

## 5 Community policing in the United States

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A major debate is now taking place in the United States over the role of the police in society. Topics such as the relationship between the police and the public, the role of the police in crime prevention, policing in difficult neighbourhoods, police management, and controls on police action are widely discussed. Surprisingly, there is more innovation and change taking place in American policing than in almost any other function of government, especially at the municipal level. It is an exciting time, for much of this change is taking place without a clear sense of what direction it will take or how successful it will be. Although it is taking many different forms, this great wave of innovation is often called 'community policing'.

Interest in community policing is not unique to the United States, and similar projects are taking place in Great Britain, Germany, Belgium, Holland, Canada, Australia, and other countries. However, I shall focus on recent innovations in policing in the United States. In this essay I discuss the definition of community policing and some of the rationales for it. I also discuss *why* community policing has appeared, and review a great deal of evidence about its effectiveness. I conclude with critical comments on the future of community policing, and some recommendations.

### I. The concept of community policing

Community policing is not a clear concept, for it involves reforming decision-making processes and creating new cultures within police departments, rather than being a specific tactical plan. It is an organizational *strategy* that redefines the goals of policing in order to guide the future development of departments (Moore, 1992). In North America, these goals are called 'mission statements', and departments all over the country are now rewriting their mission statements to conform to new ideas about the

values that should guide policing and the relationship between the police and the community.

In my view, community policing follows the following general principles:

- i) Community policing relies upon organizational decentralization and a reorientation of patrol in order to facilitate two-way communication between police and the public.
- ii) Community policing assumes a commitment to broadly focused, problem-oriented policing.
- iii) Community policing requires that police are responsive to citizen demands when they decide what local problems are and set their priorities.
- iv) Community policing implies a commitment to helping neighbourhoods solve crime problems on their own, through community organizations and crime prevention programs.

These principles underlie a variety of policing programs. Under the rubric of community policing, American departments are opening small neighbourhood substations, conducting surveys to identify local problems, organizing meetings and crime prevention seminars, publishing newsletters, helping form neighbourhood watch groups, establishing advisory panels to inform police commanders, organizing youth activities, conducting drug education projects and media campaigns, patrolling on horses, and working with other municipal agencies to enforce health and safety regulations.

### II. Community policing in American cities

*Community policing relies upon organizational decentralization and a reorientation of patrol in order to facilitate communication between police and the public*

The police are not independent of the rest of society, where large organizations have learned that decentralization is often necessary to allow flexibility in decision making at the level at which contact with customers and problems actually takes place. American police departments traditionally were organized on the assumption that policies and practices were determined at the top, and flowed down in the form of rules and orders. The job of management was to see to it that these rules and orders were carried out. Of course, this organization chart did not reflect the reality of policing, which is that operational decision making is highly discretionary

and most police work takes place outside the control of supervisors. The community policing model is more in accord with the way in which departments actually work. It involves formally granting officers at the neighbourhood level the decision making authority that they need to function effectively. Line officers are expected to work more autonomously to investigate situations, resolve problems, and educate the public. They are being asked to discover and set their own goals, and manage their own shift time. Decentralization facilitates the development of local solutions to local problems, and discourages the automatic application of central-office policies. Patrol is also being reorganized to provide opportunities for citizens to come into contact with police under non stressful circumstances that encourage them to exchange information and build mutual trust; an improvement in relationships between police and the community is a central goal of these programs.

In Chicago, a move toward community policing is involving a reduction in the number of administrative units into which the city is divided, a dramatic decrease in the size of the headquarters bureaucracy, the disbanding of many special units, and a reorganization of the department around small 'beat teams' that will largely manage themselves. Officers doing community policing find themselves attending meetings and drinking coffee with merchants. A later section of this paper describes the use of local police substations and home visits by police officers to open communication channels with the public, in order to gather information about neighbourhood problems and guide team problem — solving efforts.

*Community policing assumes a commitment to broadly focused, problem-oriented policing*

On its own, problem-oriented policing is a minor revolution in police work. It signifies a reversal of the long-standing disdain that American police have held for tasks that were not, in their view, 'real police work'. It represents a shift away from the 'crime fighting' orientation that American police departments have professed since the 1920s. Adopting that stance was useful at the time, but police departments now are experiencing the liabilities of having disconnected themselves from any close attachment to the communities they serve. Problem-oriented policing encourages officers to respond creatively to problems that they encounter, or to refer them to public and private agencies that can help. More importantly, it stresses the importance of discovering the situations that produce calls for service, identifying the causes which lie behind them, and designing tactics to deal with these causes. This involves training officers in methods of identifying and analyzing problems; police work traditionally consists of responding sequentially to individual events, while problem-solving calls for recognizing *patterns* of incidents that help identify their causes and suggest how to

deal with them. Police departments can facilitate this with computer analyses of 'hot spots' that concentrate large volumes of complaints and calls for service (Sherman, 1992). Problem-oriented policing also recognizes that the solutions to those patterns may involve other agencies and may be 'non-police' in character; in traditional departments, this would be cause for ignoring these problems.

Problem-oriented approaches like these are now common in many cities, including Tampa, Tulsa, Atlanta, San Diego, and Philadelphia. A later section of this paper describes an 'ombudsman' policing program in Baltimore that tested the impact of problem solving in white and African-American neighbourhoods.

*Community policing requires that police are responsive to citizen's priorities when they decide what local problems are and develop their tactics*

Effective community policing requires responsiveness to citizen input concerning both the needs of the community and the best ways by which the police can help in meeting those needs. It takes seriously the public's definition of their own problems. This is one reason why community policing is an organizational strategy but not a set of specific programs — how it looks in practice *should* vary considerably from place to place, in response to unique local situations and circumstances.

