

# Research paper on community policing

[Psychology](#), [Success](#)



## **Introduction**

This research paper investigates the subject of Community Policing. Firstly it offers a definition of the term – what it actually means. Further, the paper discusses the theoretical background. More than one theoretical “ label” is used in attempting to offer credible theories to support the concept of community policing. As well as describing some early efforts at implementing community policing policies and practices, this paper also provides examples of case studies of community policing, thus providing comparisons of real-life situations with the theory. Finally, there are opinions with regard to the future for community policing.

## **Community Policing: A Definition**

“ Community Policing Defined” is the title of a 2009 publication by the US Department of Justice’s Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS). The document opens with the following definition:

Community policing is a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies, which support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques, to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime. (“ Community Policing Defined” 2009).

It then continues with some explanatory text for the terms used in that definition. For example, “ partnerships” are collaborative arrangements between the police (the law enforcement agency) and organizations and individuals, in order to resolve problems and to create or increase trust in their police force. “ Organizational strategies” are the changes required in

the structure, management, and personnel, and the use of information systems to support those partnerships within the community, and to be proactive in solving perceived problems. That process of problem solving is based on the SARA model, as follows:

- Scanning: The identification and prioritization of problems;
- Analysis: Research of the known facts about the problems;
- Response: Development of enduring solutions to reduce the extent and the quantity of problems;

In essence, the philosophy behind community policing is to involve individual police officers on a long-term basis with a specific area or section of the community, so that they get to know the area and its residents, and are known by them, in order to build mutual trust and respect. Part of each officer's duties is to mobilize the combined resources of the police department, other law enforcement agencies, and the people of the community. By working together, the objective is – through their cooperative efforts – to jointly reduce crime.

## **The Theory**

Theories proffered to support the concept of community policing as a means to bring about a reduction in crime include the “ Routine Activities Theory” which, according to Branic (2014), dates back to 1979. Branic defines the theory as “ an environmental, place-based explanation of crime, where the behavioral patterns and intersections of people in time and space influence when and where crimes occur.” The theory suggests that when a motivated individual and an appropriate crime target coincide when and where there are no “ capable guardians,” a crime is likely to be perpetrated. In this

context a capable guardian can be a law enforcement officer, but could also be a member of the public or of some other agency or organization.

Conversely, if any of the three mentioned factors are missing, that might be sufficient to prevent a criminal act. This theory suggests – in effect – that by reducing criminal opportunities, a reduction in the numbers of criminal offenses will follow. Importantly, it should be noted that the theory is about the probability of a crime being committed, rather than predicting when a crime will happen. If there are more capable guardians active in the community (police foot patrols, members of other agencies and sympathetic members of the public), then there is less opportunity for motivated individuals to commit crimes, thereby bringing about a reduction in the crime rate (Branic 2014).

Another theory used to explain the concept of community policing is the “Social Bond Theory” (also called the Social Control Theory”), devised in 1969 by Travis Hirschi (Vowell 2007). The basis of that theory is that if a young person has some bond with others in society, he/she is less likely to become a delinquent, and with the following four such bonds, that individual is likely to “engage in pro-social behaviour.” First of the four bonds is Attachment, describes as “where a child identifies with parents, teachers, and friends.” The second is Commitment, which is the “extent in which the child obeys authority such as parents and teachers.” Involvement is “the extent that the child is busy doing pro-social activities such as playing sports or homework.” And the fourth bond is Belief – “the bond that the child wants to obey the law and support pro-legitimate activities.” (Mirsky 2009 p. 6).

In the same article by Mirsky, the Social Control Theory discusses police

involvement with the community. Manifestation of the Attachment bond is when the police and schools work together to assist children in identifying with those in authority. School resource officers are an example. The Commitment bond is encouraged by rewarding students who obey authority, thereby making them proud of their behavior. Involvement is achieved by creating and implementing community-based after-school programs with the community, and working with the community to help delinquents stay on the right side of the law, with programs encouraging “ pro-social activities.” Community policing fosters Belief by repairing police-community relationships. In that way, potential delinquents can be shown that police are the good guys, and so give them encouragement to be law-abiding (Mirsky 2009 p. 6).

