ROLE OF CIVIL POLICE IN CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN DISTRICT LUCKNOW RURAL DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

Executing the government orders during Covid-19 lockdown along with maintaining a compatible surrounding for the civilians was a stupendous task for the police personnel. In this paper, case of Lucknow Rural district of Uttar Pradesh state in India has been taken to study the affect of pandemic period over policing and vice versa. Punitive actions, moral and community policing through qualitative analysis and working of police in lockdown through empirical study have been laid down. Pandemic and the lockdown thereafter, imposed an alarming situation throughout the world and India was no exception. In this scenario, it was a challenging task for the police administration of a newly carved unit to confront the wrath of civilians while protecting them and executing the government orders peacefully at the same time. This study is all about the emotional stress and psychological trauma through which police and the civilians have gone through.

Keywords: Covid-19 Pandemic, Lucknow Rural, Moral Policing, Community Policing, Punitive Action.

Introduction

District Lucknow Rural was carved out from district Lucknow after the implementation of commissionarate system in the later, on 13th January, 2020 by the notification: 8/2020/55P/Six-Pu-6-2020-01Miscellaneous/2020 of Uttar Pradesh Government. Region taken under study that is district Lucknow Rural comprises of five police stations, namely, Bakshi ka Talab (26.998858°N, 80.921315°E), Itaunja (27.084289°N, 80.891387°E), Malihabad (26.921166°N, 80.713689°E), Maal (27.024843°N, 80.739030°E) and Nigoha (26.569111°N, 81.035816°E) headquartered at police office (26.745769°N, 80.965831°E). Modus operandi of the Indian

police has always been in question as it is substantiated by unethical practices at times in the history of policing. "In a shocking and a deplorable incident, a specially-abled e-rickshaw driver was allegedly manhandled by a police officer in Kannauj district of Uttar Pradesh. A video of the incident, which exposes the brutal face of the UP Police, has gone viral on social media platforms."[i] But, considering the current scenario in pandemic period, Indian police has emerged as the savior of mankind. This period has seen a drastic change in the reformative process of the image of the police. "They are doing a range of jobs: enforcing the lockdown, contact tracing, manning check-points, and providing security at high-risk zones like hospitals, quarantine centers and containment zones, and - importantly - calming people's fears about corona virus."[ii] Sudden change in the social, economic, psychological and political factors have led to a situation of panic throughout the world. No government, society or machinery was prepared for this, which led to the ultimate crisis.

Few authorities claim this pandemic as bio terrorism by China. "Mainstream scientific research and the more reputable mass media denounced the theory that the novel corona virus had been genetically engineered or was a bio-weapon".[iii] During the lockdown, Indian police posted rap songs, walked around the towns with a mythical god of death to make people understand the gravity of the situation. Social media accounts of police stations came in action for the awareness regarding the pandemic as well as for the help.[iv]

Generally, people don't have a good perception about the police owing to its cruel behavior with the general public. In most of the cases, it has been alleged by the people that was police use to take bribe for all the activities which have been assigned to them as a duty to discharge. Although police corruption is a universal problem but it is more rampant in the developing nations as compared to the developed nations.[v] But, the generalized image of the police in the people's mind has gone through a drastic change during the lock down period in Covid-19 pandemic. This is because of the transformation in the modus operandi of the police. Police personnel have shown exemplary courage in discharging their duty and protecting the society for saving the humanity.[vi] During the pandemic lockdown period many migrant laborers and other peoples such as students got trapped wherever they were. In this case police of district Lucknow Rural played an active role. Police vans were deployed to provide food and essentials to the people at their home.[vii] Policing in this time period became more problematic and dangerous job because in India, there is still a lack of police force which is about 0.5 million and in that too police personnel are being quarantined and even getting expired. This has led to an alarming situation in the crisis. Man power in police has always been a grave issue as going by the population of India, police personnel are very low in proportion and that has a direct impact over the policing as well as the psychology of police personnel and civilians.[viii] In order to protect themselves, police personnel should take proper care of the safety norms while discharging their duties. They should avoid getting in close contact with the people and duties of prime importance should be focussed upon. Duties which can be managed by mere instructions should not be handled physically.[ix] Migrant laborers from across the country fled to their homes in this time period and it was a bit difficult for the government to act immediately over this issue.

