

BEHIND CITY LANE AND LIGHTS: LIFE EXPERIENCES OF TRAFFIC ENFORCERS

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ABSTRACT

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This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of traffic enforcers in Tagbilaran City, Bohol. Specifically, sought answers to the following specific problems: the experiences of the informants as traffic officers and how does it affect the lives of the drivers. A phenomenological and qualitative approach was utilized in this study, employing methods such as interviews the key process in data gathering. There were ten selected enforcers, four of them had been interviewed individually, and the remaining six were the members of the Focused Group

Discussion (FGD). The study locale is in the City of Tagbilaran and focused on the identified barangays, namely: Cogon, Poblacion I, Poblacion II, and Dao. I used an interview guide aided by a video recorder as the basis for transcribing the responses of the informants. Utilized Collaizzi's method of phenomenological analysis procedure in analyzing the responses of the informant during the conduct of the interview. For the experiences of the informants as traffic enforcers themes created were Happy and Contented When Appreciated, The Power of Obedience and Respect, When Life and Limb Are Overly Exposed to Risks, and for addressing the problems encountered in the implementation of traffic laws, Continuing Awareness Campaign and Education, Recruiting



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of More Competent and Skillful Enforcer for aspirations of the informants to their personal and professional lives, All for Glory God and Family and For Better and Efficient Service. It suggested that there must be a refined process and proper validation of the program, law, or ordinance must be formulated for the legal basis and proper implementation, a formal reformation process, and provide additional training to improve and help the traffic enforcers.

INTRODUCTION

The idea that traffic congestion is a persistent urban problem that affects mobility, safety, and day-to-day functioning is well known. When road networks exceed capacity, travel becomes less predictable, journey time increases, and daily activities such as work, school, trade, and caregiving are disrupted. Congestion can also affect public safety by slowing emergency response times, making incident management more difficult, and increasing the likelihood that drivers will encounter conflict points when distracted, impatient, or making unsafe movements (World Health Organization [WHO], 2004, 2018). In highly motorized environments, driving attention remains a proven risk factor for crashes and near-collisions, underscoring the necessity of road-user discipline and aggressive enforcement to ensure safer roads (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration [NHTSA], 2023).

Personnel tasked with implementing traffic ordinances and national traffic regulations, including provisions of the Land Transportation and Traffic Code, are responsible for enforcing traffic laws across the city of Tagbilaran. When they operate in dynamic circumstances that need swift judgment, interpersonal skills, consistency, and ethical decision-making—especially when interacting with noncompliant drivers and managing competing road-user needs—recognizing their job helps build respect and admiration for them. This is especially true when communicating with drivers who do not comply with the rules (WHO, 2004). The audience can develop a deeper respect for their professionalism and dedication if they understand their experiences.

It is possible that by sharing their difficulties and coping methods, policymakers and officials in charge of traffic management would be inspired to support and improve enforcement conditions, ultimately leading to improvements in road safety and operational efficiency. Explicitly connecting these insights to practical applications, such as tailored training programs or supervision protocols, can help the audience see how the study's outcomes will directly contribute to improvements in traffic enforcement policy and practice.

Theoretical Background. This study is anchored in complementary perspectives that help explain performance, learning, teamwork, and compliance behavior in traffic enforcement settings, providing a solid foundation for interpreting enforcers' experiences and informing policy and practice improvements.

Competence Motivation Theory proposes that individuals are inclined

to engage in tasks where they feel capable and where successful performance is reinforced by supportive feedback. White's early formulation emphasized an inherent drive for competence, where mastery experiences strengthen perceived capability and persistence (White, 1959). Later scholarship broadened the understanding of competence-focused motivation in achievement contexts, emphasizing how competence-related goals and perceived efficacy shape sustained engagement and well-being (Elliot & Dweck, 2005). Applied to traffic enforcement, the theory offers a lens for examining how training, supervision, community feedback, and operational success (e.g., preventing conflict, restoring flow, avoiding incidents) may strengthen or weaken enforcers' motivation and confidence.