## **Early Efforts at Community Policing**

In the late 1970s, the principle of city-wide police foot patrols – an important element of community policing – was implemented in Flint, Michigan, in response to public demand. Research indicated that it improved life in the city. Among the citizens, it brought about a widespread reduction in fear, and increased their satisfaction with the city’s police force. The police officers also benefited with increased job satisfaction and good morale. The research also found that an important factor in crime reduction was information. The improved relations between police and citizens meant that police patrols received more information that could then be passed on to investigators and others to trigger action (Kelling & Moore 1988).

## **Community Policing in Practice**

The following case studies provide insights into how the theories of community policing compare with the reality when translated into real-life policing by two cities: Billings, Montana and Knoxville, Tennessee.

Referring to the SARA model discussed earlier, the Assessment of outcomes of problems dealt with was considered a weak area of Billings community policing. It was considered that more formal training of police officers would improve that situation. However, the case study authors noted that a contributory factor in that weakness was that “ officers’ problem-solving skills and outcomes were not being reflected in the agency’s performance evaluations.” (Wells & Robinson 2009 p. 100).

The Billings police also worked with several city community task forces funded by the city although, at the time of the case study, success in that area was mixed – lines and schedules of communication required formalizing. Another area needing further refinement was that of the Community Crime Prevention Council (CCPC), which operated together with the police through small neighborhood-based police stations known as “ COP shops.” After initial funding and other problems, that program was just getting underway again. Citizens reportedly favored the COP shops for liaison with the police, although some were in difficult to find locations. Overall, relationships between the Billings police and other departments in the city were good, with the occasional conflict reported. (Wells & Robinson 2009 p. 101).

It was noted by the case study authors that the Billings police chief had “ flattened” the organizational structure, eliminating the ranks of captains and

of assistant chief of police. The structure was re-arranged on a geographical basis, and certain routine duties were assigned to civilian support staff to free police officers for their primary roles. Sergeants had become the supervisors in the front line, each managing nine police officers. There was some concern that the ratio of one sergeant to nine officers was wrong – sergeants were sometimes overwhelmed with the workload. Furthermore, the Billings ratio of 12.5 police officers to every 10,000 citizens was lower than in most other cities. Kent in Washington State, for example, had a ratio of 25 officers to every 10,000 citizens. Also, because the 1999 Billings crime rate at 7,500 reported crimes per 100,000 of the population – compared with the statewide figure of 4,000 – was high, the workload per officer was perceived as too high for them to be effective in their duties. One lieutenant commented that the result was that police officers were become reactive instead of proactive in liaising with local residents. That issue raised doubts that the Billings generalist model of policing (all police officers being community police officers) was entirely appropriate. On a positive note, the geographic system of police officer deployment used was seen as being effective in that the police officers were getting to know their neighborhoods and building good relationships with local people (Wells & Robinson 2009 pp. 102-103).

As for the future of community policing in Billings, the police chief expressed the view that it would be a continuous and long-term process. In March 2001, the case study authors found that at the beginning of that year there had been a modification to the structure of the Billings police force. In a team-based reorganization, the city was divided into two operational districts,

each managed by a lieutenant. Six teams of five or six officers were allocated to specifically-assigned areas in each district, and were supervised in each case by a sergeant (Wells & Robinson 2009 p. 104).

As had been the case in Billings, the police chief “ flattened” the department’s organizational structure. He eliminated various ranks and assigned lieutenants to the 10 police zones (reduced from 12). He also introduced training and other programs, including system of promotion through test results. Some initial animosity towards CPOs from other police officers dissipated when they found an increased flow of information was also benefitting them. Each CPO was assigned to his own local area for 12 months, and the managing lieutenant was given flexibility in assigning CPOs or other officers for specific tasks. The plans for Green Bay included expansion of community policing, adding more CPOs and covering more city locations (Wells & Fisher 2009 pp. 118-121).