Better 'listening' to the community can produce different policing priorities. In my experience, officers involved in community policing quickly learn that many members of the public are deeply concerned about problems that previously were invisible. The public often focuses on threatening and fear-provoking *situations* rather than legally defined *incidents*. They often are concerned about social disorder and the physical decay of their community rather than 'serious crimes'. Community residents are unsure that they could (or even should) rely on the police to help them deal with these problems. These concerns thus do not generate complaints or calls for service, and as a result, the police know surprisingly little about them.

The routines of traditional police work ensure that officers will largely interact with citizens who are in distress because they have just been victimized, or with suspects and troublemakers. Accordingly, community policing requires that departments develop new channels for learning about neighbourhood problems. These need to be nonthreatening and supportive in character, even though they are initiated by the police. A section below describes efforts in a number of cities to gather information about the public's priorities using questionnaires. An important corollary of this commitment to responsiveness is that police need to find ways to *evaluate* themselves to some degree on their ability to satisfy the concerns expressed by the public. This is a 'customer satisfaction' criterion for

assessing the quality of policing. Some police departments are now preparing questionnaires to use in evaluating their programs on a continuing basis. Most plan to send them in the mail to people who have called for assistance, a very inexpensive process. Others (like New York City) are planning to conduct telephone interviews with residents to assess the visibility and quality of police service.

*Community policing implies a commitment to helping neighbourhoods solve crime problems on their own, through community organizations and crime prevention programs*

The idea that the police and the public are 'co-producers' of safety pre-dates the current rhetoric of community policing. In fact, the community crime prevention movement of the 1970s was an important precursor to community policing. It promulgated widely the idea that crime was not solely the responsibility of the police. The police were quick to endorse the claim that they could not solve crime problems without community support and assistance (it helped share the blame for rising crime rates), and now they find that they are expected to be the catalyst for this effort. They are being called upon to take the lead at mobilizing individuals and organizations around crime prevention. These efforts include neighbourhood watch, citizen patrols, and education programs stressing household target-hardening and the rapid reporting of crime. One of the most well known prevention strategies in the United States, the DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program, was originated by the Los Angeles Police Department, and has been adopted throughout the country. Whatever its effectiveness, the popularity of DARE has played an important role in encouraging police departments to initiate community education programs.

### III. The origins of community policing

Why is this happening? What lies behind this sudden burst of innovation? A number of factors underlie its initial development and explain its spread through the policing community. Some are unique to policing, but like many other social innovations, community policing did not emerge in a vacuum; parallel changes are taking place in society which support its development and dissemination.

The most important structural factor underlying the acceptance of community policing is *politics*. Coalitions of groups that frequently have had hostile relations with the police, including African-Americans and Spanish-speakers whose origins lie in Mexico and the Caribbean, are a potent political force in many American cities. Their political leaders have an interest in curbing police abuse, and in promoting a style of policing that serves

their constituents rather than treats them as the target of enforcement policies. Political leaders of all backgrounds also share an interest in preventing the kind of collective violence that arose following the televised beating of an African-American (Rodney King) in Los Angeles in 1991. Since the mid-1960s, riots in American cities frequently have been sparked by conflicts between African-Americans and the police. Studies of 1960s riots conducted by an American Presidential Commission found half of them were sparked by abusive incidents, and that tensions between the police and African-Americans were high in the months preceding the violence in every riot city. This pattern persists, as evidenced by riots during the 1980s in Los Angeles, Miami, and other cities. When developing departmental policies and choosing police administrators, big-city politicians pay careful attention to how their actions will be received among racial and ethnic minorities. The rhetoric of community policing is favourably received in this political environment.

As this indicates, it is very important that being involved in community policing is also a way for aspiring police officials to *develop their careers*. Cities searching for progressive and innovative police chiefs who will be sensitive to racial tensions find a commitment to community policing an attractive credential. There is a long list of recently-appointed police chiefs who gained their reputation as senior commanders of community policing projects in Houston, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and other cities. An important rationale for selecting the new Chief of Police in New York City was his commitment to continuing the community policing effort mounted by his predecessor, who was selected for the position because he would bring community policing to New York. Upwardly mobile police commanders looking to attain visibility in other cities are well advised to become involved in community policing projects.

Interest in community policing has also been encouraged by the emergence of a cadre of relatively *well-educated and sophisticated administrators* at the top of prominent police departments. Armed with university degrees in management, law, operations research, and the social sciences, they are receptive to the general shift in society toward liberalization and the development of a customer orientation among public organizations. They have been impressed by two decades of *research on policing*, which has highlighted some of the limitations of the way in which it traditionally has been organized. This research has challenged the effectiveness of routine patrol and rapid response to most telephone complaints, detective's investigation practices, the effectiveness of occasional crackdowns on outdoor drug markets, and how police handle domestic violence cases. The effectiveness of many of the alternatives to these traditional practices remain unproven, but their weaknesses have been exposed and the confidence that practitioners and informed outsiders have in many traditional policing practices has been undermined. Interest in research and maintaining racial tran-

quillity has been matched by new levels of concern about *police effectiveness*. US crime rates have continued to rise at the same time that the fiscal crisis facing American cities has ensured that the number of police officers will not be increased to meet this challenge. It is apparent that police will have to work within existing financial constraints, and that there will not be much 'more of the same' in the form of hiring more police officers to conduct policing in the traditional style.

The idea of community policing emerged during the late 1970s, although the popular label did not become visible until the middle of the 1980s. The writings of *policing intellectuals* like Albert Reiss (1971), Herman Goldstein (1979), John Alderson, and James Q. Wilson and George Kelling (1982) laid the groundwork for its appearance. *Early innovative projects*, like one in San Diego (Boydston and Sherry, 1975) that encouraged problem identification and problem solving by beat officers, introduced both a community orientation to policing and the idea that experiments should be systematically evaluated. Neighbourhood team policing units were established in a number of American cities following the riots of the late 1960s, often with special federal funding. They were supposed to restore civil relations between the police and minority communities, but they all were disbanded by the end of the decade.