Although, government took prompt actions and initiatives but, many laborers panicked and started walking to their homes on foot as there was complete lockdown throughout the nation and there were no means of transportation.[x]

In this alarming situation, there were two problems which need to be addressed in the long run. One is that every person should have financial knowledge, so that, he could go through these inevitable disasters and the other is that, government should make necessary arrangements so that, employment can be generated at the local level. Many of the migrant workers showcased their fear in front of the camera and expressed that, police personnel are beating us and they are not allowing us to sit anywhere to relax.[xi]

Methodology

Methodology involved in this research article is both qualitative and quantitative. Empirical study has been carried out based on the comparative analysis of situations before and during lockdown in the region taken under study.

Importance of frontline warriors

We must remember that, every police personnel in uniform is a human being and every person in the society as a civilian is a policeman in its own capacity of being human itself. In the time of crisis, we should not expect but, act to safeguard the humanity. When we are surrounded by problems from all the directions, then it is police which is helping us in sailing through the ocean of miseries. But, when we get through this, then for the sake of humanity, we must introspect and ask if, there was anyone who is going to protect the police personnel who are safeguarding the humanity in the time of crisis.[xii] Police personnel were not prepared to tackle the pandemic initially but soon they adopted with the situation very smartly and outperformed in all the aspects. Along with the performance, police personnel were unsafe as well because no proper practices were followed while discharging their duties as there were not any best practices in actual to adopt.[xiii] So, government should pool in the human resource to devise out safe practices for frontline warriors which could help in discharging their duty effectively.[xiv]

When nine members of Tablighi Jamaat came from Delhi then they all tested positive and possibility of spread of pandemic rose. But, effective measures of the police over there controlled the outburst of corona and things got normalized soon.[xv] In pandemic, police have had helped a lot to the migrant laborers as well as the common public for fulfilling the requirement of their basic needs. Even after the pandemic gets over, people will need the support of police for a longer period in this context as the collateral damage done by the pandemic will be long lasting and it is the short one.[xvi]

Challenges before police during lockdown

Enforcing the law which is going against the interest of public is in itself a stupendous task and getting house arrest for a common man is not humanitarian in any sense but, going by the condition of spread of the deadly virus, this step was much needed. A deadline of four hours was

given by the police to common people throughout India in order to curb the pandemic. Considering the population and vast geographical stretch along with remarkably low police-public ratio, it was a very difficult task for the police as well as common man.[xvii] For the frontline warriors, it is impossible to get their job done through telecommunication or through digital mode. It becomes necessary for them to get in contact with the people.[xviii] In order to establish proper control near hospitals and institutional quarantine centers, police personnel have been deployed. Even, at every hotspot and the containment zone in Lucknow Rural district, one officer of the rank of sub-inspector and two constables are deployed, so that, proper care could be taken off. Sanitization of affected place and making all the basic items available at the doorsteps of the people under lockdown is ensured by the police.[xix]

Prima facie, it seems that police is tasked with maintaining law and order situation in the society but, in actual, police plays the primary source of contact with the general public when it comes to implement the policies of government at the grassroot level. In order to enforce the lockdown, police automatically gets accountable for supplying the basic needs of the people as it is the police who are stopping them not to go out of their homes to buy basic necessities.[xx] It was very difficult for the cops to implement and ensure the enforceability of the very basic rules among the Indian public as it gets very ambitious and overzealous at times. Taking the example of drum and utensil beating initiative by the Prime Minister of India in order to boost the morale of corona warriors as well as common people, people got overzealous and they had not even break the lockdown norms but also flouted the social cum physical distancing norms prescribed by the government as well as World Health Organization for containing the pandemic.[xxi] When the lockdown was imposed, police personnel started stopping everyone in order to enforce the policy of government but government did not impose any restrictions over the people associated with health services as well as people concerned with civil supplies. But, it was seen that many mischievous people posed as health workers and flouted lockdown norms. In order to curb those police stopped everyone. This had posed a serious issue for those who were actually performing their services. Government soon directed district administration for issuing identity cards or special permissions for those who are associated with health facilities and civil supplies.[xxii] One of the major concerns of the pandemic period was the spread of false news. Rumors tend to create a condition of panic and in grave situation it can lead to a condition of civil war. To combat the fake news, Uttar Pradesh Police has formed digital volunteers at the local level and if the crime is committed, then accused is booked under relevant sections of Information and Technology Act and Indian Penal Code, 1860.[xxiii] Since, population density of cities is much more as compared to the rural areas, so more police force have had been deployed to the urban region. This has lead to the increase in vulnerability quotient of rural region increased. It must be taken into knowledge that none of the region can be left as such, because holistic development is required to combat with any problem. If, pandemic got contained but crime increased in rural region then also pandemic can resurgent.[xxiv]

