and use advanced tools to ensure safety, readiness, and effective threat response in port areas. PPA's adherence to international security standards, such as the ISPS Code, supports the port police's efforts to ensure maritime safety and security. The participants firmly believe that effective collaboration with other law enforcement agencies is essential for maintaining a secure port environment. However, this can only be achieved through regular communication, joint operations, and information sharing. Participants often demonstrate compassion and empathy towards passengers, especially those with limited resources or special needs, by aiding, granting exemptions, and considering initiatives to improve their experience. This was proven by Participant 3, who conducted monthly security alerts that help port police assess local threats. She defended her statement by explaining that:

Thankfully, ma'am, we belong to a low-risk area. Each month, we receive transportation security alert advisories from the national intelligence coordinating agency. These advisories provide processed intel information, which is forwarded to transportation security and then to us. This helps us determine the current risk status of our area. (Participant 3)

Certainly, port users' understanding of port laws and police explanations enhances the effectiveness and satisfaction of port police officers. This was confirmed by Participant 1, who happily stated that:

"When we confront them, they are unaware of certain laws, although there are signs posted. They likely did not read the signs, but when we discuss it, they understand. We are somewhat happy that at least the PPA (Philippine Ports

Authority) enforces these rules strictly, and they also understand the importance." (Participant 1)

There is also a strong collaboration between PDEA, PCG, EOD, and other agencies on security inspections. As noted by participant 7 that:

"Sometimes PDEA comes to coordinate with other law enforcement agencies. If there's an issue with unattended baggage and we don't have sniffing dogs here, we rely on the PCG and EOD's bomb-sniffing dogs." (Participant 7)

Participant 8 also emphasized their willingness to assist illiterate port users and those in need. He joyfully disclosed that:

"There are passengers and port users who can't read or write and need help. Sometimes our guards approach them, and sometimes there are people outside waiting for assistance because they don't have fare money. We refer them to the concerned agency to help them and assist them here as well." (Participant 8)

DISCUSSION

Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the study identified and categorized the results and findings. Thematic analysis uncovered the participants' experiences and strategies in enforcing laws and ensuring the safety and security of their assigned maritime domain. The study further revealed that positive workplace morale and ethics among port police officers such as job satisfaction and appreciation, compensation and benefits, work dedication and commitment, and professional ethics and public service as motivating factors in performing their duties to uphold maritime safety and security.

The port police officers have a strong sense of work fulfilment and satisfaction in assisting passengers, especially those with special needs during their boarding and disembarkation from the fast craft. This idea holds that the degree to which an employee's expectations match their real experiences at

work affects their level of job satisfaction by Tikayatray (2023). Moreover, port police officers are greatly encouraged to put in more effort by the fact that they can receive extra compensation for overtime and holidays, which is a clear benefit over some other police departments.

Additionally, the dedication and commitment of PCG personnel stem from their sense of purpose and strong work ethic, reflected in the enthusiasm they bring to their duties. Those who uphold such work ethic demonstrate a high level of competitiveness in fulfilling the organization's goals (Andreev, 2025).

Additionally, new issues regarding ethics for public administration are brought about by the changing nature of contemporary society, especially with the digital revolution (Kostecki & Skok, 2025). Even if there are ethical guidelines, maintaining adherence to them is necessary due to the changing nature of public service, particularly in vital fields like maritime security. It is crucial to prioritize honesty, kindness, and responsibility as the cornerstones of a moral code of conduct in public service. On the other hand, port police officers must constantly use these principles to make sure that their actions not only protect the maritime domain but also strengthen public trust in government service. The port police officers also faced operational challenges including port user's non-compliance, time constraints and organizational barriers, insufficient public knowledge, and limited resources; these challenges are regarded as negative experiences encountered by port police officers in maintaining maritime safety and security.

In port situations, where disobedient drivers routinely disobey port regulations and occasionally directly agitate port police officers, this problem is specifically severe. According to Zailani et al. (2023), safety issues are a recurring problem in many industries, and the main cause of these issues in port operations is the disregard for established safety and security protocols. This issue is largely caused by people's lack of care for laws intended to

protect them and others, as well as their safety attitudes and practices.

Time constraints and organizational barriers are also negative experiences for port police officers, which directly affect their capacity to uphold maritime safety and security. Clear Info (2024) highlighted that organizational obstacles are internal elements that prevent the free flow of information and ideas within an organization. These obstacles can take the shape of unclear information, different communication styles, a lack of trust, or even psychological problems or physical distance that deters participation. They are frequently based on basic process and communication limitations. Opportunities for meaningful participation and professional development for port police personnel are frequently limited by the combination of these limitations, time constraints from rigorous operational duties, and inflexible organizational structures.

