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Influence of Police Front Desk Attendance Skills on the Public Trust in Police Stations Within Mvita and Changamwe Sub Counties, Kenya

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Abstract

Public trust in the National Police Service is crucial for the effective and professional performance of police officers. This study examined the influence of police front desk attendance skills on public trust in police stations within Mvita and Changamwe Sub-Counties. The research focused on three main objectives: evaluating the impact of police front desk communication proficiency, assessing the influence of problem-solving aptitude, and determining the effect of empathy and respectfulness on public trust. Guided by social capital theory, the study employed a stratified random sampling method, targeting 260 respondents, including members of the public, complainants, suspects, visitors, and police officers. Data collection involved interviews and questionnaires, with ethical clearance and NACOSTI licensing obtained beforehand. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS Version 26, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings revealed that effective communication, problem-solving skills, and empathy/respectfulness at the front desk significantly enhanced public trust. However, inconsistencies in response times highlighted the need for consistent service delivery. The study also identified challenges in addressing perceived inequalities and information provision. These results underscore the importance of efficient, transparent, and fair front desk operations in building public trust and improving community-police relations. The study provides valuable insights for policy recommendations and interventions aimed at strengthening the relationship between the National Police Service and the public.

Keywords: *Police trust, Police front desk attendance skills, National Police service*

1. Introduction

Public trust in the police is foundational to the effectiveness of law enforcement and the broader criminal justice system. Historical breaches of professional ethics and neglect of citizen welfare by police personnel have significantly damaged the reputation of police services globally, necessitating urgent reforms to elevate policing standards and foster public trust (Gjelsvik, 2020; Congressional Research Service, 2020). The public's willingness to cooperate with and support the police is heavily contingent upon their trust in these institutions, a sentiment echoed by researchers (Jackson & Bradford, 2010; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011). Trust is not only a pillar of effective policing but also a crucial component in the symbiotic relationship between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

Various factors contribute to the erosion or bolstering of public trust in police institutions worldwide. In both developed and developing nations, challenges such as police corruption, inefficiency, and unethical behavior, particularly at the front desk, have been significant detractors of trust (Blumberg & Papazoglou, 2020; Sadiq, 2020). Conversely, in regions where police forces have embraced ethical practices, professionalism, and transparency, a marked improvement in public trust has been observed (Lamb, 2021; Hailu, 2018). This dichotomy underscores the variability of public trust in police across different socio-political contexts and highlights the pivotal role of police conduct in shaping these perceptions.

In Africa, the relationship between police and the public is complex and often strained due to historical contexts of colonialism, socio-economic challenges, and governance issues. Numerous countries on the continent, including South



Africa and Nigeria, have grappled with police misconduct, corruption, and human rights abuses, which have significantly impacted public trust (Lamb, 2021). Reforms aimed at improving police accountability and professionalism have been implemented with varying degrees of success (Hailu, 2018). These efforts highlight the ongoing struggle to balance effective policing with the need to uphold human rights and foster community trust.

In East Africa, countries such as Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya have faced similar challenges with police corruption, inefficiency, and the use of excessive force. Public trust in law enforcement agencies in this region has been undermined by incidents of police brutality and corruption, prompting calls for comprehensive reforms (Kivoi, 2020). Efforts to enhance police accountability and community policing initiatives have been part of the strategy to rebuild trust and improve the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies in the region.

The relationship between police performance and public trust, in Kenya, is particularly pronounced, with historical instances of human rights violations, extrajudicial actions, and corruption exacerbating public mistrust (Githinji, 2017; Kibet, 2019). These dynamics have necessitated comprehensive reforms within the Kenyan police service aimed at rehabilitating its image and operational ethos, particularly through the enhancement of front desk operations (National Police Service, 2017; Kivoi, 2020). The front desk, as the initial point of contact between the police and the public, plays an instrumental role in shaping perceptions of the police, highlighting the importance of skills such as communication proficiency, problem-solving aptitude, empathy, and respectfulness in fostering a positive public image of the police service.

