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CRIME VICTIMS' SATISFACTION WITH POLICE SERVICES: AN ASSESSMENT IN ONE URBAN COMMUNITY

RICHARD TEWKSBURY and ANGELA WEST

A 3-month study examined crime victims' satisfaction with police response to calls for service. Respondents were asked to rate officers with whom they interacted in overall satisfaction, and in courtesy/politeness, speed of response, concern, and helpfulness. Results indicate consistently high overall ratings. Nonparametric statistics indicate that female respondents rated officers significantly higher than male respondents, but no other demographic (age, race, education) or experiential variables (reason for call, location of problem, prior contact with police) significantly impacted ratings. Non parametric correlations indicated that an officer's perceived helpfulness was the strongest correlate of overall satisfaction, while speed of response was the weakest.

INTRODUCTION

Law enforcement officers are entrusted with the safety of the communities in which they operate. This responsibility entails both proactive and reactive activities. Proactive policing involves preventive actions officers take to deter criminal behavior. Routine patrol is one proactive measure meant to establish police visibility in neighborhoods and perhaps deter would-be offenders. Community-oriented policing strategies also are proactive in nature. In proactive law enforcement, officer-citizen contact most often is initiated by an officer who may have noticed something or someone suspicious in the course of routine patrol that requires closer examination.

Reactive policing involves responding to community need when a citizen believes that a crime has occurred, or is occurring. In this type of law enforcement, officer-citizen contact is initiated by citizens who call for service. Most often, dispatchers receive the calls and inform officers of the location and nature of the problem. Other times, citizens may approach officers during the course of their routine (proactive) patrols and inform them of a suspected problem.

Officer initiated contacts typically have different characteristics than citizen initiated contacts. Situations in which officers decide to investigate citizens involve a significant amount of officer discretion. Officers have the ability to decide whether each particular situation warrants a response. Then, officers decide the nature and extent of that response. These types of contacts generally outnumber

those resulting from dispatched assignments (Mastrofski, Parks, Reiss, Jr., and Worden, 1998).

Citizen-initiated contacts involve situations in which individual citizens have decided that they require an officer's services. Officer discretion does not lead to the contact, but does play a role in the response. Cheurprakobkit (2000) found that citizens in these types of contacts rated the police more favorably than citizens who had contact with the police in officer-initiated situations.

Logically, citizen-initiated contacts occur when a citizen desires law enforcement assistance. Officer-initiated contacts, however, are not likely to be as desirable; these usually involve the citizen in question doing something negative to attract law enforcement attention, or possessing information that is necessary to assist officers during investigations. While a prevalent perception is that police officers spend a significant portion of their time interacting with criminal suspects, Mastrofski et al. (1998) found that most police contacts were with citizens who were seeking assistance, or from whom the officer was requesting information or assistance.

Although media reports often portray the public as distrustful and dissatisfied with law enforcement, research indicates that citizens generally give the police favorable ratings (Mastrofski et al., 1998; Kusow, Wilson, and Martin, 1997; Dean, 1980). Perceptions of job performance and satisfaction, however, often are related to variables other than purely objective assessments of fulfilling job requirements. Factors such as race (Cheurprakobkit, 2000; Priest and Carter, 1999; Williams, 1995; Grine, 1994; Skogan, 1978); residential location (Priest and Carter, 1999; Mastrofski et al., 1998; Skogan, 1978); age (Williams, 1995; Austin and Vogel, 1995; Kusow, Wilson, and Martin, 1997); and sex (Austin and Vogel, 1995) all influence citizen perceptions of police.

Research also has indicate an important interaction effect between residential location and citizen race (Priest and Carter, 1999; Kusow, Wilson, and Martin, 1997; Skogan, 1978). That is, the neighborhood context within which interactions occur has significant implications for citizen perceptions, especially when considering the race of the citizen. Kusow, Wilson, and Martin (1997), for example, found that the interaction between race and residential location was the most important predictor of citizen satisfaction with police. They found that both white and black suburbanites were more satisfied with police performance than their urban counterparts. In fact, these authors conclude that "residential location rather than race seems to affect perceptions of police performance" (p. 663). Other

possible determinants of citizen satisfaction include education (Priest and Carter, 1999; Kusow, Wilson, and Martin, 1997); prior victimization (Priest and Carter, 1999; Kusow, Wilson, and Martin, 1997; Dean, .1980); prior contact with the police (Dean, 1980); type of contact (Dean, 1980); and police response time (Priest and Carter, 1999; Percy, 1980).

