Central question research proposal example

Law, Security

Background

Witness Protection Programs are an extension of law enforcement that is shrouded in secrecy. Originally developed to protect organized crime witnesses, these programs now have wider application (UN, 2008). In criminal cases involving members of organized crime, witnesses testify at risk to their own lives, or personal safety, as well as those close to them. This is not the only group with whom a witness may find themselves, and their families, in peril. Over the years, Witness Protection has evolved to also include other well-resourced individuals and groups who are facing criminal conviction, such as despots and war criminals finding themselves in front of the International Criminal Court (ICC) (Ngane, 2008).

In examining Witness Protection, the stakes are unusually high for the government to accept criminal witnesses into the Program, in hopes they become a ' successful' witness. Criminal witnesses are those individuals who have been part of a criminal lifestyle, but are now providing testimony against fellow criminals. A ' successful witness' is defined as someone who has capably and credibly testified at trial resulting in the conviction of the accused(s). Often, however, selection can include individuals who do not follow the rules and continue to commit criminal acts.

Many things can go wrong in a witness protection program if the wrong witness is accepted and mismanaged. This process covers the initial selection of a witness and their acceptance into a Witness Protection Program and the ongoing management, such as relocations, escorts, court preparation and protection. The liabilities to the government, including the costs associated to the Witness Protection Program, the danger posed to

witness protection officers, danger posed to the public and dangers witnesses pose to themselves are strong reasons to thoroughly examine the entrance process for witness protection. While there are differences between programs and the countries where they are implemented (Dandurand, 2010), the need for comprehensive and effective selection and management processes is universal.

*******Key Descriptions

*******Rationale

This study will look into the ' why' and ' how' of witness protection participation and selection, starting with the history of witness protection, the motivation of witnesses to come forward as well as the assessment, selection and management process itself and the role of psychology within this system. Motivation is of interest in this study from an evaluative perspective as it would be reasonable to assume that people would be highly motivated to become part of the Witness Protection Program if their life was in danger. One would also expect witnesses to act in a manner that would preserve their continued acceptance in a Witness Protection Program, not jeopardize it. Thus, it is hypothesized that the primary factor influencing the decision to join a witness protection program is survival. As various schools of behaviorism all taught, survival is an extremely powerful motivating factor.

Symbolic interactionism is a term coined by Herbert Blumer to describe the behavior of a person to a thing based on the internalized meaning of the object. The meaning that a person ascribes to an object is a product of socialization as well as modifications that the individual makes to his

socialized understanding of the object (Blumer, p. 2). Standard psychological and sociological approaches treat interaction between people as a " medium through which the determinants of behavior pass to produce the behavior (Blumer, p. 7). Sociology regards behaviors to a variety of social influences such as status, cultural norms, and values. Psychology views motives, attitudes, and psychological processes amongst others as the determinants of behavior. Instead of viewing the social interaction part as incidental to the rest of the behavioral drivers, symbolic interactionism views the interaction as the mechanism by which human conduct is formed. Interaction forms conduct because the other person must be taken into account, and a person's conduct is altered by the interaction with another (Blumer, p. 8). For symbolic interactionism, the world is made up of objects, and the objects are the result of symbolic interaction (Blumer, p. 10). Objects can be categorized into three classes: physical objects, social objects, or abstract objects. In sum, an object is anything that can be referred to, and on object's nature is whatever meaning a person wants to ascribe to it. Through a process of ' mutual indications,' objects develop the same meaning for a set of people. Human social interaction is a process by which objects are created, modified, and thrown away, and people's behaviors change to conform to the changes in the objects of their world.

The self-object is also a consequence of social interactions, in Blumer's view. Tracing the development of the concept from Mead, it is apparent that we see ourselves by how others view and define us. The consequence of this concept of self-object is that humans will socialize and interact with themselves. The interaction is not the same as the Freudian view of the ego

and the id, but rather a process by which one makes indications and directions to oneself. The process by which humans make indications to themselves means that they must interpret the world and then act, instead of the world being an environment that is responded to because of the person's organization. This stands in sharp contrast to theories of action that dominated psychological debate in Blumer's time, which viewed action as a result of motives, needs, unconscious factors, stimuli, and situational demands. A human must take into account the multitude of things that he takes heed of and construct a their conduct based on this interpretation (Blumer, pp. 13-15).

