

Beyond the Gates: Voices of Residents on Public Safety and Security

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to explore the residents lived experiences and perceptions. Participants were purposively selected and interviewed through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The gathered data were transcribed and analyzed thematically through systematic coding and categorization to identify core themes. The study pursued three main inquiries: lived experiences, strategies employed by local authorities, and insights shared by the participants regarding the benefits and challenges experienced by communities. Based on the understanding the lived experiences it revealed that residents experienced incidents of theft, disturbances, and poor lighting but responded through collective vigilance and cooperation. Concerning the strategies employed by the residents showed that participants viewed patrol visibility, curfew enforcement, and surveillance systems as effective but inconsistently implemented. Regarding the insights shared by the participants, residents emphasized the need for consistent enforcement, stronger community engagement, and infrastructure improvement to maintain public safety.

Keywords: education, sociology, safety and security, phenomenology, community vigilance, Davao City, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Tagum City, the capital of Davao del Norte, continues to grow economically and culturally, establishing itself as one of Mindanao's emerging urban centers. However, this rapid development has been accompanied by mounting concerns over public safety and security, prompting both official and public alarm. Following a recent spate of senseless killings in 2023, the provincial Governor of Davao del Norte called for a direct investigation, while the City Mayor requested an augmentation of police personnel to address the crime problem (Jubahib, 2023; Uy, 2023). This official concern aligns with reports that the city's crime rate has fluctuated significantly over the past three years (Numbeo, 2024), suggesting inconsistencies in peace and order that directly impact daily life.

In Southeast Asia, residents fear of crime in residential areas has been attributed to factors like poor lighting, high population density, and the increased presence of gangs (Sakip et al., 2016). Similarly, a study in Surabaya, Indonesia found that crowding and territoriality within urban areas have made residents feel vulnerable to crime, especially in high-density neighborhoods (Wibowo, 2019). More recent studies support these findings. For instance, Putra et al. (2023) explored how urban spatial configuration and public space accessibility influence residents sense of insecurity in Indonesia, with poor design contributing to heightened fear. In Malaysia, Samat et al. (2024) examined how inequality and economic disparities in urban and peri urban neighborhoods of Penang have led to higher perceptions of crime and insecurity. These findings align with broader regional trends where rapid urbanization, poverty, and inadequate law enforcement contribute to growing feelings of insecurity.

In the Philippines, concerns about public safety and security continue to have significant social and economic implications, particularly in urban areas. A study conducted in Metro Manila by Canare et al. (2019) highlighted that fear of crime significantly influences residents' daily behaviors. The study found that individuals with a heightened emotional fear of crime were less likely to engage in behaviors such as saving money, indicating how fear of crime extends beyond physical safety and affects economic decision-making. Similarly, research by Briones and Ng (2022) explored the role of environmental design in crime prevention, noting that poor urban planning and inadequate public spaces contribute to feelings of insecurity. Residents in poorly lit areas with high crime rates often report greater fear, which weakens community cohesion and informal social control.

A report by Mindanao Times (2024) highlighted a critical incident in Barangay Magugpo East, Tagum City, where a security guard fatally stabbed two women in a boarding house. Responding police officers shot and killed the suspect, but also fatally injured another civilian, who was allegedly attempting to assist the victims. This event prompted an investigation by the Regional Internal Affairs Service XI into the conduct of the police officers involved. The incident drew public scrutiny regarding the protocols of law enforcement during emergency responses and raised broader concerns about safety and accountability in Tagum City. Residents of the area expressed heightened fear of crime and insecurity, particularly as they felt uncertain about the police response protocols and the use of force in critical situations.

Public safety concerns in Barangay La Filipina, Tagum City intensified after a widely reported case in July 2025, in which a 19-year-old student was found dead inside her home with multiple stab wounds, and investigators initially treated robbery as a possible motive (GMA Integrated News, 2025; MindaNews, 2025; Manila Bulletin, 2025). Reports noted that the incident involved an alleged break-in and that suspects were later apprehended in connection with the case (GMA Integrated News, 2025; MindaNews, 2025). Beyond the tragedy of this single case, incidents like this illustrate how community safety can be shaped by the convergence of property crime and violent crime, especially in residential settings where offenders exploit opportunity and limited guardianship (Felson & Eckert, 2019; Andresen & Ha, 2017). Practical problem-oriented literature also emphasizes that home-invasion/robbery incidents often escalate quickly and require both enforcement and prevention responses.

Previous studies exploring community safety and security predominantly used quantitative methods to measure perceptions, patterns of crime, or effectiveness of law enforcement initiatives. While these studies contributed valuable data, they often fell short in capturing the depth and complexity of residents' day-to-day experiences. For instance, local research in Tagum City has traditionally focused on quantitative assessments of Four Pillars of public safety: national security, border strategy, counter-crime, and emergency management, which provide a structured but standardized view of citizen perception (Marco et al., 2022). Furthermore, quantitative trends in public perception often reveal a mixed reality where fear of walking the streets or burglary remains high despite official statistics, suggesting that victims and non-victims perceive safety through vastly different lenses (Panganoron Jr., 2015). Given this gap, there is a growing recognition of the need for more qualitative research, as phenomenological approaches are essential to capture the collaborative synergy and trust-building dynamics between residents and local peacekeeping teams that numbers alone cannot explain (Aragon et al., 2025).

In this research study, the focus was on the residents of Tagum City. The purpose is to understand their lived experiences in terms of safety and security. By employing a qualitative approach, this study aimed to uncover the nuanced realities behind residents' perceptions, coping strategies, and interactions with local safety initiatives. The findings offered meaningful insights and practical recommendations for residents, local program implementers, students, and future researchers. Furthermore, this study is closely aligned with United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. Specifically, it contributes to the target of creating safe, resilient, and inclusive urban environments where all citizens, regardless of background, can live without fear of violence or insecurity. By highlighting the human face of security, this research supports the development of more empathetic and community-centered urban policies.

