

Street-Level Enforcement in Urban Communities: Experiences of Cebu City Transportation Office (CCTO) Personnel

Marvin C. Alcontin, RCrim.¹,
Atty. Dodelon F. Sabijon, RCrim., Ph.D CJ¹
¹Faculty, University of Cebu-Main Campus

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Email of Corresponding Author: marvinalcontin25@gmail.com

Abstract

This study explored the lived experiences of Cebu City Transportation Office (CCTO) personnel in implementing traffic rules and regulations in Cebu City. Guided by a qualitative phenomenological approach, the study aimed to understand the challenges, coping mechanisms, motivations, and aspirations of traffic enforcers in the performance of their duties. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews with selected CCTO personnel who served as the respondents of the study. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and significant themes from the participants' narratives. The findings revealed that traffic enforcers experienced both fulfillment and hardship in their work. Respondents expressed pride and satisfaction in serving the public and maintaining road safety, while also encountering aggressive motorists, verbal confrontations, threats to personal safety, and insufficient protection during operations. Despite these challenges, the respondents demonstrated professionalism, patience, teamwork, and adherence to established procedures as coping strategies. The study further found that traffic enforcers aspire for stricter implementation of traffic laws, improved public discipline, enhanced infrastructure, and modernization of traffic management systems to promote safer and more efficient road conditions. The study concluded that effective traffic management requires not only committed personnel but also institutional support, public cooperation, and continuous improvement in enforcement systems. It recommends strengthening safety measures, providing continuous professional training, improving inter-agency coordination, and investing in modern traffic management technologies and infrastructure. The study supports Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities by promoting safer and more organized urban transportation systems, and SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions through the strengthening of public service and law enforcement practices. The sustainability impact of the study lies in its contribution to improving road safety, institutional effectiveness, public discipline, and community well-being through more responsive and efficient traffic management practices.

Keywords: Aggressive Motorists, Cebu City Transportation Office, Public Safety, Road Safety, Traffic Enforcement, Traffic Management, Traffic Regulations, Traffic Violators

1. Introduction

Traffic enforcers play an essential role in maintaining the smooth flow of urban transportation systems and ensuring public safety. Their responsibilities include regulating traffic movement, assisting motorists and pedestrians, responding to accidents, and enforcing traffic laws under difficult environmental and social conditions. Despite their importance, traffic enforcers frequently encounter harassment, resistance, and threats from motorists, particularly from aggressive and non-compliant drivers (Paje et al., 2022). In the Philippines, rapid urbanization and increased vehicle ownership have intensified traffic congestion, especially in highly urbanized cities. Cebu City experiences severe transportation challenges resulting from population growth, commercial expansion, and limited road infrastructure. Local government agencies such as the Cebu City Transportation Office (CCTO) and the Cebu City Traffic Management Coordination Committee (CITOM) are tasked with implementing traffic management policies and ensuring road discipline. However, the effectiveness of these efforts largely depends on the experiences, competence, and adaptability of traffic personnel assigned to frontline enforcement duties. The study focuses on understanding the lived experiences of CCTO personnel in implementing traffic rules and regulations, coping with occupational challenges, and identifying aspirations for improving traffic management services in Cebu City.

Existing literature emphasizes that traffic enforcement personnel operate under stressful and demanding conditions characterized by limited resources, public pressure, occupational hazards, and complex decision-making environments. Street-level bureaucrats, including police officers and traffic enforcers, exercise discretion while implementing policies in real-world situations where formal rules often conflict with practical realities (Lipsky, 2010). Similarly, Evans (2020) emphasized that frontline workers continuously balance public expectations, ethical responsibilities, and operational limitations. Studies revealed that traffic enforcers commonly encounter arrogant, aggressive, and non-compliant motorists