The self-object gets its starring role within Goffman's view of symbolic interaction. Erving Goffman believed that everybody was objectified insofar as he believed the entire world to be a stage and people were performing to meet the expectations of the audience. While distinguishing the performance that a liar performs from a person going about their everyday life, he insists that they both share a common goal of maintaining the impression that they want portrayed. In his view humans are all ' impression managers' (Goffman, p. 133)

When interacting with others, individuals will always seek information regarding the other person, or bring information that they know to play. Some information is easy to divine and has no real purpose, but other pieces of information that we acquire from the other allows us to make judgments about them and gives us a framework from which to build expectations of them. Some objects act as conveyors of meaning (sign-vehicles), and the hitherto un-introduced will be able to draw conclusions based on them.

Stereotypes are used to define an individual and their appearance and environment will contribute to the information obtained and delivered to them. Despite the psychological cues of stereotypes and sign-vehicles, without sufficient time to process the information, it is impossible to direct activity appropriately, on the information we glean while in the immediate presence of the other (Goffman, p. 1).

Individuals are always expressing themselves, whether it is intentionally or unintentionally, and in consequence others are ' impressed' by those expressions. People give information and give off information. In the former, language is key to the meaning conveyed. In the latter, the meaning is a result of actions perceived by the interviewer. In the immediate setting the only course of action is to take someone at face value and believing in a fundamental fairness, but obviously this changes as information is revealed (Goffman, p. 2). Decisions will need to be made about the extent of understanding one has of the others motives. Perhaps the other is acting in a calculating manner and has ulterior motives to the ones he gives. Individuals are likely to present themselves positively and language is easy to manipulate while there is another part that is difficult to control, such as mannerisms and expressions. Part of the truth testing that human beings do is the resolution of these two parts; if a person's speech pattern doesn't match their speeches content, there will be a failure that conveys some meaning and the listener will act accordingly. The clever manipulator will attempt to insure that their controllable and non-controllable selves are in congruence and will actively seek to modify the unconscious behavior. In turn, there is another cycle of discovery and testing, just as there is a further

level of concealment possible (Goffman, pp. 3-4).

Because interaction is necessarily with two people, there will inevitably be boundaries drawn. In most interactions the boundaries that the two people draw will likely be appropriately attuned to prevent major strife. A working consensus forms that is concerned with preventing open conflict, and this consensus is variable to the context. Familial relations are very different from professional relationships and there are appearances that individuals maintain in respect to each environment. In an interaction an individual projects himself and unfolding events are a constant test of the veracity of that projection. The projections of individuals inevitably take on a moral character due to the organization of society (Goffman, p. 8).

The definitions that we create are in constant danger of disruption, but the impact of the disruption is not dependent on its frequency. Preventive measures are taken to avert total disruption of formed definitions to avoid embarrassment or to compensate for negative occurrences. Defensive measures to protect ones protection are also taken, and together they insure the impressions that are given. Disruptions in themselves are interesting both in the context of the joke or in fantasy, and in order to be enjoyed must simply be managed (Goffman, p. 11)

This case study will rely on symbolic interaction as its framework for the interview that will be conducted with the protected witness. The interviewer will have to be aware of the multiple levels of communication that the subject is projecting. The words that come out of the subjects' mouth will say one thing, and it possible that his mannerisms and case history all point to another conclusion. It will be necessary to come up with a proper process of

distilling this information. However, the qualitative interview is a solid foundation from which to acquire this information. The interview will ultimately lead us to an understanding of the ' self,' and to the motivations and intentions that are held when one is entering into something as secretive and fraught with danger as witness protection.

Using a descriptive case study approach, this study will provide insight into a not often researched area of law-enforcement. Looking at the end users of this research, it is anticipated that police managers, as well as government managers, will benefit from the insight and highlight the importance of more embedded and stringent psychological assessment protocols for an applicant's acceptance into witness protection.