The results of this study will be disseminated to the Purok Leaders and Barangay Officials of Tagum City who are directly involved in maintaining peace and order at the community level. The findings will also be formally presented to the City Government of Tagum, particularly to offices concerned with public safety and security such as the City Mayor's Office, the City Peace and Order Council (CPOC), the Tagum City Police Office (TCPO), the City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (CDRRMO), and other relevant local

government units. This dissemination aims to support evidence-based planning, policy formulation, and the development of community-centered strategies that enhance the safety and security of Tagum City residents.

At the macro level, findings will be disseminated through regional, national and international conference and meeting presentations before submission to peer-reviewed journals and publication.

Research Questions

1. What are the lived experiences of residents concerning public safety and security within their community?
2. How do residents perceive the effectiveness of strategies employed by local authorities to ensure public safety and security?
3. What insights can the residents share concerning public safety and security?

Theoretical Lens

This study was seen through the lens of Social Disorganization Theory (Shaw & McKay, 1940), which explains that crime and social disorder arise primarily from unfavorable social and structural conditions within a community rather than from individual behavior alone. The theory emphasizes that weakened social bonds, ineffective informal social controls, and the deterioration of key social institutions such as families, schools, and community organizations significantly influence residents' perceptions of safety and security.

In the context of Tagum City, this theoretical lens provided a foundation for understanding how fragmented social relationships, limited trust among neighbors, and underperforming community institutions may contribute to feelings of fear and insecurity, even in areas where actual crime rates may not be high. Guided by this framework, the study examined residents lived experiences to capture how social cohesion, community participation, and institutional support shape their sense of safety. By contextualizing safety beyond law enforcement, the theory underscored the importance of community-based strategies, strengthened local institutions, and collective responsibility in fostering a safer, more inclusive, and resilient environment for the residents of Tagum City.

Delimitation and Limitation of the Study

This study was delimited to examining the experiences of residents regarding public safety and security within the geographical boundaries of Tagum City. The research specifically focused on key areas such as crime prevention, police visibility, emergency response, and community involvement in maintaining safety. The study targeted selected barangays with varying levels of reported crime rates to ensure representation from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The participants of this study were delimited to adult residents aged 18 and above who had lived in Tagum City for at least five years. This criterion was set to ensure that respondents had sufficient experience and familiarity with the city's public safety and security environment. Furthermore, data collection methods were confined to surveys and in-depth interviews conducted within a specified period, making the findings reflective of conditions during that timeframe only.

This study had several limitations that affected the generalizability and interpretation of its findings. First, the reliance on self-reported data may have introduced bias, as participants responses could have been influenced by personal experiences, emotions, or perceptions rather than objective facts. Second, the study did not include the perspectives of law enforcement officials, local government units, or policymakers, which might have provided a more holistic understanding of the issues.

Additionally, the study was constrained by time and resource limitations, which restricted the sample size and scope of data gathering. The focus on selected barangays, while intended to provide a representative sample, might not have fully captured the safety concerns present in other parts of Tagum City. Lastly, external factors such as recent incidents, media coverage, or political developments during the data collection phase may have influenced participants views.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This qualitative research used a phenomenological approach. A qualitative research method involves gathering data within a natural environment to understand the lived experiences of participants. It is concerned with discovering the meanings, experiences, and views of participants, rather than defining or preconceiving them. The researcher engaged participants in their natural setting, thereby seeking to capture the essence of their lived experiences. Moreover, the current research employed a phenomenological approach within the framework of qualitative research. Phenomenology is concerned with the experiences that people share regarding a phenomenon and examines the perceptions and interpretations of these lived experiences by the participants (Creswell, 2013). It was applied to understand the lived experiences of the residents in Tagum City in the context of public safety and security.

This approach is well-suited for exploring the lived experiences of individuals or groups, aligning perfectly with the study's aim and prioritizing firsthand accounts, truthful reporting, and incorporating actual quotes from conversations to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013).

Research Participants

This study explored the lived experiences of residents regarding safety and security in Tagum City. It involved 10 participants for IDI and seven participants in an FGD. These participants were purposively selected to represent diverse perspectives on community safety, experiences with crime, existing security measures, and their overall sense of protection within the city.

To identify appropriate participants, the study employed purposive sampling, which intentionally selected individuals who possessed firsthand knowledge and meaningful experiences related to public safety and security in Tagum City. As noted by Palinkas et al. (2015), purposive sampling was a widely used strategy in qualitative research that enabled researchers to gather rich, relevant insights by selecting participants based on defined criteria.

An initial screening survey was conducted to identify eligible participants. To be included in the study, individuals had to be residents of Tagum City, be at least 18 years old, and have lived in the city for a minimum of five years. Importantly, participants also had to have had either direct involvement in a crime incident, close contact with someone involved, or personal exposure to any of the eight focus crimes identified by the Philippine National Police: murder, homicide, rape, carnapping of motor vehicles, carnapping of motorcycles, physical injury, theft, and robbery. This included those who were directly victimized, were eyewitnesses to crime incidents, or experienced them indirectly through close family members or acquaintances. This clarification strengthened the inclusion criteria to ensure that participants had relevant, experience-based insights into safety and security issues in the city.

Additionally, participants were selected based on their geographic location, focusing on residents of the top three barangays in Tagum City identified by the PNP as having the highest incidence of the focus crimes. This ensured that the study included voices from communities where safety and security concerns were most acute.

The study acknowledged that some participants came from vulnerable groups, including women, elderly individuals, those with low income, or those who had experienced trauma related to crime. To safeguard these individuals, the study ensured that all participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, procedures, and their rights, including the right to ask questions, to have a companion during interviews, and to be interviewed in a safe and neutral location. Efforts were made to minimize any risk of psychological harm, with participants treated with sensitivity, respect, and confidentiality throughout the research process.

Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason and without any consequences or loss of benefits. Any data collected from participants who chose to withdraw were excluded from the study upon request, preserving their autonomy and well-being.

Individuals who did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded from the study. This included non-residents of Tagum City, individuals who had lived in the city for less than five years, those with no direct or close-contact experience related to safety and security, individuals unable or unwilling to give informed consent, and those who had recently participated in similar studies that might influence their responses. Individuals with potential conflicts of interest that could bias the results were also excluded.

By adhering to these inclusion and exclusion criteria and addressing ethical considerations, especially regarding vulnerable participants, the study ensured a rigorous, respectful, and meaningful selection process that captured a wide range of lived experiences related to public safety and security in Tagum City.

Data Sources

The data used in this study was gathered given the inclusion criteria. An initial online survey was carried out to Data for this study were collected based on the established inclusion criteria. To ensure that the participants selected were reliable and relevant to the objectives of the study, an initial online survey was conducted. This survey served as a preliminary screening tool to identify qualified individuals who met the inclusion criteria. Additionally, the selection of participants was guided by inputs from the Philippine National Police, the results of the initial survey, and recommendations from local residents. This triangulated approach to participant selection aimed to ensure that those chosen possessed firsthand knowledge and authentic experiences related to public safety and security in Tagum City.

The primary sources of data included participants responses from FGD and IDI. In addition, field notes taken during these sessions served as supplementary data to enrich the analysis. An expert-validated interview guide featuring open-ended questions was used and included in the appendices of this study.

Participants were asked open-ended questions to explore their perceptions, concerns, and experiences related to public safety and security. The use of FGDs and IDIs allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the various dimensions of their lived experiences. These tools aimed to uncover how residents interpreted, experienced, and responded to safety and security issues in their communities, offering valuable insights into their personal and collective realities.

In addition to individual interviews, FGD were conducted with the participants to supplement the data. Because they promoted group interactions and gave participants a forum to exchange experiences and opinions, the FGD was an essential part of data collection. FGD was especially useful for revealing recurring themes and safety and security concerns that might not have been as clear in one-on-one interviews. By providing a more thorough grasp of the elements that affected residents views, this method enhanced the study's conclusions and ensured that a wide variety of experiences were reflected.

To record contextual observations, nonverbal cues, and other pertinent insights that participants might not have expressed directly, field notes were also gathered throughout the interviews and focus group discussions. These observations served as valuable supplementary data, providing context to participants' responses and deepening the qualitative analysis.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis method developed by Braun and Clarke (2019) was applied to qualitative data in the context In the context of this study, qualitative data were analyzed using the thematic analysis approach as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019). The process began with data familiarization, where the researcher thoroughly reviewed the transcripts from in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and accompanying field notes to develop a comprehensive understanding of the participants narratives. Next, initial coding was conducted by identifying significant phrases, patterns, or ideas that captured key aspects of the residents' experiences and perceptions related to public safety and security.

These codes were then organized into broader themes that directly responded to the research questions and reflected the lived experiences of Tagum City residents. Thematic analysis enabled the researcher to interpret these themes within the real-life context of the participants, particularly focusing on how they experienced,

assessed, and responded to safety-related concerns in their community. The findings were presented in a narrative format and supported by direct participant quotations to amplify their voices and emphasize meaningful insights relevant to enhancing safety and security policies and practices.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Many qualitative researchers aligned with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria. Some of the key requirements for the study were credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability, as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These standards and procedures were explained accordingly.

Credibility. In this study, researcher prioritized credibility as a key aspect of trustworthiness. Credibility referred to the confidence in the truth of the findings, which was essential in qualitative research. It reflected the extent to which the results accurately represented the participants experiences and perspectives. According to Polit and Beck (2014), credibility was the most important criterion in establishing the truth value of a study, and it was achieved through rigorous research methods, transparent data collection, and thorough analysis. To ensure credibility, researcher applied systematic and well-established research procedures, maintained clear documentation of data collection, and conducted an in-depth analysis. These efforts helped ensure that the findings were grounded in the participants views and supported by the evidence gathered during the study.

Transferability. The researcher ensured that the concept of transferability was incorporated into this paper by making necessary adjustments to the data and its background to establish the context of the study, thereby enhancing its accessibility to researchers from various contexts. The researcher provided comprehensive descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation to facilitate comparisons and encourage the exploration of new perspectives. Furthermore, researcher ensured that the study's outcomes could be applied in diverse contexts and locations (Mandal, 2018).

Dependability. In this study, the researcher recognized the importance of consistency and stability in the research process. In qualitative research, dependability meant that the results remained reliable over time and under similar conditions. It showed how well the study could be repeated with similar outcomes. According to McLeod (2024), dependability was supported by the use of clear and consistent methods for collecting and analyzing data. To ensure dependability, the researcher followed systematic procedures throughout the study and documented all steps clearly, including interview guides, coding methods, and decisions made during the analysis. This made the research process transparent and allowed others to review or replicate the study if needed.

Moreover, dependability referred to the consistency and reliability of the research findings, as well as the extent to which research techniques were documented, enabling a third party to monitor, audit, and evaluate the research process (Moon et al., 2016; Polit et al., 2006; Sandelowski, 1986; Streubert, 2007).

Confirmability. In this study, researcher acknowledged the importance of ensuring that the findings were shaped by the participants responses and not by own opinions or assumptions. In qualitative research, confirmability referred to the degree of neutrality in the data, ensuring that the findings were grounded in evidence rather than researcher bias. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), confirmability was achieved when the research process was transparent, traceable, and open to external review. To support this, the researcher maintained a detailed audit trail, including documentation of research decisions, data handling, and theme development, allowing others to verify the trustworthiness of the results.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is the primary instrument in this qualitative research; researcher played a central role in every stage of the research process from data collection to analysis ensuring that all activities aligned with ethical standards and methodological rigor. Researcher responsibilities included designing and facilitating interviews, gathering accurate and meaningful data, analyzing findings, and maintaining the confirmability and trustworthiness of the study.