The concept of community policing spread during the 1980s because of the *aggressive marketing* of the concept by federal agencies and Washington-based think-tanks. Their target is not just police chiefs, but also the professional managers that run a majority of American cities. The think-tanks have staked their capacity to raise money to the promise that they can effectively promote community policing. Cities are also encouraged to share ideas by the need to write grant proposals in order to secure federal funds; these typically demand reviews of similar programs in other cities and summaries of what research suggests about the effectiveness of proposed programs. Proposals to experiment with new programs are more likely to be funded, because the results will be more visible.

The diffusion of community policing through the country has been supported by the development of nation-wide *networks* of management personnel, who are in communication with each other, government policy makers, consultants, professional planners, and police intellectuals. They communicate through conferences, magazines, research reports, and professional newsletters. For example, a Summer 1992 conference featuring the community policing program in Portland, Oregon, drew 550 police administrators from around the country. They paid their own way to attend, in order to exchange views on community policing with other departments that were experimenting with new forms of policing. Police officials are frequent visitors to other cities; one of the first actions of the new Chief of Police selected to bring community policing to St Petersburg,

Florida, was to send his top administrators on a tour of progressive departments, so that they could see new forms of policing in action first-hand. The impact of all of these factors is facilitated by the extreme *decentralization* of American policing. The sheer variety of problems, resources, leadership, and political factors that are at work in American municipalities makes it likely that proposed innovations in policing will receive attention somewhere in the country, and probably in several places. In the US there are approximately 16,000 full-service police departments. (About 130 have more than 500 officers, another 850 have between 100 and 500 officers, and of the remainder about 25 per cent have at least twenty-five officers.) They are not tightly allied; in fact, their top administrators' allegiance is divided among competing professional organizations like PERF (the Police Executive Research Forum), the Police Foundation, the IACP (International Association of Police), NOBLE (National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Officials), and state and regional organizations, each of which has an agenda that it wishes to advance. This is in contrast to the tight control over policing that is exercised by small groups of like-minded administrators in more centralized systems, including Britain.

Lying behind all of these factors are long-run *shifts in societal organization* that have facilitated the adopting of community policing. These include a general trend toward the decentralization of large scale organizations into smaller, more flexible and responsive units; and a widespread impetus to privatize the delivery of public services, coupled with an increasing reliance on markets or market-like mechanisms to secure a customer orientation among functions that are not deinstitutionalized. *Technology* is another powerful force driving change in organizations of all kinds. Even policing — traditionally among the least capital-intensive functions — is being affected. Computerized analysis of small-area crime data can identify 'hotspots' where problem-solving efforts can have the most immediate impact. We are also now on the leading edge of a mobile communications revolution that may rival the link of the telephone to the police car radio. In some cities technology is being used to directly connect patrol officers to community residents, through special phone lines and telephone answering equipment. In New Haven, Connecticut, Neighbourhood Officers carry electronic telephone paging devices that enable residents of the area they serve to contact them directly with messages, while they are in the field. As more citizens as well as police carry portable communications devices, the immediacy of their messages will rise. As the ability of citizens to directly communicate with individual officers increases, the role of centralized dispatch will diminish, along with the control that this gave headquarters personnel over officer activity and the data flow that let them monitor their performance.

#### IV. Does community policing work?

Can community policing live up to the expectations of its supporters? The answer to this is not clear, for a variety of reasons. There have been relatively few systematic evaluations of community policing programs, and some of those have been flawed by implementation problems. Other community policing tactics have not been evaluated at all, and some of the goals of community policing — such as to ‘alter departmental cultures’ — are subtle and difficult to evaluate. This section describes several major evaluations of community policing and summarizes some of their results. Most of the evaluations contrasted the impact of community policing programs with intensive enforcement programs, as well as against control areas representing ‘normal’ styles of policing. Since the mid-1980s, all of these enforcement programs had a special focus on drugs. The community policing evaluations point to some significant successes, but illustrate that evidence that community policing can significantly reduce the crime rate remains elusive. They also point out many difficulties in actually implementing community policing.

In each case the programs described below were evaluated using a systematic research design. Each program was conducted in a different area, while another matched area was designated as a control area where no new policing programs were begun. Surveys of area residents were conducted in the target and control areas before the programs began and again after they had been in operation for ten months. Each time, interviews were conducted with 400-550 residents of the areas. A variety of other kinds of data were collected as well, and the actual implementation of the program was monitored in all the cities. In one case (Birmingham, Alabama) this research design broke down; the control area was the subject of a wave of random violence and shootings shortly after the evaluation began, and community pressure forced the opening of a small police office in the area to serve as the operations centre for a new police team. In some other cities the evaluations indicate that community policing programs were only partly implemented, reducing our expectations regarding their impact.

##### *Baltimore, Maryland*

Two versions of community policing were tested in Baltimore. Each was implemented in two areas of the city, in white and African-American neighbourhoods of comparable income level and housing quality. *Foot patrols* were assigned to walk through the areas approximately twenty-five hours each week. They choose their own routes, concentrating on busy commercial areas and recognized trouble spots. They talked frequently with residents, business owners, and people on the street. In one area the

officers put more stress on law enforcement and order maintenance; they spent much of their time dispersing groups of youths on street corners and looking for drug transactions and other legal infractions. The officer who conducted most of the foot patrols in the other area focused more on talking with residents and merchants. Surveys conducted after one year indicated that about 15 per cent of the residents of each area recalled seeing an officer walking on foot within the past week; the comparable figure among residents of a control area was only 2 per cent.

