

Policing the COVID-19 pandemic: Police and public perceptions of enforcement of health protocols in the Fiji Islands

Anand Chand

School of Business & Management, University of the South Pacific, Fiji
anand.chand@usp.ac.fj (corresponding author)

Maureen Karan

University of the South Pacific, Fiji
maureen.karan@usp.ac.fj

Pariniappa Goundar

University of the South Pacific, Fiji
pariniappa.goundar@usp.ac.fj

Namrata Reddy

University of the South Pacific, Fiji
namrata.reddy@usp.ac.fj

Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has become a global health security concern (World Health Organization, 2020), and governments have called upon police agencies to assist control the spread of the COVID-19 virus. This study looks at the new roles performed by police agencies in the context of the Fiji Islands. This study addresses two main research questions. Firstly, what are the issues and challenges faced by police officers when carrying out their COVID-19 duties? Secondly, what is the public perceptions of police officers' effectiveness in enforcing COVID-19 health protocols? This study has utilized a mixed-method approach based on qualitative interviews with police officers and a quantitative survey of the public. The police officers' interviews reveal that police performed new health duties and ground-level police faced several challenges. The public survey findings reveal that most people were happy with police performance. We conclude by discussing the policy implications of our findings on police practice and the agenda for future comparative research in small island countries so that SIDs can learn from each other.

Keywords: COVID-19, enforcement of health rules, Fiji public compliance, islands, police

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Introduction

The deadly COVID-19 pandemic has become a global health security concern (WHO, 2020), countries have swiftly reacted by enforcing the WHO health protocols, and governments have called upon the police agencies to monitor and implement health protocols (Garcia et al., 2020; Lum et al., 2020; Maskály et al., 2021; Mazerolle & Ransley, 2021). These new responsibilities of police have expanded the boundaries of policing to handle new harms (Lum et al., 2020; Maskály et al., 2021; Perry & Jonathan-Zamir, 2020; Wallace et al., 2022). As a result, new concepts have emerged in the literature such as *health policing*, *disease policing*, *health regulation*, and *health compliance* to explain this expanded role of police (Cave & Dahir, 2020; Farrow, 2020; Jennings & Perez, 2020; Stott et al., 2020; Wallace et al., 2022; White & Fradella, 2020). The way police have performed their COVID-19 duties are not uniform across countries, but variations exist between countries (Aboridsade, 2021; Jankovic and Cvetkovic, 2020; Lum et al., 2020; Maskály et al., 2021).

To date, most studies on the role of police and public perception in enforcing COVID-19 health rules have been conducted in developed countries (Lum et al., 2020; Maskály et al., 2021; Stott et al., 2020). What happens in the world cannot be understood by only focusing on large, developed countries alone. It is essential to embrace and include the findings from 'island studies' to fully understand the global picture (Baldacchino, 2006; Cliff et al., 2000; Hau'ofa, 1994; Skinner, 2006; Vesilind, 2000).

Currently, we have very little knowledge of how small island countries are handling and coping with the COVID-19 pandemic and the role played by the police agency and the community (Leal et al., 2020). It is crucial to understand what is going on in Small Developing States (SIDS) and what lessons can be learned from the islands (Chand et al., 2022b). Thus, in order to fill the literature gap, the main aim of this study is to examine police officers' performance in enforcing COVID-19 health rules in the context of Fiji. This study addresses two main research questions. Firstly, what are the police officers' views when enforcing COVID-19 pandemic rules, public compliance and challenges faced when carrying out their COVID-19 duties? Secondly, what are the public's perceptions of police performance in enforcing COVID-19 protocols? By focusing on both the police and the public perception, this study provides a more holistic picture rather than studies based on the single perspective of either police or the public.

Literature review

There is growing literature that pays special attention to various issues affecting 'islands' (Baldacchino, 2004; 2006; Hau'ofa, 1994; Hayward, 2016; Skinner & Hills, 2006). Skinner and Hills (2006, p. 3) have rightly argued that the *island* has been increasingly recognized as a "a legitimate subject for social scrutiny, whether as conceptual device, as metaphor, or as [...] distinctive location." Hayward (2016), one of the main theorists of island studies, has argued for "an expanded concept of island studies," similar to arguments by Hau'ofa (1994). Hau'ofa (1994), in his excellent paper 'Our sea of islands', rejects the western-

centric notion that Pacific Islands are too tiny, poorly resourced, and remote to survive on their own, and are dependent on developed wealthy countries. Hau'ofa (1994) prefers to call the Pacific region 'Oceania' to reflect that the largest ocean in the world has plentiful resources and has been home to people for generations. These authors have argued that innovative ideas have developed in SIDS and large developed countries can learn from SIDS, not only vice versa. For example, Baldacchino (2004, 2006) has highlighted that "many innovative forms of environmental management and epidemiological research tend to involve, or be based on, islands." Cliff et al. (2000) showed that several island-based epidemiological studies have provided clues regarding or even helped solve problems surrounding certain diseases. For instance, Iceland has played an important role in genetics research due to its genealogical heritage (Vesilind, 2000). With this argument of not belittling islands in mind, our study has focused on the role of local police agencies and the community in mitigating the COVID-19 health pandemic in the Fiji Islands.