A core component of researcher's role involved establishing confirmability, ensuring that the research findings were genuinely rooted in the participants experiences rather than shaped by personal bias or interpretation. To

address this, researcher transcribed the audio recordings of all interviews and returned them to participants for member checking. Each participant reviewed their transcript and signed a verification sheet using their assigned pseudonym to confirm the accuracy of the data. After the analysis and interpretation of data, an independent auditor examined the audit trail including raw transcripts, coding documents, and analytic memos to validate the transparency and consistency of the research process. A verification letter was signed by the auditor to affirm the trustworthiness of the findings. As emphasized by Nowell et al. (2017), maintaining a detailed audit trail and enabling external review were essential strategies for enhancing the credibility and confirmability of qualitative research.

The role as a data collector, used multiple methods including IDIs, FGD, and direct observations to gather rich, contextual insights into how residents of Tagum City perceived safety and security. Engaged with participants who met specific inclusion criteria, such as residency status, age, length of stay in the city, and personal experience with public safety issues. During interviews and FGD, the researcher asked open-ended questions to elicit participants lived experiences, concerns, and perspectives related to their community's safety dynamics.

The researcher as a facilitator of FGDs, researcher created a safe and respectful space that encouraged open dialogue among participants. These group discussions provided an opportunity to explore shared experiences and identify common safety concerns, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of community sentiments. It was the researcher's responsibility to ensure these conversations remained aligned with the study's objectives and yielded valuable insights.

Additionally, the researcher served as a transcriber, meticulously converting spoken responses into written text to preserve the accuracy and integrity of the data. Additionally, the researcher as an observer, immersed in the community setting, taking note of environmental and contextual details that deepened the interpretation of residents' perceptions of safety and security.

Following data collection, the researcher assumed the role of a data analyst. This involved systematically identifying themes and patterns across participants' narratives through coding and categorization. These steps supported a structured analysis of the key issues influencing residents perceptions of public safety in Tagum City. Ultimately, interpreted the findings to draw meaningful conclusions that could inform policies, community programs, or initiatives aimed at enhancing public safety and well-being.

Equally important was self-awareness as a researcher. The researcher acknowledged that values, beliefs, and assumptions could have potentially influenced the research process. By continuously reflecting on these factors, the researcher strove to uphold objectivity and maintained the credibility of the study.

To support the capacity as a qualitative researcher, the researcher had actively participated in relevant seminars and training sessions focused on qualitative research methods, data analysis techniques, and ethical practices. These professional development experiences equipped me with the necessary skills and knowledge to conduct rigorous, ethical, and impactful qualitative research.

In summary, the multifaceted role in this phenomenological study was essential to exploring and presenting the complex perceptions of safety and security among residents of Tagum City. Through careful data collection, ethical research practices, critical self-reflection, and methodical analysis, researcher ensured the validity, reliability, and overall trustworthiness of the study.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher was fully committed to upholding ethical standards in the conduct of this research. Before any data collection took place, this study was submitted for review and approval by the University of the Immaculate Conception Research Ethics Committee (UIC-REC), in accordance with institutional research protocols. All ethical procedures prescribed by the UIC-REC were strictly followed throughout the research process to ensure the protection of participants' rights, privacy, and well-being. The final version of the manuscript indicated the protocol code GS-ER-06-25-0302 once it was issued by the UIC-REC upon approval.

The researcher was enrolled in the Master of Arts in Education major in Sociology at the University of the Immaculate Conception. Academic training had equipped foundational understanding of qualitative research, which was further supported by the guidance of her thesis adviser, an expert in qualitative methods, and the feedback of thesis panel members. Their ongoing support and evaluation helped ensure that this study was conducted rigorously, ethically, and with respect for the lived experiences of the participants. To carry out this research effectively, the researcher had full access to the university's digital and physical resources, including the UIC Library, online databases, and institutional facilities necessary for data collection, analysis, and secure storage. These resources were instrumental in maintaining the academic quality and ethical integrity of the study.

RESULTS

The Lived Experiences of Residents concerning Public Safety and Security within their community

Presented in Table 1.2 were the essential themes extracted of the residents concerning Public Safety and Security within their community. The following are the essential themes determined from the various statements of the participants in this study: *unsafe social environment, lapses in enforcement and monitoring, environmental vulnerabilities, and collective vigilance.*

Table 1.2 Lived Experiences of Residents concerning Public Safety and Security within their Community

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Unsafe Social Environment	<p>Incidents of theft, burglary, and petty crimes are common in several areas.</p> <p>Disturbances and conflicts occur, especially during late hours or due to intoxication.</p> <p>Drug-related activities and unruly neighbors disrupt peace.</p> <p>Domestic disputes occur publicly.</p>
Lapses in Enforcement and Monitoring	<p>Loose gate security and inconsistent enforcement of subdivision rules.</p> <p>Lack of patrols and visibility of tanods/police during late hours.</p> <p>Inconsistent patrol schedules.</p>
Environmental Vulnerabilities	<p>Poor lighting, unfinished or bumpy roads, and open or unguarded areas are common.</p> <p>Dark and poorly lit streets heighten fear, especially at night.</p> <p>Proximity to highways exposes residents to speed-related risks and possible crimes.</p>
Collective Vigilance	<p>Residents feel that trust and familiarity in the community.</p> <p>The presence of people — neighbors, children, vendors — gives a sense of security during the day.</p> <p>Community visibility acts as a deterrent to crime and promotes comfort.</p> <p>Community vigilance and cooperation — group chats, CCTV installation, neighborhood watch — help deter crime.</p> <p>Community cooperation and talking through misunderstandings help maintain peace.</p>

Residents View on the Effectiveness of Strategies Employed by Local Authorities to ensure Public Safety and Security

Presented in Table 2 were the residents view on the effectiveness of strategies employed by local authorities to ensure Public Safety and Security. The following are the essential themes determined from the various statements of the participants in this study: Visible and Responsive Patrols Strengthen Community Trust and Safety, Effectiveness of Curfew Depends on Consistent Enforcement, Enhanced Surveillance Improves Safety, Inconsistent Implementation Undermines Lasting Impact, and Limited Community Participation in Safety Governance.