While there is little in the way of direct study for applicant selection of witness protection participants, there perhaps exist bodies of literature with similar concerns. Psychiatric residence programs often have selection criteria that the patient is subject to. The co-morbidities of a psychiatric patient may preclude involvement, just as a co-morbidity of the witness, such as personality disorders may preclude their inclusion into the program. Furthermore, motivations for entry in the programs are unique and tailored to the individual. Both programs require rigid adherence to protocols and failure to adhere to protocols may have disastrous consequences for both types of participants. The ethical obligations of both fields require high levels of secrecy to be maintained.

*****Research Aims

- Investigation of the indicators leading to successful completion of witness protection

The central question to be addressed by this study is:

What are the motivations and intents of an individual seeking to enter a witness protection program?

Guiding Questions

Additional questions that will guide the study are:

- What is the process and procedure for entering a witness protection program?

- How does psychology contribute to overall success in Witness Protection Program applicant selection and management? Are there any behavioural indicators of concern to Witness Protection administrators?

- Why are some individuals accepted into a program and others are not?

- How does the witness perceive the process of entering a program?

- How do administrators and the protected interact with each other once in a program?

- Why do some individuals leave witness protection?

Literature Review

In preparation for the literature review it was believed that, since there had been little in the way of discussion of Witness Protection Program research amongst peers over the past 7 years, there would be limited Witness Protection research available. Unfortunately, that assessment was correct. The reality of Witness Protection and the explanation for the lack of public academic research is that it is a secretive area, and, understandably so. Researchers who are not linked to witness protection as insiders would not have direct or easy access to the inner workings of the witness protection machinery.

Research has been done in the area of Witness Protection, such as Koedam (1993) who explored the psychology of Witness Protection participants, however, the focus of her research was the clinical treatment considerations of those who are in Witness Protection. Montanino (1987) also explored Witness Protection, with emphasis on the organized crime members who are in witness protection and their continued criminal activity and victimization. Kerr, et al. (2008), examined the existence of Witness Protection Programs and their impact on Homicide clearance rates while the UN (2008) has produced documents linking Witness Protection to their operations internationally. In both cases, however, the process of selection is only mentioned superficially and typically only as a checklist item to be done. As well, many articles have been written, particularly from the mainstream media, which document failures, successes and the overall history of Witness Protection Programs.

A significant determinant for witness protection selection and management, is motivation. The motivation to come forward as a criminal turned witness is an area under examination in this study that plays a significant role in the assessment and management plan of WPP's. Defined, motivation is " the processes that activate, guide, and maintain our behaviour" (Baron 2002). Understanding why individual witnesses come forward in criminal trials and place themselves in harm's way is very important when assessing witnesses for program selection, their eventual handling and protection, with an eye to maintaining the integrity and reputation of Witness Protection Programs. When examining the surface reasons for a ' normal' non-criminal witness to come forward, it is usually obvious: to do the right thing. Sometimes a

reward is a large consideration and motivation for a witness to come forward with information. With criminal witnesses, however, there are several competing drives and motivations. Ultimately, it is expected that criminal witnesses will be rational thinkers (Bentham, 1948) and will make their decision to come forward based upon the likely benefits and costs of doing so.

There are numerous theories of motivation that will be examined in the context of coming forward as a criminal witness for acceptance into a Witness Protection Program, including incentive theory, cost-benefit theory, humanistic theory, expectancy theory and goal setting theory (Baron, 2002). For the purposes of this study, emphasis will be given to examining incentive theory and cost-benefit theory in relation to criminal Witness Protection participants.

According to the incentive theory, people take actions when they are motivated by external rewards. This theory relies heavily on behavioral learning principles because it considers both positive and negative reinforcement as a critical determinant for forming new behavioral patterns (Killeen, 1982). In the case of witness protection, paid transition into a new life is one example of an external reward that could motivate some people to become witnesses.

The incentive theory plays an important role in witness psychology because people are not only motivated by their present situation but also future outcomes such as those that can be offered from the witness protection program (Cooper & Murphy, 1997). If criminals can obtain new identities and start their lives over, with amnesty for previous crimes committed, that can

be a powerful motivation for becoming a witness. If that is the only motivation, however, is that enough for someone to become a ' successful' witness?