This study focused on Mvita and Changamwe Sub-Counties, regions that have been at the epicenter of policing challenges and reforms in Kenya. The primary objective was to investigate the influence of police front desk attendance skills on public trust in police stations within these regions. The study addressed the following research questions: How does communication proficiency at the police front desk affect public trust? What is the impact of problem-solving aptitude on public trust? How do empathy and respectfulness of front desk personnel influence public trust?

By addressing these questions, the study sought to provide insights into the critical role of police front desk services in shaping public perceptions and trust. The findings are expected to inform targeted interventions and policy recommendations that can enhance public trust in the National Police Service, ultimately contributing to more effective and community-oriented policing.

2. Research Methods

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing public trust in police front desk services within Mvita and Changamwe Sub-Counties. The mixed-methods design allowed for a nuanced exploration of the research questions, utilizing the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative data. Subject selection targeted a diverse group of respondents, including members of the public, complainants, suspects, visitors to police stations, and members of the National Police Service. Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure representation from these various groups, resulting in a total of 260 respondents proportionately selected to capture a wide range of experiences and perspectives. Data collection involved the use of structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaires captured quantitative data on respondents' perceptions of police front desk services, focusing on communication proficiency, problem-solving aptitude, and empathy/respectfulness. The semi-structured interviews provided qualitative insights into respondents' experiences, allowing for a deeper exploration of themes identified in the questionnaires. Outcome measures centered on the levels of public trust in police front desk services, assessed using Likert-scale questions in the questionnaires and thematic analysis of interview data.

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) software, Version 26. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, summarized the data, while inferential statistics, including correlation and regression analyses, examined the relationships between variables. Qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed thematically, involving several rounds of coding to refine the themes and ensure consistency. Data collection was conducted under conditions that ensured respondents' privacy and confidentiality, with interviews and questionnaires administered in secure environments within police stations. Ethical clearance and NACOSTI licensing were obtained prior to the commencement of data collection to



ensure adherence to ethical standards. Methodological activities included the development and piloting of data collection instruments, training of data collectors, and the actual data collection phase. A pilot study tested the reliability and validity of the questionnaires and interview guides, allowing for necessary adjustments based on feedback. Data collectors were trained on ethical considerations, data collection techniques, and the importance of maintaining confidentiality. This systematic approach ensured a thorough investigation into the influence of police front desk attendance skills on public trust, providing a robust framework for capturing both quantitative and qualitative data and offering a comprehensive understanding of the research questions.

3.0 Analysis Result and Discussion

3.1 Influence of Police Front Desk Communication Proficiency on the Public Trust in Police Stations within Mvita and Changamwe Sub Counties

The investigation into the influence of police front desk attendance skills on public trust within Mvita and Changamwe Sub counties revealed critical insights, particularly in terms of communication proficiency. Employing a Likert scale, the study evaluated dimensions such as conveying information, attentiveness, clarity, and the conveyance of empathy. The results showcased a nuanced picture of communication proficiency, as illustrated in Figure 1.