The lack of public awareness about the roles and responsibilities of port police officers is another negative experience for the informants in ensuring maritime safety and security. This inadequacy frequently results from the organization's narrow focus and lack of outreach, which leaves port users generally unaware of port police authority. Because of this, many port users are doubtful, which makes it difficult for officers to enforce important port laws and regulations. A lack of knowledge, as Vogels-Broeke et al. (2021) note, denotes a lack of information or understanding, leading to a limited comprehension of viable solutions and repercussions. Therefore, the general public's lack of awareness of their mission directly impairs their capacity to carry out crucial security duties and obtain the required compliance.

Additionally, the effectiveness of port operations is impacted by this lack of public awareness, which makes it extremely difficult for officers to carry out their tasks. Even though work satisfaction and overall organizational performance depend on the exchange of job-related knowledge (Fischer & Döring, 2022),

port police officers frequently encounter circumstances in which the public's poor comprehension of their duties obstructs efficient operations. This emphasizes how important it is for port authorities to actively encourage social connections and put strong knowledge management procedures in place to spread accurate information about the duties of the port police. Strong links between public awareness and involvement can inspire and excite the general public, which in the context of port security translates to increased collaboration and adherence to laws, according to Khatibi et al. (2021). Thus, it is essential to effectively educate the public on the functions, duties, and professional identity of port police officers.

Having adequate resources such as funding, staff, and advanced equipment is vital for the organization to effectively carry out operations and meet common objectives promptly. However, despite their devotion and hard work, the Port Police personnel have several challenges in doing their jobs (Lachaona Jr, 2023). Because they usually operate with a small number of personnel and equipment and lack specialized training, it is difficult for them to adequately enforce maritime safety and security in their area of responsibility (Muring, 2024). However, in the Philippine Port Authority, specifically in the port police office, they faced a shortage of necessary resources, which hindered their ability to perform their duties effectively and ensure port safety. In addition, ongoing and subsequent training for security staff is essential to avoid human errors, equipment malfunctions, and security breaches that could pose safety risks and hinder the effectiveness of port police operations. The port police force needs to establish a buddy system because of the large area the port covers and the numerous users present.

Despite the challenges, port police officers remain committed to fulfilling the agency's mission. They have adopted various strategies to overcome these difficulties, including resilient leadership and effective management, technological integration and operational

efficiency, and stringent security implementation and community partnerships.

Resilience and effective management are two indispensable qualities for port police officers. According to Duszynski-Goodman and Verhulst (2024), having resilience is the ability to recover from life's setbacks, such as trauma, stress, and workplace challenges. For port police officers, this resilience is essential due to the demanding nature of their role in enforcing maritime safety and security. They regularly face high-pressure situations, including dealing with difficult individuals, sometimes politically connected, and responding to evolving threats in the maritime environment. Thus, resilience helps port police officers stay composed, adapt to change, and maintain professionalism despite adversity. As maritime laws and security risks continue to evolve, resilient police officers are better equipped to handle these challenges effectively, ensuring the safety of ports and the broader maritime community.

Resilience alone is not enough for port police officers to effectively enforce maritime safety and security; it must be paired with professionalism. As Vaidya's (2023) notes, professionals are not only knowledgeable but are also committed to excellence, integrity, and strong relationships. This is crucial in port policing, where port officers regularly face stress, risks, and complex situations. Professionalism provides the ethical and behavioral foundation that allows resilience to thrive. It helped port officers stay composed under pressure, make sound decisions, and uphold maritime laws without compromising their values. By combining resilience with professionalism, port police officers have effectively managed challenges, maintained public trust, and ensured high standards of service and safety at the port.

Today, digital technology is essential to security management and police such as innovations like body-worn cameras, drones, and policing applications have the potential to revolutionize these fields (Laufs & Borrion, 2022). An organization becomes more profitable and

sustainable as its operational efficiency improves. This is particularly true when it leverages technological integration to streamline processes and enhance service delivery (Hayes et al., 2024). In the context of port operations, port police officers in Western Biliran have already adopted some digital tools, such as surveillance systems, automated reporting, and data-driven monitoring, to ensure security and order with greater precision and speed in their port perimeter. Through the efficient use of technology, the port police department has been generating higher returns or outcomes at the same or even lower costs compared to less advanced counterparts. Furthermore, operational efficiency allows port police to achieve their strategic objectives while minimizing the waste of time, manpower, and other valuable resources.