Social Cognitive Theory explains how behavior is learned and maintained through observation, modeling, reinforcement, and reciprocal interactions among personal factors, behavior, and environment (Bandura, 1986). In enforcement contexts, this perspective is useful for understanding how workplace norms, peer behavior, leadership practices, and repeated public encounters may shape habitual responses—ranging from professional restraint to escalation, from strict rule implementation to discretionary practices. Investigating enforcers' perceptions of organizational culture and peer influence can provide insights into factors that promote or hinder ethical and consistent enforcement (Bandura, 1986).

To frame compliance and risk-taking on the road, the study draws from established work on driving behavior and deterrence. Research distinguishing driving errors from violations underscores that risky outcomes do not arise only from skill deficits; they may also reflect deliberate rule-bending under pressure, impatience, or social norms (Reason et al., 1990). Related work applying the Theory of Planned Behavior to traffic violations suggests that intentions to violate rules are shaped by attitudes, perceived norms, and perceived behavioral control—constructs that matter for both driver behavior and enforcement strategies (Parker et al., 1992). These perspectives support examining how enforcers interpret noncompliance, how they decide when to warn versus penalize, and how perceived certainty of enforcement may influence road-user behavior.

Because traffic enforcement is often performed in coordinated deployments (posts, rotations, peak-hour assignments, incident response), the study also draws on Tuckman's Team Development Model (forming, storming, norming, performing, adjourning). Team functioning theory provides a practical lens for exploring how enforcement teams coordinate, handle conflict, standardize practice, and maintain performance under stress (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). Finally, the study acknowledges risk-related behavior frameworks commonly used in traffic safety discussions. Risk Homeostasis Theory argues that individuals may adjust their behavior to maintain a personally acceptable level of risk, implying that safety interventions can be offset by behavioral adaptation (Wilde, 1982). While debated, the concept is useful as a sensitizing

framework when analyzing how drivers respond to visible enforcement and how enforcement intensity may interact with road-user risk-taking.

Taken together, these frameworks support an interpretive account of traffic enforcers' lived experiences—how competence is built and sustained, how learning environments shape behavior, how teams function in street-level operations, and how compliance and risk emerge in everyday traffic encounters.

Statement of the Problem

Traffic congestion and road safety concerns continue to affect daily mobility and public order in many growing cities. In Tagbilaran City, traffic enforcers serve as frontliners who direct flow, manage compliance, and respond to on-street conflicts and risks. While enforcement is central to road safety governance, the work itself is carried out under practical constraints—high interaction demands, exposure to conflict, time pressure, and public scrutiny. However, there remains limited locally grounded evidence documenting how traffic enforcers experience their work, how they make sense of their role, the challenges they routinely face, and the conditions that support or hinder ethical, competent, and effective performance. Addressing potential biases or limitations in data collection methods will strengthen the credibility of these insights and reassure stakeholders of the study's validity.

General Objective

To explore and describe the lived experiences of Tagbilaran City traffic enforcers in performing traffic management and enforcement duties, with attention to competence, work realities, ethical challenges, and coping practices.

Specific Objectives

1. To describe how traffic enforcers understand and carry out their day-to-day roles in traffic management and enforcement.
2. To identify common situations and challenges encountered in the field (e.g., noncompliance, conflict, congestion peaks, incident response).
3. To examine how traffic enforcers develop and sustain competence, including learning sources (training, peer modeling, supervision, and experience).
4. To explore ethical pressures and decision points encountered in enforcement work and how enforcers navigate them.
5. To surface coping strategies and support conditions (team dynamics, leadership, policies, community relations) that shape performance and well-being.
6. To propose practical recommendations to strengthen traffic enforcement practice and road safety governance in Tagbilaran City based on the findings.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative phenomenological design to explore and describe the lived experiences of City Traffic Enforcers in Tagbilaran City. Phenomenology seeks to understand how individuals make sense of their everyday experiences and how meaning is constructed from those experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rather than attempting to measure predefined variables, the approach centers on interviewees' own accounts, allowing the essence of a shared phenomenon to emerge from their narratives. In this study, the phenomenon of interest was the experience of performing traffic enforcement duties in a dynamic urban environment.