In two other areas, *ombudsman police officers* were assigned to work with neighbourhood residents to solve local problems. They walked foot patrol, attended community meetings, and spent a great deal of time talking to merchants and residents about local problems. They developed a questionnaire which measured what residents thought were the most serious problems in the area, what caused them, and what could be done to solve them. Officers were to record how they had reacted to each problem, and their handling of them was reviewed by their supervisors. The officer serving one area was aggressive in his approach to possible drug dealers, broke up groups loitering on the street, and gave many traffic tickets. He spent most of his time in busy commercial areas of the neighbourhood. The officer in the other target area spent more time meeting with area residents, working to solve juvenile problems, conducting a neighbourhood clean-up campaign, and organizing a block watch program. He also involved other municipal agencies in these efforts. He arranged for abandoned cars to be towed away, trees to be trimmed, and empty buildings to be sealed. He also worked closely with the department's traffic, vice and narcotics units, when out of public view. Surveys at the end of the evaluation period found that 64 and 75 per cent of residents of the two areas recalled officers coming to their home, and as many as 33 per cent recalled seeing the officer who emphasized local service walking on foot within the past week (see Pate and Annan, 1989).

##### *Oakland, California*

Two policing programs were evaluated in Oakland, both aimed at reducing levels of drug trafficking and related crime and fear. Each program was implemented in its own target area, and both were implemented together in a third area. A special *drug enforcement unit* conducted traditional police operations in its target neighbourhoods. They went undercover to make buy-bust arrests, and they used informants to buy drugs and identify distributors. They also mounted an aggressive, high-visibility program of stopping and searching motor vehicles, and conducting field interrogations of groups of men whenever they gathered in public places. The team was extremely active, made a large number of arrests, and apprehended a number of major drug traffickers in the target area.

This traditional policing program was contrasted to a program of *home visits*. Officers in the experimental community policing area and in the combined target areas went door to door, introducing themselves to residents. Their job was to inform people in the target neighbourhoods of the department's new emphasis on drug enforcement, to give them pamphlets on crime and drug programs, and conduct brief interviews asking about neighbourhood problems. Their goal was to make contacts which might lead to useful information, alert the community to the drug problem, and perhaps deter potential offenders by their presence and visibility in the community. These door-step interviews were conducted in about 60 per cent of the households in the target areas, a high percentage. About 50 per cent of those interviewed indicated that drugs were a major problem in their community (In many places this kind of activity is known now as 'directed patrol', because officers conducting this form of foot patrol have specific tasks to carry out as they walk through an area). Unlike the enforcement program, however, it proved difficult to sustain the interest of Oakland officers in these home visits. It had little support from the district commander, who did not believe it could work. An energetic officer saw to it that many interviews were conducted, but there was no follow-up problem solving. None of the intended problem-solving policing was ever accomplished, and nothing was done with the information gathered in the door-step interviews (see Uchida, Forst and Annan, 1990; 1992).

#### *Birmingham, Alabama*

Three programs were evaluated in Birmingham. As in Oakland, a special *drug enforcement unit* was formed to crack down on open drug dealing in dilapidated and cocaine. The team concentrated on undercover operations. They made a series of videotaped purchases from street dealers, and then returned to the target area to make warrant arrests. Officers also posed as dealers and made videotaped drug sales to outsiders who were driving into the target area to make drug purchases. Throughout, they paid careful attention to the legality of their activities, to ensure that their cases could be successfully prosecuted. Ten officers were involved in this program for a six-month period, but although they made a number of arrests, it was unlikely that their efforts would be very visible in the community surveys.

In another area, officers were to make *home visits* in order to pass out crime and drug prevention pamphlets and conduct interviews with area residents. They developed a questionnaire that ask residents about neighbourhood crime problems and the whereabouts of drug trafficking. They eventually completed interviews at 60 per cent of the occupied housing units in their target area. Although they completed a large number of interviews, no effort was made to follow up on the information that was gathered. It was envisioned that they would do team-oriented problem

solving with the information that they gathered, but events conspired to undermine the program. A rise in calls for service in their area of the city came at the same time that the Christmas holiday season left the district understaffed. Under pressure to respond to the resulting deterioration in police response to 911 calls, officers who were to conduct the community policing program were reassigned to traditional patrol.

The third Birmingham program was instituted in the evaluation's control area after eleven people were shot in there in a short period, just after the beginning of the research project. In response to community demonstrations, a *police substation* was opened, staffed twenty-four hours per day by eight police officers. They greatly increased the visibility of police in the community. The substation unit assisted in a clean-up of the public housing project which dominated the area. In follow-up interviews, 72 per cent of residents thought the substation was effective in reducing drug-related crime (see Uchida, Forst and Annan; 1990; 1992).

#### *Madison, Wisconsin*

Madison attempted to develop a 'customer orientation' in providing police services by radically restructuring the police department and the way in which it was managed. It began as a traditional, hierarchically organized department. To reform the organization, an *innovative management structure* was put in place that emphasized teamwork and employee participation in decision making, and peer supervision. Police were to work as teams to identify and solve problems, with their managers working for them to secure the outside assistance and resources that they required to carry out their plans. A decentralized *police substation* was opened to experiment with these ideas in a district that covered one-sixth of the city. The team worked flexible hours, and took responsibility for managing their own activity. They developed a plan for 'value added policing' that called for spending more time on calls for service and follow up contacts with victims. They responded to most of the calls for service that originated from the area, and attempted to analyze them to identify community problems.

The impact of this team on the public was assessed using surveys that were conducted before and after the program, both in the target area and the remainder of the city. After it had been in operation for two years, almost 70 per cent of the residents of the target area knew about the police substation. Compared to the rest of the city, the surveys indicated a modest improvement in perceptions of the police among residents of the target area. The perceived quality of police-initiated encounters improved in the special district, and especially the perception that officers were helpful. There was also a mild increase in police visibility that could be linked to the program, and more residents of the experimental area reported they thought police were focusing their attention on preventing crime and on

important community problems. Residents of the target area reported a decrease in neighbourhood problems, while those elsewhere thought they got worse.

