U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Justice

Perspectives on Policing

June 1988 **No. 2**

A publication of the National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice, and the Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

Crime and Policing

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The core mission of the police is to control crime. No one disputes this. Indeed, professional crime fighting enjoys wide public support as the basic strategy of policing precisely because it embodies a deep commitment to this objective. In contrast, other proposed strategies such as problem–solving or community policing appear on the surface to blur this focus.[1] If these strategies were to leave the community more vulnerable to criminal victimization, they would be undesirable alternatives. In judging the value of alternative police strategies in controlling crime, however, one should not be misled by rhetoric or mere expressed commitment to the goal; one must keep one's eye on demonstrated effectiveness in achieving the goal.

Professional crime-fighting now relies predominantly on three tactics: (1) motorized patrol; (2) rapid response to calls for service; and (3) retrospective investigation of crimes.[2] Over the past few decades, police responsiveness has been enhanced by connecting police to citizens by telephones, radios, and cars, and by matching police officer schedules and locations to anticipated calls for service.[3] The police focus on serious crime has also been sharpened by screening calls for service, targeting patrol, and developing forensic technology (e.g., automated fingerprint systems, computerized criminal record files, etc.).[4]

Although these tactics have scored their successes, they have been criticized within and outside policing for being reactive rather than proactive. They have also been criticized for failing to prevent crime.[5]

Reactive tactics have some virtues, of course. The police go where crimes have occurred and when citizens have summoned them; otherwise, they do not intrude. The police keep their distance from the community, and thereby retain their impartiality. They do not develop the sorts of relationships with citizens that could bias their responses to crime incidents. These are virtues insofar as they protect citizens from an overly intrusive, too familiar police.

This is one in a series of reports originally developed with some of the leading figures in American policing during their periodic meetings at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. The reports are published so that Americans interested in the improvement and the future of policing can share in the information and perspectives that were part of extensive debates at the School's Executive Session on Policing.

The police chiefs, mayors, scholars, and others invited to the meetings have focused on the use and promise of such strategies as community-based and problem-oriented policing. The testing and adoption of these strategies by some police agencies signal important changes in the way American policing now does business. What these changes mean for the welfare of citizens and the fulfillment of the police mission in the next decades has been at the heart of the Kennedy School meetings and this series of papers.

We hope that through these publications police officials and other policymakers who affect the course of policing will debate and challenge their beliefs just as those of us in the Executive Session have done.

The Executive Session on Policing has been developed and administered by the Kennedy School's Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management and funded by the National Institute of Justice and private sources that include the Charles Stewart Mott and Guggenheim Foundations.

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Moreover, the reactive tactics do have preventive effects—at least in theory. The prospect of the police arriving at a crime in progress as a result of a call or a chance observation is thought to deter crimes.[6] The successful prosecution of offenders (made possible by retrospective investigation) is also thought to deter offenders.[7] And even if it does not deter, a successfully prosecuted investigation incapacitates criminals who might otherwise go on to commit other crimes.[8]

"Reactive tactics do have preventive effects — at least in theory..."

Finally, many police forces have developed proactive tactics to deal with crime problems that could not be handled through conventional reactive methods. In drug dealing, organized crime, and vice enforcement, for example, where no immediate victims exist to mobilize the police, the police have developed special units which rely on informants, covert surveillance, and undercover investigations rather than responses to calls for service.[9] In the area of juvenile offenses where society's stake in preventing crimes seems particularly great, the police have created athletic leagues, formed partnerships with schools to deal with drug abuse and truancy, and so on.[10] It is not strictly accurate, then, to characterize modern policing as entirely reactive.

Still, the criticism of the police as being too reactive has some force. It is possible that the police could do more to control serious crime than they now achieve. Perhaps research will yield technological breakthroughs that will dramatically improve the productivity of police investigation. For now, however, the greatest potential for improved crime control may not lie in the continued enhancement of response times, patrol tactics, and investigative techniques. Rather, improved crime control can be achieved by (1) diagnosing and managing problems in the community that produce serious crimes; (2) fostering closer relations with the community to facilitate crime solving; and (3) building self-defense capabilities within the community itself. Among the results may be increased apprehension of criminals. To the extent that problem-solving or community strategies of policing direct attention to and prepare the police to exploit local knowledge and capacity to control crime, they will be useful to the future of policing. To explore these possibilities, this paper examines what is known about serious crime: what it is, where and how it occurs, and natural points of intervention. Current and proposed police tactics are then examined in light of what is known about their effectiveness in fighting serious crime.

Serious crime

To individual citizens, a serious crime is an offense that happened to *them*. That is why police departments throughout the country are burdened with calls requesting responses to offenses that the police regard as minor. While there are reasons to take such calls seriously, there is also the social and administrative necessity to weigh the relative gravity of the offenses. Otherwise, there is no principle for apportioning society's indignation and determination to punish; nor is there any basis for rationing police responses. The concept of serious crime, then, is necessarily a *social* judgment—not an individual one. Moreover, it is a *value* judgment—not simply a technical issue. The question of what constitutes serious crime is resolved formally by the criminal code. But the criminal code often fails to give precise guidance to police administrators who must decide which crimes to emphasize. They need some concept that distinguishes the offenses that properly outrage the citizenry and require extended police attention from the many lesser offenses that pose less urgent threats to society.

Like many things that require social value judgments, the issue of what constitutes serious crime is badly neglected.[11] Rather than face a confusing public debate, society relies on convention, or administrative expertise, or some combination of the two, to set standards. Yet, if we are to assess and improve police practice in dealing with serious crime, it is necessary to devote some thought to the question of what constitutes serious crime.