For this study, rather than doing a generic literature review, we have thematically reviewed the literature to address the role played by police agencies globally.

New roles of police

Studies have found that police have undertaken new health-related roles in addition to their regular law enforcement. New roles included monitoring if people were wearing masks, enforcing social distancing, and monitoring quarantine lockdowns, and curfews (Alcadipani et al., 2020; Jiang & Xie, 2020; Perry & Jonathan-Zamir, 2020; Mazerolle & Ransley, 2021; Wallace et al., 2022; White & Fradella, 2020). Hence, these additional health duties have expanded the traditional policing boundary of law enforcement to policing the pandemic (Perry & Jonathan-Zamir, 2020; Wallace et al., 2022). In addition, police agencies made internal organizational changes to cater for COVID-19 health duties (Alcadipani et al., 2020; Ashby, 2020; Cave & Dahir, 2020; Drew & Martin, 2020; Farrow, 2020; Jennings & Perez, 2020; Lum et al., 2020; Maskály et al., 2021; Stott et al., 2020).

Training and preparedness of the police

Existing studies have confirmed that police officers in most countries are not adequately trained in performing COVID-19 duties (Anazonwu et al., 2022; Frenkel et al., 2020; Lum et al., 2020; Matarazzo et al., 2020). Lum et al. (2020) found that even in rich developed countries, police officers tend not to be adequately trained: For example, around 60% of police organizations in various parts of the United States and Canada did not provide proper training for police officers on the COVID-19 health protocols. Moreover, Matarazzo et al. (2020) found that only around two-thirds of police officers were trained and equipped on how to remain safe during the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil. Thus, it is essential for us to find out if any training was given in small island states which have limited resources and capability in dealing with a health pandemic.

Increased workload

Studies have shown that the workload of police has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic (Dinnen & Walton, 2021; Frenkel et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2021). For example,

Frenkel et al. (2020) found that police officers suffered from increased workload when coping with limited resources. Wu et al.'s (2021) survey of 6,000 Chinese police officers reported that police officers suffered from excessive work during peak times of the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, Dinnen and Walton (2021) found that COVID-19 added more work to an existing small police force in Papua New Guinea (PNG) that is already under-resourced and struggling to meet its regular law enforcement workload.

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

Literature reveals that many police agencies in all kinds of countries (both developed and developing countries) were unable to provide an adequate supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) to police officers. There were shortages of face masks, face shields, goggles, and medical hand gloves (Aborisade, 2021; Alcadipani et al., 2020; Alvarado et al., 2020; Anazonwu et al., 2022; Dagba et al., 2020; Drew & Martin, 2020; Farrow, 2020; Jennings & Perez, 2020; Maskály et al., 2021; Stott & Harrison, 2020). Even large developed countries such as the USA, the UK, Canada, and Australia faced shortages (Alexander & Ecki, 2020; Horn, 2020; Stott et al., 2020; Sandrin & Simpson, 2021; Simpson & Sandrin, 2021). Moreover, there was a lack of training on the proper use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), managing quarantine, and attending to emergencies (Frenkel et al., 2020; Aborisade, 2021).

Public compliance, trust, and legitimacy of police

Several studies have found that the public has complied with the police instructions during the COVID-19 pandemic (Clements, 2020; Gibbs et al., 2021; Hermann & Anabi, 2020; Jackson et al., 2020; Janković & Cvetkovic, 2020; Luscombe & McClelland, 2020; McCarthy, 2021; Mohler et al., 2021; Palmer, 2020; Perry & Jonathan-Zamir, 2020; Sibley et al., 2020). For example, as Sibley et al. (2020, p. 625) aptly put it, "COVID-19 can bring people together at the national level to reduce virus infection." However, some studies showed the public not complying with COVID-19 protocols. For instance, Nivette et al. (2021) found that young adults in Switzerland were not complying with COVID-19 protocols because of a lack of trust in and legitimacy of the police.