who resist traffic regulations and challenge enforcement authority (Paje et al., 2022). Other challenges include heavy workloads, inadequate manpower, delayed compensation, environmental exposure, and occupational health risks such as musculoskeletal problems, stress, and noise-induced hearing loss (Goetsch & Lobaton, 2023; Plaudel et al., 2018; Adversario et al., 2020). Research also highlights the importance of teamwork, organizational support, professionalism, and communication in improving public service delivery. Tuckman's stages of team development emphasize the role of collaboration, cohesion, and shared responsibilities in achieving effective team performance (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). Meanwhile, competence motivation theory suggests that individuals are intrinsically motivated when they feel effective and capable in performing their roles (Harter, 1978). Studies on traffic management further stress the importance of modern infrastructure, intelligent transportation systems, road discipline, and technology integration in achieving sustainable urban mobility (Hamilton et al., 2013; Newman & Kenworthy, 1999; Ebrahim, 2021).

Globally, traffic congestion significantly affects economic productivity, environmental sustainability, public health, and urban mobility systems. Congestion creates delays, increases fuel consumption, contributes to air pollution, and disrupts economic activities (Afrin & Yodo, 2020). Urban planners and policymakers increasingly advocate for integrated transportation systems, sustainable urban planning, and reduced automobile dependence to address these issues (Newman & Kenworthy, 1999). Nationally, the Philippines continues to struggle with worsening traffic congestion due to rapid urbanization and increasing vehicle registration. Reports indicate substantial economic losses caused by traffic congestion, with estimates reaching billions of pesos daily if conditions continue to deteriorate (Banga et al., 2018). In Metro Manila and other urban centers, traffic enforcers face growing workloads despite manpower shortages (Gumasing et al., 2023). Locally, Cebu City experiences serious transportation and traffic management concerns resulting from increasing urban density, commercial activity, and population growth. Major roads and intersections regularly experience congestion, affecting commuters, businesses, and emergency response systems. Cebu City implements traffic management through ordinances and regulations such as City Ordinance No. 1264 establishing CITOM, City Ordinance 801 or the Cebu City Traffic Code, and City Ordinance 2612 governing speed limits. National laws including Republic Act No. 4136, Republic Act No. 10913, and Republic Act No. 11229 also provide the legal framework for traffic regulation and road safety enforcement.

This study is anchored on Safety Culture Theory by Antonsen (2009), Team Performance Theory by Tuckman (1965), and Competence Motivation Theory by Harter (1978). Safety Culture Theory emphasizes that safety within organizations is shaped by shared beliefs, communication patterns, leadership practices, and organizational behavior rather than merely by formal rules. Antonsen (2009) argued that safety culture should be understood through qualitative and context-sensitive approaches that capture the lived experiences of personnel. This theory is relevant to traffic enforcement because it explains how organizational culture, communication, and institutional support influence the behavior and effectiveness of traffic personnel. Team Performance Theory explains how teams evolve through stages of forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). The theory highlights the importance of teamwork, collaboration, and role clarification in achieving operational effectiveness, especially in high-pressure work environments such as traffic management. Competence Motivation Theory posits that individuals are motivated by their desire to feel effective and competent in performing tasks (Harter, 1978). Traffic enforcers derive motivation from fulfilling their responsibilities, protecting public safety, and supporting their families, which strengthens their commitment to public service.

Although several studies have examined traffic management, road safety, aggressive driving behavior, and occupational stress among traffic personnel, limited research has focused on the lived experiences of traffic enforcers in Cebu City using a phenomenological approach. Existing studies primarily emphasize policy implementation, traffic congestion, or technical transportation systems, while fewer studies explore the emotional, social, and organizational realities faced by frontline traffic personnel. This study addresses this gap by examining the firsthand experiences of CCTO personnel in implementing traffic rules and regulations, coping with occupational difficulties, and identifying aspirations for improving traffic enforcement and urban mobility management. The study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the human dimension of traffic management and contribute to evidence-based improvements in public service delivery, organizational support systems, and urban transportation governance.