Most of the effects of the program seemed to be internal to the department. Interviews with all of the city's police officers were conducted at three points in time over the two year reorganization experiment. They revealed that, compared to those assigned elsewhere, officers in the experimental district saw themselves working as a team, that their efforts were being supported by their supervisors and the department, and that the department was really reforming itself. They were more satisfied with their job and more strongly committed to the organization. They were more customer oriented, believed more firmly in the principles of problem-solving and community policing, and felt that they had a better relationship with the community. In addition, department records indicated that disciplinary actions, absenteeism, tardiness, and days off sick went down more in the experimental area (see Wycoff and Skogan, 1992). These changes accord with Wycoff's (1988) summary of the results of interview studies of officers assigned to community policing. Compared to others, they have been found to think their work is more important, interesting and rewarding, and less frustrating. They feel they have more independence and control over their jobs, important determinants of job satisfaction. Finally, they tend to take a more benign and trusting view of the public.

#### *Houston, Texas*

Three programs were evaluated in Houston. The first was a neighbourhood *police substation*. The program team located space in a small commercial building with good parking. The office provided a place for people to meet with police. Officers took crime reports and gave and received information from the public, and some community meetings were held there. Officers assigned to the station were freed from routine patrol for much of their daily shift. The office was their base of operations for getting acquainted with neighbourhood residents and business people, identifying and helping solve local problems, seeking ways of delivering better service to the area, and developing programs to draw the police and community closer together. The staff quickly developed programs which extended into the immediate neighbourhood, including a series of large community meetings in a nearby church. Station officers organized *special patrols* in trouble-spots areas, and they met regularly with local school administrators. Area churches and civic clubs were invited to select members to ride with officers patrolling in the neighbourhood. Finally, on five occasions during the evaluation period the station staff distributed approximately 550 *newsletters* throughout the neighbourhood. The newsletters advertised the

station's programs and other community events, and printed articles about crime prevention. The station provided a direct test of several aspects of community policing. It provided the officers who ran it a great deal of management autonomy, and flexibility in allocating their own time and effort. They responded by developing community-oriented programs which were virtually unheard of in Houston's police department, and they invented a variety of new ways in which police and citizens could meet and exchange information and discuss their priorities. Surveys conducted at the conclusion of the evaluation found that 65 per cent of area residents knew about the substation (see Wycoff and Skogan, 1987; Skogan, 1990).

The *Community Organizing Response Team* (CORT) attempted to create a local crime prevention organization in a neighbourhood where none existed. The team's immediate goal was to identify a group of residents who would work regularly with them to define and help solve neighbourhood problems. Its long-term goal was to create a permanent organization in the community, one that would remain active after CORT left the area. To test the CORT concept, the task force first tried to become familiar with the area's problems. To do this they conducted their own door-to-door survey of the neighbourhood. CORT members questioned approximately 300 residents about problems which they felt merited police attention, and whether they might be willing to host meetings in their homes. The survey told them a great deal about the nature of area problems, and resulted in invitations to hold such meetings. They then organized small meetings to introduce themselves to area residents. Thirteen neighbourhood meetings were held, each attended by 20–60 people. At these meetings CORT members identified a group of leaders who met regularly with their commander to discuss community problems and devise solutions involving both the police and residents. The group eventually held elections and formed committees, and by the end of the evaluation period had sixty official members. During the evaluation period special newsletters were mailed each month to all residents who had been contacted in the survey or who had participated in an activity. The CORT program tested the ability of police departments to assist in the development of community self-help organizations.

Houston's *Home Visit* program was to help patrol officers to become more familiar with the residents of their areas and to learn about neighbourhood problems. Officers in one target area were freed from routine patrol assignments for part of each daily shift. During this time they visited households in the area. Typically, officers in the program would visit an apartment building or a group of homes, introduce themselves to whoever answered, explained the purpose of the visit, and inquired about neighbourhood problems. They recorded these on a small 'citizen contact card', along with the name and address of the person they interviewed. The officers left personal business cards, indicating that if there were further



problems they should be contacted directly. A record of these visits was kept at the district police station, to guide further contacts. It also served as a mailing list for a newsletter tailored for the area, which was distributed each month to those who had been contacted. During the ten months of the program, team officers talked to approximately 14 per cent of the adult residents of the area. Visits also were made to commercial establishments in the area, and after ten months about 45 per cent of the merchants had been contacted. About 60 per cent of the people that were interviewed had something to complain about. Conventional crimes were most frequently mentioned, but about one-quarter of the residents mentioned a problem which might fall into the disorder category, including disputes among neighbours, environmental problems, abandoned cars, and vandalism. The officers took numerous actions in response to problems they identified during these visits (see Skogan, 1990).

#### *Newark, New Jersey*

Two programs were evaluated in Newark. In one area police attempted to suppress crime and street disorder using traditional *intensive enforcement* tactics. They conducted extensive 'street sweeps' to reduce loitering and public drinking, drug sales, purse snatching, and street harassment by groups of men who routinely gathered along commercial streets in residential areas of the city. Congregating groups were broken up by police warnings and large-scale arrests. Foot patrol officers walked the areas of the evening; they were to become familiar with local problems, establish relationships with local merchants, disperse unruly groups, and ticket illegally parked cars. Special efforts were made to enforce traffic regulations in the area using radar units and by making frequent traffic stops to check for alcohol use. Random roadblocks were set up to check drivers' credentials, check for drunken driving, recover stolen vehicles, and arrest drivers with outstanding tickets and arrest warrants. There was also an attempt to clean up area parks and vacant lots, and to deliver better city services. This program tested the ability of the police to reassert their faltering authority, demonstrate that they controlled the streets of Newark, and crack down on forms of disorder thought to lead to serious crime.