A descriptive phenomenological orientation guided the inquiry. The researcher remained attentive to the process of reflexivity and bracketing—consciously setting aside prior assumptions as much as possible—to focus on how interviewees described their work realities (Moustakas, 1994). This orientation was considered appropriate given the study's aim of understanding everyday enforcement experiences from the perspective of those directly involved.

The research was conducted in selected barangays of Tagbilaran City—Cogon, Poblacion I, Poblacion II, and Dao. These areas were chosen for their relatively high traffic volume and for the presence of commercial establishments, transport routes, schools, and government offices. The operational demands in these locations provided a relevant context for examining the experiences of traffic enforcers assigned to busy and complex intersections.

Interviewees consisted of ten (10) City Traffic Enforcers with at least three (3) years of service. The minimum experience requirement was intended to ensure that interviewees had sufficient exposure to routine operations, peak-hour congestion, and conflict situations. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to identify individuals who could provide rich and information-laden accounts of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Four interviewees participated in individual in-depth interviews, while six took part in a focus group discussion. The combination of individual interviews and group discussion allowed for both personal reflection and collective sense-making.

The information was gathered through semi-structured interviews guided by open-ended questions. In this style, interviewees could share their experiences in their own words while also addressing key areas of interest. These key topics included everyday responsibilities, problems encountered, decision-making processes, ethical considerations, and coping techniques. The interviews were audio-recorded with interviewees' permission to ensure accuracy. Throughout the research process, both field notes and a reflective notebook were kept to record contextual observations and emergent ideas.

Before beginning data collection, formal approval was obtained from the appropriate authorities at the institution and the local government offices. Interviewees were informed of the study's objectives, that their participation

was entirely voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Before beginning the interviews, written informed consent was obtained from the interviewees. The use of pseudonyms and the removal of identifying information from transcripts protected the confidentiality and anonymity of the conversations.

A verbatim transcription of the audio recordings was provided. In cases where responses were provided in the native language, they were meticulously translated into English, ensuring the contextual meaning was preserved. The phenomenological method developed by Colaizzi (1978) was used to analyze the data. This method entails the repeated reading of transcripts, the extraction of significant statements, the formulation of meanings, the clustering of themes, the development of an exhaustive description, and the synthesis of the fundamental structure of the experience. To strengthen the credibility of the findings, they were, when appropriate, sent back to a subset of interviewees for validation.

To ensure the reliability of the results, the research was conducted in accordance with the criteria outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The organization's credibility improved through member checks and sustained engagement with the data. Maintaining an audit trail of analytical decisions addressed the issue of dependability—the documentation of theme development and the use of reflexive journaling both supported confirmabilities. The transferability of the findings was improved by providing a comprehensive explanation of the research context. This enabled readers to evaluate the extent to which the findings apply to comparable settings.

Through these procedures, the study sought to provide a careful, grounded account of the lived experiences of Tagbilaran City traffic enforcers, while maintaining ethical integrity and methodological rigor.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The stories that traffic enforcers shared depict that their jobs are both important and hard. Their experiences are like what happens every day on the road: some are helpful, while others are hard on the body and mind.

Three broad areas emerged from the analysis: (1) experiences in the line of duty, (2) ways of addressing enforcement concerns, and (3) sources of personal and professional motivation.

I. Experiences in the Line of Duty

Moments of Recognition and Encouragement. Several interviewees discussed the fleeting but significant moments when motorists publicly expressed gratitude for their efforts. At first glance, it appeared as though a straightforward “thank you,” a respectful gesture, or acquiescence without disagreement would leave an impression that would remain unquestionable.

Several interviewees gained confidence as a result of this interaction,

which demonstrated that their presence on the road is much valued. Despite its frequent association with conflict, one narrative holds that public acknowledgment serves as a counterbalance to the daily pressure of traffic policing.

