COMMUNITY POLICING: THE POLEMICAL POLARIZATION

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Abstract

There is no gainsaying the fact that the police have a difficult work; besides, the role of the police has always been somewhat ambiguous. During the last few decades, the perception of the police mission by police leaders and the community leaders varied. Despite some accomplishments of community policing, not all agree with community policing and that is why with respect to community policing the debate continues. Against this backdrop, research on the effectiveness of community-oriented policing has yielded mixed results. A sizeable proportion of experts are not overly enthusiastic over the idea of community policing. One of the challenging faced in community policing is to define what is meant by community. In diverse community policing projects, the concept of community is defined in terms of "administrative areas" traditionally used by police departments to allocate patrols, instead of in terms of "ecological areas" defined by common norms, shared values, and interpersonal bonds or relations. It has been argued that if the police are using administrative areas instead of ecological areas, they lose the ability to activate a community's norms and cultural values. Meanwhile it is significant to note that some administrators are also uncomfortable with balcanising a community up into "parcels" and possibly having those areas competing against themselves for funding, attention and service. Also many feel that community policing can actually have a negative effect on certain people. A critical analysis of a victim callback programme established by the Houston Police Department found that the programme, which was originally designed to help victims, had a generally negative effect on some minority groups (Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans), whose members may have been suspicious of the departments' intentions. However as reports of overall crime rate decreases hit the presses in the mid-and late-1990s, some police officials associated decrease to closer relationships with their communities through community policing.

Keywords: Community, Police, Community Policing, Crime rates, Polemical Polarization.

INTRODUCTION

It is hackney to reiterate that community-oriented policing is an approach toward crime as well as endeavours to apply long-term problem solving to the question through improved police-community partnerships as well as communication. The National Centre for Community Policing in East Lansing Michigan was founded by Robert C. Trojanowicz, in 1983 and was the director until his death in 1994. Trojanowicz believed that community police can play a vital role in reducing three important kinds of violence, ranging from (1) street crime to domestic abuse to drug-related violence; (2) civil unrest, which can often include gang violence and open confrontations among various segments of society, specifically the police; and (3) police brutality (1992:7-12).

The concept of community policing is not a new phenomen. Policing, from its early English antecedents, has indeed been community oriented. The issue of community policing dates as far back as London's Sir Robert Peel, when he began building his public police in 1829. In his original principles, he said, "The police are the public and the public are the police; the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence (1997:70-71).

The Michigan State University, David L. Carter (1995:2), explains that community policing did not suddenly matrialise as a new idea; rather, it evolved from research conducted by a wide range of scholars as well as police research organizations. Beginning primarily in the early 1970s, a great deal of research was conducted on police patrol. With a more holistic approach, community policing seeks to replace our traditional methods of police patrol. The community policing officer acts as a problem solver and an ombudsman to other social service agencies that can assist in addressing the problem (Bucquerox, *www.policing.com*). This model supports Trojanowicz's belief that "community policing is a philosophy of full service personalized policing, where the same officer patrols and works in the same area on a permanent basis, from a decentralized place, working in a proactive partnership with citizens to identify and solve problems (*http//safesstreet.org*).

Thus, the experiences of Detroit, New York City, as well as Houston are some instances of very early attempts at community police. In this regards, in Detroit, one innovative approach developed by community policing advocates was the development of decentralized neighbourhood-based precincts that serve as "store-front" police stations. The Detroit Mini-Station Programme, is one well-known programme which established more than 36 such stations around the city. From the outset, the community did not accept the programme because the officers assigned to the mini-stations seemed to lack dedication. Later, however, officers were chosen for mini-station duty on the basis of their community relations skills and crime prevention ability, and since then the programme has met with much greater community acceptance (Ahern, 1972:83-85). Houston that involved patrol officers visiting households to solicit viewpoints and information on community problems reported both crime and fear decreases in the study area (Wycoff, et al 1985).

In 1984, the New York City Police Department began a Community Patrol Officer Programe (CPOP). Undoubtedly, CPOP officers did not respond to calls from 911 but instead were directed to identify neighbourhood challenges as well as develop short-and long-term strategies for solving these problems. Also each officer kept a beat book in which he or she was expected to identify major problems on his or her beat as well as list strategies to deal with these challenges. Officers thus were encouraged to think about problems and their solutions (Farell, 1988:73-88).