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Defining serious crime

The usual view of serious crime emphasizes three characteristics of offenses. The most important is physical violence or violation. Death, bloody wounds, crippling injuries, even cuts and bruises increase the severity of a crime.[12] Sexual violation also has a special urgency.[13] Crime victims often suffer property losses as well as pain and violation. Economic losses count in reckoning the seriousness of an offense. Still, society generally considers physical attacks—sexual and nonsexual—as far more serious than attacks on property.[14]

A second feature of serious crime concerns the size of the victim's losses. A robbery resulting in a murder or a permanent, disfiguring injury is considered worse than one that produces only cuts, bruises, and fears. An armored car heist netting millions is considered more serious than a purse-snatching yielding the price of a junkie's next fix.

Third, the perceived seriousness of an offense is influenced by the relationship between offenders and victims. Commonly, crimes against strangers are viewed as more serious than crimes committed in the context of ongoing relationships.[15] The reason is partly that the threat to society from indiscriminate predators is more far-reaching than the threat

from offenders who limit their targets to spouses, lovers, and friends. Moreover, society judges the evil intent of the offender to be more evident in crimes against strangers. In these crimes, there are no chronic grievances or provocations in the background to raise the issue of who attacked whom first and in what way. The crime is an out-and-out attack, not a mere dispute.[16]

These characteristics—violence, significant losses to victims, predatory strangers—capture much of what is important to societal and police images of serious crime. The intuitive appeal of these criteria is reflected in the categories of the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports. Murder, rape, robbery, burglary, aggravated assault, and auto theft (most presumably committed by strangers) are prominently reported as Part I Offenses. This key, national account of crime not only reflects, but anchors society's view of serious crime as predatory street crime.

"Society judges the evil intent of the offender to be more evident in crimes against strangers."

While this notion has the sanction of intuitive appeal, convention, and measurement, it also contains subtle biases which, once pointed out, might cause society and the police to adjust their traditional views. First, the accepted image of crime seems to downplay the importance of crime committed in the context of ongoing relationships. From the perspective of the general citizenry, such offenses seem less important because they do not pose a *general* threat to society. From the perspective of the police (and other criminal justice officials), such crimes are less clear-cut because the existence of the prior relationship muddies the distinction between offender and victim and increases the likelihood that a case will be dropped when the antagonists resolve the dispute that produced the offense.

From the victim's point of view, however, the fact of a relationship to the offender dramatically intensifies the seriousness of the offense. A special terror arises when one is locked into an abusive relationship with a spouse or lover. A date that turns into a rape poisons a victim's psyche much more than an attack by a stranger. And, as Boston Police Commissioner Mickey Roache found when he was heading a unit dealing with interracial violence in Boston, serious interracial intimidation and violence did not appear in crime reports as robberies or burglaries. Rather, the serious crimes appeared as vandalism. What made the vandalism terrifying was that it was directed at the same address night after night.

Second, the view of serious crime as predatory violence tends to obscure the importance of fear as a separate, pernicious aspect of the crime problem. To a degree, the issue of fear is incorporated in the conventional view of serious crime. Indeed, fear is what elevates predatory street crimes above crimes that occur within personal relationships. What the conventional view misses, however, is the empirical fact that minor offenses and incivilities trigger citizens' fears more than actual crime victimization. Rowdy youth, abandoned cars, and graffiti frighten people, force them to restrict their movements, and motivate them to buy guns, locks and dogs. To the extent that the conventional view of serious crime deflects attention from fear and the offenses that stimulate fear, it may obscure an important opportunity for the police to contribute to the solution of the serious crime problem.

Third, defining serious crime in terms of the absolute magnitude of material losses to victims (without reference to the victim's capacity to absorb the loss, or the implications of the losses for people other than the victim) introduces the potential for injustice and ineffectiveness in targeting police attention. In the conventional view, a jewel theft at a swank hotel attracts more attention than the mugging of an elderly woman for her Social Security check. Yet it is clear that the stolen Social Security check represents a larger portion of the elderly woman's wealth than the losses to the hotel's well-insured customers. The robbery of a federally insured bank would attract more attention than the robbery of an inner-city convenience store. But the robbery of the ghetto store could end the entrepreneurial career of the owner, drive the store from the area, and, with the store's departure, deprive the neighborhood of one of its few social underpinnings.

Fourth, to the extent that the conventional view of crime emphasizes the reality of individual criminal victimization, it underplays crimes that have symbolic significance. The current emphasis on child sexual abuse, for example, is important in part because it sustains a broad social commitment to the general care and protection of children. The current emphasis on domestic assault, among other things, helps to sustain a normative movement that is changing the status of women in marriages. The interest in white-collar economic crimes and political corruption can be explained by the desire to set higher standards for the conduct of those in powerful positions. The social response to these offenses is important because it strengthens, or redefines, broad social norms.

"The view of crime as predatory . . . misses the terror of the abused spouse or molested child, the wide social consequences of driving merchants out of business, the rot that drug dealing brings . . . , and the polarizing effects of fear."

In sum, the view of crime as predatory, economically significant violence stresses the substantial losses associated with street offenses. It obscures the losses to society that result from offenses that poison relationships, transform neighborhoods into isolated camps, and undermine important social institutions. It misses the terror of the abused spouse or

molested child, the wide social consequences of driving merchants out of business, the rot that drug dealing brings to an urban community, and the polarizing effects of fear.
An alternative view of serious crime would be one that acknowledged violence as a key component of serious crime but added the issues of safety within relationships, the importance of fear, and the extent to which offenses collapse individual lives and social institutions as well as inflict individual losses. This enlarged conception rests on the assumption that the police can and should defend more social terrain than the streets. Their challenge is to preserve justice and order within the institutions of the community.