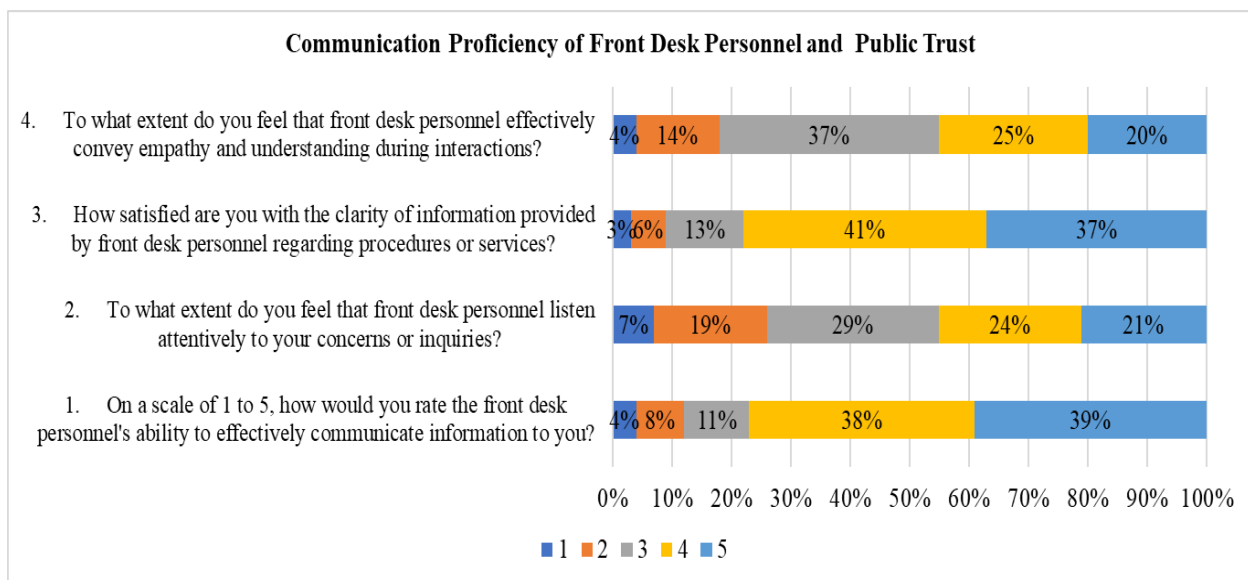


Fig 1: Influence of Communication Proficiency of Front Desk Personnel on Public Trust within Mvita and Changamwe Sub counties

The study uncovered that a substantial majority, comprising 77%, rated the communication ability of front desk personnel as good or excellent. This aligns with prior research by Kivoi (2020) and Namira (2010), emphasizing the pivotal role of effective communication in shaping public perceptions of police services. Attentiveness was also a noteworthy factor, with 69% expressing moderate to complete satisfaction. Additionally, clarity of information provided received favorable ratings from 78% of the respondents, echoing the importance placed on clear communication in fostering trust.

In assessing the conveyance of empathy and understanding, the results indicated positive perceptions, as 82% felt that front desk personnel exhibited at least a moderate level of empathy. These findings parallel the emphasis on interpersonal skills highlighted by Mew (2018) and Lampropoulos et al. (2022). The alignment between empirical evidence and existing literature underscores the enduring significance of communication proficiency in enhancing trust within law enforcement agencies.

In conclusion, the analysis demonstrates that front desk personnel in Mvita and Changamwe Sub counties generally exhibit satisfactory attendance skills, contributing significantly to public trust in police stations. The study advocates for continuous training and development for front desk personnel, emphasizing the importance of maintaining high



standards of communication and professionalism. Such endeavors, as suggested by Griego (2021) and King County Executive's Office (2010), could serve as catalysts in perpetuating positive relationships and further elevating trust levels within the community.

3.2 Influence of Police Front Desk Problem-Solving Aptitude on the Public Trust in Police Stations within Mvita and Changamwe Sub Counties

The investigation focused on assessing the problem-solving aptitude of police front desk attendance and its subsequent influence on public trust within Mvita and Changamwe Sub-counties. The front desk serves as the primary interface between the public and law enforcement, making its efficacy critical in shaping perceptions of police services. The results were as presented in figure 2.