Moral policing during lockdown

Moral policing is one of the important aspects for persuading and commanding the crowd in a positive manner which has played a positive role in this scenario. Wherever, police has its positive image due to moral policing, the responses of people were seen positive. But, wherever police were alleged of being brutal and cruel, there it has been very difficult for the authorities to control the crowd. Community policing is also a part of moral policing as well. In community policing, moral policing is required. All the influential people in the society, whom society considers as respectable are required by the police during the maintenance of law and order situation. Politicians, local leaders, religious leaders, educated and well mannered individuals having due recognition offered by the society comes in these criteria that help police in normalizing the grave situations. During the compliance of the lockdown norms, police in India used minimal force. It was at times misrepresented in media that police acted inhumanly. But, seeking the ground reality, it was found that police was trying to convince people first and requesting them after making them aware of the lockdown norms. Still, people acted against the norms and thus police was compelled to take necessary action.[xxv]

Police officials have been directed for not taking action against the persons, who are involved in petty crimes knowingly or unknowingly, especially in the cases where punishment is less than seven years.[xxvi] If, the situation of the society is not getting disturbed by the occurrence of small crimes and that could be in unawareness too, then action over these kinds of cases should be avoided. As action against people in small crimes could not only involve physical contact but also, create a scenario of panic which could lead to further disturbance in social peace.

Legal tools of the police to fight against Corona pandemic

Punitive actions must be taken into consideration for the habitual offenders as well as for deterrent.[xxvii] By doing so, possibility of containment of any problem increases manifold. It sets out a very clear and loud massage to all the sections of the society that illegal activities will never be dealt with morality and kindness rather it will be confronted with brute force of legality and normality.[xxviii] In Lucknow Rural district, police has been deployed for supporting medical and paramedical staff from miscreants, supervision, detention and arrest if any case of misappropriation with medicine against the common interest of the public is being done along with its routine duty of patrolling and enforcing government's orders. Disaster Management Act and the Epidemic Act have been the two most important legal tools of the police in corona pandemic in order to combat with violators of the lockdown norms. In order to penalize and book under relevant sections of the special acts, these two above mentioned legal entities were referred.[xxix] Vehicles are being challaned as well as getting seized. FIRs are being registered under section 188 of Indian Penal Code against the people who are not in conformity of the actions of the police personnel and are also showing their discontent through their activities against the police personnel. Those persons who are harming the police and any other government employee during the course of discharging their duties are being booked under the

aforementioned section of the IPC.[xxx] Section 269 and section 270 of Indian Penal Code, 1860 stating that any person who is negligently becoming the factor of spreading the disease which is lethal to life and committing such acts which can act as a factor in spreading the same, respectively are used to charge the accused. Section 269 of IPC attracts an imprisonment of six months or fine, or both and section 270 of IPC attracts an imprisonment of 02 years or fine, or both.[xxxi]

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath directed the officials to book the people under National Security Act.[xxxii] People who were flouting the lockdown norms will be charged under section 51 of the Disaster Management Act if they did so in continuation for three weeks.[xxxiii]

Uttar Pradesh Epidemic Disease Control Ordinance, 2020 is meant not only for the protection of common man and punishing the violators but under its ambit, all the corona warriors will also get protected and benefitted. It is very important to provide legal immunity to the frontline warriors in order to equip them with great vigor to fight the cause.[xxxiv]

Comparative study of crime before and during corona pandemic

Apart from maintaining the law and order situation police has also played an active role in helping the people in other manners as well like distribution of the food, masks and arrangement of temporary shelters as it was the police who acted as frontline warrior and no other person was allowed to move out in the lockdown period. Almost, all of the police personnel were compelled to discharge their duty more than the normal hours.

The most important aspect of policing throughout this pandemic has been in the fight with fake news and creating awareness among people through to different and creative means by the police personnel. While lockdown was imposed it was widely circulated by the health officials that washing of hands and using of masks is very important to protect oneself from the deadly virus, creating a great demand of sanitizers and masks. This has led to the soaring price of both the commodities. This created a condition of panic among common people but soon police came into action and warned the traders of dire consequences under the ambit of law that, if anyone created a scene of panic by asking illegitimate price as well as found doing hoarding of the commodities for unethical practices. Sting operations and raids were also conducted at shops which created a positive environment for the common people in the form of deterrence for the potential offenders.