Levels, trends, and social location of serious crime

It is no simple matter to represent the current levels, recent trends, and social location of serious crime. Still, several important observations can be made.

First, in any year, a noticeable fraction of American households is touched by serious crime. In 1986, 5 percent of American households experienced the violence associated with a rape, robbery, or assault. Almost 8 percent of households were touched by at least one serious crime: rape, robbery, aggravated assault, or burglary.[17] When considering the likelihood that a household will be victimized sometime in the next 5 years, these figures increase dramatically, for a household faces these risks *each year*. Thus, most American households have first- or second-hand experience with serious crime.

Second, from the mid-1960's to the mid-1970's, the United States experienced a dramatic increase in the level of serious crime. In fact, the level of serious crime reached historic highs. Since the mid-seventies, the level of serious crime has remained approximately constant, or declined slightly.[18]

"Criminal victimization is disproportionately concentrated among minority and poor populations in the United States."

Third, criminal victimization is disproportionately concentrated among minority and poor populations in the United States. Homicide is the leading cause of death for young minority males living in metropolitan areas.[19] Black households are victimized by violent crimes such as robbery, rape, and aggravated assault at one and a half times the frequency of white families. The poor are victimized at one and a half times the rate of the wealthy.[20] These numbers probably underestimate the real differences in the losses— material and psychological—experienced by rich and poor victims, since those who are black and poor have fewer resources to deal with the losses associated with victimization.

Precipitating causes of serious crime

In searching for ways to prevent or control serious crime, the police look for precipitating causes. While it may be useful to examine what some call the root causes of crime (e.g., social injustice, unequal economic opportunity, poor schooling, weak family structures, or mental illness), such things are relatively unimportant from a police perspective since the police exercise little influence over them.[21] The police operate on the surface of social life. They must handle incidents, situations, and people as they are now—not societies or people as they might have been. For these reasons, the immediately precipitating causes of serious crime are far more important to the police than are broader questions about the root causes of crime. Four precipitating causes of crime seem relevant to policing: (1) dangerous people; (2) criminogenic situations; (3) alcohol and drug use; and (4) frustrating relationships.

"The police . . . must handle incidents, situations, and people as they are now — not societies or people as they might have been."

One way the police view serious crime is to see the precipitating cause in the character of the offender. A crime occurs when a predatory offender finds a victim. One could reduce such events by teaching potential victims to avoid situations and behaviors that make them vulnerable. And, to some degree, the police do this. But the far more common and attractive path for controlling predatory crime is to identify and apprehend the predators. Thus, dangerous offenders can be seen as a precipitating cause of serious crime and an important focus of police attention.[22]

Recent research on criminal careers provides a firm empirical basis for this view.[23] Interviews with convicted criminals conducted by the Rand Corporation indicate that some criminal offenders committed crimes very frequently and sustained this activity over a long career.[24] Moreover, these violent predators accounted for a substantial amount of the serious crime.[25] Now, an investigation of the root causes of such patterns of offending might disclose strong influences of social disadvantage and psychological maltreatment in shaping the personalities of such offenders. Moreover, the influence of these factors might reasonably mitigate their guilt. One might also hold out some hope for their future rehabilitation (through the natural process of aging if nothing else). So, the criminal proclivities of violent predators need not be viewed as either inevitable or unchangeable. From the vantage point of the police, however, the presence of such offenders in the community can reasonably be viewed as an important precipitating cause of crime. Controlling such offenders through incapacitation or close surveillance thus becomes an important crime control strategy.

Having noted the role of dangerous offenders in producing serious crime, it is worth emphasizing that such offenders

account for only a portion of the total amount of serious crime—far more than their share, but still only about half of all serious crime.[26] The necessary conclusion is that a significant portion of the serious crime problem cannot be attributed to determined attacks by career criminals or to predatory offenders. These crimes arise from quite different causes.

Some of these crimes might be produced by situational effects. Darkness and congestion around a subway exit may create an attractive location for muggings. An after-hours bar may host more than its share of fights. A rock house from which crack is being sold may become a magnet for violence. Closing time in a popular disco may produce fights among teenagers leaving the scene. In sum, there are some places, times, and activities that bring people together in ways that increase the likelihood of serious crime.

The fact that this occurs is knowable to police. By analyzing calls for service, they can observe that there are repeated calls made from certain places and at certain times.[27] These "hot spots" become important targets of police attention.[28] For example, patrol units might be dispatched just to sit and observe at the appropriate times. There may also be other solutions including permanent changes in the criminogenic situations. For example, the subway area could be lighted; the attention of a neighborhood watch group could be directed to the troublespot; the after-hours bar could be put out of business; aggressive street-level enforcement could be directed against the rock house; or transportation could be arranged for the kids leaving the disco so the crowd thins out more quickly.[29]

Crimes are also significantly related to alcohol or drug abuse.[30] It is now quite clear that: (1) a surprisingly high percentage of those arrested for serious crimes are drug or alcohol users;[31] (2) many offenders have drunk alcohol or taken drugs prior to committing crimes;[32] and (3) victims as well as offenders are often intoxicated or under the influence of drugs.[33] What is unclear is exactly how alcohol and drugs produce their criminogenic effect. Four hypotheses have been advanced to explain this phenomenon.[34]

“Intoxicated people make particularly good victims.”

The first is that physiological effects stimulate or license the person to commit crimes. The theory of stimulation may be appropriate to methamphetamines or PCP, which sometimes seem to produce violent reactions among consumers. The theory of licensing or disinhibition seems more appropriate in the case of alcohol where the release of inhibitions is arguably the mechanism that permits offenses to occur.[35]

Second, dependence or addiction forces users to spend more money on purchasing drugs, and they turn to crime in a desperate effort to maintain their habits. This is a powerful theory in the case of heroin (under conditions of prohibition), and perhaps for cocaine. It is far less powerful for alcohol or marijuana.

