The law enforcement in england and wales criminology essay

Police officers are perceived as the " gatekeepers" of the criminal justice system (Mendias & Kehoe, 2006: 70). They are in charge in ensuring safety and security of the public, preventing crimes, and apprehending offenders.

Law enforcement in the England and Wales traces its roots back to the " kin" policing established in the 1800s to provide protection in the communities. This form of policing flourished until increasing threats brought by terrorism compelled the government to implement changes in the police force in the 1960s. The decades following this transformation gave way to various concepts aimed at enhancing the quality of police service. Today, England and Wales follow a law enforcement style of policing in each of their decentralized forces.

This paper aims to provide a critical appraisal of the policing style in the England and Wales. The next section of the paper presents the evolution of the police force. This is followed by a discussion of the different features of the England law enforcement. Critical appraisal is presented in the discussion section. Lastly, a conclusion is presented.

Law enforcement in England and Wales

According to Alpert and Dunham (2009), policing in England started as a private force for the elite members of society. Those who cannot afford to hire their own guards rely on a shared and informal form of policing called the " kin" policing. People are expected to ensure their own safety, serve as guardians of their own community, and bring forth criminal acts to the court of law. According to Beckley (2007: 938), this form of policing was employed until the 1960s when terrorism threats prompted the development of more

appropriate policing strategies. The Police Act of 1964 provided for the establishment of more " scientific" and organized law enforcement to meet the changing needs of the public. Police professionalism standards such as the Metropolitan Police Principles and the Association of Chief Police Officers' Statement of Common Purpose and Values of 1985 were established. Various innovative changes in the police force followed these developments and continued to this day.

Despite these changes, policing in England and Wales still exhibit some characteristics of its older form as evidenced by the lack of centralized police system. Today, law enforcement in England and Wales consist of 43 individual county police forces. Having this system implies diversity in policing strategies between the different counties (Hawdon, 2008: 191). Moore (1992: 107) on the other hand observed that despite all this, professional law enforcement remained the main basis of any policing strategy.

Features of law enforcement in UK and Wales

Das and Verma (2003: 190) contend that " police organizations are shaped by culture, political priorities, and immediate needs of the situations surrounding them." Law enforcement in England and Wales has distinct features that separate it from other police forces in the world.

Professionalism

Das & Verma (2003: 204) noted that law enforcers in Europe are noted for their professionalism. They are among the best in terms of training and education. Despite this advantage, Moore (1992: 110) argued that

professionalism in police force is an ambivalent concept. He believes that police professionalism should not only focus on " criminal laws but also those laws that protect citizens from arbitrary action by government agencies- including the police." Thus, the police officers' emphasis on the crime control rather than the law contradicts the essence of their professional duty.

Multi-functioning

McGarrell, Freilich, and Chermak (2007: 143-4) contend that law enforcement has changed more than any other agency in the public bureaucracy since the 1960s. The authors added that the developments in England's police force were not only brought by threats of terrorism but also by the social and political changes in the past two decades. Police force had to adjust to meet the changing needs of the public. Police officers are not only expected to enforce laws but also to ensure public safety and security, investigate crimes, do job-related community service, control traffic, and respond to public's call for assistance (Das & Verma, 2003: 224).

The multitude of tasks expected from the police makes it hard to measure police performance and thus result to ambivalent perceptions about the force. Alpert and Dunham (2009) assert that people have conflicting views of the police. They are brave " crime fighters" and " heroes" on one hand and " corrupt", " heartless", and " brutal" on the other. Public perceptions about the police are often based on selective positive and negative experiences and not on their collective performance.

Beckley (2007: 939) also noted the lack of centralized police organization like the National Guard or Compagnie Re´publicaine de Se´curite´ in the

United States and France in the UK. This function is decentralised to the various police forces. UK police officers are in charge of community policing tasks as well as specialist police duties. They have to perform tasks from traffic supervision and community patrol to criminal investigation.

Technologically advanced

According to Swanson, Territo and Taylor (1993), police officers not only need human and conceptual skills but also technical skills. They have to be able to use computers; analyse evidence; apply management principles; and perform planning, accounting and budgeting functions. The use of radios, mobile phones and vehicles in patrolling enables police to respond to calls for help quickly. Computers made reporting and record keeping more effective and efficient. The advancements in forensic science brought investigations to a different level. However, critics say that the use of patrol cars instead of foot patrolling limits interaction between the community and police, thus contributing to the degradation of police and community relations.

Power

Weisburd and Braga (2006: 13) stressed the police's capability to perform their tasks without public intrusion. Despite the fact that they are established by the government and accountable to the public, they remain independent (Moore, 1992: 109). Alpert and Dunham (2009) contended that police officers are provided with enormous discretionary power which may not be beneficial to the public. Das and Verma (2003: 224) argued that the fact that the UN General Assembly formulated the Code of Conduct for Police Officials in 1979

attests to the authority of the police and the need to prevent abuse and misuse of this power.

Reactive policing

Moore (1992: 112) also recognised the reactive characteristic of policing. Police officers tend to rely on patrols and calls from the public to solve crimes. The advantage of this strategy is that it prevents the police from interfering in private lives of the people without their consent. This ensures that the participation of the police in the situation is necessary, official and acceptable to the community. However, this strategy is problematic because it implies that a crime has to be committed before action can be taken. While this is an effective law enforcement strategy, it is not a good crime control method. Moore also observed that it cannot be utilised in crimes where there are no victims or witnesses or where victims refuse to come forward.

