

Balancing Authority and Human Dignity: Police Officers' Lived Experiences of Human Rights-Based Policing in Kidapawan City

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Abstract

Introduction: Human rights-based policing promotes lawful enforcement, accountability, and respect for human dignity. However, limited research has examined how police officers experience and apply human rights principles in everyday law enforcement, particularly in local Philippine contexts.

Objective: This study explored the lived experiences of police officers implementing human rights-based policing in Kidapawan City, Philippines.

Methods: Using Husserlian descriptive phenomenology, the study purposively selected 10 police officers with direct experience in public-facing police duties. Data were collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method. Trustworthiness was supported through transcript review, peer validation, documentation of analytical decisions, epoché, and reflexive journaling.

Results: Five experiential dimensions emerged: human rights in daily practice; continuous learning and cultural development; community interaction and accountability; ethical mindset and self-reflection; and balancing enforcement with rights. Participants reported implementing procedural safeguards, engaging in professional development and community relations, and promoting accountability. Challenges included limited resources, unequal training opportunities, justice-system delays, contested allegations, and inconsistent community cooperation.

Conclusions: Human rights-based policing involves balancing law enforcement responsibilities with procedural safeguards, institutional conditions, community relationships, and respect for human dignity. Strengthening this practice requires sustained training, adequate resources, and stronger police-community collaboration. Given the small, purposively selected sample and reliance on self-reported experiences, the findings are context-specific and do not independently verify police compliance or support broader generalization.

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1. Introduction

Human rights, often hailed as the cornerstone of a just society, are intended to guarantee every individual's dignity, freedom, and equality; yet, in many parts of the world, these rights remain elusive. Despite global efforts and widespread acknowledgment of their importance, violations persist at every level of society, casting a long shadow over the promises made by international agreements (Mendes, 2022). Through its Charter, the United Nations explicitly emphasizes promoting and protecting human rights as a core objective, reflecting its commitment to fostering respect for fundamental freedoms across all member states (Yüzel, 2023). Additionally, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN in 1948, set a universal standard for human rights and influenced national constitutions and international treaties (Şener, 2021). However, despite these milestones, implementing human rights protections has faced significant hurdles, as ongoing violations and injustices persist worldwide (Antai et al., 2024).

The 1987 Philippine Constitution provides the fundamental legal foundation for human rights protection in policing, particularly through Article III, or the Bill of Rights, which guarantees due process, equal protection, protection against unreasonable searches and seizures, and other safeguards of individual liberty (Republic of the Philippines, 1987). These protections are further operationalized through Republic Act No. 9745 (Anti-Torture Act of 2009), Republic Act No. 7438, which protects persons arrested, detained, or under custodial investigation, and Republic Act No. 9344, or the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006. Together, these laws establish law enforcement officers' legal responsibilities in protecting the dignity and rights of persons under police authority.

The Constitution also provides for a national police force under the supervision of the National Police Commission, with local executives' authority over police units defined by law (Rillera-Laroya et al., 2022). These provisions reinforce the expectation that public safety and law enforcement should be carried out consistently with constitutional rights and human dignity.

As regional context, the Police Regional Office-12 reported 2,324 crime incidents in Soccsksargen between March and June 2025, representing a 3.61% decrease from the previous period (Turnos, 2025). These figures apply to the entire SOCCSKSARGEN region and do not specifically represent Kidapawan City. They are therefore used only to establish the broader law-enforcement environment in which police officers operate. Within this context, officers may face competing demands to respond effectively to crime while ensuring that enforcement remains fair, lawful, and respectful of human rights.

Existing studies have examined police–community relations, public perceptions, institutional practices, and human rights concerns in policing. However, understanding remains limited regarding how police officers experience and make sense of implementing human rights-based policing in their everyday duties, particularly in Kidapawan City. This gap supports a phenomenological approach, which allows the study to focus on the meanings officers attach to their experiences rather than merely measuring compliance or public perceptions.

The study is anchored in Procedural Justice Theory (Tyler, 1990; Tyler, 2003), which provides a lens for understanding fairness, neutrality, transparency, and respectful treatment in police practice. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) complements this perspective by explaining how professional identity, organizational expectations, and relationships with the community may influence officers' perceptions and decisions. These theories guided the development of the interview questions and provided conceptual support in interpreting the participants' accounts. However, the theories did not determine the findings; the themes emerged from participants' lived experiences using Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method. Thus, phenomenology served as the methodological approach, while the two theories provided supporting conceptual lenses for understanding how officers experience and interpret human rights-based policing.

The study directly contributes to Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16): Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, particularly its emphasis on effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions and access to justice. By documenting police officers' lived experiences, the study can generate context-sensitive insights into the practical realities of human rights-based law enforcement and identify areas to strengthen institutional practices, professional development, and community-police relations. Its findings may be disseminated through national and international scholarly forums, contributing to broader discussions on rights-based policing and evidence-informed approaches to building fair, accountable, and people-centered law enforcement institutions.