Third, drug use gradually demoralizes people by putting them on the wrong side of the law, bringing them into contact with criminals, and gradually weakening their commitment to the obligations of a civil society. Again, this seems more appropriate for those who become deeply involved with drugs and alcohol over a long period of time, and therefore relies more on the dependence-producing attributes of drugs rather than on the immediate intoxicating effects.

Fourth, intoxicated people make particularly good victims. In some cases, intoxication makes people vulnerable to victimization.[36] In other cases, it causes victims to provoke their attackers.[37] In either case, a serious crime can result.

Whichever theory, or theories, is correct, the close association among drugs, alcohol, and serious crime suggests that the amount of serious crime might be decreased by reducing levels of alcohol and drug use, or by identifying those offenders who use drugs intensively and reducing their consumption.[38]

“Many serious crimes — including murders, robberies, rapes, and burglaries — are disputes and grievances among people rather than criminal attacks.”

Finally, the fact that many serious offenses occur in the context of ongoing relationships suggests that some relationships may be criminogenic. Relationships can cause crime because they create expectations. If the expectations are not met, the resulting disappointment produces anger. Anger may lead to vengeance and retaliation. In such cycles, the question of who caused the ultimate crime becomes confused. Usually, the offender is the one least damaged after the fight. A court may conclude that the crime stemmed from the evil intentions of the person identified as the offender. But this may not be the best way to view the problem from the vantage point of crime control or crime prevention.

It might be more suitable to see the crimes as emerging from a set of relationships that are frustrating and provocative. The proper response might be to work on the relationship through mediation, restructuring, or dissolution. Indeed, this is often the challenge confronting the police when they encounter spouse abuse, child abuse, and other sorts of intrafamily violence. In such situations, arrests may be appropriate and effective in deterring future crime and in restructuring the relationship.[39] There are many other crimes which emerge from less obvious relationships: the personal relationships of

neighbors and friends; the economic relations of landlord and tenant or employer and employee; or transient relations that last just long enough to provoke a quarrel or seed a grudge. Seen this way, many serious crimes—including murders, robberies, rapes, and burglaries—are disputes and grievances among people rather than criminal attacks.

Controlling serious crime

Currently the police fight serious crime by developing a capacity to intercept it—to be in the right place at the right time so that the crime is thwarted, or to arrive so quickly after the fact that the offender is caught. Reactive crime fighting is intuitively appealing to both the police and those to whom the police are accountable. It is unclear, however, whether the reactive response really works. Over the last two decades, confidence in the reactive approach has been eroded by the accumulation of empirical evidence suggesting that these tactics are of only limited effectiveness. It is not that the approach fails to control crime. (It would be foolish to imagine that levels of serious crime would stay the same if police patrols and investigations were halted.) Rather, the limits of the reactive strategy are now becoming apparent. Further gains in police effectiveness in dealing with serious crime must come from different approaches. Key research findings suggesting the limitations of the reactive approach are these.

First, the Kansas City Preventive Patrol Study found that levels of serious crime were not significantly influenced by doubling the number of cars patrolling the streets.[40] This cast doubt on the potential for reducing serious crime simply by increasing the level of preventive patrol.

Second, a study of the effectiveness of rapid response to calls for service (also in Kansas City) found that the probability of making an arrest for most serious crimes was unaffected by the speed with which the police responded. The crucial factor was not the speed of the police response, but the speed with which citizens raised the alarm. If citizens did not notice the crime, or did not call the police quickly, no amount of speed in the police response helped much.[41]

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Third, studies of the investigative process revealed that the key factor in determining whether a crime was solved was the quality of the information contributed to the investigation by victims and witnesses about the identity of the offender.[42] If they could not be helpful, forensic wizardry generally was not up to solving the crime.

It is important to understand that these weaknesses appeared in precisely those areas of crime control where the reactive strategy should have been particularly strong: i.e., in dealing with crimes such as murder, rape, robbery, assault, and burglary. These crimes could be expected to produce alarms; they also were interceptable and solvable by a vigilant police force waiting to be mobilized by outraged citizens.

There are, of course, many other kinds of serious crimes for which the reactive police strategy is much more obviously inappropriate.[43] It cannot, for example, deal with consensual crimes such as drug dealing behind closed doors. Nor can it deal with crimes such as extortion and loan sharking where the victims are too afraid to report the crimes. A reactive strategy cannot deal with sophisticated white collar crimes or political corruption where the losses associated with the crimes are so widely distributed that people do not notice that they have been victimized. Finally, a reactive strategy cannot deal even with traditional street crimes in those parts of cities where confidence in the police has eroded to such a degree that the citizens no longer call when they are victimized.

“Confronted by high levels of crime and limited budgets, the police felt a growing need for initiative and thoughtfulness in tackling serious crime.”

Although these findings and intrinsic limitations of the reactive strategy have not unseated the intuitive appeal of and wide experience with the reactive crime fighting strategy, they have added to a growing sense of frustration within police departments. Confronted by high levels of crime and limited budgets, the police felt a growing need for initiative and thoughtfulness in tackling serious crime. Working within the logic of their current approaches, but reaching for additional degrees of effectiveness, during the 1970's the police developed new proactive tactics.