Police did the job of making people aware about the do's and don'ts perfectly. They have used loudspeakers over their patrolling vehicles and kept on repeating the record at every square. But, people still flouted the norms. Few went on to clicking selfies at famous places. This was the heights of foolishness people did in order to enjoy but never took corona seriously. Few of the crimes like domestic violence have increased and this was envisaged as well. This is due to the tendency of human beings living together under one ceiling with lack of understandings as well as bitter financial conditions. But, along with this, few other crimes like theft have also surged up and these are also cause of concern for the policing.[xxxv]

All kind of habitual criminals put their activities somewhat to an end but the activities of cyber criminals had increased manifolds. This can be attributed to the isolation of people during the lockdown and quarantine period. This has not only led to the habitual criminals surpassing their earlier activities but the common public and new offenders came into light.[xxxvi]
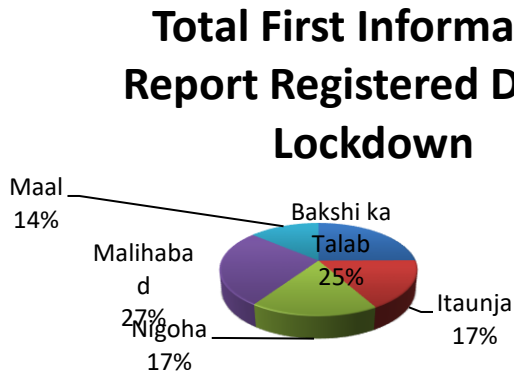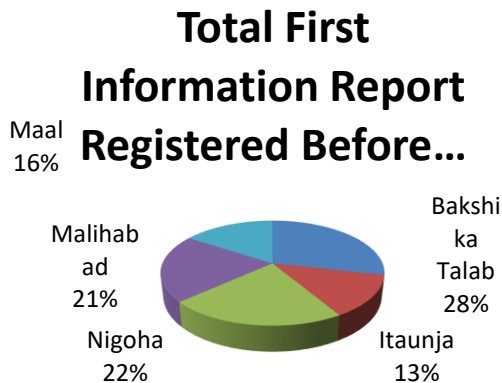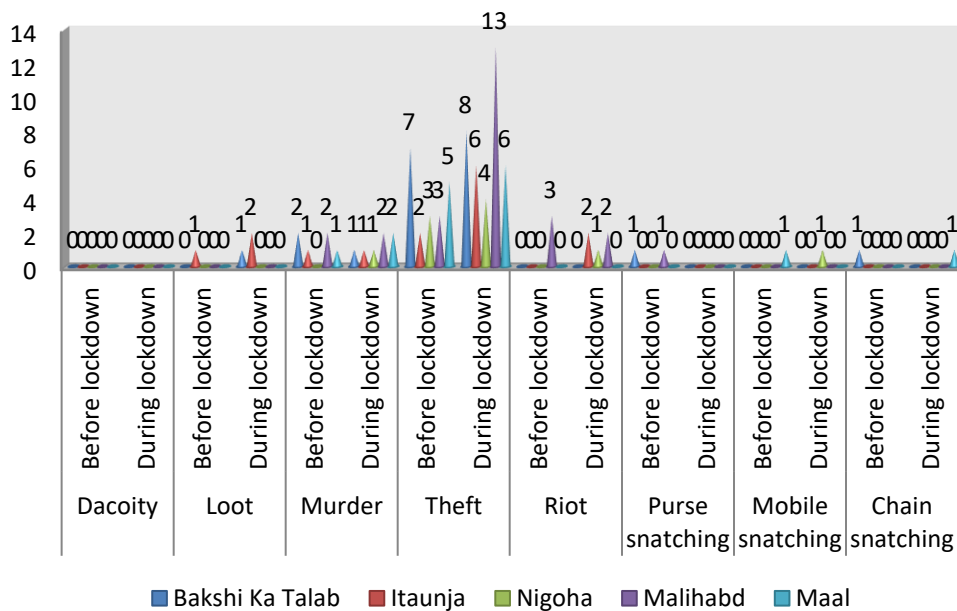
Figure 1

Total First Information Report Registered During Lockdown

Figure 2

Total First Information Report Registered Before…

Figure 1 shows the percentage share of first information reports registered before lockdown from the time period 01st December, 2019 to 23rd March, 2020. Bakshi ka Talab witnessed most number of reported crimes while Itaunja witnessed the least. While figure 2 shows the percentage share of first information reports registered during lockdown from the time period 24th March, 2020 to 31st July, 2020.