Research Questions

This phenomenological study seeks to explore and understand the lived experiences of selected police officers in Kidapawan City in implementing human rights-based policing. It specifically aims to uncover how police officers experience, interpret, and make meaning of their responsibilities, encounters, and challenges in upholding human rights within their daily law enforcement practices. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do police officers describe their lived experiences in implementing human rights-based policing in Kidapawan City?
2. What significant experiences do police officers encounter while balancing law enforcement responsibilities with the principles of human rights-based policing?
3. How do police officers make meaning of the challenges and situations they experience in implementing human rights-based policing?
4. What is the essence of police officers' lived experiences in implementing human rights-based policing in Kidapawan City?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design, specifically Husserlian descriptive phenomenology, to explore police officers' lived experiences of implementing human rights-based policing. The study followed Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method, which is designed to identify and describe the psychological meaning structures of participants' lived experiences through a systematic process of reading the complete description, identifying meaning units, transforming these meaning units into psychologically sensitive expressions, and synthesizing them into a consistent structure of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009). Consistent with the Husserlian orientation, the researchers practiced epoché, or bracketing, throughout the research process. The researchers consciously identified and set aside, as far as possible, their preconceptions, assumptions, and prior knowledge concerning policing and human rights. The researchers maintained reflexive notes to promote awareness of potential researcher influence and keep the analysis grounded in participants' descriptions. The analysis focused exclusively on Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method rather than combining phenomenological analysis with a separate thematic analysis approach. This ensured methodological consistency between the study's phenomenological orientation and its data-analysis procedure. The resulting descriptions and structures were derived from participants' accounts and were intended to capture the essential meaning of their lived experiences of implementing human rights-based policing.

2.2. Respondents and Sampling Procedure

The study involved 10 police officers serving in Kidapawan City, selected through purposive sampling based on their direct experience and involvement in implementing human rights-based policing (Suri, 2011). The participants were selected because their firsthand experiences were considered relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. To be eligible, officers had to be currently serving in a police unit in Kidapawan City, have sufficient experience performing police duties involving public interactions, and be willing to participate voluntarily in an in-depth interview. The study excluded officers who were not actively serving during the data-collection period or who could not provide

informed consent. The researchers conducted recruitment through appropriate institutional channels. Potential participants who met the established criteria were informed about the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Only officers who provided informed consent were included in the final sample. To protect participants from identification, we did not report individual names, badge numbers, specific assignments, or other potentially identifying information. Researchers presented participant characteristics only in aggregate form where relevant. The study focused on the participants' shared experiences rather than on comparisons based on rank, unit, or individual characteristics. The final sample of 10 participants was considered adequate for the phenomenological inquiry because they had direct, relevant experience of the phenomenon being studied and provided sufficiently rich accounts of their lived experiences. Consistent with the study's Husserlian descriptive phenomenological orientation and Giorgi's method, adequacy was determined primarily by the depth and richness of the experiential accounts rather than by statistical representativeness. Purposive participant selection enabled the study to obtain the detailed descriptions needed to identify the essential meaning structure of implementing human rights-based policing.

2.3. Data Collection

In accordance with the approved institutional research protocol and standard data collection procedures. As a first step, the interview questions were developed and patterned on the study's theoretical foundations, research objectives, and the specific needs and experiences of the target population, police officers implementing human rights-based policing. Qualified reviewers then critically validated the initial interview guide for content, relevance, clarity, appropriateness, and alignment with the research questions before it was used for data collection. The researchers incorporated necessary revisions based on the validation results. After validation of the interview guide, the researchers secured the necessary permission from the appropriate authorities before approaching qualified participants. Before the interviews, the researchers explained the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality measures, and participants' right to withdraw, and obtained informed consent from all participants. Data were collected through individual, semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face with 10 purposively selected police officers. Interviews were conducted in a private and appropriate setting to provide participants with sufficient comfort and confidentiality. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and followed the critically validated semi-structured interview guide.

With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate capture of their responses. The recordings were transcribed verbatim after each interview. Interviews were conducted in Cebuano and English, depending on the participants' preferred language and the natural flow of the conversation. Cebuano responses included in the manuscript were translated into English while retaining their original meaning and context. The researchers carefully checked the translations against the original Cebuano statements to minimize loss or alteration of meaning. No formal follow-up interviews were conducted after the initial interviews. The researchers maintained field and reflexive notes during and immediately after the interviews to document relevant contextual observations, nonverbal cues, reflections, and methodological considerations. These notes served as supplementary material to support contextual understanding and researcher reflexivity during analysis. The research team handled all interview recordings, transcripts, consent documents, and related research materials confidentially. Participants were assigned codes rather than identified by name. Digital files were stored in a password-protected, access-restricted storage system accessible only to the authorized research team. Researchers separated identifying information from the interview data, and managed and retained all research materials in accordance with the institution's approved data-management, ethical, and confidentiality policies.