Developments in proactive crime fighting

To deal with serious street crime, the police developed the tactic of directed patrol. Sometimes these patrols were aimed at locations that seemed particularly vulnerable to crimes, such as branch banks, convenience stores, and crowded bars. Other times, the patrols were focused on individuals who, on the basis of past record or recent information, were thought to be particularly active offenders.[44]

The police sought to attack street robberies and muggings through anticrime squads that sent decoys into the streets to prompt active muggers into committing a crime in the full view of the police. The police also sought to control home robberies and burglaries through sting operations involving undercover officers who operate as fences to identify and gather evidence against the offenders.

Finally, the police sought to enhance the effective impact of their enforcement efforts by increasing the quality of the cases they made. Quality Investigation Programs[45] and Integrated Criminal Apprehension Programs[46] were adopted by many departments to increase the likelihood that arrests would be followed by convictions and long prison sentences.

For the most part, each of these innovations produced its successes. The perpetrator-oriented patrols, sting operations, and quality investigation efforts were a little more successful than the location-oriented directed patrols and the undercover operations directed against street robbery. Nonetheless, the police did demonstrate that concentrated efforts could increase arrests, clearances, and convictions. These efforts did not show that these programs alone—without the support of courts and corrections and the involvement of the community—could reduce aggregate levels of serious crime in the cities in which they were tried.

Moreover, insofar as each program took a more aggressive and proactive approach to crime, it also troubled those who were concerned that the police not become too intrusive. Perpetrator-oriented patrols, for example, raised the question of whether it was appropriate to target offenders rather than offenses, and if so, on what evidentiary basis.[47] The use of undercover tactics to deal with both robbery and burglary raised important questions about entrapment.[48] And the emphasis on producing convictions from arrests prompted worries that the police might be motivated to manufacture as well as simply record and preserve evidence. Arguably, these civil liberties concerns were inappropriate at a time when the police seemed unable to deal with high crime rates. The fact that these concerns arose, however, indicated that the police were, in fact, using their authority more intensively than they had when they were relying principally on reactive strategies. Such concerns must be reckoned a cost of the new efforts.

The police also made substantial investments in their ability to deal with those crimes that could not be handled through routine patrol or investigative operations, either because the crimes were too complicated to handle with ordinary arrest and investigative methods, or because the routine operations would not disclose the crime. In terms of dealing with especially demanding crimes, like hostage takings or well-armed offenders, the police developed Special Weapons and Arrest Teams. They also enhanced their capacities to deal with riots and demonstrations. And at the other end of the spectrum, the police developed special procedures for dealing with deranged and disordered offenders who often looked violent (and sometimes were) but mostly were simply mentally disturbed.

To deal with crimes that were not always revealed through the ordinary procedures of complaints by victims and witnesses, the police developed special units skilled in investigating the sensitive areas of child sexual abuse, rape, and domestic assault. They also created special investigative units to deal with high-level drug dealing, organized crime, arson, and sophisticated frauds. These units often relied on special intelligence files as well as special investigative procedures, such as the recruitment of informants, electronic wiretaps, and sustained undercover investigations. These programs also scored their successes and enhanced the ability of the police to deal with serious crime.

Missed opportunities in crime fighting?

These innovations demonstrated the resourcefulness and creativity of the police as they faced the challenge of high crime rates with limited financial resources, diminished authority, and constrained managerial prerogatives. With the benefit of hindsight, however, some crucial oversights are apparent.

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First, there was little appreciation of the crucial role that better information from the community could play in strengthening police performance.[49] It was not that the police were unaware of their dependency on citizens for information. Long before it was demonstrated that the success of rapid response to crime calls and retrospective investigation depended on the willingness of victims and witnesses to report crimes and aid in their solution, the police had mounted campaigns mobilizing citizens to support their local police.

The real problem was that the police did not adequately consider what was needed to attract that support. They thought that their interest and ready availability would be sufficient. They did not understand that citizens felt vulnerable to retaliation by offenders in the community and needed a closer connection with the police if they were going to help them solve the crime. Nor did the police understand that a partnership with the community could be constructed only from the material of daily encounters with the public; in particular, by taking seriously the public's concern with less serious offenses. In short, while the police knew that they were dependent on the community for information about crime, they never asked the public what was needed to obtain help beyond setting up 911 systems.

Second, the police rarely looked behind an offense to its precipitating causes. Nor did they think about crime prevention in terms of managing the precipitating causes. They knew, of course, that much crime was being produced by dangerous offenders, criminogenic situations, alcohol and drug abuse, and aggravating relationships. But they were

ambivalent about acting on that knowledge. They tended to limit their responsibilities to applying the law to incidents to which they were summoned; they did not think in terms of applying instruments of civil law or the capacities of other city agencies to work on the proximate causes of crime. Criminal investigations emphasized legal evidence of guilt or innocence—not the question of precipitating causes.

There were many reasons to maintain this narrow focus on law enforcement. To a degree, it protected police organizations from criticisms that they were lawless and out of control. The police could explain that they merely enforced the laws and that they exercised no discretion beyond this basic function. The narrow focus on law enforcement also protected the organization from failure in its basic crime control mission. If the police role was limited to applying the criminal law to offenses rather than to the more challenging goal of actually preventing and controlling crime, the police could succeed even if crime were not controlled. They could blame the other parts of the criminal justice system for their failures to deter and incapacitate the offenders whom the police had arrested. Finally, the narrow focus was consistent with the training and aspirations of the police themselves. Arresting people and using authority was real police work; mediating disputes, mobilizing communities, and badgering other city agencies for improved services was social work.

"Arresting people and using authority was real police work; mediating disputes, mobilizing communities, and badgering other city agencies for improved services was social work."