In another area of Newark the police implemented a variety of *community policing* projects. The test area for the community policing project was in the most densely-populated and crime-ridden part of Newark. The evaluation tested the ability of an ambitious multi-intervention program to effect crime and fear of crime in an extremely difficult area. Police opened a *substation* that took crime reports, distributed crime prevention information, gathered complaints about city services for referral to other municipal agencies, and answered questions. Local groups held meetings in the station during the evening, and about 300 people used the substation each

month. At the end of the evaluation period, 90 per cent of the residents of the area knew about the substation. Like Houston, police also conducted *home visits* in the area. Officers visited homes and filled out brief questionnaires concerning neighbourhood problems. The teams also distributed crime prevention information, told residents about block watch programs, and advertised the substation. During the course of the evaluation they questioned residents of 50 per cent of the homes in the area, and in the evaluation surveys 40 per cent of area residents recalled being interviewed. The sergeant supervising the team reviewed the questionnaires, and either his team dealt with the problems that residents identified or he passed them on to the special enforcement squad for their attention. The team also organized a *neighbourhood clean-up program* and distributed a police newsletter; 43 per cent of area residents recalled receiving one, when they were later surveyed. As in the enforcement area, a special squad targeted street disorder in the area (see Bayley and Skolnick, 1986; Skogan, 1990).

#### *Evaluation findings*

Table 5.1 presents a summary of some of the findings of these evaluations. Each project had a number of goals, represented by outcome measures included in the evaluation surveys of neighbourhood residents. This summary focuses on a common subset of those outcomes, while excluding many others. They all shared fairly common questionnaire measures of four outcomes. *Fear of crime* was measured by questions about worry or concern about personal and property crime in the immediate vicinity. The impact of the programs on *disorder* was assessed by questions concerning loitering, public drinking, begging, street harassment, truancy, and gang activity. These disorders did not all involve illegal activity, but they are closely linked to fear of crime and neighbourhood decline. Between them, the fear and disorder questions assessed the extent to which residents felt they lived in a secure environment. The prevalence of *victimization* was measured by questions about respondents' experiences with burglary, robbery and assault. These survey measures provide a better estimate of the extent of crime than official statistics, especially when police programs are being evaluated. *Police performance* was measured by questions about how good a job police did at a variety of particular tasks, and how fair, helpful, and polite they were. The *availability of drugs* was measured by questions about the extent of drug trafficking in their neighbourhood (questions about drug availability were not included in the Houston and Newark evaluations).

Except in Birmingham, the effects of each program were assessed by comparing before-and-after changes in these measures in the target areas to comparable shifts in control areas, using multivariate statistical analyses that took into account many other factors. Judgments about Birmingham



**Table 5.1**  
**Summary of community policing evaluation findings**

	Fear of crime	Disorder	Victimization	Police service	Drug availability
Oakland enforcement	down		ok	down	
home visits	down	down	up	down	
enforcement and home visits	down			down	
Birmingham enforcement				ok	
home visits			down	up	
substation	down			up	
Baltimore foot patrol					
ombudsman	down	down		up	
Madison substation				up	
Houston home visits		down	down	up	na
substation	down	down		up	na
organizing		down		up	na
Newark enforcement		down		ok	na
multiple community policing	down	down		up	na

Note: 'up' and 'down' indicate significant program effects. 'ok' indicates that possible negative program effects were avoided. 'na' indicates there was no outcome measure for that evaluation. No entry indicates no significant program effect.

are based on before-and-after changes in what became the three program areas, after the emergency implementation of a program in the intended control area. In Table 5.1, an 'up' entry indicates a statistically significant increase in an outcome that probably was due to the program, and a 'down' entry indicates a statistically significant decrease in an outcome that probably was due to the program. An 'ok' entry for assessments of policing

indicates that the outcome measures were not affected by enforcement programs that *could* have actually heightened tensions between the police and the community; in this case, this was a positive outcome.

The overall picture presented by Table 5.1 is mixed. There were significant program effects in thirty-one of sixty-five comparisons. It is apparent that these programs had the most consistent effect on attitudes toward the quality of police service. Almost all of them resulted in improved opinion, or in the case of intensive enforcement programs did *not* change opinion for the worse. The enforcement programs did not do as well at meeting their goals as did the community policing efforts; they were successful in only six of fourteen opportunities, while the community policing programs succeeded in twenty-five of fifty-one opportunities. Of course, this simple count does not take into account that the programs were highly variable in the quality of their implementation. In a statistical analysis that includes a measure of the *extent of implementation*, I find that the estimated impact of these programs goes up considerably.

#### *Other evaluations*

Many evaluations of community policing are not included in Table 5.1; these are studies that I have been involved in, and for which I have personally examined the data. Other evaluations using sample surveys of target populations to evaluate the visibility and effectiveness of community policing have found positive results.

The positive effects of home visits were partially replicated in *London and Birmingham*; decreases in fear levels in these English cities were not significant, but the sample sizes involved were small (Bennett, 1989). A *Baltimore County* study of the impact of a program including home visits (in seven areas), crime prevention efforts by police (seven areas), and some problem-oriented policing (in ten areas) also found a modest reduction in levels of fear of crime across two waves of interviews; however there were no control groups against which to benchmark these changes (see Corder, 1986). Reports of more substantial reductions in levels of fear have been reported in a series of less methodologically rigorous evaluations of foot patrol in *Flint Michigan* (see Trojanowicz, 1986; 1983). These evaluations have been hampered by small sample sizes and the absence of control areas. On the other hand, one of their strengths is their inclusion of diverse samples of stake holders, ranging from small business operators to the clergy. A *Cincinnati Team Policing* experiment found that residents of an area served by a decentralized Neighbourhood Team Policing Unit felt more positively about the police, were less likely to report being fearful of crime, and were less likely to report being cautious when they were out after dark. The team's foot patrols were very visible, and both residents and business operators were more likely to be acquainted with officers serving

their area. Victimization rates were unaffected, but more commercial robberies and burglaries were reported to the police (see Clarren and Schwartz, 1976; Schwartz and Clarren, 1976).