2.4. Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed manually following Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method, consistent with the study's Husserlian phenomenological orientation. The researchers first read the transcripts several times to obtain a holistic understanding of the participants' accounts. The

researchers then identified relevant meaning units, examined them in relation to the phenomenon under investigation, and transformed them into psychologically and contextually sensitive expressions. These meaning units were subsequently synthesized to identify the essential structure of the participants' lived experiences of implementing human rights-based policing. Artificial intelligence (AI) tools, specifically Gemini, ChatGPT, and Claude, were used only as supplementary aids during the analytic process. Their use was limited to providing possible patterns or preliminary thematic directions to help the researchers organize and examine the large volume of textual data. AI-generated suggestions were not treated as findings, final themes, or independent interpretations. The researchers critically evaluated all suggestions generated by the AI tools against the original transcripts and the study's phenomenological objectives. The final interpretation remained the responsibility of the researchers and was based on human judgment, contextual understanding, methodological rigor, and careful consideration of the participants' actual statements. AI outputs were therefore treated only as exploratory prompts and were accepted, modified, or rejected based on the researchers' critical assessment of the data. This process ensured that the participants' lived experiences, rather than automated outputs, remained the primary basis of the findings. To strengthen the credibility and consistency of the analysis, John Rowuel Palabrica, Doctor of Business Management; Maria Fe Doong, Master in English; and Beatriz D. Gosadan, Doctor of Education, reviewed and cross-checked the manually derived findings and interpretations. Their review provided an additional critical examination of the emerging interpretations and helped identify inconsistencies, unsupported interpretations, or possible researcher bias. The research team, however, made the final analytical decisions and grounded them in the participants' original narratives. The researchers used AI ethically and transparently, with AI serving only as a supplementary research aid and not as a substitute for the researchers' analytical judgment. The researchers retained full responsibility for the accuracy, interpretation, and presentation of the study findings.

2.5 Trustworthiness

The study ensured trustworthiness through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was supported by the critical content validation of the interview guide, repeated review of the transcripts, and peer review of the emerging interpretations by John Rowuel Palabrica, Maria Fe Doong, and Beatriz D. Gosadan. Member checking was not used because the study followed Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method. The researchers maintained dependability through a documented research process, including records of data collection, transcription, analysis, and analytical decisions. Confirmability was supported through bracketing and reflexive journaling, which helped the researchers recognize and manage their assumptions. AI tools were used only to suggest possible patterns and were not used to determine or finalize the findings; the researchers critically examined and decided all interpretations. The researchers addressed transferability by providing sufficient contextual description of the participants, setting, and phenomenon so readers can assess the relevance of the findings to similar contexts. Overall, the findings were grounded in the participants' accounts and subjected to systematic human review and critical judgment.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The Central Mindanao Colleges - Institutional Ethics Review Board reviewed and approved the study under CMC-IERB 2025-04-014. The study was conducted in accordance with the approved research protocol and applicable institutional ethical standards. Before participation, each police officer was informed of the study's purpose, procedures, confidentiality measures, and voluntary nature. The researchers obtained written informed consent before the interview. Participants were informed that they could decline to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or effect on their employment or professional standing. Given the hierarchical structure of police organizations, the researchers obtained permission through institutional channels. However, participation was voluntary and was not dependent on the recommendation or approval of a superior officer. The researchers emphasized that participation was an individual decision and that participants could provide honest responses without fear of administrative or professional consequences. To protect confidentiality, participants were identified by code rather than name. Specific station affiliations, assignments, badge numbers, and other details that could reasonably identify individual officers were excluded or reported only in aggregate form. Interview recordings, transcripts, consent documents, and

related files were stored in password-protected, access-restricted storage and were accessible only to authorized members of the research team. Identifying information was kept separate from the research data and will be retained and securely disposed of in accordance with institutional data-retention and privacy policies. The study was reported in line with the COREQ (Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research) guidelines to promote transparency and completeness in qualitative research reporting. The completed COREQ checklist is provided as a supplementary document alongside the revised manuscript.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Lived Experiences of Police Officers in Implementing Human Rights-Based Policing

The phenomenological analysis revealed that police officers in Kidapawan City experience human rights-based policing as an integral part of everyday law enforcement rather than as a separate or additional responsibility. Participants described their experiences through the routine application of human rights protocols, ongoing professional development, community engagement, ethical reflection, and the need to balance enforcement responsibilities with protecting individual rights. Across their narratives, human rights-based policing emerged as a practice shaped by organizational rules, legal requirements, professional values, and direct encounters with community members. Five interconnected experiential dimensions were identified: (1) human rights embedded in daily practice, (2) continuous learning and cultural development, (3) community interaction and accountability, (4) ethical mindset and self-reflection, and (5) balancing enforcement with rights. These dimensions describe how participants experience the phenomenon within their everyday professional roles.

Table 1. Research Questions, Themes, and Representative Quotations

Research Question	Theme	Representative Quotation
RQ1: Lived experiences implementing human rights-based policing	Human rights embedded in daily practice	"We always follow Miranda Rights and Human Rights protocols before making an arrest..." (IDI_P4)
RQ1	Continuous learning and cultural development	"All police officers undergo seminars on human rights." (IDI_P5)
RQ1	Community interaction and accountability	"Civilians and PNP work together... civilians are more understanding." (IDI_P3)
RQ1	Ethical mindset and self-reflection	"Human rights are not a hindrance... officers can perform duties while respecting rights." (IDI_P6 and P8)
RQ1	Balancing enforcement with rights	"Some actions are restricted by human rights depending on the situation." (IDI_P7 and P10)
RQ2: Significant experiences balancing enforcement and rights	Procedural accountability as a basis for decision-making	"During arrest... observe Miranda rights... [so that the person being handcuffed is not hurt]." (IDI_P7)
RQ2	Institutional support and professional development	"Continuous learning about human rights is crucial... laws and policies evolve..." (IDI_P3 and P5)
RQ2	Operational constraints and resource limitations	"Sometimes we lack the basic facilities...so it becomes difficult to provide the conditions..." (IDI_P5)
RQ3: Meaning-making of challenges	Justice-system constraints as professional tension	"Juvenile Justice Act has a slow process... technicalities lead to acquittals." (IDI_P4 and P6)
RQ3	Public scrutiny, contested claims, and the need for evidence	"Body-worn cameras help because they serve as evidence and protection whenever actions are questioned..." (IDI_P4, P8, and P10)