Moreover, studies have shown the complex relationship between compliance and trust in the police. Some scholars have argued that people will only obey if they *trust* the police (Murphy, 2016; Perry & Jonathan-Zamir, 2020; Tyler, 2006). Perry and Jonathan-Zamir (2020) stressed that during a public protest regarding health rules, protesters would comply with the police only if the public *trusted* the police. Faull's (2020) survey in South Africa revealed that 70% of participants understood the lockdown was needed due to the danger of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the lack of trust in and legitimacy of the police agency remained unchanged. Studies have also identified *procedural justice* as another requirement for the public to comply with the police (Murphy, 2016; Perry, 2020; Tyler, 2006). For example, Murphy (2016) argued that if police adopt *procedural justice*, then people are more likely to comply and trust the police. Murphy (2016) added that *procedural justice* can promote public

compliance even among defiant citizens. Literature shows that public compliance is based on trust and procedural justice (Murphy, 2016; Perry, 2020; Tyler, 2006).

Public perception of police performance during COVID-19

There are only a few studies that have examined the public's view of how well the police performed their new COVID-19 duties (Caluori & Clements, 2020; Janković & Cvetković, 2020; Laufs & Waseem, 2020; Sandrin & Simpson, 2021; Wallace et al., 2022). For instance, Janković and Cvetković (2020) conducted an online survey of public perceptions of the Serbian police during the COVID-19 pandemic and found that the public was happy with police performance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, Sandrin and Simpson (2021) explored public perceptions of police performance in the USA by using a procedural justice paradigm and found participants' perceptions of procedural justice are positively related to their assessments of police duties and performance.

Present study: Background

The Fiji Islands are located in the South Pacific region. Fiji has two security forces, firstly the Fiji Police Force (FPF) and secondly, a military force (Brown, 1998), and both were used by the government to control the spread of COVID-19 virus. The first COVID-19 case was reported on 20 March 2020, and at the time of writing Fiji had undergone three waves of COVID-19. The first wave was between March-August 2020. The second wave was between May-October 2021. The third wave was between December 2021-February 2022 (Fiji Ministry of Health, 2022). One of the advantages of held by remote small island countries is that they are insulated from large countries and in some cases COVID-19 arrived later in the islands.

Methodology

This study has utilized a mixed-method approach, and four research methods were used to collect data. Firstly, we conducted a literature review of scholarly journal articles, Fiji government documents, police legislation and regulations, and Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). Secondly, qualitative interviews with 10 key informants (community policing scheme members) were conducted. Thirdly, qualitative interviews were conducted with 18 police officers to explore the police officers' views of the issues and challenges they faced when enforcing COVID-19 protocols. Finally, an online quantitative survey of 202 members of the public was undertaken to find out people's perceptions of how well the police performed their new health duties such as monitoring if people are wearing facial masks, maintenance of two-meter social distance, providing of external and internal border security, guarding quarantine facilities, guarding lockdown areas, and enforcing curfew hours. The survey questionnaire was administered via online applications such as Facebook, Viber, Twitter, and e-mails. In addition, we interviewed a few key informants from the public who were willing to discuss their views on police performance in carrying out their COVID-19 duties.

Sample

Qualitative interviews were conducted with eighteen (n=18) police officers which consisted of three (n=3) senior police officers (2 males and 1 female) and fifteen (n=15) frontline police officers (9 males and 6 females). Qualitative interviews were also conducted with ten (n=10) key respondents, of which 7 were males and 3 females.

Purposive (non-probability) and *convenience sampling* techniques were used to select the 18 police officers and 10 key informants. The rationale is that we wanted to talk to police officers who were directly involved in COVID-19 operations and community policing scheme members who knew about their police role in their community. The qualitative interviews with 18 police officers and 10 key informants were recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically (Becker, 2017; Miller & Glassner, 2020; Silverman, 2020).

For the quantitative survey, a total of 202 participants completed 15 closed-ended questions and wrote answers for open-ended questions. For the open-ended questions, NIVIVO software was used to identify themes. Table 1 presents the details of the demographic data of 202 participants (Q1-Q5).

Table 1. Summary of demographic data of survey participants (Q1-Q5 in questionnaire).

	Scale: Area				
1. Geographical area	Labasa/ Savusavu	Sigatoka/ Nadi/Lautok/ Ba	Suva/Nasinu/ Nausori/ Navua	Other areas	
	16 (7.9%)	29 (14.4%)	146 (72.3%)	10 (5.0%)	
	Scale: Years				
2. Age	15-20 yrs	21-30 yrs	31-40 yrs	41-50 yrs	>50 yrs
	8 (4.0%)	64 (31.7%)	81 (40.1%)	22 (10.9%)	27 (13.4%)
	Scale: F or M				
3. Gender	Female	Male			
	112 (55.4%)	90 (44.6%)			
	Scale: Ethnicity				
4. Ethnicity	Indo-Fijian	<i>I-Taukei (indigenous)</i>	Others		
	160 (79.2%)	28 (13.9%)	14 (6.9%)		
	Scale				
5. Education level	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary		
	6 (3.0%)	22 (10.9%)	174 (86.1%)		

Table 1 shows that a slight majority of participants were females. In terms of age, around 40% were in the age group 31-40 years and 32% were in the age group 21-30 years. Around 79% of participants were ethnic Indo-Fijians, 14% were ethnic *I-Taukei*, and 7% were from other minority ethnic groups. Because a disproportionate number of Indo-Fijian participants completed the survey relative to the ethnic composition of Fiji as a whole, generalizations cannot be made from this exploratory study. Regarding the education level, a sizable majority of participants had a tertiary qualification.