With regards to community policing, Joseph E. Braun, of the U.S. Department of Justice, wrote in 1977:

> The traditional role of law enforcement is changing…. Community Policing
> allows law enforcement practitioners to bring government resources closer to

the community. Hence, participation and cooperation are key… We cannot expect law enforcement to solve crime and social disorder problems alone. Community involvement is imperative…. With the implementation of community policing practices, officer and deputies still retain their enforcement duties and powers. Community policing does not mean that authorities is relinquished; rather, its proactive nature is intended to reduce the need for enforcement in the long term as problems are addressed up front and much earlier. This can only occur with the co-operation and participation of the community (Braun, 1977).

Community policing mandates that the police work with the community, rather than against it, to be effective. Furthermore, the foot patrol experiments described earlier in the text are examples of the community policing model suggested by Wilson and Kelling in their "broken windows" approach to policing. Kelling in "Broken Windows" and Police Discretion, maintain that community policing model expands and encourages the use of discretion among officers at all levels of the organization. As is commonly found in police manuals, the traditional method of telling officers what they can and can't do, will not greatly improve the quality of policing. Invariably, he advocates teaching officers how to think about what they should do, do it and then review their actions with coworkers.

The main theme of this paper is to present some empirical and anecdotal evidence of the accomplishments of community policing, but will also show how some scholars and practitioners do not agree with these policing strategies. It is against this background that the writer is critically appraising community policing and the polemical polarization; and subsequently on the subject matter, community policing, the debate continues. However, the expectation of the present writer is that by presenting the issues and exploring them, we may continue the process begun by Sir Robert Peel in 1829 of making the police an essential part of life in the community.

EXTANT AND CONTEMPORANEOUS ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF COMMUNITY POLICING

The extant and contemporaneous accomplishments of community policing continues unraveling the relationships between the police and the community but deals with more philosophical and strategic issues about reducing crime and improving the quality of life of the community. In the 1960s, increases in crime, technological advancement and changes in police management thinking led to the abandonment of police foot patrols which were replaced by highly mobile police officers who could drive from one incident to another in minutes. According to U.S. Deputy Attorney General, Eric Holder (1999):

> The high degree of citizen support for America's neighbourhood police officers
> is a testament to the dedicated men and women who work day in and day out
> to establish relationships with the residents in their communities. These
> relationships help citizens and police work together to promote community
> safety.

Nonetheless, hesitant to attribute all the success to community policing efforts, the chief of Lawrence, Massachusetts, Police Department was ecstatic to report that 2005 was the first year

since 1972 without recording a single homicide and that there was a significant decline in the overall crime rate. Undoubtedly Boston was experiencing the highest homicide rate in 10 years. Also, in addition to having some improved criminal data availability, the Lawrence department's chief and officers regularly attend community meetings throughout the city to build relationships with the community and be available for citizens to talk to. Besides, the chief targeted domestic violence, gangs, and drugs-three areas that lead to homicides. Furthermore, he also recruited more bilingual officers to interact with the predominantly Latino city. Residents and police alike report that the residents have taken ownership in their city and are joining with police department to improve the quality of life in their city and feel things are "changing for the best" (Contreras, 2006).

It is germane to state that the Community Policing Consortium, funded by office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), issues a bimonthly publication, Community Policing Exchange, dedicated to reporting the newest developments in community policing partnerships. However, its statement of purpose states inter alia, "Community Policing Exchange strives to assist law enforcement practitioners in bridging the distance between communities, facilitating the exchange of information, and giving voice to all involved in the implementation of community policing (*www.communitypolicing.org*). More importantly, the Community Policing Consortium maintains a website that provides information and links regarding community policing. The primary mission is to deliver community policing training and technical assistance to police departments and sheriffs offices that are designated COPS grantees. More so, the website provides information, resources, tools, publications, and a chat room regarding community policing.

In the mid- and late-1990s, reports of overall crime rate decreases hit the presses, some police officials with their communities through community policing, and the addition of new community policing officers. At this junction, it is important to give some instances:
*   Fort Worth, Texas, police attributed a 7 percent decrease in overall crime and a 50 percent drop in homicides to a closer relationship between the department and the community
*   Wichita, Kansas, police attributed 11percent decrease in crime to community policing and its different way of looking at the crime.
*   Los Angeles police attributed a 4 percent crime decline to police-community participation and emphasis on problem solving.
*   Baton Rouge, Louisiana, experienced three straight years of crime rate decreases and gave much of the credit to the community.
*   Denver, Colorado, police officials noted a 13percent decrease in crime and attributed it to community participation in the crime fight.
*   Police officials in Austin, Texas, also credited increased citizen involvement for a 23 percent drop in crime and the ability of residents and police to reclaim a city park that had become a haven for drug deals.
*   New Orleans police reported that a community policing plan had helped cut the murder rate by 18 percent and led to a homicide rate decreases in three public housing developments where police deployed community-oriented police teams (*Law Enforcement News*, 1996: 1, 14).