RQ3	Community cooperation as a condition for effective policing	“Unity with the community... train barangay officials... encourage reporting...” (IDI_P4 and P7)
RQ4: Essence of the lived experience	Continuous balancing of authority, responsibility, and human dignity	Synthesized across all participants; see the Essence subsection.

3.2. Human Rights Embedded in Daily Practice

Participants consistently described human rights as embedded in routine police procedures, particularly during arrest, detention, and complaint handling. Rather than describing human rights as an abstract legal principle, officers referred to concrete practices through which they attempt to protect the rights and dignity of persons under police custody.

Participant 2 explained:

“We coordinate with the Human Rights Office when inmates have complaints... documented and monitored.” (IDI_P2)

Similarly, Participant 4 stated:

“We always follow Miranda Rights and Human Rights protocols before making an arrest... right to medical attention...” (IDI_P4)

These accounts suggest that participants experience human rights-based policing through procedural safeguards, documentation, coordination, and attention to the welfare of persons under police authority. Their narratives indicate that compliance with established procedures gives officers a practical structure for decision-making in situations where exercising police authority directly affects individual liberty. This finding aligns with Martin (2022), who explained that human rights become meaningful in policing when officers incorporate them into their everyday routines and sense-making practices. From this perspective, human rights-based policing is not implemented solely through formal policies; it becomes operational through repeated professional practices and interpretations of situations encountered in the field. The participants' experiences therefore indicate that implementing human rights is perceived as part of competent policing. Rights protection is not necessarily seen as contrary to law enforcement effectiveness; rather, procedural compliance gives officers a framework for exercising authority legitimately and responsibly.

3.3. Continuous Learning and Cultural Development

Participants also described human rights-based policing as an ongoing learning process. They described seminars, meetings, online sessions, and other forms of institutional reinforcement as important mechanisms for maintaining awareness of human rights standards and adapting to changes in laws, policies, and social expectations.

Participants 2, 4, and 5 shared:

“Every month and sometimes weekly, we hold Zoom meetings on human rights.” (IDI_P2, P4, and P5)

Participants 5 and 10 similarly stated:

“All police officers undergo seminars on human rights.” (IDI_P5 and P10)

These experiences demonstrate that participants perceive human rights competence as something that must be continuously developed. The narratives also suggest that learning extends beyond formal classroom-based training. Officers use organizational meetings, peer discussions, and experience-sharing to reinforce their understanding of appropriate conduct. This finding supports Sharma and Azad (2023), who emphasized that effective policing requires knowledge, skills, and attitudes that promote respect for human rights. It also suggests that organizational culture plays an important role in sustaining rights-based practices. When human rights principles are repeatedly discussed and reinforced, they become more likely to influence everyday professional judgment. However, the participants' accounts also reveal a tension between the institutional expectation of

continuous learning and the actual accessibility of training opportunities. This tension becomes more visible in their accounts of significant experiences and challenges, discussed in the succeeding sections.

3.4. Community Interaction and Accountability

Participants described their experiences of human rights-based policing as closely connected with interactions with civilians. Community engagement was viewed not only as a crime-prevention strategy but also as a way to strengthen understanding, cooperation, and accountability between police officers and citizens.

Participant 3 stated:

“Civilians and PNP work together... civilians are more understanding.” (IDI_P3)

Participants 4 and 7 added:

“Body-worn camera ensures transparency... protects us when public videos are incomplete.” (IDI_P4 and P7)

These narratives indicate that participants experience accountability as reciprocal. Police officers describe recognizing the need to explain and document their actions, while community cooperation is perceived as necessary for effective law enforcement. Participants experienced body-worn cameras, in particular, as a mechanism that can provide a documentary record of police encounters; such footage supports accountability but, as with any recording, does not by itself constitute a complete or neutral account of an encounter.

The finding highlights the importance of positive police–community relations in strengthening public trust and confidence. This is consistent with Labata (2024), who found that community engagement, cooperation, police visibility, and transparent communication contribute to positive perceptions of the police and greater public confidence. Wang et al. (2023) also support this finding, noting that perceptions of police effectiveness, competence, and trustworthiness influence public confidence in policing. Thus, Wang et al. (2023) provide supporting evidence, while Labata (2024) offers a more directly aligned Philippine context for the present finding. Similarly, Andrade et al. (2024) reported support for body-worn cameras as a way to enhance transparency and public confidence.

From a phenomenological perspective, however, these practices matter beyond their technical function. Participants experience documentation and transparency as forms of professional protection and institutional accountability. Thus, accountability is experienced not simply as an external requirement imposed on officers but as part of navigating the relationship between police authority and public perception.