The *Hartford Crime Prevention* project examined the impact of a complex treatment package that included a modest physical redesign of traffic flows, supporting community organizations to deal with crime problems, and instituting a local neighbourhood policing team in a target area. The program was evaluated over a four-year period. The remainder of the program was successfully implemented, but the policing component of the package deteriorated after the first two years. A series of surveys suggested that perceived burglary problems and perceptions of risk of victimization went down in the treatment area relative to control areas, and informal community defense efforts by residents went up. Other measures of fear did not evidence any differential change in the program area, however (see Fowler and Mangione, 1986). A *Minneapolis Community Organizing* project focused on the impact of an extensive community organizing program in Minneapolis neighbourhoods. It was to have included a 'cop on the block' component; organizers in half of the treatment areas were to have been assigned a patrol officer to assist them in their efforts. However, bureaucratic entanglements made it difficult to sustain this program element, and it was no surprise to the evaluators that these did not differ from the other treatment areas in terms of levels of participation or the outcome measures (see Pate, McPherson, and Silloway, 1987).

The *Champaign Neighbourhood Team Policing* experiment examined the impact of this strategy on a largely black neighbourhood. The team worked in decentralized fashion with a participatory management structure, and was extensively trained in planning and crime analysis, crime prevention, and human relations. It used a great deal of foot patrol. The results of the intervention were evaluated using large cross sectional surveys of program and control areas, twenty months apart. Compared to the control area, residents of the program area were less fearful of crime, and thought the police gave them better service and treated people more professionally, at the end of the project. They were also more likely to have called the police for personal assistance, and to have been pleased with the outcome. The program had no impact on crime rates, but the clearance rate for the target community went up (see Nardulli, 1980). Finally, the *Newark Foot Patrol* project aimed at reducing street crime by adding foot patrols in four project areas where there had been none, eliminating foot patrols in four areas where it had been in place, and continuing existing foot patrols in four other areas. Fear levels and perceptions of crime problems declined in beats in which foot patrol was added, while resident recognition of officers and satisfaction with police service went up. Levels of victimization were unaffected (see Pate, 1986).

## V. Challenges to community policing

### *Implementation*

The first challenge to community policing is illustrated by the evaluations described above. Implementation problems plagued even these closely-monitored projects. They were defeated by at least three challenges: some were disbanded in the face of rising calls for service, in order to restore traditional service levels; others were discredited by mid-level managers who resented their loss of authority to lower ranking personnel; and some failed to endure because they did not succeed in changing the organizational culture of the department.

In particular, successful community policing programs must not ignore the '911 problem'. Since the volume of telephone calls to big-city departments skyrocketed in the mid-1970s, police commitment to respond to these calls as quickly as possible has absorbed the resources of many departments. In effect, many departments are being managed by the thousands of citizens who call the police, not by their commanders. In the home visit area of Birmingham, pressure to respond quickly to calls for service at a time when the police district was understaffed led to the abandonment of the problem-solving aspects of the program. The district commander responsible for devising the program was punished with an undesirable assignment for letting responses to calls for service slacken because of his commitment to the community policing experiment. At about the same time, Houston's city-wide community policing effort was halted following charges that police had allowed responses to calls for serviced to deteriorate, because (it was charged) officers were being freed from this responsibility in order to carry out the program. The program had powerful enemies among lieutenants and other mid-level supervisors in the department; the Chief of Police was soon fired, and little remains of her program.

Recognizing these lessons, Chicago's plan for community policing includes a careful calculation of the personnel needed to continue to respond to calls for service, and a plan for dealing with more non-emergency calls over the telephone or by mail. New York City dealt with this problem by creating a small, independent community policing force, and took advantage of the political crisis being created by crime in that city to secure additional funding from the State of New York to pay for it. In both cases, the Chiefs of Police know the lessons of Houston and Birmingham, and are attempting to avoid them.

In other cities, community policing has floundered in the face of the crime-fighting culture of traditional departments. In Oakland there was little enthusiasm for community policing among officers assigned to the

program. While a few hard-working officers carried out the most easily monitored task — making home visits and conducting interviews — they did nothing to follow up on the information that they gathered. Their immediate supervisor dismissed the effort as ‘social work’, and did nothing to ensure that the community policing program developed in the Chief’s office actually was implemented in the field. One officer conducting home visits actually quit his job because he was so frustrated by the lack of support for his efforts. In Baltimore, officers pulled from routine assignments to replace the foot patrol officers while they were on vacation were unenthusiastic about the assignment. One of the Ombudsman police officers preferred giving out traffic tickets to interviewing citizens and attending meetings.

### *Effectiveness*

As the evaluations described above also indicate, proponents of community policing must develop better answers to the question, ‘Does it work?’ As indicated above, the evidence is mixed. The most consistent finding of evaluations to date is that community policing improves popular assessments of police performance. This is certainly an accomplishment, especially in the African-American and Hispanic neighbourhoods in which many of these projects took place. However, it is vulnerable to the charge that this is merely a triumph of ‘public relations’, for rarely is there good evidence that crime has been reduced. As depicted above, the evaluations indicate that assessments of policing improved in thirteen of fifteen opportunities, while victimization was down significantly only in three of fifteen cases. I do not know of an evaluation of foot patrol which can point to reduced levels of conventional crime. If more of the projects had demonstrated reductions in crime, critics could also have pointed to the possibility that it was simply displaced to somewhere else rather than actually prevented, for none of these evaluations was designed to address that possibility.

To be fair, victimization is also very difficult to measure accurately. The evaluation surveys described here could not devote sufficient questionnaire space to measure it properly. Surveys are known to under count certain kinds of crime (such as domestic violence), and are of only marginal utility for others (drug trafficking; nonresidential vandalism). Neighbourhood crime rates are quite sensitive to the level of repeat multiple victimization, something that surveys are not good at measuring under the best of circumstances. In this light, the fact that several evaluations point to significant declines in measures of concern or worry about crime, or the extent of local crime problems, might be evidence that these interventions are having effects on crime as well.