Table 2 Residents View on the Effectiveness of Strategies Employed by Local Authorities to ensure Public Safety and Security

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Visible and Responsive Patrols Strengthen Community Trust and Safety	<p>Residents appreciated frequent barangay and police patrols, especially at night.</p> <p>Patrols increase residents’ sense of safety, reduce loitering and disturbances, and help respond quickly to incidents.</p> <p>Residents reported noticeable improvements in peace and order when patrols and surveillance are active.</p> <p>Reduction in public drinking, disturbances, and theft has been observed.</p> <p>The presence of responsive tanods and barangay officials strengthens residents’ trust in local governance.</p>
Effectiveness of Curfew Depends on Consistent Enforcement	<p>Curfew for minors is preventing night-time disturbances and drinking.</p> <p>Curfew is effective when monitored, leading to fewer loiterers and reduced risks of conflict or accidents.</p> <p>Curfews often lose impact due to weak or inconsistent enforcement.</p>
Enhanced Surveillance Improves Safety	<p>CCTV systems and additional streetlights have proven effective in deterring theft and improving visibility in dark areas.</p> <p>Areas with functioning CCTVs or better lighting report decreased crime and increased public confidence.</p> <p>The limited coverage and maintenance of these systems reduce CCTV overall effectiveness.</p>
Inconsistent Implementation Undermines Lasting Impact	<p>Many participants acknowledge positive short-term outcomes—reduced thefts and improved discipline—after new initiatives.</p> <p>Inconsistent implementation, limited manpower, and lack of follow-through cause programs to lose effectiveness over time.</p> <p>Residents appreciate authorities’ efforts and intentions, but highlight the need for systematic monitoring and sustained commitment.</p>

<p>Limited Community Participation in Safety Governance</p>	<p>Local authorities often decide and implement safety measures without adequate consultation. Residents expressed that they are usually informed only after decisions are made, with little opportunity to provide input. A few noted instances of participation through barangay assemblies, but participation remains limited and inconsistent.</p>
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Insights Shared by the Participants Concerning Public Safety and Security

Presented in Table 3 were the insights shared by the participants concerning Public Safety and Security. The following are the essential themes determined from the various statements of the participants in this study: Consistent and Responsive Enforcement of Public Safety, Strengthen Community Engagement, and Integrated Approach to Public Safety Improvement. These insights emphasize the residents’ desire for more proactive, coordinated, and inclusive approaches that address both human and environmental aspects of safety.

Table 3 Insights Shared by the Participants Concerning Public Safety and Security

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
<p>Consistent and Responsive Enforcement of Public Safety</p>	<p>Consistency in the public safety implementation. Active and consistent presence of guards or barangay tanods. Enhance responsiveness: Timely and proactive, not reactive. Timely and consistent responses to emergencies.</p>
<p>Strengthen Community Engagement</p>	<p>Conduct awareness and civic responsibility seminar among residents. Promote community engagement: Establish hotlines, feedback systems, and seminars. Improve collaboration and communication between residents and authorities.</p>
<p>Integrated Approach to Public Safety Improvement</p>	<p>Training and retraining barangay tanods and guards to improve alertness, responsiveness, and discipline. Upgrade security infrastructure: Add CCTVs, streetlights, and stricter gate policies.</p>

DISCUSSION

The Lived Experiences of Residents concerning Public Safety and Security within their community

This study delved into the lived experiences of residents regarding their perceptions of safety and security within their respective communities. The following essential themes emerged from the narratives of the participants: unsafe social environment, lapses in enforcement and monitoring, environmental vulnerabilities, and collective vigilance. These themes encapsulate how everyday encounters, environmental conditions, and community relationships shape residents sense of peace and order.

Unsafe Social Environment. This theme implies that residents perceive their communities as having weakened social structures and inconsistent enforcement, which contribute to a persistent sense of uncertainty and insecurity in their surroundings. The participants account of theft, burglary, and disturbances caused by intoxicated individuals reflect how fragile community order and the lack of consistent monitoring can heighten fear and caution among residents. Such conditions suggest that the weakening of social bonds and limited informal control reduce the community’s ability to collectively maintain peace and order.

These findings align with the study of Jing et al. (2020), who explained that weak social structures and irregular enforcement lead to greater fear and insecurity within neighborhoods. Likewise, similar patterns were observed

in the Philippine context, where Escriba et al. (2024) found that disturbances such as public intoxication, poor patrol visibility, and social instability contribute to reduced perceptions of safety. Furthermore, limited community cohesion was found to intensify fear and vulnerability, underscoring how fragile social ties weaken collective resilience a perspective also supported by Zeng et al. (2023) and Zahnou (2024).

Lapses in Enforcement and Monitoring. This theme implies that residents perceive inconsistencies and gaps in law enforcement, creating uncertainty and weakening confidence in formal institutions. Irregular patrol schedules, minimal visibility of authorities, and occasional absence of monitoring reduce the community's ability to rely on consistent formal control.

These findings align with prior research showing that irregular police presence diminishes public confidence and weakens the effectiveness of informal social controls (Weisburd et al., 2021). In the Philippine context, communities in low-income or rural areas often suffer from inconsistent police patrols, exacerbating feelings of vulnerability and reducing trust in law enforcement. Escriba et al. (2024) found that higher levels of police visibility in selected barangays in Davao City were associated with reduced social disorder and improved community cohesion. Similarly, Alejo-Abitago and Nabe (2024) show that greater police public trust is linked with increased peaceful behavior, although fear of crime did not have a significant impact.