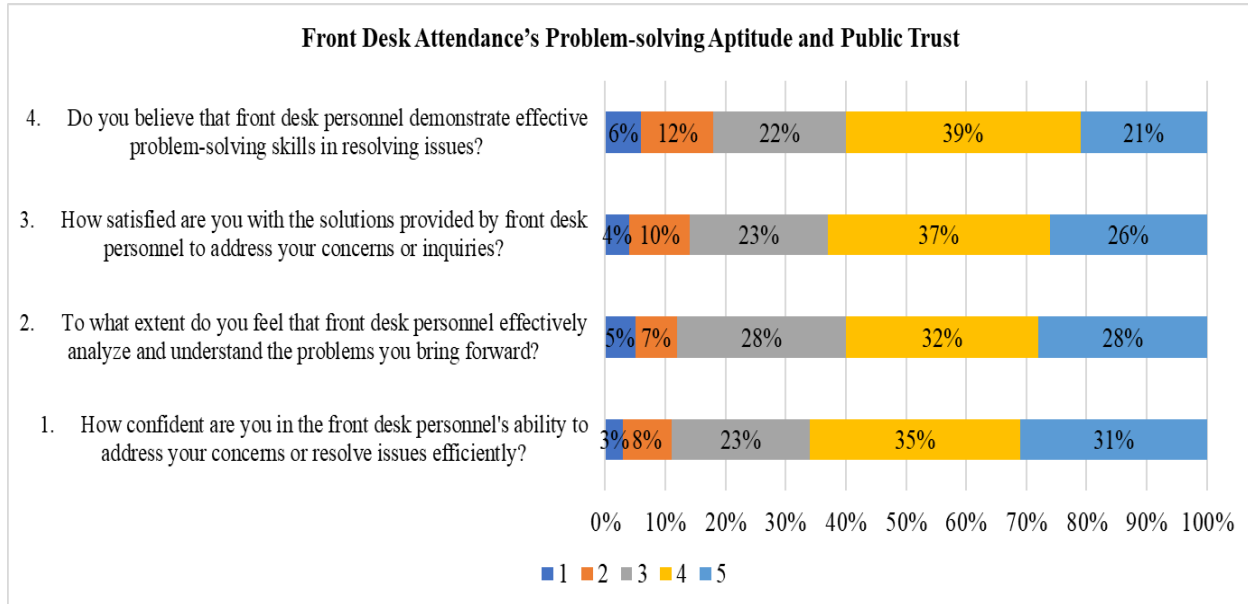


Fig 2: Influence of Police Front Desk Attendance's Problem-solving Aptitude on Public Trust within Mvita and Changamwe Sub counties

Through a Likert scale assessment, the study explored dimensions such as the efficiency of addressing concerns, understanding issues, and the satisfaction levels with solutions provided. Notably, a substantial majority of respondents, representing 66%, displayed moderate to complete confidence in the problem-solving abilities of front desk personnel. This positive perception underscores their pivotal role in fostering trust and satisfaction within the community.

From the analysis, it emerged that about 60% of those surveyed acknowledged that front desk personnel have an effective grasp of analyzing and understanding the issues presented to them. This demonstrates a significant level of trust and satisfaction among the public regarding the problem-solving skills and empathy exhibited by front desk personnel in handling their concerns. Additionally, the majority of respondents, totaling 63%, conveyed satisfaction ranging from satisfied to very satisfied with the solutions offered by front desk personnel, reflecting a positive evaluation of their problem-solving capabilities. This consensus highlights a broader confidence among the public in the ability of these personnel to competently address and resolve issues, further underlining the critical role they play in fostering trust and ensuring satisfactory outcomes for the concerns brought forward by community members.

These findings align closely with previous empirical literature, emphasizing the importance of effective problem-solving skills in bolstering public trust within police stations. Studies by Kivoi (2020) and Namira (2010) underscore the significance of front desk personnel in shaping positive perceptions of police services, particularly through their problem-solving abilities. Additionally, the emphasis on customer satisfaction, as highlighted by the King County



Executive's Office (2010), resonates with the observed satisfaction levels among respondents in this study, further validating the importance of problem-solving aptitude in enhancing public trust.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that front desk personnel within Mvita and Changamwe Sub-counties exhibit commendable problem-solving aptitude, as perceived by the public. The positive perception of their ability to address concerns efficiently, analyze problems effectively, and provide satisfactory solutions underscores their pivotal role in fostering trust and satisfaction within the community. These results emphasize the importance of continued investment in training and development programs to further enhance the problem-solving skills of front desk personnel, ultimately strengthening the relationship between law enforcement agencies and the public.