It is pertinent to state that Newark, New Jersey, has been using the broken windows theory for nearly 10 years with startling breakthroughs. Similarly, violent crime is down by 58 percent. Thus, there have been blips, homicide and car thefts have increased, and even the broken windows proponents admit other factors may also be at work. However, in all, the strategy is a success and people are headed back into the city. Newark had adopted Kelling's ideas after seeing the success that New York City had (Kilzer, 2006).

Note also that Denver, Colorado, recently instituted the broken window's theory after years of increasing crime and decreasing arrest rates. Denver police, though it is early, are attributing crime decreases and increased public perception to the strategy. Undoubtedly, criminal offences have dropped by 7.4 percent for the first five months of 2006 compared with the same time in 2005, and arrests had increased more than 10 percent. The police department cracked down on crimes of disorder, increased graffiti and including increased aggressive patrols. Moreover, residents noticed the increased cleanup of graffiti as well as decrease in car burglaries. The city government and residents are encouraged by the new police tactics and the resulting crime drops (Osher, 2006).

That of the New York City is the biggest success often cited. Against this backdrop, the New York's crime escalated in the mid-1980s and the quality of life was dismal in many areas of the city with panhandlers intimidating tourists and residents, graffiti was all over the city, vagrants were sleeping on the street, subways overwhelmingly smelled of urine, and peep shows and sex shops took over the streets as more legitimate businesses left town. More so the city condemned property, enforced new ordinances, removed graffiti, pursued con artists as well as loiterers and violent criminals. Violent and property crime rates are way down in New York, and business investors as well as residents and tourists are flocking to Times Square and Grand Central Station as the city flourishes with new investment and business and a perception of safety (Berg, 2006).

In this regards, surveys indicate that the public supports community policing and strategies that are indicative of community policing. One survey found that when citizens were queried about strategies that are part of community policing, they overwhelmingly supported the increased use of community meetings with the police as well as the increased use of police programmes in schools (Weitzer & Tuch, 2004:26-30). Some studies have shown that community policing initiatives led to not only decreases in crime but also to an increase in resident's confidence in policing and feelings of safety and the belief that police were successfully addressing community problems (Tuffin, et al 2006).

EXTANT AND CONTEMPORANEOUS DISAGREEMENTS TO COMMUNITY POLICING

Although many attribute crime reduction to community policing strategies, many do not. Also, some believe that these new philosophies are merely rhetoric. Many others attribute the drastic decrease in crime rates in the mid-and late 1990s to more aggressive, strategic and legalistic law enforcement, similar to that practiced in New York City and other metropolitan areas. As earlier stated research on the effectiveness of community policing-oriented policing has yielded mixed results. On community policing the debate continues discussing the relationships between the police and the community but deals with more philosophical and

strategic issues about reducing crime and improving our quality of life. Moreso, it addresses the concept of community policing and problem-solving policing, concepts that many consider new strategies of policing while others feel these concepts are not new strategies but, rather, a return to the policing of the past.

The scholar, George L. Kelling (1988) stated:

> A quiet revolution is reshaping American Policing. Police in dozens of communities are returning to foot patrol in many communities, police are surveying citizens to learn what they believed to be their most serious neighbourhood problems. Many police departments are finding alternatives to rapidly responding to the majority of calls for service. Many departments are targeting resources on citizen fear of crime by concentrating on disorder. Organising citizens groups has become a priority in many departments. Increasingly, police departments are looking for means to evaluate themselves on their contribution to the quality of neighbourhood life, not just crime statistics. Are such activities the business of policing? In a Crescendo, Police are answering yes.

As earlier stated above, many feel that community policing can actually have a negative effect on certain people. In fact, an analysis of a victim callback programme established by the Houston on Police Department found that the programme, which was originally designed to help victims, had a generally negative effect on some minority groups (Asian American and Hispanic Americans), whose members may have been suspicious of the department's intentions (Skogan & Wycoff, 1987:490-501).

Thus the worry that has been expressed by some law enforcement leaders is questioning whether the activities that officers are engaging in under the umbrella of community policing (recreational roles, tutoring roles, social work roles) are the type of activities that law enforcement officers should be carrying out. On a continuing basis police departments need to be addressing the issue.