Another claim by Hanna and Gillis (2024) is that, technological integration enhances decision-making, reduces delays, and supports efficient resource use through data-driven platforms, ultimately promotes a more agile, secure, and responsive port environment. In port operations, this is strengthened by the utilization of digital tools, real-time analytics, and automation to streamline tasks like passenger screening, cargo monitoring, reporting and issuing notice of violations. Hence, technological integration and operational efficiency are essential for the port police to remain competitive in today's fast-paced business environment. Through investing in these areas in the Philippine Port Authority, port police have gradually been improving decision-making, enhancing port user's experience, increase productivity, reduce costs, and manage risks more effectively.

Stringent security implementation and adherence to regulations are crucial for the port police officers to properly carry out their responsibilities. This includes enacting strong strategies to prevent and decrease risks, making sure rules are followed, and keeping a high level of preparedness for operations. A study is conducted to assess how Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) remains a major

security threat in Nigeria and its neighboring countries, with human and drug trafficking as the dominant forms. Despite Nigeria's efforts to cooperate regionally and internationally, progress has been limited, emphasizing the urgent need for stronger national inter-agency collaboration. Agencies like NAPTIP and NDLEA are central to this effort. Continued investment in digital integration and modern port security infrastructure is vital to strengthening Nigeria's response to TOC (Igwe, 2023).

In the port environment, this is particularly important because no single agency can address all the complexities that arise in port operations. Port police must work with various other entities and the whole community as well to achieve one shared goal in safety and security. Moreover, partnerships boost effectiveness by promoting teamwork among personnel from various agencies and by enabling the exchange of information and resources. The effectiveness of every operation such as anti-drug operation involves both national and global cooperation between countries. Efficient management of the entire mission process is crucial for achieving success. Because of the complexity and resource requirements, no single organization can handle everything. The process of creating intelligence happens at each stage and has been a crucial factor in consistently enhancing performance (Benbya et al., 2020). Collaboration among different agencies is becoming more and more crucial in the realm of digital government. It seems that laws and regulations are crucial in supporting the governance of inter-agency networks. Moreover, the significance of multi-level leadership, formal governance, flexibility in implementation, the role of technology as a social actor, and trust building through expertise and collaboration appear to be especially important (Gasco-Hernandez et al., 2022).

Maritime safety and security cannot be achieved by a single entity alone; it is a shared responsibility among government agencies, law enforcement, industry stakeholders, local

communities, and even families. Therefore, the participation and contributions of the concerned agencies and community members, enforcing maritime safety and security will be more effective and at the same time improve the quality of the work and services of the port police officers.

Recommendations. The findings of the study highlight key recommendations, as presented below, for sustaining maritime safety and security in Eastern Visayas, Philippines.

1. **Professional Development of Port Police Officers.** Port police officers require comprehensive training programs to strengthen their capacity in enforcing maritime safety and security.
2. **Mental and Psychological Support for Port Police Officers.** The management under the Philippine Port Authority must provide mental and psychological support for police officers, which is a critical component in maintaining port safety and security. Such support strengthens their emotional resilience, promotes sound judgment during high-pressure situations, and ensures their overall psychological well-being. By prioritizing these interventions, institutions can enhance the effectiveness, professionalism, and readiness of port police personnel in carrying out their security responsibilities.
3. **Enhancement Training for Port Police Officers.** The agency needs to mobilize and give full support for the enhancement training of port police officers to enhance their adaptability in high-pressure situations. These should incorporate training programs on time management, crisis response, and stress handling to streamline operational procedures by reducing unnecessary redundancies that hinder efficiency while maintaining strict adherence to safety standards.
4. **Enhancing Public Knowledge on Maritime Safety and Security.** Public education

initiatives must be developed to raise awareness of maritime safety and port security protocols. These may include community-based programs highlighting emergency preparedness and passenger responsibilities within port premises. The use of mainstream and digital media platforms such as radio, local television, and social media is highly recommended to ensure wider reach and impact. Additionally, partnerships with academic institutions may be established to integrate maritime safety awareness into curricula or extracurricular outreach programs, thereby instilling early knowledge among students.

5. **Intensifying International, National & Local Coordination.** The Philippine Port Authority should also strengthen international partnerships and coordination with other port police officer as well as other maritime-related sectors in other countries to enhance the maritime safety and security enforcement in the country through intelligence and information sharing.
6. **Resource Allocation.** To address resource limitations, it is recommended that port management maximize existing manpower and equipment by integrating technology-based solutions such as CCTV monitoring systems, drone surveillance, and digital reporting tools. Increased budgetary allocation from government agencies and the PPA should also be pursued to support logistics, training, and procurement of modern equipment necessary for effective operations. The Port Police Officers in Western Biliran Command stations also need more personnel, equipment, and facilities to ensure maritime safety and security. In this case, the agency should allocate funds to provide the resources needed by the port police officers.

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