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Community Policing in America

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Abstract

ABSTRACT

Community policing in America is widespread, and most police officers cannot seem to agree upon one definition. This may cause a problem when changing places of employment. Community policing is used to address community problems, reduce the fear of crime, and promote public safety. Crime has taken on new encrypted methods in order to try to avoid detection. Community policing needs to be explored and implemented as crime changes. Community policing should be implemented in every policing organization in the United States. Various journals articles, books, internet sites, and government documents were used to create this literature. Counterpoints were located and discussed but were also rebutted. Most police officers do not want to follow the community policing style but without updating a police officer's knowledge, that officer may not know how to combat the crime and may be unable to assist the citizen if asked how to prevent the crimes happening in the community. Community policing will provide that officer with the answer needed. Compstat is the newest form of community policing that has been able to produce statistics to show how crime is reduced.

INTRODUCTION

Community policing has been defined as the philosophy of efforts of law enforcement agencies and officers to partner with other branches of local government as well as non-governmental organizations such as churches, non-profit community groups, and private businesses, to reduce crime and increase the quality of life for law-abiding citizens (Friedman, 1992). Community policing is a policy and a strategy aimed at achieving more effective and efficient crime control, reduced fear of crime, improved quality of life, improved police services and police legitimacy, through a proactive reliance on community resources that seeks to change crime-causing conditions. It assumes a need for greater accountability of police, greater public share in decision-making and greater concern for civil rights and liberties (Friedman, 1992). Community policing is a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies that 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. Collaborative partnerships between the law enforcement agencies, individuals, and organizations help to develop solutions to problems and increase trust in police.

Community policing has become the most discussed topic among community leaders, politicians, and police administrators, as well as police officers. Community policing can be viewed as a collection of innovative police practices that are designed to refocus traditional police activities of law enforcement to crime prevention. For those new to policing, community policing possibly seemed to have recently become a new topic, albeit it has been in existence for many generations and eras.

Johnson (1981) wrote that community policing has been dated back to the 1840s (as cited in Peak and Barthe, 2009). The Political Era (1840 – 1930s) describes the police officer receiving his authorization from politics and law using foot patrol as their main tactic, providing broad social services as their functions, and having a very intimate relationship with their environment. This era lead to the Professional (or Reform) Era (1920 – 1970's), which depicts the police officer deriving his authorization from laws and professionalism using preventive patrol and rapid responses as their main tactic, providing crime controlled as their function, and being professionally remote from the environment. Despite the fact that crime was being somewhat control, the Community Policing Era came about. The Community Policing Era (1970 – Present) explains the police officer obtaining his authorization from community support, using problem solving as their main tactic, providing a provision of broad services to the general public, and being very intimate with the environment.

The development of community policing in America began after the Civil War. The major function of the police was to control particular groups, like slaves and immigrants. American policing was a different style of policing from that of Great Britain. American police officers carried guns, which gave officers a sense of power over the average citizen. Officers being placed in areas where they were supervised and where they perform their civil duties at the discretion of politically appointed local captains served as a precursor to later problems, such as corruption (Fisher-Stewart, 2007). As time marched on, police officers were switched back and forth between corrupted politicians and then back to citizens where they continued "the circle of life." Police officers were initially placed into the community, and they developed an intimate

relationship with the citizens within these particular communities. Politicians soon corrupted police officers as the politicians had specific goals of attaining power. Throughout policing history, the police officers have returned to the public from which they came. Traveling through history and observing the tragedies of the different eras of policing is depressing and angering at times. With political corruption tainting the policing environment, the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King pushed the ideas of community policing into a dark abyss. In order for community policing to shed light in this dark hole, the officers needed some improvement, and this meant the officer and officer's style had to change (Chappell, 2009). With community policing evolving to a much better form of the modern version of community policing, the foot-beat officer needed to be better educated, trained, and equipped.