Discussion and appraisal of the law enforcement policing

Based on the discussion provided above, it is apparent that the law enforcement style of policing in England and Wales has advantages and disadvantages. Although police officers in the England are known for their professionalism, their tendency to focus on crime prevention rather than law enforcement reflects misguided understanding of their professional duty. As a result, police legitimacy and effectiveness remains problematic. According to Moore (1992: 111), there is no indication that policing has delivered in their diverse functions. He noted that: there are no positive correlations between patrolling and crime prevention; police crime investigations are not always fruitful; response systems do not guarantee arrests; and criminal punishments do not always result to rehabilitation. This shows that

implementation of policies like the UN General Assembly's Code of Conduct for Police Officials and the UNDP Police Act (UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, 2003) are necessary to ensure police accountability; improve efficiency and effectivity; and prevent police misuse and abuse of power.

The multitude of police functions makes performance evaluation difficult and inconsistent. Beckley (2007: 939) noted the absence of specialised duty delegation in the UK police. Police officers are expected to be able to perform duties from the community patrolling to crime investigation. While this is advantageous in the overall growth of police officers, it prevents the development of specialised and quality skills that can only be learnt from constant exposure to a specific task. The multiple functions required of the police force prevent them from specializing and optimizing their potential in a given function. They are spread too thin to be efficient and effective.

Technological advancements on the other hand have undoubtedly promoted the efficiency and responsiveness of the police force. They are able to provide timely response to citizen calls. However, too much reliance on technology discourages the police to depend on their own resources and hone their skills. By using vehicles instead of foot patrolling, the police loses the opportunity to mingle and connect with the people. Some police officers obtain information from the internet and database records instead of going to the field. Investigation and prosecution proceedings are relying more and more on forensic science to provide evidence. This reduces if not eliminates the need for people participation in the process. Employment of technology reduces interaction and prevents the creation of a better and more

cooperative relationship between police and the people. As a result, the gap between police and community expands. People are not comfortable dealing with the police and may hesitate to call for assistance or help them in their investigations.

Hillyard and Tomlinson (2000: 400) believe that police officers have political, legal and financial accountabilities. However, closer inspection of the police force reveals that police officers are only accountable to their professional mandates and not to anyone else (Moore, 1992: 116). Despite the introduction of the " value for money" service in law enforcement under the Thatcher government (Long, 2004), the police force still have the discretion to decide which public concerns are important and which are not part of the police work. They can refuse assistance if they deem the work to be irrelevant to police functions. This promotes public distrust to the police. Although there is increasing recognition of the need to enforce police accountability, the question about how and to whom they should be made accountable remains.

The authority and autonomy given to the police force on the other hand creates dangers on the way police works. While the idea of a law enforcement emancipated from the government is alluring, the unrestrained power it afforded the police can be daunting. The police functions as an objective agency that protects the people from criminals and from the government abuses; however, there are beliefs that the people are also susceptible to dangers from the police force itself. Organisations like the UNDP recognize the authority of the police force and how this could result to abuse and misuse of power. There is a need to draw the line between

accountability and authority; between policing and coercion; and between public safety and citizen liberty. Furthermore, Moore (1992: 117) also argued that the lack of governmental regulation and public control in policing also results to their stagnation. They remain oblivious of the government and citizen's views, thus they are limited by their own perceptions and mandates and fail to make appropriate improvements in their services.

The UK police force is now perceived as an industry rather than an agency. They have become productivity-oriented (high clearance rate, high arrest rate and high productivity) rather than community-oriented. As mentioned earlier, the lack of centralised police agency in the UK gives the police force more authority and responsibility. Their involvement is not only limited to the community but to the entire nation. They have more authority than their counterparts from other countries. They have too much power and too little regulation, thus, the risk of police domination.

Reactive policing requires the police to take action after a crime is committed. This ensures that the police are not unlawfully intruding into the lives of the citizens. However, this promotes retrospective instead of preventive action. It relies on victims and witnesses in order to enforce the suitable police action. Also, reactive policing does not ensure the apprehension of the offenders. Thus, this strategy does not help reduce crime.

Another issue is the deterioration of relationship between police and the public. Negative issues like police discrimination, aggression, abuse and corruption had resulted to the public's mistrust of law enforcers. This

prevents the public from cooperating with police officers in community patrols and crime investigations. They do not believe that helping the police will lead to safer and more secure community. The flow of information to the police is not as strong as it used to be. According to Moore (1992: 117), some people choose to stay quiet than cooperate with the police to avoid retaliation from the violators. This implies not only the people's lack of trust on the integrity of the police force but also on their capability to protect them.

Conclusion

The law enforcement style of policing in the UK and Wales is both favourable and detrimental to the performance and effectivity of policing and the public's perception of the police force. It promotes professionalism of the police force. The various features of policing in England and Wales reflect the government's attempt to improve the police force and meet the changing needs of the public. The integration of various strategies such as reactive policing addresses the concern of involvement and interference. Technological advancements are incorporated for more efficient, effective, responsive, and up-to-date system. However, the multitude of functions makes performance evaluation problematic. Despite these imperfections, law enforcement style of policing in the UK and Wales is effective as it provides a common backdrop to the various police agencies in the said places.