Findings from police officers

This section discusses and analyses the research findings from the qualitative semi-structured interviews with 18 police officers and key informants.

New COVID-19 roles of police officers

The Fiji Islands have gone through three major waves of COVID-19 between 2020-2022 which required actions by the government, the Ministry of Health officials, and police organizations. During the interviews, all (18) police officers stressed that their priority was to assist the Ministry of Health to monitor and enforce health protocols. A senior police officer mentioned: "We senior leaders of the police met with the Ministry of Health staff and designed new roles for police officers" (Interview with a Senior Police Officer 1, February 2022). The police officers confirmed their new roles include ensuring that people in public places wear facial masks, people are maintaining a two-meter social distance, providing external and internal border security, guarding quarantine facilities, guarding lockdown areas (red zones), and enforcing curfew hours. During the interviews, a police officer mentioned: "My job was to visit supermarkets and check if people are wearing facial masks and maintaining a two-meter social distance" (Interview with Police Officer 2, February 2022). His colleague added, "If we see people not wearing their masks or incorrectly (on their chin), we remind them to wear the masks correctly" (Interview with Police Officer 3, February 2022). Another police officer said: "My task is to help the Ministry of Health staff to contact tracing" (Interview with Police Officer 4, February 2022). With regards to the curfew, one police officer mentioned: "Curfew made our job easier because the people were not moving around" (Interview with Police Officer 5, March 2022). The Fiji government's use of a curfew to restrict people's movement to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus has been effective. The novelty of using curfew as a successful method of restricting the movement of people was used by Fiji much earlier than countries such as Australia and New Zealand, which learned from Fiji and followed suit. Fiji had previously used curfew as a repressive tool to control the public during the political upheavals of 1987 and 2000 coups but has utilized curfew in a positive sense during the COVID-19 pandemic to reduce the chances of people getting the virus.

Training and preparedness of the police

During the interviews police officers were asked if they received proper training on COVID-19 duties, and all 18 police officers mentioned that they were not properly trained and were only given ten-minute instructions by their superiors. For instance, one police officer highlighted that a major challenge was "no time for proper training on COVID-19 health protocols as the police were needed immediately to carry out COVID-19 duties" (Interview with Police Officer 5, February 2022). The police officers mentioned that they had to learn what to do on the job. All police officers suggested that training would have better prepared them to handle their COVID-19 duties. Even in developed countries, there was a lack of proper training (Alvarado et al., 2020;

Alexander & Ecki, 2020; Cave & Dahir, 2020; Deckert et al., 2021; Frenkel et al., 2020; Jones, 2020; Lum et al., 2020; Maskály et al., 2021; Stogner et al., 2020). Police officers require training specifically on how to be safe, proper usage of PPE, how often to change masks, and when to sanitize their hands (Lum et al., 2020; Alexander & Ecki, 2020; Frenkel et al., 2020).

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The police officers were asked whether Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) were provided for their safety. The police officers stated that during the first wave of COVID-19 in Fiji, there was a limited supply of facial masks and hand sanitizers. For instance, a police officer mentioned that: “My colleagues and I were only given normal facial masks, but not face shields and medical hand gloves” (Interview with Police Officer 5, February 2022). Another police officer added: “I wish we were given face shields and we should have been given hand sanitizers to carry them when patrolling public places and to use it when needed” (Interview with a Police Officer 6, February 2022). This finding of shortage of PPEs is the same as those reported in the literature (Aborisade, 2021; Alcadipani et al., 2020; Alvarado et al., 2020; Anazonwu et al., 2022; Dagba et al., 2020; Lum et al., 2020; Maskály et al., 2021; Simpson and Sandrin, 2021). Fiji did not need to buy PPE because donor partners Australia, New Zealand, the USA, and Japan had donated PPE to Fiji. This shows that in times of crisis, islands are not isolated but integrated into the global economy (Hau’ofa, 1999).