3.3 Influence of Police Front Desk Empathy and Respectfulness on the Public Trust in Police Stations within Mvita and Changamwe Sub Counties

The analysis of empathy and respectfulness as indicators of the influence of police front desk attendance skills on public trust in Mvita and Changamwe Sub counties provides insightful results as presented in figure 3.

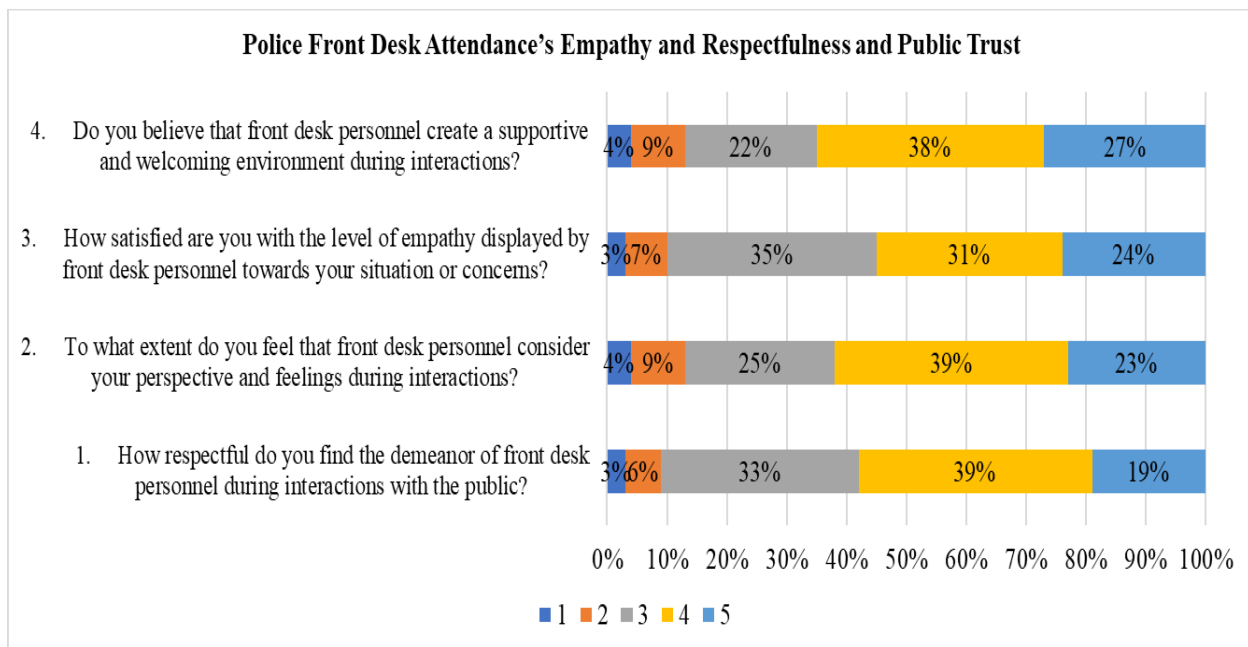


Fig 3: Influence of Police Front Desk Attendance's Empathy and Respectfulness on Public Trust within Mvita and Changamwe Sub counties

From these results, it's evident that there's a prevailing sense of satisfaction with the empathy and respectfulness displayed by the front desk personnel among the respondents. The moderate to high ratings across the board suggest that the interpersonal skills of the front desk personnel, in terms of respect, empathy, and creating a supportive environment, are perceived positively by a majority of the public. This positive perception is crucial for building and maintaining trust between the police and the communities they serve.