Here, Malihabad shared the majority of crime while least was in Maal police station during lockdown. Since percentage of crime registered in police station Maal, Bakshi ka Talab and Nigoha have been decreased so it can be inference out that crime rate went down in these areas where as crime rate went up in Malihabad and Itaunja as the percentage of first information registered in these areas went up during the lockdown. Since there is not much changes in the figures, so it cannot be clearly stated that lockdown has really impacted the crime rate or not.

Figure 3

In figure 3, comparison has been drawn for certain categories of crime in police stations of district Lucknow Rural before and during lockdown from the time period 01st December, 2019 to 23rd March, 2020 and 24th March, 2020 to 31st July, 2020 respectively. For dacoity, condition was same in both the time periods taken into consideration. No case of dacoity was registered in any of the police stations of district Lucknow Rural. For loot, 01 case was registered in PS Itaunja before lockdown while 1 case was registered in PS Bakshi ka Talab and 2 in Itaunja during lockdown. Crime of murder was almost same in the both time periods but the cases of theft abruptly increased during lockdown. Loss of jobs during pandemic is the major reason behind this. Riot before lockdown were 3 in Malihabad police station but during lockdown, it was reported in Itaunja, Nigoha and Malihabad. This is due to the conditions aroused in order to enforce the norms of lockdown during pandemic. Purse, mobile and chain snatching crimes were meager or nil.

Police action to combat the vulnerable situation during Covid-19
Food was being prepared at police stations in Lucknow Rural district. There are five police stations viz. Malihabad, Maal, Nigoha, Bakshi ka Talab and Ittaunja, where concerned station house officers took the charge of distributing the food prepared at police stations. For this purpose, government provided the fund and help from non-governmental organizations as well as volunteering organizations was taken. Food was offered to vulnerable, marginalized and

migrant laborers in the society. [xxxvii] Hotspots and containment zones are being regularly monitored and changed according to the policies. Use of barricades and loudspeakers along with police force is actively deployed to the hotspots and containment zones. [xxxviii]
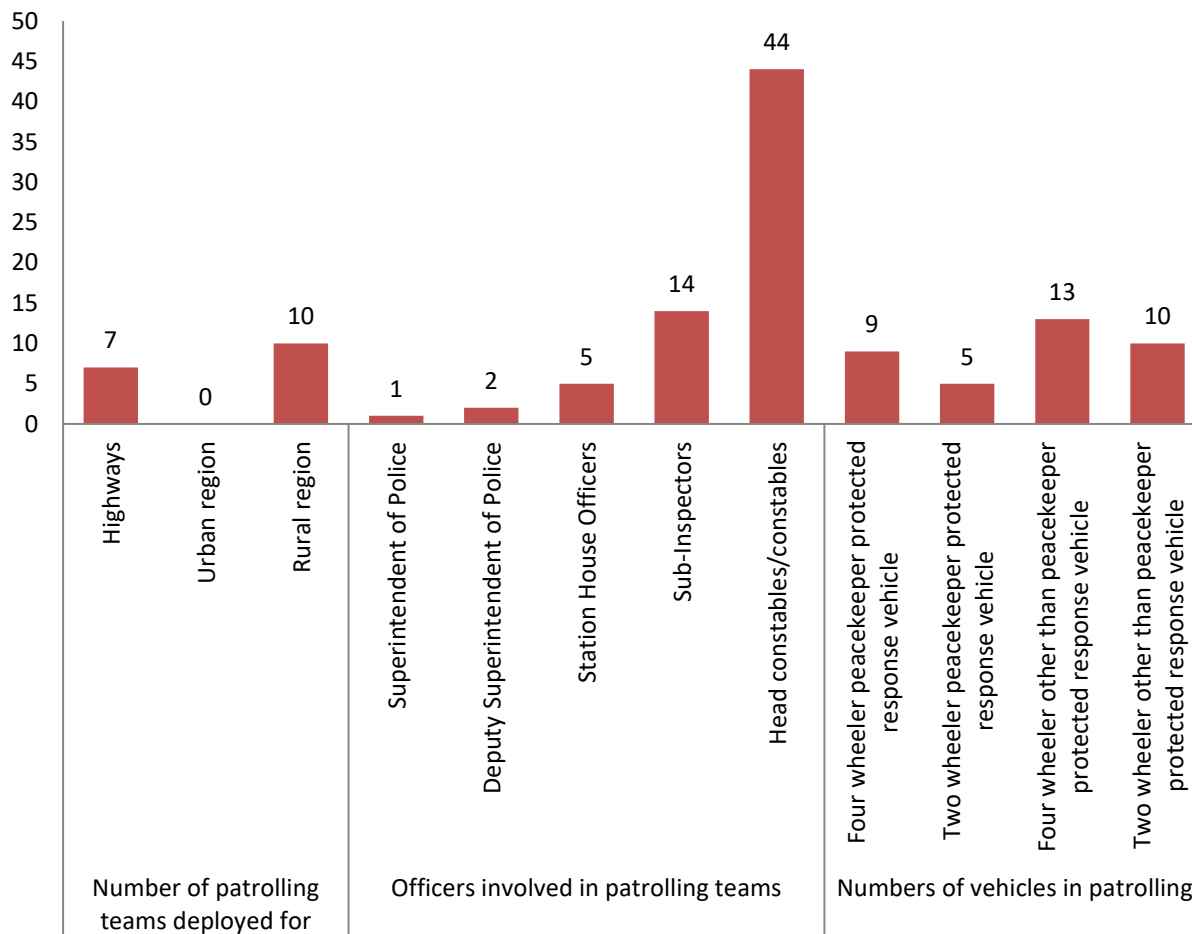
Figure 4