The incentive theory relies on explaining why people learn behaviors and how their behavioral patterns become consistent over time. Being a witness is not a chronic state of existence that necessarily induces a habit, it is usually temporally limited. While the reward of a new identity, and assistance in creating a new life, may be appealing to some criminal witnesses who willfully decide to testify, other criminal witnesses are more likely to observe the process as difficult, restrictive and unappealing, rather than as a motivating reward. This would then make the definition of incentive far more situational and subjective.

Cost-benefit theory is of equal importance in understanding criminal witness motivation. One of the most important theories is the Subjectively Expected Utility (SEU) theory proposed by Edwards (1961). It is proposed that people weigh the probability of certain outcomes occurring, such as being caught, parental disapproval, etc., with the utility of the object pursued. If the utility of the object pursued is greater than the utility of negative outcomes, such as getting caught, then the person will likely commit the actions needed to obtain the object.

Legal regulations can also play an important part in motivating people to become witnesses. For example, higher rates of crime and government corruption are recorded in Eastern European countries, such as Ukraine and Russia, and the witness protection programs in those countries may be insufficient and flawed in their structure and operation (Stack, 2009;

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada [IRB], 2012). As such, it is suggestive that there is less motivation to participate in these Programs, as the risks for the witness to be compromised are higher.

In an area with limited previous research, the proposed study will look at the selection and management of witnesses considered for entrance into a Witness Protection Program and how psychology plays a vital role in that process. There is no known research in this specific area at this time, however, the body of work will grow as a result of this study if not only by my own continued research with this population.

*********Data Collection

*********Data Collation and Analysis

Design

A qualitative research design using a descriptive single case study was selected for this report. The case study is ideal in identifying the specific context in which behaviour occurs and provides a glimpse into the " richness of people's lives" in " real-world conditions" (Yin 2011). In this instance, the glimpse is of the very real world of someone who made a difficult choice to change the path they were headed and come forward in a serious criminal case. This study observed many of the difficulties that were encountered during that time comprising regular involvement and interaction with the participant. An active collaboration for a mutually beneficial outcome, as it were (Yin, 2011).

The case study approach is limited by the inability to generalize the data broadly, however, it allows the study to employ wide approaches by removing restrictive definitions. Furthermore, biases that would be

intolerable for quantitative research designs are more permissible. A double-blinded, quantitative controlled study investigating motivation and intent would be phenomenally difficult to design in such a way as to get meaningful data. Qualitative method provides a foundation for future research, and allows for pragmatism in dealing with difficulties as they arise.

Participants

This case study will use a convenience sample of one. Convenience samples are non-probability methods of sampling where the participant is chosen because of his close availability.

Selection of the case study subject resulted from significant exposure during the course of their particular Witness Protection selection, acceptance and management process. The subject was accepted into a Witness Protection Program by a large Canadian police agency and was a ' successful witness'. ' Successful witness' is defined as someone who has capably and credibly testified at trial resulting in the conviction of the accused(s).

Data Collection

Data will be collected utilising a framework based upon McAdam's Life Story Interview (1995, 2008) where key areas of the subjects life, or " critical life episodes" (Quartaroli, 2012) are examined, in particular the period leading up to and through the subject's involvement with the Witness Protection Program. The examination of a specific time in the subjects life is based on a psychobiographical model (Quartaroli, 2012).

The data will be obtained from a subject who was accepted into witness protection in a large metropolitan Canadian police agency. The data will

consist of archival data as well as participant observation and in-depth narrative interviews. Psychometric testing using the Psychology Assessment Inventory (PAI) (Morey, 2007) to determine psychopathology, or issues of concern, would provide a portion of the witness suitability assessment and is included as an archival data source. Unstructured and semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the results compared to the need of witness protection programs to identify persons with profiles suggestive of success or failure upon admission to a program. Additional semi-structured interviews will also be conducted as part of a follow-up protocol.