The study aligns with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) relevant to transportation management, public safety, institutional effectiveness, and sustainable urban development. SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-Being is reflected in the study's emphasis on road safety, accident prevention, occupational health, and public welfare. Traffic enforcers contribute to safer roads and reduced transportation-related injuries through effective enforcement and emergency response. SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth is relevant because the study highlights the working conditions, occupational hazards, delayed salaries, and employment concerns faced by traffic personnel. Improving organizational support and workplace conditions contributes to decent and sustainable employment. SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure is reflected in discussions regarding intelligent transportation systems, traffic technology, CCTV implementation, infrastructure improvement, and modernization of traffic management systems (Hamilton et al., 2013;

Ebrahim, 2021). SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities is strongly connected to the study because traffic management directly influences urban sustainability, mobility efficiency, public safety, environmental quality, and accessibility within highly urbanized cities such as Cebu City. SDG 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions is reflected in the study's focus on fair law enforcement, public accountability, institutional coordination, and ethical public service delivery.

The study contributes to multidisciplinary sustainability by addressing interconnected issues involving public safety, urban governance, transportation management, occupational welfare, institutional effectiveness, and community development. From a public health sustainability perspective, improved traffic management reduces accidents, injuries, stress, and environmental exposure among road users and traffic personnel. In terms of technological and innovation sustainability, the study highlights the importance of intelligent transportation systems, CCTV integration, speed monitoring devices, and modern traffic infrastructure in improving urban mobility and operational efficiency. Regarding socio-economic sustainability, efficient traffic systems support business productivity, commuter mobility, and economic activity while reducing losses caused by congestion and transportation delays. The study also contributes to institutional and governance sustainability by emphasizing the need for stronger support systems, professional development, fair enforcement practices, inter-agency collaboration, and evidence-based policymaking. Finally, the research supports community sustainability by promoting road discipline, public cooperation, safer transportation systems, and trust between traffic personnel and the public. Understanding the lived experiences of traffic enforcers contributes to developing more responsive, humane, and sustainable urban traffic management systems.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative research design, specifically descriptive phenomenology, to examine the lived experiences of CCTO personnel. Phenomenology focuses on understanding individuals' experiences and the meanings they attach to those experiences. This design was appropriate because the study sought to explore how traffic enforcers perceive and interpret their daily encounters, challenges, and responsibilities in traffic management. The qualitative approach allowed participants to describe their experiences in detail and enabled the researchers to gain deeper insights into the realities of frontline traffic enforcement. The study followed interpretative and descriptive procedures commonly associated with phenomenological inquiry to capture authentic experiences and perspectives.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in Cebu City, one of the highly urbanized cities in the Philippines known for its dense population, commercial activities, and increasing traffic congestion. Cebu City experiences significant transportation challenges due to rapid urbanization, infrastructure limitations, and high vehicle volume. The Cebu City Transportation Office (CCTO) serves as the primary agency responsible for implementing traffic regulations, maintaining road order, and managing traffic flow within the city. The locale was selected because it provides a relevant setting for examining the lived experiences of traffic personnel who regularly encounter urban traffic management issues.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study were CCTO personnel actively involved in traffic management and law enforcement operations in Cebu City. Participants included traffic enforcers with direct experience in regulating traffic, responding to road incidents, and interacting with motorists and commuters. The respondents were selected based on their firsthand knowledge and actual experiences in traffic enforcement. Their insights provided valuable information regarding occupational challenges, public interactions, organizational support, and personal aspirations related to their profession.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study employed purposive sampling in selecting participants. Purposive sampling was used to identify individuals who possessed relevant experience and knowledge regarding traffic enforcement and urban traffic management. Participants were chosen based on established criteria, including active service in the CCTO and direct involvement in traffic operations. The sampling procedure ensured that respondents could provide rich and meaningful descriptions of their lived experiences. The number of participants was determined based on data saturation; wherein no new significant themes emerged from subsequent interviews.