Evidence also indicates that perceptions of police procedural justice and effectiveness strengthen citizen trust and engagement (Na et al., 2023). Visible and consistent police presence is essential in fostering trust and collective efficacy within communities (Yesberg et al., 2023). However, in the Philippines, the effectiveness of policing can be undermined by political factors, such as local government influence, corruption, or a lack of coordinated efforts between national and local authorities. Jumao-as et al. (2025) further highlight how positive perceptions of law enforcement policies lead to increased community participation in crime prevention efforts in Davao City, which aligns with Social Disorganization Theory. When residents perceive police actions as fair and procedurally consistent, it strengthens police legitimacy and promotes greater public cooperation in crime prevention efforts (Kuen, 2024). This also ties into Social Disorganization Theory, as the perception of fairness and the consistency of law enforcement can either reinforce or undermine the social fabric of a community. These findings suggest that gaps in enforcement can weaken both formal and informal social controls, increasing fear and vulnerability among residents.

Environmental Vulnerabilities. This theme implies that structural and environmental deficiencies such as poorly lit streets, neglected communal areas, and hidden walkways undermine residents' perceptions of safety. Physical neglect reduces natural surveillance and limits informal social control, creating conditions conducive to fear and potential criminal activity. These findings align with Kaplan et al. (2021), who found that visible environmental features such as lighting, maintenance, and clear sightlines enhance perceived safety. In the Philippine context, Zeng et al. (2023) showed that the built environment, social cohesion, and residents' activity jointly influence perceptions of neighborhood safety. Additionally, Zeng et al. (2023) emphasized how environmental features, such as poor lighting and lack of maintenance, can exacerbate feelings of insecurity, particularly in urban neighborhoods. The participants' narratives suggest that without structural improvements, even communities with active residents and formal enforcement may continue to experience elevated fear and perceived vulnerability, reinforcing Social Disorganization Theory's emphasis on the interaction between social and structural factors in maintaining safety.

Collective Vigilance. This theme implies that residents actively engage in informal social control measures to compensate for gaps in formal enforcement. Participants described heightened awareness, coordinated monitoring among neighbors, and mutual sharing of information regarding suspicious activities. In the Philippine context, these behaviors are often seen in communities with barangay-based patrols or neighborhood watch groups, particularly in urbanized areas where formal police presence may be inconsistent. For instance, Rufino and Besas (2024) found that community safety initiatives in Tacurong City, such as neighborhood patrols, contribute significantly to residents' sense of security. Similarly, Escriba et al. (2024) observed that visible law enforcement and active community participation in Davao City enhanced public trust and cooperation in maintaining neighborhood safety.

These behaviors suggest that even when formal law enforcement is inconsistent, communities develop internal mechanisms to maintain safety. Rufino and Besas (2024) emphasize that collective efforts in crime prevention

contribute to community satisfaction, which can counteract the challenges posed by inconsistent formal enforcement.

These results imply that residents vigilance and cooperation strengthen informal control, mitigate the risks associated with environmental and enforcement vulnerabilities, and exemplify the practical application of Social Disorganization Theory in fostering neighborhood stability. Prior research supports this, showing that visible law enforcement and active community participation enhance trust and collective efficacy within neighborhoods (Yesberg et al., 2021; Jumao as et al., 2025). Similarly, recent studies demonstrate that collective efficacy shared expectations for control and cooperation plays a critical role in reducing crime and improving residents' perceptions of safety (Escriba et al., 2024). Collectively, these findings suggest that cohesive and organized communities, together with active citizen engagement, are essential for maintaining order, preventing disorderly behavior, and fostering long-term neighborhood security.

Residents' View on the Effectiveness of Strategies Employed by Local Authorities to ensure Public Safety and Security

This study also provides an in-depth examination of residents' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of safety and security strategies implemented by the barangay and local authorities. The analysis revealed five essential themes that emerged from the participants experiences and evaluations: Visible and Responsive Patrols Strengthen Community Trust and Safety, Effectiveness of Curfew Depends on Consistent Enforcement, Enhanced Surveillance Improves Safety, Inconsistent Implementation Undermines Lasting Impact, and Limited Community Participation in Safety Governance.

Visible and Responsive Patrols Strengthen Community Trust and Safety. This theme suggests that residents perceive visible and frequent patrols by barangay officials, particularly during the night, as crucial for maintaining their sense of safety. Participants emphasized that regular patrols not only deter criminal activity but also reduce disturbances and ensure quicker responses to incidents. These findings suggest that consistent formal enforcement, in the form of barangay patrols, strengthens informal social control mechanisms and fosters trust in local authorities.

Previous studies support these findings, showing that visible police presence and community patrols significantly improve residents' perceptions of safety and encourage cooperation with law enforcement (Yesberg et al., 2021; Jefferies & Poynton, 2023; Wang et al., 2022). However, some research indicates that merely increasing patrol visibility without strategic targeting or ensuring consistent presence may not automatically lead to reduced crime or sustained long-term effects (Basford et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, limited yet consistent authority visibility appears to reinforce collective efficacy, mitigates fear, and acts as a deterrent to disorderly behavior. This aligns with Social Disorganization Theory, which underscores the importance of maintaining social order through effective and visible law enforcement, as well as community cohesion.

Effectiveness of Curfew Depends on Consistent Enforcement. This theme implies that residents perceive curfew measures as effective only when applied consistently. Participants noted that uneven enforcement reduces compliance and diminishes the protective value of curfews. These observations suggest that inconsistent formal control weakens informal monitoring and collective efficacy.