Interviews of the subject will be video or audiotape recorded for accuracy of responses. Permissions will be obtained to do so without disclosing physical identity. Information gathering will have occurred in several different environments including safe houses, vehicles, restaurants and other informal, yet controlled, settings. Collateral information will be obtained from two law enforcement officers involved in the file, one as the primary investigator, the other as part of the witness protection team.

A semi-structured interview will be conducted with the primary investigator, responsible for the overall investigation of the criminal actions and the identification of the witness for protection. A semi-structured interview will also occur with a witness protection detective (not the researcher) who was involved in the protection of the witness. Permissions will be obtained to record the interviews, through audio and video, without disclosing the officers' physical identities. The information gathered will be focused on the perception of the witness, the witness protection process and the impression

from investigators of psychological assessment and its benefit in the overall

management of the file.

Interviews will be based upon the guiding questions, but will be flexible to elicit additional information from the subject(s).

Data Analysis

With the main purpose of the study gaining understanding of the subjects'

motivations for entering and their points of view regarding witness

protection and the selection process, a model was needed to rigorously

analyse the data. Using the Five–Phased Cycle of analysis, as described by

Yin (2011), the data is compiled, disassembled, reassembled, interpreted

and conclusions made. Similar to Miles and Huberman's Interactive Model

(1994), the acknowledgement and allowance of non-linear data analysis

within the model allows for flexibility in the identification of emerging issues

and adjusting focus accordingly.

Credibility or trustworthiness of the data will be established using multiple

data sources and triangulation of the data (Yin, 2011). Member checking will

be incorporated to ensure accurate representation of the data occurs.

Interviews with the law enforcement participants will assist in data

validation, as they will be used to corroborate observable behaviours of the

criminal witness subject. The researchers time and depth of exposure to the

criminal witness subject will lessen the likelihood of social desirability

responses since the subject is more accustomed to the researcher and a

baseline of behaviour has been established (Farrington et al., 1980).

Implications

The research proposed is an original research project in an area of limited access to researchers. Due to the significant liabilities that government and law enforcement agencies find themselves in relation to Witness Protection, the importance in determining effective means that would identify successful participants for Witness Protection acceptance holds tremendous value. This value is most notably seen in the safety of those people directly involved in the Witness Protection Program.

All participants will contribute to an increase in understanding the attributes of a successful program. Identification of people who will successfully integrate into the system, follow the rules, act in a self-preserving manner, and be valuable in protecting the lives of all those mentioned, is not simple. The handlers, or witness protection officers, directly contribute to the selection of witnesses through their observed behaviours of the witness. Behaviours that would be considered anti-social, self-jeopardizing and anti-authoritarian, would be primary behaviours looked for in order to identify potential concerns. Contributing these observations to the selection group, which would include a psychologist or psychiatrist, would provide a main source of information from which decisions related to selection or dismissal are made.

Ultimately, program administrators and governments would find significant value in the selection of successful participants in Witness Protection. Funding provided to witness protection programs is most effectively used by avoiding the selection of those who will fail and bring disrepute to the Program. The selection of persons who ultimately fail in witness protection

naturally leads to liability implications. Alternatively, the selection of those who are motivated and able to travel the path of the Program, from beginning to end, will ultimately reduce lawsuits against the respective governments. Determining the viability of someone succeeding or failing in the Program using a variety of measures, and taking appropriate actions, will successfully insulate and improve the programs by increasing success rates, lowering overall expenditures and increasing political and public confidence. As a foundational study, with the intention of conducting future studies surrounding Witness Protection participant selection, this work is intended to serve as a guide to other researchers. The main goal is to continue obtaining data and develop a database that will serve as a ' profile' guide to Witness Protection participant selection. That is, over time, a ' profile' database may be established so that persons with certain profiles or traits that are predictive of failure or success within the program will be identified and appropriately screened.

The future direction of this work could best be served with concurrent data gathering from active Witness Protection participants via their respective Witness Protection Program agencies. Ideally, psychological assessment, including personality testing (PAI, MMPI-2, NEO), psychopathy testing (PCL-R) and vocational testing, would become the norm internationally, with the results maintained in either country of origin dedicated databases, or a central international repository, where the research on successful witness protection participant profiles can continue. The latter may prove difficult in obtaining transnational agreement for information sharing, however,

anonymous information vetted for ' research use only' may be an attainable goal.