The new community policing officer was made possible first with help from Title I of the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act (the Crime Act). Chappell (2009) stated this act made it achievable for hundreds of thousands of police officers to be put in place to combat crime in the United States of America. Crime control was an important function of the police but now prominence has been given to crime prevention. Community policing strives to bring police officers and the communities which they protect and serve closer together in new, dynamic ways to solve the problems of crime, fear of crime, promote public safety. Allender (2004) wrote that regular interactions between police organizations and society will only build more trust in police officers. Along with the increase in trust, information tends to flow more smoothly and helps to reduce the fear of crime and help both facets prevent crime. Crime and criminals will continue to evolve. As crime and criminals change or mutate,

community policing must step ahead of the new innovations of crime, or community policing will forever have to play the role of catch up.

Police officers face many ever-changing challenges each time an officer dons the uniform to protect and serve the general public. Police officers realize there is an abundant amount of situations the officer may encounter during the tour of duty, yet that officer continues to go out every day and face those terrors the common citizen runs away from, while the officer runs toward the cries for help. Police officers must always maintain a professional appearance as well as demeanor, even when faced with ridicule, disrespect, and life-threatening circumstances. Community policing should be continued throughout communities in the United States of America because of the considerable research attention that has been given to this particular topic. Policing criminals and other societal problems will continue to be a source of conversation, and police officers need to be there to address any and all issues. Ellison (2006) pointed out that community policing is unequivocally vital, and a majority of law enforcement organizations have explored the practice or is currently practicing it in some form or fashion.

POSITION

In order for community policing to thrive in a particular environment, there must be cooperation between the citizens and police officers located within that community. Agreement between all members is vital to community policing in ensuring the safety and security of the community. The collaboration of citizens and police officers provides them with positive feelings when the merger is completed in a reasonable amount of time. Understanding and knowing ethics is one of the major components of creating a

new team, and comprehension of ethics will be expected of the members joining the team. Before the team is formed, ethics should be discussed in order for everyone to understand the expectations everyone has of the team. A common definition of ethics is doing the right thing, at the right moment, for the right reason.

Those involved in adopting community policing must understand that community policing will be different for each individual neighborhood or community. Functions for those involved must be adjusted to the nature of the equations that the function is attempting to solve. The first step is identifying the issues that may plague that particular neighborhood. Community policing is hard work, and it is honesty at its best, trying to build lasting relationships between the police organizations and the community which it serves. When community policing was introduced in Houston, Texas, the acronym used was "NOP," which stood for Neighborhood Oriented Policing, but citizens would joke around, saying that NOP stood for "Nobody on Patrol" (Griffith, 2005). This simple adjustment of placing police officers in neighborhoods can reduce crime and disorder before solving the problems of the community (Rahtz, 2001). Placing police officers in neighborhoods and using officer foot patrols and bicycle patrols eliminates the barrier of an officer riding pass a citizens in a patrol car at 30 or 35 miles per hour without waving or acknowledging the citizen. This barrier of separation being removed and placing the officer in the position of providing face to face opportunities have a positive effect when the citizen has a chance to engage the officer in conversation. This small change may assist police officers and citizens in reconnecting and aid in developing or reinforcing the partnership they must share in order to address the problems of crime in the neighborhood.

According to Rahtz (2001), community policing should incorporate foot patrols and bicycle patrols, so officers are more accessible to the community, which helps to smooth the progress of building and repairing broken relationships between the police officer and community. Attending neighborhood association meetings, attending church gatherings, and speaking at local schools are all forms of building community relations. Giving back to the community and knowing citizens and police officers on a first name basis also helps the community relations building process.