Problem-solving as a regular practice was established in 1995. The requirement for all the force’s officers to learn how to work that way and to get on with it was generally well received, and officers were trained in the police academy and given problem-solving kits based on a modified SARA model. Additionally, since 1997, senior personnel had been meeting regularly for tactical planning purposes. Alternative responses to situations were discussed and reported by crime analysts to their district commanders (Wells & Garrihy 2009 p. 135).

Problems in public housing complexes were the subject of attention by community policing officers. Because those complexes were legally classified as private properties, officers were entitled to check IDs to ensure that



individuals had a right to be there. That procedure helped reduce drug dealing problems that were caused primarily by non-tenants. However, despite ongoing efforts by the local community police officer, there was still reluctance on the part of neighbors to resolve neighborhood issues without calling the police. Another approach Knoxville had “ borrowed” from another city was to find and nominate individual members of the community as mediators. Their role was to help resolve certain issues and problems without the need to involve the police (Wells & Garrihy 2009 p. 136).

A notably successful partnership project involved the revitalization of Knoxville’s Old Town. Following the relocation of some of the key businesses to other areas, the Old Town had deteriorated into a series of vacant buildings populated by homeless people. The police played an active role in a partnership project with businesses, city residents and others in bringing life and prosperity back to the area, increased foot and bicycle patrols, crime analysis and mapping, and improvements in lighting and property security were all instrumental in bringing a renewed confidence to the area, which in turn encouraged businesses back to an Old Town that was once again “ safe and welcoming.” (Wells & Garrihy 2009 pp. 136-137).

An interesting innovation used by the Knoxville police was the introduction of a “ city watch program.” Residents could be called on an automatic basis by telephone, to inform them of important messages. An example could be when a series of burglaries had happened in a particular area. The police also conducted courses on topics such as crime prevention for citizens and business people. The success of the Knoxville community policy could perhaps be measured by the fact that a project set up in 1997 resulted in

Knoxville police providing training for their opposite numbers in a total of eight states across the southeast US. They also established a program to target the specific needs of Hispanic communities in the area (Wells & Garrihy 2009 p. 138).

As regards the organizational structure in Knoxville, the city was divided into three main districts, each overseen by a police captain. Each of those districts was further staffed by three or four lieutenants and a crime analyst, and five sergeant-supervised squads of officers on patrol duties, plus two squads designated as “special squads.” A key feature was that individual police officers were assigned to a fixed geographical area unless they were promoted. That structure, as reorganized by Chief Keith, resulted in a reduction of the numbers of captains and lieutenants, an increase in the numbers of sergeants, plus two new deputy chiefs of police. Also – under his jurisdiction – there was a dramatic increase in the numbers of officers promoted over the following decade. All promotions were on the basis of proven abilities and merit in service. Volunteers also became an important element of the Knoxville law enforcement, freeing up officers to spend more time on their primary duties. Another time-saving and efficiency innovation was to provide laptop computers within the force’s patrol cars. Officers could write reports away from base and upload them to the centralized computer system over a wireless network (Wells & Garrihy 2009 p. 139).

## **The Future for Community Policing**

The following published statement also reinforces the belief that success must be considered a longer-term objective: “So if there is to be a successful future for community policing, it needs to be on a sustainable and

innovative basis.” (Crump, 2012).

Reiterating the same view, the Conclusion to a COPS publication includes the statement that: “ While community policing has matured and evolved during the last 25 years, more remains to accomplish to take community policing to its next level and bring it closer to its ideal.” (Diamond & Weiss 2009 p. 29).

## **Conclusions**

The research undertaken has indicated that community policing has not only been successful so far – although most agree that there is still a long way to go before full success can be claimed – but also that it has been widely adopted as a key operating principle of policing across most law enforcement jurisdictions throughout the United States and beyond. The case studies included in the paper have demonstrated that each town or city has its own specific demographics or other issues and related problems that merit adjustments to the detail of organizational structure and methods of community policing. However, a common factor that applies throughout is the need for individual community police officers to work always in the same geographical area, so that they get to know the area and its residents and vice-versa. That approach helps build relationships and trust and the cooperation of members of the community, which ultimately reduces crime. In some instances, it was observed that there was initial animosity from “ traditional” police officers to the new community policing methods, but that usually dissipated when their success was demonstrated.

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