Comparing these findings with the empirical literature review reveals a congruence with the expectations set by previous reforms and studies. Literature suggests that interpersonal skills, such as empathy and respect, and the creation of a supportive environment are fundamental in fostering public trust (Kivoi, 2020; Mew, 2018; Lampropoulos et al., 2022). The emphasis on these skills in the reforms and the training of front desk personnel appears to have positively impacted the public's perception, aligning with the notion that effective communication and interpersonal interactions can significantly enhance trust in police institutions. However, there's a noted discrepancy in the neutral responses, particularly in the satisfaction with empathy and the extent to which personnel consider the public's perspective, indicating room for improvement. While the majority express satisfaction, the presence of neutral



and dissatisfied respondents underscores the variability in individual experiences and the complexity of fully meeting public expectations.

In conclusion, the analysis suggests that the emphasis on empathy and respectfulness by police front desk personnel in Mvita and Changamwe Sub counties has a positive influence on public trust. The findings align with the literature, reinforcing the importance of interpersonal skills in enhancing police-public relations. While the overall trend is positive, the existence of neutral and negative experiences highlights the ongoing challenge of ensuring consistently high-quality interactions for all members of the public. Continued focus on training and development in these areas is essential for further improvements in public trust and satisfaction.

4. Conclusions

The findings of this study highlight the critical role that police front desk attendance skills play in shaping public trust in police stations within Mvita and Changamwe Sub-Counties. Effective communication proficiency, problem-solving aptitude, and empathy/respectfulness were identified as key factors that significantly enhance public trust. The study revealed that the quality of interactions at the police front desk, as the initial point of contact, is instrumental in forming public perceptions of the police service. This underscores the importance of equipping front desk personnel with the necessary skills to foster positive relationships with the community.

The positive correlation between satisfactory communication, adept problem-solving, and empathetic interactions with higher levels of public trust suggests that targeted training programs for front desk personnel could have a profound impact on improving community-police relations. The study also identified areas needing improvement, particularly in ensuring consistency in service delivery and addressing perceived inequalities and information provision. By addressing these issues through comprehensive training and continuous professional development, the National Police Service can enhance its image and operational effectiveness, ultimately fostering a more trusting and cooperative relationship with the public. These findings provide valuable insights for policy recommendations and strategic interventions aimed at rebuilding and strengthening public trust in the police force.

5. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn from this study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance public trust in police front desk services within Mvita and Changamwe Sub-Counties. Firstly, it is essential to invest in comprehensive training programs for front desk personnel. These programs should focus on practical communication skills, conflict resolution, and empathetic interactions. Regular workshops and training sessions can ensure that personnel are equipped with the necessary skills to foster positive public interactions. Additionally, developing and implementing clear standard operating procedures (SOPs) for front desk operations can help achieve consistency in service delivery. These procedures should emphasize promptness, transparency, and fairness in handling public inquiries and complaints. Regular audits and feedback mechanisms should be established to monitor adherence to these standards and identify areas needing improvement.

Furthermore, enhancing community engagement efforts is vital for improving public trust. The National Police Service should increase its community engagement efforts through regular community forums, outreach programs, and public feedback sessions. These initiatives can help bridge the gap between the police and the public, providing a platform for addressing concerns and building trust. Ensuring that all community members are treated equally and that information about police services and procedures is clear and accessible is also crucial. The police should conduct public awareness campaigns to educate the community about their rights and the services available to them. Clear signage at police stations and easily accessible online resources can improve information provision. To maintain high standards of service, it is recommended that the National Police Service establish regular monitoring and evaluation processes. This includes collecting feedback from the public and conducting performance reviews of front desk personnel. Such measures can help identify areas for continuous improvement and ensure that the services provided meet public expectations. By implementing these recommendations, the National Police Service can significantly enhance the quality of front desk services, thereby fostering greater public trust and cooperation. These strategic interventions are essential for building a more effective, transparent, and community-oriented policing system.

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