Community policing is about building police-community relationships and actually looking for different ways to develop partnerships, which assists in building safer communities through proactive problem-solving efforts (Fisher-Stewart, 2007). When police officers remove themselves from their patrol cars and walk among the citizens, this simple action builds relationships, and citizens are more likely to approach a police officer when that citizen has been a witness to a crime (Griffth, 2005). All programs that are used in community policing are not only designed for the common citizens. Some programs in the community policing model were designed with the purposes of also helping or aiding former criminals. A program was piloted in Dover, Delaware in 2007 that was sponsored by the Department of Justice as the Project Safe Neighborhoods. This program assisted in building relationships, and they served as valuable resources for anti-recidivism and prisoner reentry initiatives. The program was designed to combat gun violence through partnerships that consisted of community leaders, federal and state law enforcement organizations, and offices within the judicial systems (La Vigne, Solomon, Beckman, & Johnson, 2006).

As police officers engage the community with newly found partnerships and community relationships, police officers must also attract other public services to assist in cleaning up the neighborhoods. Improving the quality of life throughout the neighborhoods and communities within the city will also help reduce the fear of crime. Whenever a decaying house, car, or street is noticed within a neighborhood or community, the proper authorities need to be notified to correct the problem. Ellison (2006) advised that to improve the quality of life for the city residents, proper officials should be made aware of abandoned cars and houses to ensure the matter is corrected. Enforcing building codes, traffic codes, and city ordinances will help to prevent criminals being attracted to those types of areas, where crime can fester. Researchers have been able to show the correlation of fear and disorder more than a correlation with crime. How interesting that order maintenance was once a main function of the police in the past, and it is now one of the functions that police has been attempting to downplay (Peak & Barthe, 2009).

Poor collaboration between police organizations is a central challenge and organizations attempt to use community policing to solve community problems and reduce the fear of crime. Police officers cannot solve public safety issues without assistance from citizens in the community and other police organizations. The office of Community Oriented Policing Services was created in the U. S. Department of Justice at the same time the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act was passed. A four-stage problem solving process was also developed. This process was scanning, analysis, response, and assessment (SARA). The scanning identified the problem, analyses determined the root of the problem, response developed strategies to dissolve

the problem, and assessment evaluated the effectiveness of the process (Stevens, 2002). Community leaders, city leaders, and other policing agencies need to understand that without cooperation and participation between all individuals involved within the community, community policing fails. To increase or improve the quality of life and address public safety, the leadership of the community, city council, and police department should address all community related problems.

COUNTER POSITION

There are methods and strategies that different agencies may be able to use to facilitate an agreement upon a definition of community policing since the organization and community efforts, community-relations, and crimes being committed are ever changing. Community policing must be in a state of constant change to keep up with the crimes and criminals. Fisher-Stewart (2007) wrote that the definition used by the U. S. Department of Justice to define community policing is the following: Community policing focuses on crime and social disorder through the delivery of police services that includes aspects of traditional law enforcement, as well as prevention, problem-solving, community engagement, and partnerships. The community policing model balances reactive responses to calls for service with proactive problem-solving centered on the causes of crime and disorder. Community policing requires police and citizens to join together as partners in the course of both identifying and effectively addressing these issues.

Even with the wide armed welcome of many American policing organizations, community policing has been met with some oppositions. Every police officer employed with an American policing agency does not welcome community policing without first

having some resistance due to holding onto traditional policing styles; community policing is also very labor intensive and costly, and the lack of having resources places strain upon departments, which requires many agencies to have to supplement manpower with the few officers the agency has. On the other hand, proponents of community policing have been able to show that officers can maintain performing some traditional policing styles while incorporating community policing methods, using civilian employees to reduce cost associated with community policing, and forming partnerships with other agencies to help out with the lack of resources when it comes to personnel.

Community policing has different meanings to individual citizens as well as to individual police officers. Some police officers cannot help themselves from wanting to continue to follow the traditional style of policing they have become so accustomed to accepting and refuse to adjust to community policing. For some patrol officers, hearing the words community policing makes them cringe, or they may react negatively towards a plan of implementing community policing into the patrol beats. Rahtz (2001) wrote that hostility is felt and displayed by patrol officers because the patrol officers believe that the newly assigned community police officer will enjoy flexing the officers' hours, handling less calls for service, and taking pleasure in receiving weekends off.