Increased workload

The police officers were asked if COVID-19 duties increased their workload. All 18 police officers mentioned ‘yes’ their workloads increased. In Fiji, during peak times of COVID-19, most police did a 12-hour shift (not the standard 8-hour shift) per day. One police officer stressed: “Doing 12-hour shifts are long and tiring” (Interview with Police Officer 7, February 2022). Another police officer said: “We were always busy during COVID-19 and with little time to rest” (Interview with a Police Officer 8, February 2022). This result is similar to findings in studies by Jennings and Perez, (2020), Lum et al., (2020), Maskály et al., (2021), Simpson and Sandrin (2021), and Stott et al., (2020).

Police view on public compliance during COVID-19

The last question police officers were asked was if the public complied with police instructions during COVID-19. The police officers mentioned that the majority of the public complied with their instructions except for a few who did not listen and questioned the police officers. Police also mentioned that they noticed a different level of compliance during each of the three waves of COVID-19 in Fiji, with higher compliance during the first wave. One police officer highlighted that “During the 1st wave of COVID-19 most people complied with COVID-19 health protocols and listened to us but in the 2nd wave of COVID-19 and 3rd wave of COVID-19 people began to relax and we had to tell some people to wear masks” (Interview with Police Officer 10, March 2022). This lower compliance in the second and third waves is perhaps unsurprising

as the public tired of restrictions being imposed upon them. Moreover, during the first wave, probably people were frightened because a lot of COVID-19 patients died. But during the second and third waves of COVID-19, people who had received their first dose of vaccination were less frightened. This probably suggests that not all people in Fiji were willing to listen and abide by police instructions during the second and third waves of COVID-19. This is similar to findings in the literature (e.g., Aborisade, 2021; Hossain et al., 2020; Ilori, 2020; Khan et al., 2020; Alexander & Ekici, 2020; Cave & Dahir, 2020; Frenkel et al., 2020; Jennings & Perez, 2020; Warren et al., 2020).

Table 2. Summary of research findings from survey of 202 people: (Q1-Q10).

Questions	Disagree fully 1	Disagree somewhat 2	Not sure 3	Agree somewhat 4	Agree fully 5
Q1. Were police able to effectively enforce COVID-19 protocols?	12 (5.9%)	18 (8.9%)	21 (10.4%)	103 (51.0%)	48 (23.8%)
Q2. Do you think the police did a good job in maintaining internal border security (quarantine, lockdown rules)?	13 (6.4%)	26 (12.9%)	11 (5.4%)	83 (41.1%)	68 (33.7%)
Q3. Do you think the police performed extra duties during COVID-19, and whether the new responsibilities hinder the normal functions of police?	17 (8.4%)	39 (19.3%)	41 (20.3%)	73 (36.1%)	32 (15.8%)
Q4. Should police engage in additional duties during a disease outbreak?	6 (3.0%)	7 (3.5%)	14 (6.9%)	70 (34.7%)	102 50.5%
Q5. Do you feel secure with the role of the police in enforcing COVID 19 protocols?	11 (5.4%)	16 (7.9%)	16 (7.9%)	84 (41.6%)	75 (37.1%)
Q6. Do you think the new role of the police requires appropriate training to deal with disease outbreak situations?	3 (1.5%)	4 (2.0%)	7 (3.5%)	36 (17.8%)	152 (75.2%)
Q7. Have you witnessed incidents where police officers themselves did not abide by the COVID 19 protocols?	20 (9.9%)	27 (13.4%)	34 (16.8%)	66 (32.7%)	55 (27.2%)
Q8. Have you witnessed incidents where police officials have failed to tell people to abide by the COVID 19 protocols?	43 (21.3%)	27 (13.4%)	34 (16.8%)	73 (36.1%)	43 (21.3%)
Q9. Have police been efficient in carrying out their new COVID duties?	10 (5.0%)	16 (7.9%)	24 (11.9%)	100 (49.5%)	52 (25.7%)
Q10. Overall, are you satisfied with the police performance during the COVID-19 pandemic?	11 (5.4%)	14 (6.9%)	27 (13.4%)	83 (41.1%)	66 (32.7%)

Findings from members of the public

Table 2 presents a summary of the findings of ten questions from the quantitative online survey of 202 people. For ease of reporting the research findings, the 'agree fully' and 'agree somewhat' categories were combined together, and similarly 'disagree somewhat' and 'disagree fully' were combined together. The 'unsure' category is left as it is.

Police enforcing COVID-19 protocols

Results of Q1 indicate almost three-quarters of participants agreed that police were able to enforce COVID-19 protocols, around 15% disagreed with police being able to enforce COVID-19 protocols, and the remaining 10% were not sure. For example, one key informant mentioned: "I noticed on several occasions at the supermarkets police officers did not enforce two-meter social distancing rule" (Interview with Key Informant 1, March 2022). Supermarkets are nicknamed in Fiji as 'super-spreaders' of the COVID-19 virus, and most of them had to be closed for fumigation. This finding of police not enforcing COVID-19 protocols in Fiji is similar to findings in other developing countries such as Trinidad and Tobago (Wallace et al., 2022), Nigeria (Aborisade, 2021), and Brazil (Alvarado et al., 2020).