3.5. Ethical Mindset and Self-Reflection

Another important dimension of participants' lived experience was developing an ethical mindset. Officers described human rights as connected to personal morality, professional discipline, and an awareness of the consequences of their decisions.

Participant 1 expressed:

“Every person has rights... You learn what is right and wrong. Do what is right — moral grounding.” (IDI_P1)

Participant 6 similarly stated:

“Human rights are not a hindrance... officers can perform duties while respecting rights.” (IDI_P6)

These accounts suggest that participants do not necessarily experience human rights as an obstacle to law enforcement. Instead, they interpret rights protection as compatible with fulfilling police responsibilities. Their narratives emphasize moral judgment, self-regulation, and professional accountability. This finding is consistent with Banatao et al. (2024), who emphasized the importance of

ethical education in reducing police misconduct and strengthening professional behavior. The participants' experiences suggest that formal rules become more meaningful when accompanied by an internalized ethical orientation. The phenomenological significance of this finding lies in the way officers understand themselves as both enforcers of the law and protectors of human dignity. Their professional identity is therefore not limited to apprehending offenders; it also involves judging how authority should be exercised.

3.6. Balancing Enforcement with Rights

The most prominent tension in participants' experiences concerns the simultaneous demands of law enforcement and rights protection. Officers are expected to maintain peace and order, apprehend suspects, and enforce the law while avoiding coercion, abuse, and unnecessary force.

Participants 6 and 8 stated:

"Cannot force confession... no coercion." (IDI_P6 and P8)

Participants 7 and 10 explained:

"Some actions are restricted by human rights depending on the situation." (IDI_P7 and P10)

These accounts reveal that officers experience human rights-based policing as a process of negotiating professional authority. The officers must determine what actions are legally and ethically permissible while responding to situations that may require immediate intervention. This finding matters because it shows that human rights-based policing is not a simple application of rules. Instead, officers must interpret rules within specific circumstances. The practical meaning of human rights therefore emerges through decision-making, situational judgment, and professional responsibility.

Overall, the participants' lived experiences show that human rights-based policing is an ongoing process of integrating legal compliance, ethical judgment, institutional learning, community accountability, and operational decision-making. This finding provides the foundation for understanding the significant experiences through which officers negotiate the demands of law enforcement and human rights. Because these accounts are entirely self-reported, they describe how officers present and interpret their own conduct rather than independently verified behavior; participants may understandably emphasize compliance and downplay difficulty, particularly on a topic as reputationally sensitive as human rights practice, and this possibility is discussed further below and in the Limitations section.

3.7. Significant Experiences in Balancing Law Enforcement Responsibilities and Human Rights

The second research question examined the significant experiences police officers encountered while balancing law enforcement responsibilities with human rights principles. The narratives indicate that this balance is shaped by both enabling experiences and constraining circumstances. Three particularly significant experiential conditions emerged from the narratives: procedural accountability, institutional support and learning, and operational constraints involving resources, legal processes, public scrutiny, and community cooperation.

3.8. Procedural Accountability as a Basis for Professional Decision-Making

Participants described established procedures as important safeguards when exercising police authority. Compliance with Miranda rights, medical examinations, documentation, and other procedural requirements guides officers in arrests and detention.

Participants 2 and 5 noted:

"Mga SOP... para dili ma-violate ilang rights... bago i-lock up i-agi ug medical exam." [We follow standard operating procedures so that their rights are not violated... before locking someone up, they go through a medical exam. Author note: verify this translation for accuracy.] (IDI_P2 and P5)

Participants 7 and 10 similarly stated:

"During arrest... observe Miranda rights... dili masakitan ang gipusasan." [...so that the person being handcuffed is not hurt. Author note: verify this translation for accuracy.] (IDI_P7 and P10)

These accounts show that procedural safeguards are experienced as both obligations and practical guides. Officers see adherence to procedure as necessary to protect arrested persons while also reducing the risk of complaints, procedural violations, and compromised cases. This finding is consistent with Flores et al. (2021), who emphasized the importance of clear, enforceable policies in regulating police conduct and strengthening public trust. In the context of the present study, procedural discipline appears to function as an important mechanism through which officers translate human rights principles into operational behavior.

3.9. Institutional Support and Professional Development

Training and institutional reinforcement also helped participants navigate human rights requirements. Officers described seminars, meetings, and internal discussions as opportunities to strengthen their understanding of changing laws and policies.

Participants 3 and 5 stated:

“Continuous learning about human rights is crucial... laws and policies evolve... seminars help strengthen discipline and professionalism.” (IDI_P3 and P5)

This experience demonstrates that officers recognize the dynamic nature of human rights-based policing. Legal requirements and social expectations may change, requiring officers to continuously update their knowledge and professional practices.

At the same time, participants reported that training opportunities were not always equally accessible.

Participant 1 explained:

“We also conduct open forums... Experience is more important... communication.” (IDI_P1)

The use of internal forums and peer learning suggests that officers develop informal mechanisms to compensate for limited access to formal training. This finding supports Pastrana and Martir (2024), who emphasized the importance of equitable access to training and the need for development programs responsive to the diverse roles of police personnel.