### *Equitable policing*

Community policing also threatens to become politicized. The evaluation of community policing in Houston reviewed above found that the way in which several of the programs were run favoured the interests to home owners and established interests in the community. The Community Station relied in established community organizations to attract people to the station’s programs. They chose who would ride along with the police, and who would attend meetings with the local police district commander. The groups also helped organize community meetings that brought major figures like the Chief of Police to speak to area residents. This approach worked well for members of those groups, but less affluent area residents did not hear about the programs and did not participate in them. The *Community Organizing Team* held a number of small meetings to identify area leaders and begin their organizing efforts; almost all of them were held in the parts of the target area dominated by white residents owning single-family homes. The largely-black residents of large rental buildings in the area were quickly identified as the source of problems in the community, and became the targets of their activities. All of this was reflected in the findings of our evaluation, for the positive effects of the programs in both areas were confined to whites and home owners. The reasons for this were subtle, but important. Working on their own initiative, the officers in both areas focused their efforts in areas where they were well received. The community organizing team could hold meetings only where they were welcome, and the team working out of the neighbourhood substation found that working through established groups made their task of quickly mobilizing community support much easier.

This suggests that policing by consent can be difficult in places where the community is fragmented by race, class, and lifestyle. If, instead of trying to find common interests in this diversity, the police deal mainly with elements of their own choosing, they will appear to be taking sides. It is very easy for them to focus ‘community policing’ on supporting those with whom they get along best and share their outlook. As a result, the ‘local priorities’ that they represent will be those of some in the community, but not all. Critics of community policing are concerned that it can extend the familiarity of police and citizens past the point where their aloofness, professionalism, and commitment to the rule of law can control their behaviour. To act fairly and constitutionally, and to protect minority rights, the police must sometimes act contrary to the opinion of the majority. As Stephen Mastrofsky points out (1988: 65), community policing must develop a process by which officers can be given sufficient autonomy to do good without increasing their likelihood of doing evil.

### *Lawful policing*

One significant challenge is that of conducting community policing in a lawful manner. Community policing emphasizes working with neighbourhood residents to solve local problems in a practical fashion, and placing responsibility for doing this in the hands of individual police officers. They will have a great deal of discretion in how they act, and the rules for 'problem solving' will always be ambiguous. They often will not be constrained by legal statutes, and may find themselves free to act upon their prejudices or stereotypes. This runs counter to long-standing practices in policing. Over time, American police have narrowed their role by shedding many of their traditional order maintenance and even service functions, in order to limit their own lawlessness. Between the 1950s and the 1970s, departments become even more rule bound, in order to avoid corruption (see below) and to establish an even-handed manner which discouraged overt discrimination, brutality, and violence. As noted above, this was often in response to local political pressure and a desire to avoid civil strife. By many measures this form of professionalism was extremely successful; for example, police shootings of and by civilians have plummeted over the last two decades, even in the face of drug-war violence and the escalating calibre of street weapons. Adopting an aloof, legalistic style of policing, and sticking to the rules in a bureaucratic fashion, remains a good way to stay out of trouble in most departments.

### *Corruption-free policing*

Corruption is an endemic problem in police departments, and community policing does not make the task of controlling it any easier. Some of the organizational 'problems' of police that community policing is supposed to address were created expressly to counter corruption, and it is not clear how community policing will address this issue.

Proponents of community policing always call for stability of assignments and 'beat integrity'. They argue that officers need to be assigned to one area for a long period of time, so that they can learn about problems in the area and who the trouble makers are, and so that they can develop relationships with local residents and organizations. They also want those officers to handle as many of the emergency and non-emergency calls for service that the department receives from 'their' area as possible. The difficulty is that the practice of frequently changing the assignments of police officers evolved as a response to corruption. Officers are moved from place to place so that they cannot develop long-term ties with potential 'corrupters', including those who violate liquor ordinances, evade environmental and land use regulations, and wish to protect gambling and prostitution.

Reformers bent on controlling corruption and enhancing the professionalism of their department also have moved to break the ties between police and politicians. For example, when O.W. Wilson took control of the corrupt Chicago Police Department in 1961, he noted that the boundaries of police districts were drawn to match those of the City Council, so that each political ward had its own policing. This helped ensure that local politicians could control the promotion and assignment of police officers, set their priorities, and share the proceeds of corrupt police dealings with gamblers and other corrupters. He immediately moved to scramble police district boundaries and to make them much larger than political wards so that competing politicians had to share districts. Control over operations was centralized to recapture control over officer behaviour, and the police became increasingly autonomous in selecting and promoting personnel.

Now community policemen are looking for local connections. Being 'political', in the sense that they seek to represent the interests of the community, has become a virtue. Police are encouraged to seek out local leaders, ally themselves with community representatives, and seek to represent local interests. In democratic societies, this is what politicians do, too, and it will be difficult to justify keeping 'the representatives of the people' out of the process of policy making and priority setting. Having won at the polling place provides a powerful claim for the right to articulate the community's interests in policy-making circles, for that is how Americans legitimate making choices among competing interests.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Some critics of community policing have been quick to claim that in reality it is just rhetoric. It is certainly true that it *involves* rhetoric, for I have argued from the outset that community policing is an organizational strategy for redefining the goals of policing and providing a new vision of where departments should be heading. This calls for rhetoric, one of the tools of leadership. Community policing also calls for rhetoric because departments do not exist in a vacuum. They are dependent on the communities that they serve for tax money. Unlike private organizations, they must have public, political support for whatever direction they are going. Rhetoric about community policing informs the public about a set of goals that they are being asked to pay for.

The question is, is it *more* than rhetoric? Above I have documented that community policing certainly is proceeding at a halting pace. There are ample examples of failed experiments, and huge American cities where the whole concept has gone awry. On the other hand, there is evidence in many evaluations that a public hungry for attention has a great deal to tell police, and are grateful for the opportunity to do so. When they see more

police walking on foot or working out of a local substation they feel less fearful; where officers have developed sustained cooperation with community groups and fostered self-help, they have witnessed declining levels of social disorder and physical decay.

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