Whatever the reasons, the police remained reluctant to develop the internal capabilities needed to make their anecdotal impressions of precipitating causes systematic and powerful. Crime analysis sections merely kept statistics or characterized the location of crime; they did not identify dangerous offenders or trouble spots and avoided examining the role of alcohol and drugs in the serious crime problem. Nor did they propose alternative methods for dealing with crime problems. From the perspective of the police, it was far better to stay at the surface of social life and respond to crimes as they occurred rather than to intervene more widely and actively to manage the immediate conditions that were producing crimes.

Third, the police never fully exploited the self-defense capacities of the community itself. They did offer advice to merchants and citizen groups about how they could protect themselves from criminal victimization. And they helped organize neighborhood watch groups. But the main efforts went into helping the communities become more effective operational auxiliaries to the police departments. Citizens were encouraged to mark their property not only because it helped the police solve the crime, should the item be stolen, but also because it allowed the police to return the property to the owners. Crime watch groups were instructed to call the police rather than to intervene themselves. This was consistent with the desires of the police to maintain their monopoly on both expertise and operational capability in dealing with crime. They did not really want any growth in private security—whether it took the form of volunteer associations such as the Guardian Angels or commercial operations such as Burns Security Guards. Because of that interest, police commitment to building a community's self-defense capacities was always ambivalent. And, because they were ambivalent, the police did not think through the question of whether and how such efforts could actually help them control serious crime.

Problem-solving and community approaches to crime control

In the 1980's, police departments throughout the country have begun to explore the crime-fighting effectiveness of tactics that build on previous approaches, but seek to extend them by looking behind offenses to the precipitating causes of crimes, building closer relations with the community, and seeking to enhance the self-defense capacities of the communities themselves. These efforts are guided mostly by a theory of what might work and some illustrative examples. The theory is that the effectiveness of existing tactics can be enhanced if the police increase the quantity and quality of their contacts with citizens (both individuals and neighborhood groups), and include in their responses to crime problems thoughtful analyses of the precipitating causes of the offenses. The expectation is that this will both enhance the direct effectiveness of the police department and also enable the police department to leverage the resources of citizen groups and other public agencies to control crime.

Some examples, drawn from recent experiences, suggest the ways in which these new approaches can lead to enhanced crime control.

Enhanced police presence. From its inception, patrol has sought to prevent crime through the presence, or potential presence, of a conspicuous officer. Patrolling in cars is only one way to communicate police presence, however. Activities such as foot patrol, visiting citizens in their homes, and attending group meetings also increase the awareness of police to which all citizens respond—those intent on crime as well as those not. This presence both deters potential offenders from committing crimes and affords officers the opportunities to note criminal acts in progress.

Example: A youth walking down a street in a small business section of town sees an unlocked automobile with the key in the ignition. He is tempted to steal it. Glancing around, he notes a police officer a short distance away walking down the street. The youth decides not to enter the car for fear of being caught by the officer.

Example: An officer, through crime analysis, becomes aware of a pattern of burglaries in a neighborhood. Increasing her patrol in alleyways, she notes a youth attempting to enter the back window of a residence. She makes an arrest.

"In England . . . , when an anticrime unit is sent in to deal with a serious crime problem, as often as not it consists of foot patrol."

Although the success of foot patrol tactics in controlling crime is counter-intuitive to those accustomed to patrol by automobile, confidence in this approach is common in England. There, when an anticrime unit is sent in to deal with a serious crime problem, as often as not it consists of foot patrol. The approach is successful because foot patrol officers have access to areas unavailable to officers in cars: walkways and areas between houses, for example. Unpublished work by Glenn Pierce suggests that some crimes, such as burglary, tend to be patterned within limited geographical and chronological space. If this is true, when combined with what is known about how burglars enter homes and businesses, properly targeted foot patrol might be the strongest potential anticrime tactic to deal with such crimes.

Better surveillance and deterrence of dangerous offenders. From the outset, police have sought to control crime through close surveillance of those who have committed crimes in the past. The problem has been to accurately identify those offenders. Police officers who work closely with a neighborhood are in a position to learn who behaves in criminal or delinquent ways within the community. By stationing themselves in particular locations, officers can surveil known troublemakers and forestall criminal behavior.

Example: Police investigation of a rash of robberies committed by juveniles involved house-to-house interviews of the neighborhood. In these interviews, photographs of suspects were shown to residents. While no information about the crimes was produced, the word rapidly spread through the neighborhood that the police were keeping close tabs on specific individuals. The robberies stopped without an arrest.

It is also legally and procedurally possible to consider assigning neighborhood police officers to the surveillance of probationers and parolees. Such surveillance would be more immediate and regular than that now provided by probation or parole officers. Aware that neighborhood police officers had easier access to information about their activities, people who were in the community on a conditional basis might be deterred from committing illegal acts.

Example: Paroled sexual offenders in a conservative state regularly move to a community known for its relatively open values. A plan is worked out between local police and the state correctional agency. Upon parole, all sexual offenders returning to this community are interviewed by the chief of patrol and the neighborhood officer policing the area in which the parolee is to live. An offender known for attacks on teenage girls returns to the community. Regular contacts between the officer and parolee are scheduled to enable the police officer to oversee the parolee's behavior while in the community. The police officer discovers that the parolee is now working in the local fast food restaurant—a workplace which regularly hires teenage girls. The officer, in conjunction with the parole officer, requires that the parolee find a different job, one in which young girls are not always present.

Increased access to information. Community policing emphasizes the development of close communication between citizens and police. This communication helps police gather information for both *preventing* and *solving* crime.

Example: In an area frequented by many street people, a street person approaches a neighborhood police officer to inform him that a stranger from another neighborhood is attempting to recruit assistance to commit a street robbery. The street person describes the newcomer to the police officer. Shortly afterwards while patrolling, the officer notices a person on the street who matches the description. The officer approaches the person, questions him, tells him that he (the officer) is aware of what he is planning, and instructs him to leave the area.