Cultural resistance was also mentioned when community policing was the topic of discussion. Many officers related unworthiness to community policing (Chappell, 2009). Despite the many advancements and literature that can be found on community policing, some officers still find community policing to be problematic. Most officers do not want to go the extra mile and reach beyond law enforcement. Ellison (2006) stated that the traditional culture of dedicated police officers may have the feeling that

community policing is soft on crime and those officers do not accept a crime-prevention approach to crime as compared to crime-fighting approach. These dedicated officers will align themselves with union and procedures in an attempt to better control their work and workplace (Ellision, 2006). Skogan (2004) illustrated that police officers are resistant to change and resistant to community policing strategies in particular. Although, foot patrols and bicycle patrols may work very well in some neighborhoods and communities, motorized patrols may not work as well in other areas. Beaches with vast acreage covered with sand will not allow bicycle patrols to be utilized, and foot patrols will only extend or delay the response times of the patrol officers. Rahtz (2001) advised that intelligent approaches to solving community-related problems define community policing more closely. Allender (2004) talked about how community policing can use existing resources such as officers that are assigned to any given area in the traditional mode or a community policing setting can reduce the monetary issues of the department.

Policing organizations may face many obstacles when attempting to solve criminal issues and when attempting to reduce the amount of crime occurring within the city. If the citizens within those cities take a stance to stop being victims of crime, then a real chance of deterring crime and reducing the fear of crime can be accomplished. The support of the community provided to the policing organizations helps the organization to reduce the cost affected by increasing the number of officers assigned within a particular neighborhood. Determining the most affected budget item when calculating community policing being implemented into a particular city usually leads the accountant to an officer's salary. This is usually the highest line item when looking at

the cost of changing over to a community policing model of policing. As stated earlier, using existing resources, such as officers that are assigned to any given area in the traditional mode or a community policing setting, can reduce the monetary issues of the department (Allender, 2004). The use of civilians to take nonemergency reports and forming partnerships with other agencies in an effort to share the cost of implementing community policing are also great ideas related to the lack of resources (Chappell, 2009).

Finally, resources include more than just monetary notes. Community policing takes a toll on more than just the budget while being implemented. Another barrier to using a community policing model is the lack of resources. This is especially true when personnel are the topic of discussion. Chappell (2009) explained that with a lack of manpower meant that officers had to be assigned and be responsible for larger sections, and this meant there was no way officers would be able to get to know the citizens within the areas of responsibility. Once community-relations have been established and a strategy has been determined, direction is crucial for the best way to deploy scarce resources as well as a way of measuring the performance of the police department (Peak & Barthe, 2009).

CONCLUSION

Community policing can be interpreted in many different ways. Community policing can also be defined in various ways. Community policing has been around in the United Stated for many years, dating back to the 1800s. If crime is to be reduced, then community policing is vital in helping community leaders, citizens, and police administrators achieve that goal. Community policing has taken on different forms as it

has evolved into what it has become today. The most popular form of community policing is COMPSTAT, which was started in New York. Researchers have been able to provide reliable and valid statistics to illustrate that COMPSTAT has been able to show significant reduction in crime by using crime mapping techniques. Weekly reports are generated to show where crimes are being committed, and with these reports, police administrators are able to deploy resources in those designated areas to combat the crime being committed in the area.

Police officers and community leaders must be able to visit with one another at different venues in order to discuss community related problems as well as any criminal activity that may be occurring. The development of these partnerships helps everyone in the community to become crime free or, at the very minimum, reduce the fear of crime in the areas that utilize the partnerships. Police officers and community leaders should not limit the relationship they develop with only each other. They both should turn to other policing organizations and public services, which will aid in making a better quality of life for all that reside or visit the community.

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