3.10. Operational Constraints and Resource Limitations

Participants also described situations in which limited facilities and resources affected the implementation of humane and rights-based practices.

Participant 5 shared,

“Sometimes we lack the basic facilities that should be available for persons in custody, so it becomes difficult to provide the conditions that they are supposed to receive.” (IDI_P5)

Similarly, Participant 8 stated,

“We try to follow the proper procedures, but there are times when the available facilities and resources are not enough to meet all their needs.” (IDI_P8)

These experiences matter because human rights protection depends not only on officers' intentions but also on the material conditions under which policing occurs. When facilities and basic resources are inadequate, officers may struggle to translate rights principles into appropriate custody conditions. This observation aligns with Saguran et al. (2023), who identified sanitation problems, overcrowding, inadequate sleeping conditions, insufficient food, and other facility-related concerns among the challenges experienced by persons deprived of liberty. Thus, the participants' experiences show that human rights-based policing partly depends on institutional capacity. Ethical commitment alone cannot fully compensate for inadequate infrastructure, equipment, and resources.

3.11. Meaning-Making of Challenges in Implementing Human Rights-Based Policing

The third research question focused on how police officers make meaning of the challenges they encounter. The narratives demonstrate that participants do not simply describe these challenges as barriers. Rather, they interpret them as conditions that require adaptation, documentation, professional judgment, and stronger collaboration. Five interconnected challenges were identified: resource limitations, unequal access to training, justice-system constraints, public scrutiny and contested claims, and dependence on community cooperation.

3.12. Resource Limitations as Institutional Constraints

Participants understood inadequate facilities and basic resources as constraints that can affect the humane treatment of persons in police custody. They therefore did not necessarily interpret the problem as a lack of commitment to human rights, but as a limitation in institutional capacity. This distinction is important. Participants' narratives suggest that officers may recognize the standards expected of them while also struggling to meet those standards because of resource limitations. Human rights-based policing, therefore, requires not only individual compliance but also institutional investment. This challenge therefore reflects shared institutional responsibility: officers may be responsible for implementing rights-based practices, but agencies must provide the resources needed to make those practices feasible.

3.13. Training Gaps as a Need for Continuous Professional Learning

Participants viewed limited access to training as a challenge because human rights requirements evolve and require continuing professional knowledge. Rather than rejecting training, officers expressed a desire for broader and more consistent opportunities to learn. Participant 3's observation that laws and policies evolve demonstrates that human rights competence is understood as a continuing professional responsibility. This finding indicates that training is meaningful to officers not merely as compliance with organizational requirements but as a mechanism for developing confidence and competence in difficult operational situations. Consequently, training accessibility becomes an institutional condition for effective rights-based policing.

3.14. Justice-System Constraints as a Source of Professional Tension

Participants also described procedural requirements and perceived delays in the justice system as difficult aspects of their work.

Participants 1 and 2 stated:

"If you violate legal procedures, the case could be dismissed." (IDI_P1 and P2)

Participants 4 and 6 added:

"Juvenile Justice Act has a slow process... minors cannot be charged... technicalities lead to acquittals." (IDI_P4 and P6)

These accounts reveal a complex meaning attached to procedural safeguards. On one hand, officers recognize that legal procedures protect individual rights and are necessary for legitimate prosecution. On the other hand, they may experience these same procedures as operational constraints when cases do not progress as expected.

Participant 6's characterization that "minors cannot be charged" simplifies the framework of Republic Act No. 9344, the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006, which exempts children below the age of criminal responsibility from criminal liability and directs children in conflict with the law toward diversion and intervention programs rather than eliminating accountability altogether; this distinction is reported here as the participant's own understanding of the process, not as an authoritative statement of the law.

This tension is important for understanding the phenomenon. Participants appear to negotiate between the immediate expectations of law enforcement and the procedural demands of a rights-protective justice system. Rather than interpreting human rights solely as a limitation, their narratives reveal an ongoing effort to reconcile procedural legitimacy with enforcement effectiveness.

3.15. Public Scrutiny, Contested Claims, and the Need for Evidence

Participants also described public perception as a significant aspect of their professional experience. Officers reported situations in which their actions were questioned or interpreted negatively, particularly when incidents were recorded or circulated through social media.

Participants 4, 8, and 10 explained:

“Body-worn cameras help because they serve as evidence and protection whenever actions are questioned.”
(IDI_P4, P8, and P10)

Participants 1 and 7 similarly stated:

“Some suspects create scenarios... we do medical check-ups before detention... medical certificate protects us.”
(IDI_P1 and P7)

These narratives show that documentation is interpreted as accountability and professional protection. Body-worn cameras and medical documentation are perceived as mechanisms that can establish an evidentiary record when accounts of an encounter differ. Andrade et al. (2024) likewise reported that body-worn cameras can support transparency and public trust. Mabanglo (2023) further identified their value in documenting police operations and strengthening the evidentiary basis of law enforcement activities. However, the phenomenological meaning extends beyond technology itself. Officers experience public scrutiny as part of the contemporary reality of policing, particularly in an environment where encounters can rapidly become visible online. Consequently, transparency is experienced simultaneously as accountability, evidence, and protection of professional credibility.