Figure 4 shows the number of force deployed in the district Lucknow Rural for patrolling purposes and for law and order maintenance at crucial spots. Since there is no urban region falls in district Lucknow Rural, so the patrolling force is shown nil. On the highways there are 7 patrolling teams in total while in the rural region there are 10 patrolling teams. There are 9 four wheeler peacekeeper protected response vehicle and 5 two wheelers of the same category whereas, 13 four wheelers and 10 two wheelers other than peacekeeper protected response vehicles have been deployed for patrolling purposes. One officer of SP (Superintendent of Police) level, two of DSP (Deputy Superintendent of Police) level, 5 station house officers, 14 sub inspectors and 44 personnel of head constable/constable ranks have been deployed for patrolling purposes at crucial spots, apart from regular patrolling services.
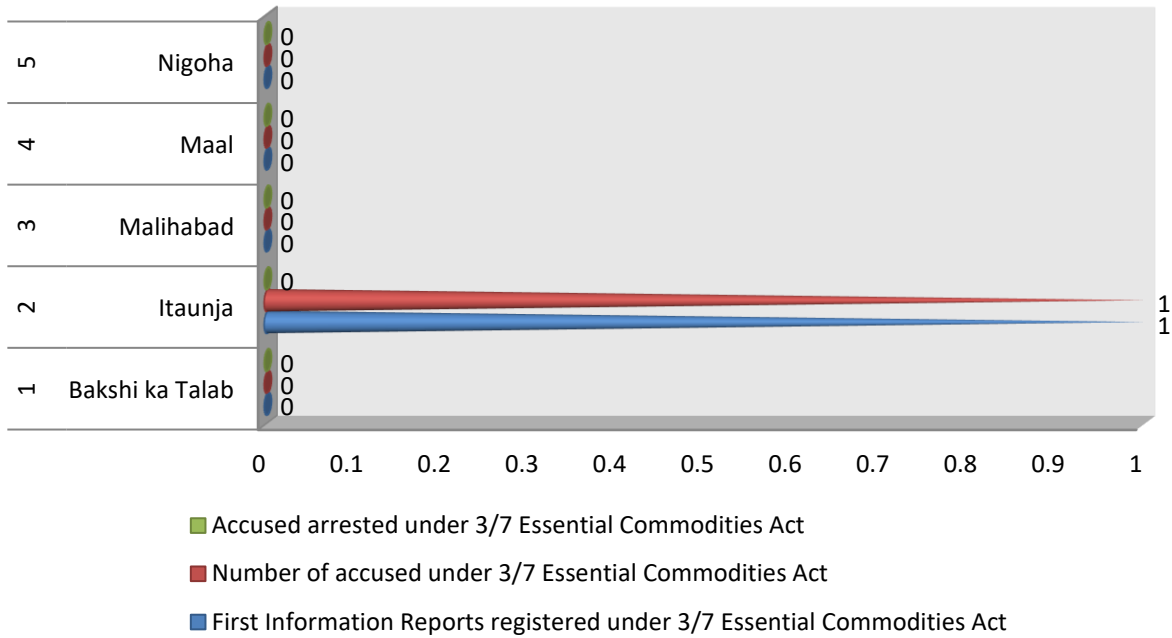
Figure 5