"Use of information gathered by patrol officers is one of the most important ways in which police can improve their ability . . ."

Example: Shortly after leaving her church a woman is mugged on the street. She appears to be seriously injured as a result of being knocked to the ground. Police and medics are called. The neighborhood officer responds by foot. She is approached by several children and their parents. The children were playing in an open space in the public housing project across the street from the church and saw the youth mug the woman. They know the youth and where he lives. Accompanied by a neighborhood entourage, including the parents and children who identified the youth, the officer proceeds to the apartment and makes the arrest.

Familiarity with the social and physical characteristics of their beats also helps neighborhood police officers to understand linkages between various pieces of information gathered from their own observations and from other disparate sources.

Example: Parents have complained to a neighborhood police officer about an increase of drug availability in their neighborhood. Several parents have found drugs in their children's possession. In addition, the officer has noticed many youths congregating around an entrance to a second-story apartment over several stores. The officer contacts the drug unit and informs them of his suspicion that drugs are being sold to children from that apartment. The drug unit arranges an undercover "buy" and then "busts" the dealers.

Work by Pate,[50] Greenwood, Chaiken and Petersilia,[51] Eck,[52] and Skogan and Antunes[53] suggests that use of information

gathered by patrol officers is one of the most important ways in which police can improve their ability to apprehend offenders. In 1982, Baltimore County, Maryland initiated a Citizen Oriented Police Enforcement unit (COPE), designed to bring the police into closer contact with the citizens and reduce their fears. A 1985 study showed that not only had COPE reduced fear, but also it had apparently produced a 12 percent reduction in the level of reported crime.[54]

Early intervention to prevent the escalation of disorder into crime. In a widely read article, Kelling and Wilson argue that there is an important causal link between minor instances of disorder and the occurrence of serious crime.[55] Disorderly behavior—youths congregating, drunks lying down, prostitutes aggressively soliciting—left untended, can escalate into serious crime. The implication is that intervention by police to stop uncivil behavior keeps it from escalating.

"An important part of community policing is providing anticrime consultation to citizens, businesses, and other community institutions."

Example: Youths panhandle in a subway station. Citizens give money both out of charitable motives and because they are fearful. Youths, emboldened by citizen fear, intimidate and, finally, threaten and mug subway users. Intervention by police to end panhandling by youths reduces threatening and mugging of citizens.

Although this argument has intuitive appeal, little direct empirical evidence exists about exploiting its anticrime potential.

Crime prevention activities. An important part of community policing is providing anticrime consultation to citizens, businesses, and other community institutions. The recommendations range from home target hardening (locks, strengthened doors, etc.) to street and building design.

Example: Residents of a neighborhood have been troubled by daytime burglaries. In addition to planning a police response, police consult with homeowners about ways in which they can make their homes more secure from burglars. Suggestions include moving shrubs away from doorways, strengthening locks, securing windows, and taking other burglary prevention precautions.

A 1973 evaluation of Seattle's Community Crime Prevention Program, which used this approach, found a significant reduction in burglaries.[56]

Shoring up community institutions. Institutions of neighborhood social control include families, churches, schools, local businesses, and neighborhood and community organizations. In many communities, the corrosive effects of social disorganization have seriously weakened such organizations. Police, working with such institutions and organizations, can reinforce their normative strength in a community.

Example: Drug dealing is a serious problem in an inner-city neighborhood. Drug dealers not only have dealt drugs freely, but also have intimidated residents to the extent that they are afraid to complain to police. A local church decides that the problem is so serious that an organized effort must be made to attack the problem. Church officials contact the police and ask them to work closely with the neighborhood group. Citizens demonstrate against drug dealing, getting both police protection and great publicity. Citywide and local political leaders, as well as other public and private agencies, become concerned about the problem and develop a concerted effort to reduce drug dealing and intimidation. Sustained street-level enforcement ends drug dealing in that location.

Example: Using up-to-date technology, police are able to identify the patterns of a burglary ring which is moving through a neighborhood. Police contact the local neighborhood anticrime group and inform its members of the patterns so that they can be alert and watch their own and each others' homes.

Example: A woman who lives in public housing has been troubled by attempts of local gangs to recruit her youngest son. Up to now, his older brother has been able to protect him. Now, however, the older brother is going into the service. Approached by the mother, the neighborhood police officer now keeps an eye out for the youngster on the way to and from school as well as on the playground.

Example: A local school is plagued by dropouts who continually hang around the school intimidating both students and teachers. Crime has increased in and around the school. The principal decides to crack down on the problem. The neighborhood police officer becomes involved in the efforts. He teaches a course in youth and the law, increases his surveillance of the grounds, consults with the teachers about handling problems, and invokes other agencies to become involved with the youths who have dropped out of school.

Although promising, it is unclear what impact the strengthening of community institutions has on serious crime. It is an attractive idea, however.

Problem solving. Police have historically viewed calls for service and criminal events as individual incidents. Many such incidents are part of a chronic problem amenable to diagnosis and preventive intervention by either police or other agencies.

Example: Police and citizens note an increase in daytime burglaries in a particular neighborhood. This neighborhood has also been characterized by high rates of truancy. Suspecting that many burglaries are committed by truants, police, citizens, and school officials plan a carefully integrated anti-truancy campaign. Daytime burglaries drop.

Problem solving appears to be a promising approach to deter crime. When, in 1985, the Newport News Police Department turned to problem-oriented policing as an approach to dealing with crime, it was successful in dealing with three stubborn crime problems that had beset the community: a series of prostitution-related robberies; a rash of burglaries in a housing project; and larcenies from vehicles parked in downtown areas. In each case, the problem was solved not simply by solving the crimes and arresting offenders, nor by increasing levels of patrol (though both were done), but also by operating on the immediate conditions that were giving rise to the offenses.[57]

"Police have historically viewed calls for service and criminal events as individual incidents. Many such incidents are part of a chronic problem amenable to diagnosis and preventive intervention . . ."