Studies conducted in the past on the motivation for public service have shown that individuals who work for the government typically find purpose in their work by contributing to the community (Perry & Wise, 1990). The findings of that research, which indicate that this association does exist, are congruent with this conclusion, which is consistent with those findings. The conclusion that can be drawn from this observation is substantial. According to Vandenabeele (2007), acknowledging the significance of service, especially when delivered casually, can enhance professional identity and strengthen commitment.

Rather than being purely motivated by the authority to enforce the law, the interviewees' contentment appeared to be anchored in the perception that they were contributing to maintaining public order. Their expertise and the significance they play in ensuring safety were validated by the recognition they received.

Cooperation as a Form of Relief. There was a recurring theme emphasizing the ease with which motorists experience when following directions without resistance. The individuals who took part in the study described those days as "less burdensome" and more serene, as a result of their collaborative behavior; stress and conflict were reduced, allowing them to focus on managing traffic rather than resolving various problems.

According to research on procedural fairness, compliance increases when power is perceived as legitimate and equitable (Tyler, 2006). According to the narratives provided by the interviewees, this study did not explicitly evaluate interviewees' perspectives on legitimacy; rather, it suggests that mutual respect fosters more successful interactions between law enforcement. An individual's sense of efficacy may improve with the experience of orderly traffic flow.

Bandura (1997) asserts that consistent successful task performance bolsters confidence in one's abilities. In the context of traffic enforcement, visible compliance may serve as evidence that their efforts are effective.

Daily Exposure to Risk and Discomfort. In addition to these uplifting occasions, the enforcers communicated openly about the requirements of their place of employment. It was characterized as usual to be subjected to intense heat, sudden rain, dust, and vehicle emissions. While apprehending those who violated the law, some individuals related incidents in which they came dangerously close to being struck by vehicles or sustained injuries. Occupational health research has shown that those who work in traffic enforcement experience increased environmental dangers, including exposure to airborne contaminants (Dirks et al., 2012; Patil et al., 2014). These allegations align with findings from occupational health research. The combination of these variables and the unpredictability of traffic volume at the workplace

creates an atmosphere that demands constant alertness.

Unpredictability, along with physical exposure, can strain relationships. Research on law enforcement professionals has demonstrated that continuous exposure to risk and uncertainty may contribute to the development of cumulative stress (Violanti et al., 2017). According to Maslach and Leiter (2016), prolonged stress may eventually affect well-being if a person does not receive sufficient institutional support. As a result, the narratives reflect not only resilience but also vulnerability, an essential factor to consider when planning regulatory and administrative implementation.

II. Addressing Challenges in Traffic Law Implementation

The Role of Education and Awareness. Interviewees frequently stressed the importance of teaching drivers. To reduce misunderstandings and repeat offenses, some experts suggested offering more seminars or running more effective awareness campaigns. Their proposals show that they think enforcement alone is not adequate. Research on behavioral patterns backs up this point of view.

Bandura's (1977) social learning theory posits that individuals obtain norms and expectations via observation and reinforcement. When traffic regulations are consistently and transparently conveyed for modeling purposes, individuals can progressively assimilate them. Elliott, Armitage, and Baughan (2007) discovered that instructional interventions, when coupled with visible enforcement, can diminish hazardous driving behaviors. Research on road safety backs up this fact. Thus, the interviewees' emphasis on awareness corresponds with overarching findings suggesting that preventative approaches enhance regulatory initiatives.

Workforce and Operational Capacity. One of the concerns raised throughout the conversations was the limited personnel. Interviewees elaborated on instances in which a limited number of law enforcement officers were assigned to monitor high-traffic intersections.

According to an investigation by Kim (2005), organisational research indicates that adequate employment levels contribute to both the performance and the well-being of individual workers. It is possible for personnel to experience fatigue and reduced attentiveness when they are pushed beyond their limits.