Figure 5 shows the details of section 3/7 Essential Commodities Act where in PS Itaunja, only one case was registered and one person was arrested from 24th March, 2020 to 04th September, 2020.
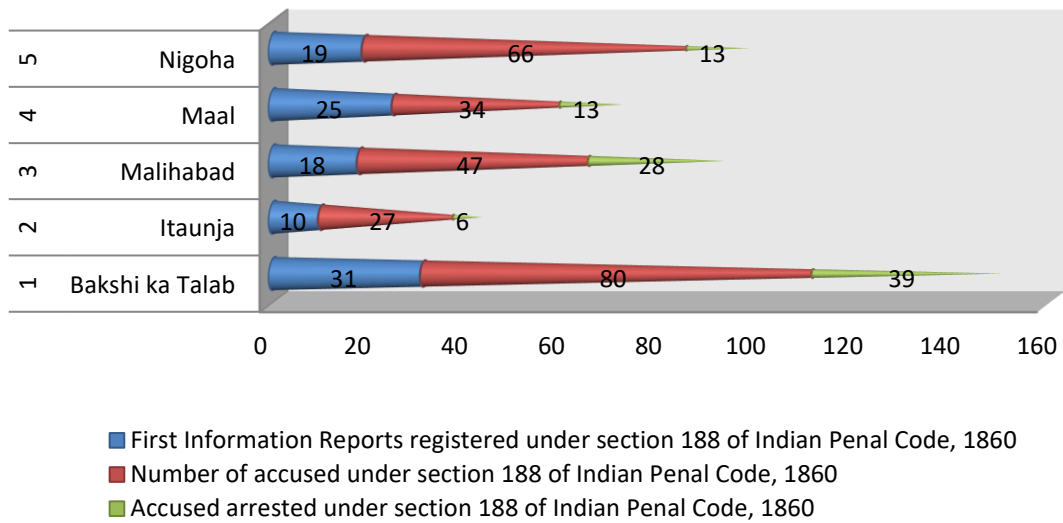
Figure 6

First Information Reports registered under section 188 of Indian Penal Code, 1860
Number of accused under section 188 of Indian Penal Code, 1860
Accused arrested under section 188 of Indian Penal Code, 1860

Figure 6 shows the actions taken under section 188 of Indian Penal Code, 1860. Most number of cases registered in the time period from 24th March, 2020 to 04th September, 2020 is in PS Bakshi ka Talab whereas, least are in PS Itaunja of the same circle.
Figure   7

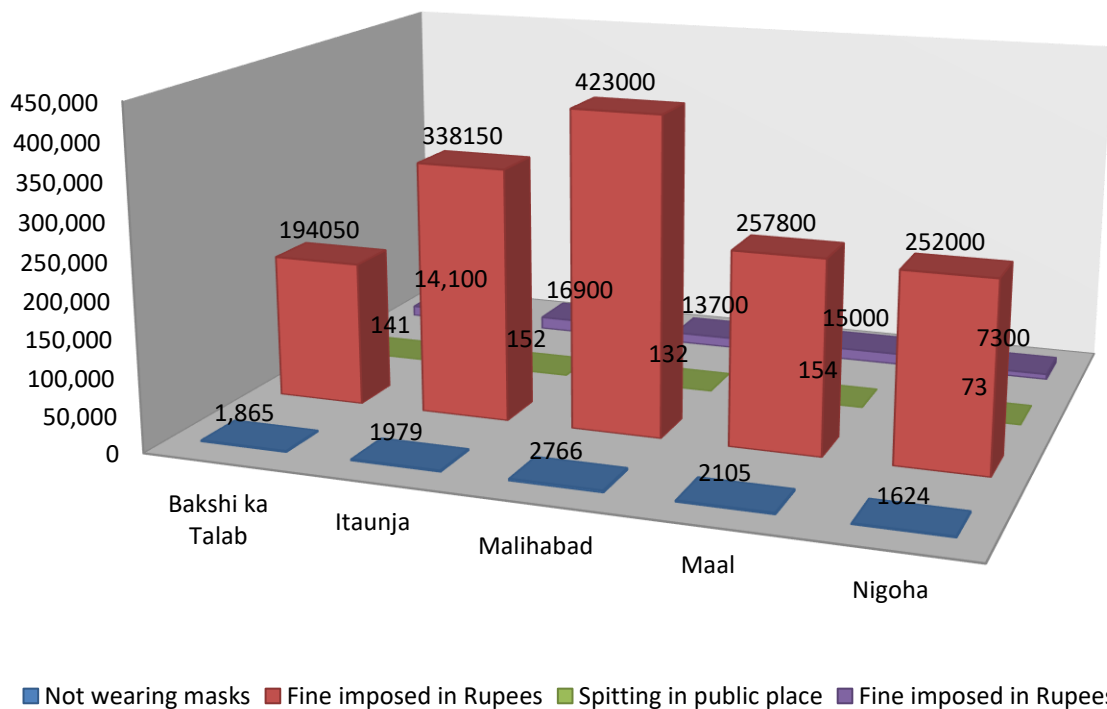Not wearing masks   Fine imposed in Rupees   Spitting in public place   Fine imposed in Rupees