Limitations

As a single case study based on a convenience sample, the main limitation of this paper is the generalizability of this study to the larger population of witness protection program participants (Robson, 1993). It is acknowledged that it is not possible to assume like characteristics to all persons who are participants within a Witness Protection Program. Differing personal backgrounds, different experiences with handling teams, motivations for entering Witness Protection, criminal backgrounds and pre-existing or developing psychopathology will all contribute to the subjective experience with Witness Protection and what it means to those participants.

The ability to replicate the study is also noted as a limitation due to the security and privacy concerns involving witnesses involved in such programs. This touches on data standardization, as the questions asked may elicit a response which needs to be vetted for security purposes, the participant may choose not to answer the question(s), or, the question(s) may not be permitted to be asked at all.

Organically, or synergistically, being an integral part of the environment in which the observations were made, one may argue that it would be difficult to make objective observations. In response, I would argue that experiencing the same situations alongside the subject has allowed for a deeper understanding of their individual makeup and context in which behaviour occurs, while at the same time maintaining an objective position. To further explain the point of objectivity, the reality of the situation is one where losing

objectivity could have potentially fatal consequences. In essence, this case study would be the practice of objectivity borne out of necessity.

Ethical Issues

The use of case study data obtained via interviews and psychometric testing will require Human Research Ethics Committee approval. The subject has been involved as a witness for several years and many resources have been already made available and used by them, such as psychological counseling and 24/7 contact availability of the author and others in the protection team. These protocols have addressed and stabilized several concerns ensuring that standards according to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans are met.

Written authorization and permission to conduct the interviews and testing will be obtained from the subject(s) with the acknowledgement that they can withdraw participation at any time. Full disclosure will be provided outlining the usage of the data collected. Copies of the forms will be provided to the subject(s) for their records. Additionally, contact information will be provided to the subject for any complaints they may have with the researcher or their participation in the study. Protocols established by the Ethics Committee of Charles Sturt University in the event of any adverse incidents will be adhered to.

The researcher has extensive experience in maintaining confidentiality and these standards and principles will be vigorously applied. Information will be vetted in order to preserve the identities of the subjects. Storage of the data and all authorizations will be maintained under secure encryption on computers, with physical documents kept in a secured biometric safe in the

researchers office at his residence.

Ensuring that the recounting of the struggles the subject encountered during the Witness Protection phase do not trigger any emotional or behavioural difficulties, close monitoring of the subject through phone calls, e-mails and the provision of researcher contact numbers will mitigate concerns and accessibility. In the event of a concern being expressed by the subject, intervention strategies will be initiated in accordance with what those concerns are, including psychological counseling referrals or medical interventions. There are no anticipated concerns as the subject has adapted to their situation and functions in a manner that would be considered ' normal' relative to the majority of the population.

The subject is over the age of majority in the jurisdiction of study, nineteen (18) years of age in Alberta, Canada. There are no developmental or cognitive impairments that would prevent the subject from making an informed decision about their participation in the research study.

The researcher had professional dealings with the subject and maintained this contact for several years while legal proceedings surrounding the case made their way through the courts. In order to preserve the security of witness protection programs, no operational information on how a witness is protected will be provided in this study.

Timeline

Literature Review would be ongoing with the majority of reading completed by July 2013.

Interviews with the subject(s) will begin upon Research Proposal and Ethics

Committee approvals. It is expected that interviews could be completed by

November 2013.

Data Analysis to begin concurrently with data collection with completion anticipated for March, 2014.

Writing of thesis to be completed for August 2014.

Resources and Costs

The requirement for resources at this time is limited to the requirement of a

digital camcorder and laptop computer. Both of these items are already

available for the study and not needed for purchase.

Additional expenses such as gas for vehicle travel in order to meet with the

subject(s) to conduct interviews would be nominal.

********Dissemination

Blumer, H. (1986). Symoblic Interactionism Perspective and Method.

Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

Goffman, E. (1956). The Presentation of Self In Everyday Life. Edinburgh:

University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Centre.