3.16. Community Cooperation as a Condition for Effective Policing

Participants also viewed community cooperation as essential to effective rights-based policing.

Participants 4 and 7 stated:

“Unity with the community... train barangay officials... encourage reporting... coordination helped solve cases.”
(IDI_P4 and P7)

Participants 6 and 9 similarly explained:

“Police need the community... community is first responders... community-service-oriented policing... barangay coordination.” (IDI_P6 and P9)

These narratives indicate that participants understand policing as relational rather than purely institutional. Effective enforcement depends partly on citizens' willingness to communicate, report incidents, cooperate with investigations, and participate in community-based initiatives. Macabeo (2022) emphasized the importance of police-community engagement in addressing human rights concerns and strengthening mutual understanding. The present findings reinforce this perspective by showing that officers themselves view community cooperation as a necessary condition for effective, rights-oriented policing. Taken together, the challenges do not simply represent obstacles encountered by individual officers. They reveal institutional, procedural, relational, and resource conditions that shape how human rights-based policing is experienced and enacted.

3.17. Essence of the Lived Experience of Human Rights-Based Policing

The fourth research question sought to determine the essence of police officers' lived experiences in implementing human rights-based policing. Across the participants' narratives, the essence of the phenomenon may be understood as the continuous negotiation between exercising legitimate police authority and protecting the dignity and rights of the people they serve. Participants did

not generally portray human rights as incompatible with effective law enforcement. Instead, their narratives show that rights-based policing is a professional obligation that requires continuous awareness, procedural discipline, ethical judgment, institutional support, and community engagement, noting that not all narratives were uniformly affirming. Participant 7's statement that "some actions are restricted by human rights depending on the situation" and Participant 6's description of the Juvenile Justice Act process as slow reflect a degree of tension with, rather than uncomplicated endorsement of, human rights procedures; these divergent accounts are treated here as part of the phenomenon rather than set aside, and they suggest that officers' support for human rights principles coexists with situational frustration about procedural constraints. More broadly, because nearly all participants described themselves as compliant and supportive of human rights principles, and because these are self-reports on a professionally and reputationally sensitive topic, the possibility of social-desirability bias and institutional loyalty shaping participants' accounts cannot be ruled out; this study reports what participants described experiencing, not an independent audit of their conduct (see Limitations).

3.18. The essence of this experience can be expressed through five interconnected meanings:

First, human rights are experienced as an everyday professional responsibility. Officers incorporate rights principles into arrests, detention, documentation, and interactions with civilians. Human rights therefore become meaningful through routine practice rather than through abstract knowledge alone. Second, human rights-based policing is experienced as a continuing process of learning and adaptation. Participants recognize that laws, policies, technologies, and community expectations change. Continuous training and institutional reinforcement therefore become necessary for maintaining professional competence. Third, rights-based policing is experienced as a negotiation of authority. Officers must exercise lawful authority while recognizing the limits imposed by constitutional rights and procedural safeguards. The participants' narratives demonstrate that effective policing involves not only knowing when to act but also knowing what actions are legally and ethically impermissible. Fourth, accountability is experienced as both institutional responsibility and professional protection. Documentation, body-worn cameras, medical examinations, and procedural compliance are seen as mechanisms that protect civilians' rights while also providing evidence that can establish the legitimacy of police actions. Finally, human rights-based policing is experienced as relational and community-dependent. Officers recognize that maintaining public safety requires cooperation with citizens, barangay officials, and other stakeholders. Trust is therefore not simply an outcome of policing but also a condition that enables effective policing.

From a phenomenological perspective, these meanings converge into a central experiential structure: police officers experience human rights-based policing as a continual balancing of authority, responsibility, and human dignity within the realities of everyday law enforcement. The phenomenon is therefore neither limited to compliance with legal procedures nor reducible to the challenges officers encounter. It is an ongoing professional process through which officers interpret rules, exercise judgment, respond to community expectations, manage institutional limitations, and attempt to protect human dignity while fulfilling their mandate to maintain peace and order.

This interpretation aligns with Procedural Justice Theory, which emphasizes fairness, transparency, neutrality, and respectful treatment in shaping perceptions of legitimate authority. It also complements Social Identity Theory by highlighting the role of professional identity and community relationships in shaping officers' interpretations and behaviors. The participants' narratives suggest that officers' understanding of themselves as both law enforcers and public servants influences how they negotiate situations involving competing demands.

The findings further support the broader objectives of Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), particularly the promotion of accountable, effective, and inclusive institutions. Rights-based policing contributes to this objective when police authority is exercised within a framework of legality, accountability, transparency, and respect for human dignity.

The findings across the four research questions reveal that human rights-based policing in Kidapawan City is best understood as a lived professional practice rather than merely a set of institutional rules. The participants' experiences demonstrate that implementation occurs through the interaction of individual ethical commitments, procedural requirements, organizational support, material resources, community relationships, and the broader justice system.