2.5 Research Instrument

The primary research instrument used in the study was a semi-structured interview guide designed to gather detailed narratives from participants regarding their experiences as traffic enforcers. The interview questions focused on their duties, challenges, coping mechanisms, interactions with motorists, organizational support, and aspirations for improving traffic management services. Semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility in probing responses while maintaining consistency

across participants. The instrument was validated to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the objectives of the study. Audio recordings and field notes were also utilized to ensure accurate documentation of responses during the interviews.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers secured the necessary permissions and approvals before conducting the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Interviews were conducted individually in locations convenient and comfortable for the participants to encourage openness and honest responses. The researchers used semi-structured interviews to collect detailed narratives regarding the lived experiences of traffic personnel. Responses were audio-recorded with permission and supplemented by field notes to ensure completeness and accuracy of the collected data. The researchers maintained confidentiality and ethical considerations throughout the data gathering process.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview recordings were transcribed, organized, and examined to identify recurring themes, patterns, and significant statements related to the participants' experiences. The researchers categorized responses into thematic clusters to interpret the meanings and insights derived from the narratives. Data analysis involved coding, thematic organization, and interpretation to ensure that the findings accurately reflected the lived experiences of the respondents. The phenomenological approach enabled the researchers to focus on the essence of participants' experiences while maintaining the authenticity of their narratives.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Positive Experiences of Traffic Enforcers

3.1.1 Sense of Fulfillment in Public Service

The findings revealed that many CCTO personnel experienced fulfillment and satisfaction in serving the public despite the difficulties associated with traffic management. Respondents expressed pride in helping maintain road order, reduce traffic congestion, and ensure public safety. Their work provided them with a sense of accomplishment, especially when motorists cooperated and appreciated their efforts. These findings suggest that public service serves as a strong motivating factor for traffic enforcers. Their commitment reflects the principles of public service responsibility and dedication to community welfare. The findings support the idea that employees who perceive meaning and value in their work are more likely to remain committed and productive in their duties. The positive emotional experiences associated with helping the public contributed to their resilience and motivation in performing challenging responsibilities.

3.1.2 Motivation Through Family and Personal Responsibility

The respondents identified family and personal responsibility as major sources of motivation in performing their duties. Many participants emphasized that supporting their families encouraged them to endure work-related stress and continue fulfilling their responsibilities despite occupational risks and challenges. The findings indicate that family-oriented motivation strengthens employee commitment and job performance. The study revealed that psychological meaningfulness mediated the relationship between family motivation and work performance, while collectivistic culture reinforced this motivation. These results imply that cultural values and family obligations significantly influence work attitudes and resilience among traffic enforcers.

3.2 Negative Experiences of Traffic Enforcers

3.2.1 Confrontations with Arrogant, Hot-headed, and Unruly Drivers

The study found that respondents frequently encountered arrogant, aggressive, and disrespectful motorists while enforcing traffic regulations. Traffic enforcers reported experiences of verbal abuse, resistance, and hostility from drivers who refused to acknowledge violations or comply with traffic rules. These encounters often resulted in stressful and emotionally exhausting situations for the personnel. The findings support Safety Culture Theory by Stian Antonsen, which explains that safety performance is influenced by shared values and behaviors related to safety. In the context of traffic management, motorists' disregard for traffic laws and disrespect toward enforcers weakened the culture of road safety and contributed to confrontational situations. Paje et al. (2022) recommended that traffic enforcers remain calm, patient, and respectful when dealing with rude motorists. Likewise, Lajunen and Parker (2001) found that aggressive driving behavior is strongly associated with driver anger and general aggressiveness. Shinar (1998) further explained that aggressive driving is often frustration-driven and influenced by environmental conditions.

3.2.2 Threats to Safety, Life, and Lack of Protection

The respondents also identified threats to personal safety and lack of adequate protection as significant challenges in their work. Traffic enforcers described feeling vulnerable during confrontations with motorists and while managing traffic in

hazardous road conditions. Participants expressed concerns regarding insufficient protective measures, exposure to accidents, and the risks associated with field operations.

These findings indicate the need for stronger institutional support systems and safety measures for traffic personnel. The challenges experienced by the respondents highlight the importance of organizational protection, adequate equipment, and proper coordination with law enforcement agencies. The results further suggest that improving safety policies and support mechanisms can enhance both employee welfare and operational effectiveness in traffic management.