These ideas, examples, and results lend plausibility to the notion that problem–solving or community policing can enhance the crime control capabilities of professional crime fighting. They do not prove the case, however.

A strategic view of crime fighting

While police executives can produce increased levels of arrest and local reductions in crime through the creation of special programs, they are frustrated because they do not know how to produce reductions in citywide levels of crime. The main reason for this might be that their main force is not engaged in a serious crime-fighting effort even though it seems that it is. After all, it would be unreasonable to imagine that any single small program, typically engaging less than 5 percent of the force, could have much impact on aggregate levels of crime. The important question is what is the remaining 95 percent of the force doing? For the most part, the answer is that they are deployed in patrol cars, responding to calls for service and investigating crimes after they have occurred. These tactics have only limited effectiveness.

What remains unanswered is the consequence of shifting a whole department to a radically different style of policing. Moreover, the answer is hard to determine, since the period of transition would be quite awkward. In the short run, were officers taken from patrol and detective units to do problem-oriented or community policing, it is almost certain that response times would lengthen —at least until the problem-solving efforts reduced the demands for service by eliminating the precipitating problem that was producing the calls for service.[58] And even though an increase in response times does not necessarily indicate a real loss in crime-fighting effectiveness, it would be perceived as such because the public and the police have learned to equate rapid response to crime calls with crime control effectiveness.

What is tempting, of course, is to avoid choosing among these strategies, and to adopt the strengths of these various approaches while avoiding their weaknesses. This would be reflected in decisions to establish special units to do problem-solving or community policing within existing organizations whose traditions and main forces remained committed to reactive patrol and retrospective investigation.

But it may not be this easy. Indeed, experience demonstrates that it is not. Previous initiatives with team policing or split-force policing succeeded in building capacities for both styles of policing within the same department, but tended to foster eventual competition and conflict.[59] The problem-solving and community policing aspects have usually eventually yielded to administrative demands to keep response times low, or to officers' desires to avoid the demanding engagement with the community. The reason seems to be partly a matter of resources—there has never been enough manpower to maximize performance in both domains at once. But it also seems to be a matter of administrative style and structure. Problem-solving and community policing both require a greater degree of decentralization than does the current policing strategy. They depend more on the initiative of the officers. And they reach out for a close rather than a distant relationship with the community. These are all quite different than the administrative emphases of the current strategy which prescribe centralization, control, and distance from the community.

"Problem-solving and community policing . . . reach out for a close rather than a distant relationship with the community."

So while logic and evidence suggest the crime control potential of adding problem-solving and community policing to the concept of rapid response and retrospective investigation, it is hard to add these functions without increasing the resources and significantly changing the administrative style of a police organization. That is hard for a police chief to decide to do without convincing evidence that it would work. The only things that make such a move easy to contemplate are: (1) a deep sense that the current strategy and tactics have reached their limits; (2) the plausibility of the idea that increased effectiveness lies in working on proximate causes and mobilizing communities; and (3) the little bit of evidence we have that the alternative approach works. A few departments, such as Houston, Newport News, Baltimore County, and Philadelphia, have committed themselves to these alternative approaches. If they succeed over the next 3 to 5 years in reducing serious crime as well as in attracting citizen support, then the field will know that it has a better strategy of policing available than is now being used.

Notes

1. For descriptions of these alternative strategies, see Robert C. Trojanowicz, "Community Policing vs. 'High Tech' Policing: What's in a Name?" (Unpublished paper, Michigan State University, April 1987); Herman Goldstein, *The Urban Police Function* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Ballinger Publishing, 1977); John Eck and William Spelman, "Solving Problems: Problem-Oriented Policing in Newport News" (Washington, D.C.: Police Executive Research Forum, January 1987).

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8. Ibid.

9. Mark H. Moore, *Buy and Bust: The Effective Regulation of an Illicit Market in Heroin* (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1977). Peter K. Manning, *The Narc's Game: Organizational and Informational Limits on Drug Law Enforcement* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1980). Mark H. Moore, "Invisible Offenses: A Challenge to Minimally Intrusive Law Enforcement," in Gerald M. Caplan, ed., *Abscam Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Police Foundation, 1983). Gary Marx, "Who Really Gets Stung? Some Issues Raised by the New Police Undercover Work," in Caplan, *Abscam Ethics.*

10. George L. Kelling, "Juveniles and Police: The End of the Nightstick," in Francis X. Hartmann, ed., *From Children to Citizens,* Vol. 2: *The Role of the Juvenile Court* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1987).

11. The exception is Marvin Wolfgang's work devoted to measuring crime seriousness as perceived by citizens. See Marvin E. Wolfgang and Thorsten Sellin, *The Measurement of Crime Seriousness* (New York: Wiley Publishing, 1964). See also Mark H. Moore et al., *Dangerous Offenders: The Elusive Target of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), Chapter 2.

12. Bureau of Justice Statistics, *The Severity of Crime* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, January 1984), p. 5.

13. Susan Estrich, *Real Rape* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

14. Bureau of Justice Statistics, *The Severity of Crime.*

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16. For a view of crime as a dispute rather than an attack, see Donald Black, *The Manners and Customs of the Police* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), Chapter 5. For important empirical evidence, see Vera Institute of Justice, *Felony Arrests: Their Prosecution and Disposition in The New York City Courts* (New York, 1981).

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NCJ 111460

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