The officers' commitment to human rights provides the foundation for implementation; their significant experiences reveal the practical situations in which this commitment is tested; their meaning-making explains how they interpret and respond to these situations; and the essence of their experiences demonstrates the underlying process of balancing police authority with human dignity. Accordingly, the findings suggest that strengthening human rights-based policing requires interventions at multiple levels. At the individual level, continuing professional and ethical development should strengthen officers' knowledge, judgment, and reflective capacity. At the organizational level, adequate training, equipment, detention facilities, documentation systems, and institutional support are necessary. At the system level, coordination among law enforcement, justice institutions, and community stakeholders is essential. At the community level, sustained police-community engagement can promote mutual understanding, accountability, and trust. Rather than viewing human rights as a constraint on police effectiveness, the findings suggest that human rights can function as a foundation for legitimate, accountable, and community-centered policing. When police exercise authority fairly and transparently, protecting human dignity and effectively performing law enforcement responsibilities can become mutually reinforcing rather than competing objectives.

4. Conclusion

Based on the phenomenological findings, this study concludes that participating police officers in Kidapawan City describe human rights-based policing as an everyday professional responsibility requiring continuous negotiation of law enforcement authority, procedural obligations, ethical judgment, and respect for human dignity. In their accounts, human rights are not merely external legal requirements but principles incorporated into routine police practice, particularly during arrest, detention, documentation, and interactions with community members. Participants' experiences point to institutional conditions that, in their view, shape this balance: established procedures, continuing training, documentation mechanisms, and institutional guidance support rights-based practice, while limited resources, unequal access to training, procedural complexities within the justice system, public scrutiny, and varying community cooperation constrain it. The study's contribution lies in documenting how individual officers in this setting experience and interpret this balance, complementing institutional and public-facing research on police human rights compliance with an officer-centered phenomenological account, and extending Procedural Justice Theory and Social Identity Theory to this local context. These conclusions are drawn from the self-reported accounts of a small, self-selected group of officers from one city and were not independently verified against observation, documentary evidence, or civilian and detainee perspectives; they describe how these particular participants experienced and made sense of human-rights-based policing, not a verified assessment of institutional compliance, and should not be generalized beyond this setting (see Limitations).

5. Recommendations

Based on the participants' accounts, the following recommendations are proposed as directions informed by the study's findings rather than independently validated policy prescriptions. PNP station and regional leadership should sustain and expand access to human-rights training across ranks and units while promoting equitable training opportunities. The PNP Human Rights Affairs Office may strengthen coordination in complaint documentation, monitoring, and feedback on case resolution. The Local Government of Kidapawan City may support improvements in detention-facility infrastructure and equipment, while detention-facility administrators should ensure consistent medical examination and documentation procedures for persons in custody. Training institutions are encouraged to adopt case-based and scenario-driven human-rights training that develops situational judgment alongside

knowledge of legal requirements. Community and barangay partners may strengthen formal police-community coordination, training, and accessible reporting mechanisms, while complaint-handling bodies should promote fair, independent, accessible, and transparent mechanisms that protect both complainants and police officers. Future researchers should complement officer-centered accounts with observational, documentary, civilian, or detainee perspectives and consider larger, multi-site studies to assess the transferability of findings. Overall, the study contributes to Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) by providing an officer-centered account of how accountable and rights-respecting policing is experienced within a Philippine local context.

6. Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. The study involved a small, purposively selected sample from a single city and apparently a single police station or unit, limiting the transferability of the findings to settings with different institutional and community conditions. Self-selection may have favored officers who were more confident in or positively disposed toward their human-rights practices, while social-desirability and institutional-loyalty biases may have encouraged participants to emphasize compliance over challenges. Because the study relied exclusively on police officers' self-reported accounts, without observational, documentary, civilian, or detainee data, reported practices, accountability, community trust, and humane treatment cannot be independently verified and should be understood as participants' perceptions rather than evidence of institutional compliance or stakeholder experiences. Participants' positions within a hierarchical organization may also have influenced their willingness to disclose critical experiences, particularly where recruitment involved a superior. In addition, some interviews were conducted in Cebuano and translated into English, which may have resulted in nuances of meaning being lost or altered; the translation procedure should therefore be transparently documented. Finally, researcher positionality, including prior assumptions and relationships with participating institutions, may have influenced data collection and interpretation. Accordingly, the findings should be viewed as one perspective on human rights-based policing and not as a comprehensive representation of policing practices or experiences in Kidapawan City.

Supplementary Details

Supplementary Materials & Data availability statement (If Applicable):

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly available due to privacy and confidentiality restrictions, as they contain information that could compromise the anonymity of the research participants.

Author Contributions:

All authors were responsible for the conceptualization and design of the study, development and validation of the research instrument, data collection and analysis, interpretation of findings, and preparation and revision of the manuscript. The authors also reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and accepted responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of the work.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards for educational research. Necessary permissions were secured from the concerned educational authorities and participating schools prior to the conduct of the study.

Informed Consent Statement:

The study adhered to ethical standards in research involving human participants. Prior to data collection, participants were provided with a comprehensive informed consent form detailing the purpose of the

study, procedures, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality measures, and their rights, including voluntary participation and the option to withdraw at any time without

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Conflicts of Interest:

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Disclosure Statement:

The authors used Grammarly only for language editing. No AI tools were used in the data analysis or in generating the study's results. The authors reviewed and validated all content and take full responsibility for the article's accuracy, originality, and integrity.

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