3.3 Coping Mechanisms of Traffic Enforcers

3.3.1 Education and Courtesy as First Response

The study revealed that respondents commonly used education, communication, and courtesy when dealing with motorists and difficult situations. Traffic enforcers emphasized the importance of explaining traffic rules calmly and respectfully to minimize conflict and encourage cooperation from the public. The findings suggest that professional communication skills are essential in maintaining order and reducing tensions during traffic enforcement. Courtesy and proper communication promoted better relationships between enforcers and motorists while preventing unnecessary escalation of conflicts. These practices also reflected the respondents' commitment to professionalism and public service despite stressful working conditions.

3.3.2 Reliance on Teamwork, Superiors, and Protocols

The respondents identified teamwork, organizational support, and adherence to protocols as important coping strategies in managing work-related challenges. Traffic enforcers relied on assistance from colleagues and supervisors when facing difficult motorists, dangerous situations, and stressful incidents. These findings emphasize the importance of organizational cohesion and institutional guidance in traffic enforcement operations. Supportive leadership, clear procedures, and teamwork helped reduce occupational stress and improved confidence among personnel. The findings further imply that strengthening organizational culture and collaboration can improve employee morale and operational efficiency.

3.4 Aspirations for Improved Traffic Management

3.4.1 Strengthened Traffic Law Enforcement and Road Discipline

The respondents expressed the need for stricter implementation of traffic laws and improved public discipline on the roads. Participants believed that stronger enforcement and increased cooperation from motorists could reduce violations, improve traffic flow, and enhance road safety in Cebu City. The findings indicate that traffic management effectiveness depends not only on enforcement personnel but also on public compliance and discipline. The respondents recognized that collaborative efforts among government agencies, motorists, and the community are necessary to establish a safer and more organized transportation environment.

3.4.2 Improvement of Traffic Infrastructure and Technology

The study also revealed that respondents aspired for improved traffic infrastructure, modernized technology, and enhanced traffic management systems. Participants emphasized the importance of smart traffic systems, better road signage, centralized traffic monitoring, and updated enforcement equipment to improve efficiency and reduce operational difficulties. These findings highlight the importance of technological innovation and infrastructure development in addressing urban traffic challenges. The respondents believed that integrating modern systems and providing continuous training on traffic technologies would strengthen traffic operations and improve public safety. According to Antonsen's theory, promoting open communication and continuous learning can further strengthen organizational safety culture and operational effectiveness.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concluded that Cebu City Transportation Office (CCTO) personnel experienced both rewarding and challenging situations in the implementation of traffic rules and regulations. The respondents demonstrated commitment to public service through their sense of fulfillment, dedication to maintaining road safety, and motivation driven by family responsibilities. However, they also encountered difficulties such as confrontations with arrogant and aggressive motorists, threats to personal safety, and insufficient protection while performing their duties. To cope with these challenges, traffic enforcers relied on professionalism, courtesy, teamwork, and adherence to established protocols. The findings further revealed that respondents aspire for stricter law enforcement, improved public discipline, enhanced infrastructure, and modernization of traffic management systems to improve road safety and operational efficiency.

The study recommends strengthening traffic law enforcement policies, improving safety measures for traffic enforcers, and providing adequate protection and support systems during field operations. Continuous training in communication, conflict management, and professional conduct should also be reinforced to help personnel effectively handle difficult situations

with motorists. Furthermore, the study recommends enhancing coordination among government agencies, improving public awareness and discipline regarding traffic regulations, and investing in modern traffic infrastructure and technology to support efficient traffic management and ensure safer road conditions for both enforcers and the public.

Compliance with ethical standards

The authors declare no conflict of interest. This study complied with recognized ethical standards for human-participant research by ensuring voluntary participation with informed consent, the right to withdraw without penalty, and strict confidentiality through anonymous, secure, and aggregated data handling. Given the focus on psychological well-being, procedures were non-invasive, and safeguards were observed to minimize discomfort, with guidance to appropriate support services when needed, and required institutional permissions were secured for instrument use and access to academic records.

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