According to Salas, Sims, and Burke (2005), high-performing teams often rely on clear roles, proper coordination of efforts, and sufficient human resources. It is therefore possible to interpret the desire for additional enforcers not simply as a plea for convenience, but rather as a structural requirement for efficient and sustainable traffic management.

III. Personal and Professional Aspirations

Family as a Motivating Anchor. Many individuals cited their family as a source of strength. Providing for children and ensuring a stable future were common topics. In collectivist societies, family responsibilities often influence vocational dedication (Hofstede, 2001). Work gets interwoven with relationship responsibility rather than just personal success. According to research on subjective well-being, a meaningful job related to family welfare increases life satisfaction (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003).

For these enforcers, motivation appears to be highly relational. Their everyday presence on the road is tied to both civic obligation and household stability.

Fulfillment Through Contribution. A further point raised by the interviewees was their wish to improve traffic flow and ensure that their department functions more effectively. One of the elements that contributed to their sense of accomplishment was the awareness that the roads were smoother. Another factor was the acknowledgment they received from supervisors and citizens.

According to Perry and Wise (1990), this orientation toward service reflects patterns observed in research on public service motivation. These studies have found that dedication to the public good functions as an inherent driver. According to Judge et al. (2010), having recognition and appropriate reward are additional ways to reinforce involvement. Professional fulfillment, as described by the interviewees, seems to arise from a combination of service impact, community recognition, and tangible workplace support.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to analyze traffic enforcers' lived experiences while carrying out their tasks. Their accounts revealed a profession shaped by both praise and tragedy. On the one hand, thanks from drivers and pedestrians is encouraging. A simple acknowledgement, a gesture of respect, or basic obedience to traffic regulations acknowledges their presence and boosts their sense of purpose. Many interviewees cherish these brief interactions because they show how their efforts benefit public order and community safety.

On the other hand, the work is still hard. Every day, they have to deal with bad weather, air pollution, changing traffic levels, and the constant risk of an accident. People with these diseases need to be strong both physically and emotionally. These problems are made worse by a lack of staff, which adds to the workload of those responsible for organizing busy crossings. In addition to practical reasons, the interviewees are highly driven by a desire to serve and protect their families. Their job is more than just a way to make money; it affects their children's health and safety, and it shapes their desire to make the community safer and more organized.

Taken together, the findings suggest that traffic enforcement is not simply

regulatory work—it is relational and service-oriented labor carried out under physically demanding conditions. Recognizing both the humanity and the hazards embedded in this role is essential in shaping policies that support those who stand daily at the center of the road.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the interviewees' experiences, the following recommendations are offered:

1. **Improve workplace safety and health measures.** There is a possibility that local governments and other relevant organizations will consider strengthening the safety measures in place in traffic. This could involve providing appropriate protective equipment (such as air filtration masks and cooling vests), regular medical checkups, support with hydration, and rotation assignments timed to prevent prolonged exposure to heat and pollution. Structured stress management programs may also help reduce accumulated psychological stress.
2. **Increase staffing and capacity-building.** Hiring more traffic officers may help spread the workload more fairly and reduce fatigue. Aside from growing numbers, ongoing professional development—including conflict resolution, communication skills, and updated traffic regulations—can boost confidence and efficacy in enforcement.
3. **Invest in sustained public education campaigns.** Interviewees stressed the need for driver awareness. Rather than relying solely on arrests and sanctions, local governments should implement continuous, visible, and accessible traffic education initiatives. Partnerships with schools, transportation groups, and media outlets could help to reinforce traffic rules and reduce confrontations.
4. **Develop a culture of mutual respect.** Efforts to improve traffic management should also include initiatives that encourage courteous interaction between motorists and enforcement officers. Public messaging that emphasizes traffic enforcers' roles as community safety partners, rather than just ticket issuers, may gradually increase public trust and cooperation.
5. **Recognize and support front-line personnel.** Formal recognition programs, performance feedback methods, and equal reward rules may help boost morale. Small acts of institutional appreciation can mimic the public recognition that interviewees perceived as motivating.

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