Moreover, a few key informants mentioned that a few rich businesses were giving bribes to police officers to stop police from fining them for breaches of COVID-19 health protocols. For example, the local newspaper reported that a police officer was caught demanding F\$200 (USD 100) from a businessman for letting customers into the shop who did not wear facial masks (Kumar, 2021). Moreover, the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC) has investigated several police accepting bribes during COVID-19 times. This finding of police not strictly enforcing COVID-19 protocols and being involved in accepting bribes is similar to those found in developing countries such as Trinidad and Tobago (Wallace et al., 2022), Nigeria (Aborisade, 2021), and Brazil (Alvarado et al., 2020). It is a concern that some people indicated that police did not do their job properly, and this calls for intervention by police leaders to remind frontline police officers to be strict with enforcing COVID-19 health rules.

2. Police maintaining internal border security (lockdown, curfew hours, etc.)

The results of Q2 show that three-quarters of the participants agreed that the police did a good job in maintaining internal border security, such as monitoring quarantine red zones (specific areas under quarantine), lockdown, and curfew hours. One person mentioned: "Police have done a good job during COVID-19" (Survey Participant 13, March 2022). However, around one-fifth of participants disagreed. One participant said: "I saw police allowing a few people to leave the red quarantine zone in my area." Another participant who had experienced two-week border quarantine in New Zealand and Fiji mentioned: "Compared to NZ, the police in Fiji are not strict in following COVID-19 quarantine protocols such as allowing people in quarantine hotel to mix around when going for a walk around hotel compound" (Interview with Key Informant 4, March 2022). This finding of police not enforcing COVID-19 protocols in

Fiji is similar to findings in other developing countries such as Trinidad and Tobago (Wallace et al., 2022), Nigeria (Aborisade, 2021), and Brazil (Alvarado et al., 2020).

3. Police performing extra duties

Results of Q3 show that two-thirds of participants indicated that police performed extra duties during COVID-19, while around one-third of participants disagreeing. Those people who believed that police performed extra duties indicated that these extra COVID-19-related duties may have hindered the other normal functions of police such as attending to crime and law enforcement. Naisoro (2021) reported that the COVID-19 pandemic demanded increased efforts from the Fiji police as shift work lasted 12 hours. This finding of extra police duties during COVID-19 is similar to those found in the literature (Aborisade, 2021; Anazonwu et al., 2022; Bamberry et al., 2022; Jones, 2020; Laufs & Waseem, 2020; Molldrem et al., 2021; Odigbo et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2021).

4. Should police engage in additional duties?

Results of Q4 show that more than three-quarters of participants indicated that police should be engaged in additional duties during deadly disease outbreaks (such as COVID-19) because police are the law enforcers, and it should be one of their duties to protect people from any form of harm. One participant stressed: "It is the job of the police to protect we Fijians from this deadly COVID-19 virus" (Survey Participant 152, March 2022). Another participant put it aptly: "I prefer police to protect us and not the military officers as I am afraid of them being around in public places." Peel (1829) had stressed that it is the duty of police to provide human security to the citizens of a country. Only around 7% felt that police should not be engaged in additional duties during disease outbreaks. This finding on the role of police to protect communities is similar to those found in the literature during the Spanish Flu pandemic and bird flu in Asia (Alcadipani et al., 2020; Jiang & Xie, 2020; Laufs & Waseem, 2020; Panchenko, 2020; Wu et al., 2021).

5. Public feeling secure

Results of Q5 reveal that around three-quarters of the participants stated that they felt secure when they saw police around in public places during COVID-19. However, around 13% of participants mentioned that they did not feel secure because some police were not enforcing the COVID-19 protocols. One participant said: "Police were sitting inside the police posts, and people without facial masks were roaming around outside the police posts" (Survey Participant 183, March 2022). Another participant highlighted that: "I did not feel secure, and I took it on myself to tell other people to wear facial masks properly (not on the chin) and maintain the two-meter social distance and people did abide" (Survey Participant 191, March 2022). This finding is similar to those found in the literature (e.g., Boon-Kuo et al., 2021; Heidinger & Cotter, 2020; Nouri & Kochel, 2021; Sargeant et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2021).