Yet another issue of concern is the debate about community policing and reverting to the older foot patrol model as stated above of close interactions with the community. However, there is always a concern for corruption and unfair influence when officers get too involved or too close to community groups. Are the community policing strategies placing officers in an ambiguous position and perhaps enhancing relationships and consequently influence with one group over another? Against this background, zero-tolerance policies as well as aggressive patrolling to clean up the streets, make community groups happy, and improve the quality of life. In another genre, the question is: Can this desire to please and be successful lead to overly aggressive techniques and possibly cross the line to abuse? These issues need to be continuously examined and assessed. Put differently, a reassuring report is from New York City, one of the success stories regarding broken windows. In fact the city saw the crime rate plunge-including murders, which decreased from 2, 262 in 1990 to 629 in 1998-and concurrently, complaints against police and police shootings waned. In fact, police shootings reached their lowest level since the 1970s when the data was first recorded (Bratton & Kelling, 2006).

Some believe the empirical evidence for community policing's effectiveness in solving the crime problem is both limited and contradictory (Yet in another genre, other researchers concede to the fact that there are a number of documented successes of community policing programmes, however, there is also an indication that community policing may displace crime. Indeed, several studies indicate there has been an increase in crime in the areas surrounding the community policing impact area (Reichers & Roberg, 1990:110).

Sometimes, even among officials of the same agency, the debate continues to rage regarding community policing. In different ways, different departments may define community policing differently, although, they may label certain programmes as community policing when they are just the traditional methods with a new nomenclature. A thorough commitment to community policing involves new structures and new responsibilities for the officers in engaging the community in problem solving rather than just using the rhetoric or titles (Griffith, 2005:40, 42, 45). Invariably, to effectively use the community policing philosophy, departments need to tailor their responses to their community- it is not "one size fits all". To evaluate community policing initiatives correctly, the initiatives must be examined closely to separate true community policing from "pretenders" (Oettmeier & Wycoff, 2006:352). In order to effectively evaluate community policing efforts, everyone needs to clearly understand what we are defining as community policing as well as what is defined as "success" as well as how it is measured. Moreover, a concern for agencies implementing and using Community Policing is that it may necessitate the development of new hiring guidelines, evaluation guidelines, and promotional standards. Also, departments need to define what type of qualities they are looking for in officers so they can maximize their success in the community policing milieu.

A professor in the University of Chicago Law School, Bernard Harcourt, recently challenged the success of broken windows. Harcourt as well as Jens Ludwig, an associate Professor at Georgetown University, reanalyzed Northwestern University Professor Wesley Skogan's Disorder and Decline: Crime and the Spiral of Decay in American neighbourhoods, originally presented in 1990. As Bralton and Kelling (2006) noted, Skogan's original findings supported the link between disorder and serious crime, fortifying support for the broken windows theory. Harcourt and Ludwig argue the "popular crime fighting strategy is, well, wrong", and it doesn't work in practice (McManamy, 2006).

Besides, an audit of the Houston Police Department by a consulting firm criticized the department's neighbourhood-oriented policing (NOP) approach. Although, the audit concluded that "well-conceived," NOP faced a number of difficulties and had not produced any comprehensive improvements in police services. NOP has the potential to enhance the quality of police services without adding costs but claimed that the Houston programme did not have tangible effects on citizen's security and quality of life, the report acknowledged. The report said that the programme, which had been implemented at the expense of more proactive law enforcement functions, such as arresting criminals, had resulted in mediocre performance in response time to emergency calls for service (*Law Enforcement News*, 1991:1).

A major threat recently to community policing as well as the major criticism of the initiatives that have taken place relates to the current inability to keep police departments fully staffed and to keep the money flowing to these initiatives, At a conference Bralton spoke

and declared that community policing had caused a downward trend in crime nationally in the 1990s, but that crime is beginning to rebound because less money and attention is being devoted to community police since 11 September, 2001. Many of the resources previously devoted to community policing have been siphoned to prevent terrorism. He believes local jurisdictions as well as states and the federal government need to re-examine this issue (2006).

CONCLUSION

Community policing as well as problem-solving policing have been practiced for longer than one decade, and some say it has been tremendously popular and successful. Although others have disagreed, so the debate continues, which is good for policing hence the polemical polarization. In conclusion therefore, we presented some empirical and anecdotal evidence of the benefits and accomplishments of community policing but on a polemical polarization as stated earlier some scholars and practitioners do not agree with community policing strategies. The discussion of and study of community policing continues and it is hoped that, by presenting the issues and exploring them, as we have done in this work, we have succeeded in critically assessing the process begun by Sir Robert Peel in 1829 of making the police an indispensible part of life in the community.

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