Similar findings are reported in previous studies, which show that irregular enforcement of safety regulations undermines public trust and reduces the overall effectiveness of protective measures. Weisburd et al. (2023) and Engalan et al. (2023) highlight how inconsistent law enforcement leads to lower community cooperation with curfew regulations. In the Philippine context, barangay-based patrols and curfews in urban areas like Quezon City and Davao have been shown to reduce crime when enforced consistently, but gaps in enforcement leave communities vulnerable (Escriba et al., 2024; Rufino & Besas, 2024). Additionally, the Australian Institute of Criminology (2024) stresses that predictable enforcement is necessary to maintain community trust and the perceived effectiveness of curfew policies.

The findings also indicate that curfew measures alone are insufficient without complementary community engagement and targeted safety interventions. These results highlight that steady and predictable enforcement is crucial not only for maintaining residents' sense of security but also for reinforcing social order and sustaining collective efficacy. Curfew policies are therefore most impactful when integrated into a broader public safety strategy that balances formal law enforcement with proactive citizen participation.

Enhanced Surveillance Improves Safety. This theme implies that structural and technological surveillance measures such as CCTV, streetlights, and neighborhood watch programs are perceived by residents as key contributors to community safety. Participants reported that these features improve the detection of suspicious activities, reduce crime opportunities, and provide an enhanced sense of security. Many residents highlighted that well-lit streets and functional monitoring systems not only discourage potential offenders but also encourage more community interaction, as people feel safer moving around their neighborhoods. These observations are consistent with prior research showing that environmental design and monitoring strengthen both perceived and actual safety (Cozens & Love, 2015; Zeng et al., 2023). Additionally, studies in the Philippine context indicate that visible security measures, coupled with residents' awareness of police presence and monitoring, positively influence perceptions of safety and confidence in local authorities (Nabe, 2024).

Moreover, participants emphasized that the absence or poor maintenance of surveillance infrastructure such as broken streetlights, malfunctioning CCTV cameras, or unmonitored public areas heightens fear of crime and weakens informal social control. In some areas, residents reported feeling hesitant to engage in social activities or leave their homes at night due to inadequate safety measures. These findings highlight that technological and structural interventions alone are insufficient unless they are supported by consistent community vigilance and cooperation. When residents coordinate with local authorities and actively participate in neighborhood monitoring, informal control is reinforced, collective efficacy is strengthened, and opportunities for disorder decrease. Collectively, these results illustrate that effective safety management relies on the integration of environmental design, technological infrastructure, and active community engagement, reflecting the principles of Social Disorganization Theory.

Inconsistent Implementation Undermines Lasting Impact. This theme implies that residents perceive irregular or poorly coordinated strategies as diminishing the long-term effectiveness of safety initiatives. Participants highlighted that intermittent patrols, uneven program enforcement, and lack of follow-up on reported incidents create uncertainty and reduce trust in authorities. These observations suggest that inconsistent formal control weakens informal monitoring, diminishes collective efficacy, and can heighten residents' fear of crime. Similar studies support this, showing that inconsistency in law enforcement and community programs weakens social control and reduces public confidence (Wickes, 2017; Engalan et al., 2023; Australian Institute of Criminology, 2024). Likewise, Noviyanto (2023) found that inconsistent implementation of community policing strategies disrupted relationships between officers and residents, limiting program effectiveness.

In contrast, Tsai et al. (2021) observed that even minimal but consistently applied enforcement can maintain residents' perceptions of safety and reinforce collective efficacy, highlighting that predictability and responsiveness are as critical as the intensity of interventions. In the Philippines, this is evident in areas where consistent patrols and community engagement have been shown to foster a sense of security and cooperation (Escriba et al., 2024). Collectively, these findings emphasize that continuity, coordination, and consistent follow-up are essential for sustaining public confidence, fostering collective efficacy, and maintaining neighborhood safety.

Limited Community Participation in Safety Governance. These findings align with prior research showing that active resident participation enhances collective efficacy and strengthens both formal and informal social controls. For example, Nubani (2023) found that when residents are involved in crime reduction strategies, it increases local ownership and responsiveness to safety concerns. Li et al. (2024) identified that key structural and motivational barriers, such as lack of opportunity and limited motivation, significantly hinder effective resident participation in governance. Similarly, Baxter (2023) highlighted that meaningful public participation in decision-making processes leads to better governance outcomes, particularly in contexts where residents' input is seen as valuable.

In the Philippine context, studies indicate that community participation is often hindered by structural barriers such as lack of accessible platforms for engagement and inconsistent communication from local authorities. For instance, Rufino & Besas (2024) found that while barangay-based initiatives (such as neighborhood patrols and safety programs) are widely implemented in many urban and rural communities, participation remains uneven. Many residents in Metro Manila and Davao City have reported dissatisfaction with the lack of follow-up on their concerns and feel that inconsistent enforcement of safety measures limits their trust in local authorities (Escriba et al., 2024).

These studies suggest that integrating community engagement with enforcement measures is critical to achieving sustainable safety and reinforcing neighborhood cohesion, in line with Social Disorganization Theory. This theory posits that weak social ties and limited participation undermine a community's ability to self-regulate and maintain safety, leaving it more vulnerable to crime and disorder. These findings, particularly in areas where local authorities maintained consistent engagement and followed through on feedback, support this theory, showing that such efforts strengthen community trust and enhance the effectiveness of formal interventions.

Insights Shared by the Participants Concerning Public Safety and Security

This study carries an in-depth analysis of the participants' recommendations for improving safety and security in their communities. The analysis revealed three essential themes that emerged from the participants insights: Consistent and Responsive Enforcement of Public Safety, Strengthen Community Engagement, and Integrated Approach to Public Safety Improvement.

Consistent and Responsive Enforcement of Public Safety. The findings reveal that residents perceive consistent and responsive enforcement as crucial for maintaining safety and building trust in authorities. Participants emphasized the importance of regular patrols by barangay tanods and guards, as well as prompt responses to emergencies. They pointed out that gaps in enforcement contribute to heightened fear and insecurity, reinforcing the need for active community policing and visible law enforcement.