Figure 7 shows the data on people fined for not wearing masks and spitting in public place. Through the figure, it can be inference out that cases were almost uniform throughout the

district, despite of awareness campaigns at the end of government. This also shows the attitude of people blatantly disregarding the authority.
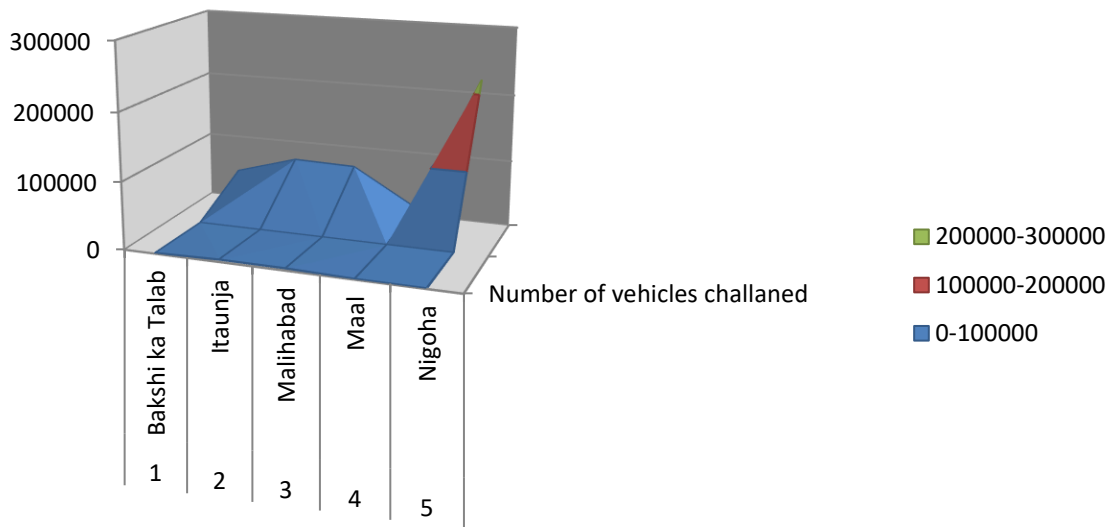
Figure 8

Figure 8 shows that number of vehicles challaned, seized and the fine charged, police station wise from 24th March, 2020 to 04thth September, 2020.

Conclusion

With growing concerns of police personnel getting diagnosed with corona virus, the smart policing needs are much needed in current times. If, the surveillance and compliance of the order of the government can be done through online mode or by any methodology where police do not have to involve with the public in person, then the virus can be contained easily and the lives of police personnel and the general public can be saved effectively. In current scenario, police department have utilized the social media and technology in the best possible manner. Use of WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and internet in general has been best utilized by the police in tracking the grievances of general public as well as making it easier to trace the cyber crimes. Data collection in Uttar Pradesh Police was done manually but since the establishment of new police headquarters in Lucknow, in the period of corona pandemic, all the information related to pandemic is being collected throughout the state with the help of Google forms and spreadsheet. This works in real time and the changes can be seen by all the entities involved. This has led to the prompt decision making and action initiated by the officers. Digitization of police functioning can lead to avoidance of direct contact with the people, thus preventing pandemic. Crime and Criminal Tracking Network System (CCTNS), Integrated Grievance Redressal System (IGRS), Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) etc. are the portals serving the same purpose. Going by the newspaper reports, public response and

the data collected, we can easily say that the functioning of police has risen exponentially to a good standard.

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