6. Police training

Results of Q6 reveal that 93% of participants thought the new role of enforcing COVID-19 protocols by police requires appropriate training on health issues to deal with disease outbreaks. For instance, training is needed on ‘how deadly the COVID-19 virus is?’, ‘how it spreads?’, and ‘the importance of wearing facial masks properly (with nose covered and not on chin)’, ‘not to touch mask and face frequently’, and ‘maintaining a two-meter social distance’. As mentioned earlier, police officers in Fiji only received a short briefing (10-15 minutes) by senior police supervisors and not the Ministry of Health officials who knew better about the COVID-19 virus. Training would have better equipped police officers and assisted them in handling COVID-19 duties. Training of police officers is also needed to ensure they and their families are safe when they return home after duties.

7. Police themselves do not abide by COVID-19 protocols

Results of Q7 reveal that almost two-thirds of the participants witnessed incidents where police officers *themselves* had failed to abide by COVID-19 protocols, particularly not maintaining a two-meter social distance. Participants said police were seen wearing facial masks, but the problem was they did not maintain a two-meter social distance amongst themselves, which was a rule by the Fiji Police Force. Police officers were required to maintain a two-meter social distancing in the police stations and outside the stations. One key respondent highlighted that “Police officers on patrol did not practice two-meter social distancing as they walk side by side to each other” (Survey Participant 81, March 2022). This police deviance does not send a good message to the public and was seen as double standard practiced by police officers. If police officers themselves follow rules then people are likely to do the same. This laxity of police has affected people’s *trust* and *legitimacy* in police (Peel, 1829; Johnson, 2014; Heaton & Tong, 2017; Nkrumah et al., 2020). Similarly, a study in Nigeria by Aborisade (2021) found that police were not abiding by COVID-19 protocols.

8. Police not reminding people to abide

Results of Q8 indicate that around 57% of participants witnessed incidents where police officers failed to tell ‘people’ to abide by COVID-19 protocols, particularly not maintaining a ‘two-meter social distance’. One participant highlighted that “I saw several times police officers not practicing two-meter social distancing.” Another participant mentioned that “police are good at enforcing the wearing of facial masks, but, not good at implementing a two-meter social distance” (Interview with a Key Informant 3, February 2022). This is probably due to a lack of understanding of what ‘social’ distance means, and it is suggested that the term *physical* distance should be used in countries where the English language is not the mother tongue of people. Due to a lack of training, most police did not understand a two-meter social space.

9. Police efficiency

Results of Q9 indicate that three-quarters of participants stated that police were efficient in carrying out the COVID-19 protocols. One key informant mentioned that “police are good at enforcing the wearing of facial masks in public places” (Interview with Key Informant 5, February 2022). As found in similar studies, the public supported the initiatives of the police as they knew that they were facing a major deadly disease (Tajfel, 1978; Stein, 1976; Todman, 2020). Only around 13% disagreed that the police were efficient in doing their new duties. This result requires senior police leaders to train police officers to enforce strict COVID-19 protocols to increase public trust and confidence that police are efficient in their work to protect citizens fully (Greintzeig, 2020; Staff, 2022).

10. Overall public satisfaction with police performance

The last question participants were asked was whether they were satisfied with police performance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Results of Q10 show three-quarters of participants indicated that they were satisfied with police performance COVID-19. One key informant mentioned “I am satisfied with police performance during the three waves of COVID-19 in Fiji” (Interview with a Key Informant 3, February 2022). Another key informant mentioned “I am happy with police presence in public places [...] especially when police are putting themselves at risk to enforce COVID-19 rules (Interview with Key Informant 5, February 2022). This finding is similar to those found in some of the literature (e.g., Perry & Jonathan-Zamir, 2020; Boon-Kuo et al., 2021; Ghaemmaghami et al., 2021; Heidinger & Cotter, 2020; Nouri & Kochel, 2021; Sargeant et al., 2021; Sibley et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2021). When the public is faced with an emergency or threat, they respond with a general sense of cohesion and positivity (Chand et al., 2022a; Clements, 2020). However, around 12% of participants disagreed and mentioned that they were not satisfied with police performance and suggested some improvements. This finding implies that police leaders must design strategies to increase people’s satisfaction with the police.

Summary of main findings

One aim of the study was to explore police officers’ views of the issues and challenges they faced when enforcing COVID-19 protocols. To sum up, the main findings from police officers’ interviews revealed that the ground-level police faced several challenges in conducting their new COVID-19 health-related duties. These were: needing to undertake extra health-related duties, not having adequate PPE, receiving little training, and dealing with members of the public who did not comply with police instructions. These findings are similar to those in recent literature (e.g., Adepeju & Jimoh, 2021; Alcadipani et al., 2020; Alexander & Ecki, 2020, Horn, 2020; Jennings & Perez, 2020; Matarazzo et al., 2020; Sargeant et al., 2021; Seale et al., 2020; Sibley et al., 2020; Stott et al., 2020; Wallace et al., 2022; Wu, 2021).