These findings aligned with prior research, which emphasized that a steady law enforcement presence and proactive responses are crucial for reinforcing social order, strengthening informal social controls, and fostering community trust (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, & Medicine, 2018; Lum et al., 2023). In the Philippine context, sustained patrols and collaborative policing initiatives have been shown to improve perceptions of safety and encourage citizen cooperation (Regalado & Sun, 2024). For example, a study by De Asis et al. (2020) in Bayambang and Llanto et al. (2024) in Mati demonstrated that barangay tanods and police visibility are directly linked to reduced social disorder and stronger community perceptions of safety.

These insights reflect the principles of Social Disorganization Theory, which suggests that a consistent, community-oriented approach to law enforcement is essential for restoring social stability and ensuring long-term neighborhood safety. When law enforcement is perceived as irregular or unresponsive, it undermines the social structure, creating an environment where fear and insecurity thrive (Ariel, 2023; Skogan, 2018). Furthermore, research by Scriba et al. (2024) and Zheng et al. (2023) emphasized that disturbances, such as public intoxication, exacerbate the loss of social stability, further intensifying fear and reducing perceptions of safety. This reinforces the argument that community cohesion is vital, as weak social ties and inconsistent enforcement erode collective resilience (Zheng et al., 2023; Zanja, 2024).

Strengthen Community Engagement. The findings reveal that residents perceive safety as a shared responsibility, emphasizing the need for active participation from both authorities and the community. Participants recommended organizing civic awareness seminars, establishing communication channels (such as hotlines or online groups), and encouraging residents to report concerns directly to local authorities. These suggestions indicate that limited integration between local authorities and community members weakens collective efficacy, reducing the community's capacity to prevent and address safety issues effectively.

This is consistent with prior studies, which indicate that consistent law enforcement, paired with proactive safety measures, enhances stability, deterring crime, and fostering trust (Lum et al., 2024; Ekici, 2022; Nabe & Amar, 2024). Furthermore, collaborative engagement between residents and authorities strengthens compliance, trust,

and local safety outcomes (Murphy & Mazerolle, 2021; Jonathan-Zamir et al., 2024). These findings suggest that engagement is not just about enforcement but also about encouraging meaningful interaction and cooperation within the community.

In the Philippine context, similar trends have been observed, where sustained patrols, cooperative policing, and active community participation have been shown to improve perceptions of safety and foster stronger citizen–authority relationships (Regalado & Sun, 2024; Villanueva, 2020). In communities where local authorities have engaged with residents and followed through on concerns, there have been increased levels of trust and better safety outcomes. For instance, in Metro Manila and Davao City, barangay officials and local police worked together on initiatives like community patrols and crime prevention seminars, leading to improved perceptions of security and a reduction in community-based crime.

The implications of these findings are consistent with Social Disorganization Theory, which posits that strong community engagement and informal social control are essential for reducing disorder and promoting collective responsibility (National Institute of Justice, 2016; Skogan, 2015; Triplett, Gainey, & Sun, 2020; Wickes, 2017). When community members actively engage in safety efforts, they contribute to the collective resilience of the area, making it less susceptible to crime and disorder. This emphasizes the importance of building social cohesion through consistent collaboration between community members and authorities.

Integrated Approach to Public Safety Improvement. The findings highlight that residents perceive an integrated approach combining manpower training, technological advancement, and environmental improvements as essential for sustainable safety. Participants recommended retraining barangay tanods, upgrading CCTV systems, improving lighting, and maintaining secure public spaces. These insights suggest that residents recognize the interplay between formal enforcement, community cooperation, and environmental management in shaping their sense of security. Limited coordination among these components can weaken collective efficacy and reduce the effectiveness of safety initiatives.

This aligns with prior research, which indicates that consistent law enforcement and proactive safety measures reinforce social order, strengthen trust, and deter crime (Braga, 2024; Kim, 2024). Moreover, the integration of collaborative engagement between authorities and residents further enhances compliance, trust, and local safety outcomes (Murphy & Mazerolle, 2021; Jonathan-Zamir et al., 2024). These findings emphasize that public safety is not only about enforcement but also about creating a cooperative environment where all parties contribute to the community's security.

In the Philippine context, similar trends have been observed, where sustained patrols, cooperative policing, and active community participation have been shown to improve perceptions of safety and strengthen citizen–authority relationships (Regalado & Sun, 2024; Villanueva, 2020). Community policing efforts in Mati and other regions have improved resident–authority relations and contributed to increased cooperation in crime prevention (Llanto et al., 2024; Haim et al., 2021). These findings suggest that when the community feels involved and heard, they are more likely to trust and cooperate with local authorities, leading to safer neighborhoods.

Furthermore, infrastructure improvements such as functional street lighting, well-maintained roads, and secure public spaces combined with community collaboration, significantly reduce opportunities for crime. Empirical studies support this, showing that environmental disorder and physical neglect increase fear and decrease collective efficacy, whereas improvements in the built environment and active community engagement enhance security (Bogges & Hipp, 2010; Chen & Wilcox, 2022; Ng & Briones, 2024). These findings suggest that environmental enhancements, along with community-driven efforts, are critical for fostering a safer environment.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study provided meaningful insights into how residents perceived and experienced safety and security within their communities. It revealed that while crime, weak enforcement, and environmental challenges posed real concerns, collective vigilance and cooperation among residents remained strong foundations for

community stability. This research underscored that public safety was not only a governmental responsibility but also a shared commitment among citizens, law enforcers, and local leaders.

Conducting this study had been an eye-opening experience. Gathering and analyzing participants narratives allowed the researcher to understand the complex realities of community life its vulnerabilities, resilience, and shared sense of responsibility. Despite challenges in data collection, the research journey strengthened the researcher's understanding of social phenomena and deepened appreciation for community collaboration. The insights gained from this study were expected to inspire policymakers, barangay leaders, and future researchers to continually strive for safe, cohesive, and empowered communities in Tagum City and beyond

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