The second aim of the study was to explore public perceptions of how well police officers carried out their COVID-19 duties. The results from the public survey of 202 participants highlighted that most people were happy with police work in enforcing COVID-19 protocols, maintaining internal border controls, efficient in carrying out new COVID-19 duties, and were satisfied overall with police performance COVID-19. The public's perception of police officers' work during COVID-19 in Fiji was largely positive. This finding of support for the police is a bit surprising because previous research shows little trust in the police (Chand et al., 2022a, Wallace et al., 2022). For example, a study by Wallace et al. (2022) in the small islands of Trinidad and Tobago found that public support for police was high during the COVID-19 period when normally public support is low. The support for police could be premised on (1) public knowledge of the seriousness of the deadly COVID-19 virus and (2) public awareness of people dying due to COVID-19. These findings are similar to those in literature (e.g., Adepeju & Jimoh, 2021; Alcadipani et al., 2020; Jennings & Perez, 2020; Jiang & Xie, 2020; Mazerolle & Ransley, 2021; Perry & Jonathan-Zamir, 2020; Sargeant et al., 2021; Seale et al., 2020; Sibley et al., 2020; Wallace et al., 2022).

Limitations of the study

Some limitations of the study are acknowledged. Firstly, the qualitative interview with police officers is not based on a probability sample; hence sample bias may exist. Secondly, we acknowledge that the sample in the survey does not reflect the perceptions of the total population of Fiji because the sample consists of a disproportionate number of Indo-Fijians and people with higher educations. People from different demographic groups and education levels may differ in their views and experiences of interactions with the police. Given these limitations, generalizations of the whole population cannot be made.

Policy implications

The relevant stakeholders handling COVID-19 responsibility can use these study findings to make some policy decisions. Government policymakers and police leaders need to ensure police officers are adequately *trained* to ensure police to perform COVID-19 duties more efficiently (Alvarado et al., 2020; Alexander & Ecki, 2020; Cave & Dahir, 2020; Deckert et al., 2021; Frenkel et al., 2020; Jones, 2020; Lum et al., 2020; Maskály et al., 2021; Stogner et al., 2020; Wu, 2021). Secondly, for police safety, officers need to be provided with N-90 facial masks, face shields, and hand sanitizers to carry when police are on foot patrol in public places (Alcadipani et al., 2020; Alexander & Ecki, 2020, Jennings & Perez, 2020; Horn, 2020; Stott et al., 2020). Thirdly, police leaders need to remind their police officers to themselves follow COVID-19 protocols and at the same time ensure citizens abide by COVID-19 protocols (Agusi et al., 2020). This finding is essential for police leaders to take note of and ensure this does not happen when the next COVID-19 wave hits Fiji. Finally, public satisfaction, trust and

legitimacy of police officers must be improved and enhanced (Laufs & Waseem, 2020; Wallace et al., 2022).

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the police officers' views of the issues and challenges they faced when enforcing COVID-19 protocols and the public perceptions of how well the police officers carried out their COVID-19 duties in a small island country in the Pacific Region. To sum up, the main findings from police officers' interviews revealed that the ground-level police faced several challenges when conducting their new COVID-19 health-related duties namely, police officers not receiving adequate training, not enough PPE, having to cope with extra work, and reminding members of public who were not complying with COVID-19 protocols. Moreover, the results from the public survey highlighted that most people were happy with police work in enforcing COVID-19 protocols and were satisfied overall with police performance during the three waves of COVID-19. The findings suggest that police undertook more work during this time and that the public overall appreciated the work of the police and complied with directions. The findings contribute to research on policing in small island developing states and in the Global South.

The government, Ministry of Health officials, and police policymakers need to ensure police officers are adequately trained in COVID-19 protocols, adequate supplies of PPE are given to police, police receive adequate training in how to enforce COVID-19 protocols, and police improve their relationship with the communities. More resources need to be channeled into police training and upskilling on health issues. The police organization needs to develop a better relationship with the community so that public trust and legitimacy of police can be improved if the police closely work with the community. Given that COVID-19 has not been eradicated globally and since Fiji has opened its borders to tourists, the threat of COVID-19 is still present. Fiji has gone through three major waves of COVID-19 and now is the time for the Ministry of Health staff and police officers to be fully prepared and trained to handle the inevitable arrival of the fourth wave of COVID-19. This study has shown that islands can survive deadly COVID-19 with the resilience of the police, people, and community support. This paper suggests that more research on COVID-19 ought to be conducted in the context of small island countries so that island countries can learn from one another rather than follow the practices of the Global North.

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