The importance of assessing and understanding citizen perceptions and satisfaction with police services has become a focal point in recent years. As the primary peacekeepers of communities the police rely heavily on the assistance and cooperation of community members. To ensure that community assistance and cooperation will be forthcoming, however, it is imperative that citizens view the police in a positive light. To develop and maintain a positive perception of law enforcement, those with whom the police interact must perceive those interactions as helpful, courteous, productive, and respectful. As a result, law enforcement agencies that seek to maintain high levels of effective and efficient operations need to understand community perceptions, any existing trends or patterns in perceptions, and the factors that may influence the development of those perceptions. Such a thorough understanding is the only way to assure that positive and productive community relationships are developed and maintained.

THE CURRENT STUDY

The present research was commissioned based on rising concerns about the nature, form and perceptions of interactions between officers of the Louisville Division of Police and the citizens of Louisville. Recent media portrayals and political rhetoric contend that the relationships among officers of the Louisville Division of Police and community members are tense, strained and mutually antagonistic. Popular assumptions also contend that race is a significant factor, with officers engaging in racial profiling and other such discriminatory practices. Only anecdotal evidence exists, however, to support or refute this perception. Therefore, leadership in the Louisville Division of Police believed it important to assess this relationship objectively and scientifically.

The goal of this research was to assess the perceptions held by crime victims in one of the five Louisville districts concerning their satisfaction with contacts and services provided by officers. This research fulfilled the three following objectives: (1) to identify crime victims' satisfaction with officers and services; (2) to assess whether demographic (sex, race, age, educational level) or experiential (form, reason and frequency of contact with officers) variables influence satisfaction

ratings; and (3) to identify elements of interactions that may be strongly related to crime victims' satisfaction with officers.

METHODS

All data were gathered through a brief survey mailed to households that reported a criminal victimization in the study district of the Louisville Division of Police during the months from January through March 2000. The mailing list was compiled from Offense Summary Reports (OSR) generated by the Louisville Division of Police. These OSR were reviewed to identify criminal victimizations that occurred at specific, non-commercial addresses in the district. Surveys printed on return-postage-paid postcards were mailed with cover letters (see Appendix A) to identified addresses within two weeks of the offense report date. All surveys were returned to the research team at the University of Louisville in an effort to increase the response rate and to assure potential respondents of the value and seriousness of the project.

During the three-month study period, 383 OSR were submitted to the research team. After the initial wave of mailings, however, it became apparent that many of the addresses on these reports were not "good" addresses. Many were returned as "undeliverable," "addressee unknown," or "no such address." On reviewing the OSR, it was discovered that the location of the victimization was recorded on the OSR, not necessarily the address of the victim. Many of these victimizations were related to an individual's automobile and occurred in or around a parking lot. In these cases, officers recorded the parking lot location. Similarly, victimizations were reported in and around businesses. Subsequent mailings disregarded any address that could be verified as belonging to a business or to an uninhabited area. Of the 383 total mailings, 50 (15%) were returned as undeliverable.

Of the remaining 333, only 50 (15%) were complete and usable. This low response rate is of some concern, but indicates a potential problem for measuring the satisfaction of crime victims. Can one assume that those who chose not to return their response cards were satisfied, or just disinterested? It seems logical that unsatisfied citizens would have taken advantage of the opportunity to have their dissatisfaction noted. Thus, while this rate is low, it may be argued that the respondents represent the most dissatisfied community members. The "squeaky wheel" philosophy may apply in this case; those with complaints or gripes to air would be those most likely to respond, and those who were most satisfied would not bother to respond.

Citizens were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the officer(s) responding to their victimization, and in the following four areas: (1) courtesy/ politeness; (2) speed of response; (3) concern; and (4) helpfulness. These concepts were defined for the respondent in the cover letter. Respondents also were asked to provide basic demographic information (age, sex, race, and level of education).

In addition, data were gathered that determined the respondents' current and prior experience with officers. Respondents were asked (1) if officers came to their home and if so, how many times; (2) whether the respondent personally spoke with an officer; (3) the reason for the call and the location of the problem; and (4) whether the respondent had called the police for any reason within the, last year. These questions were asked to get an idea of the level and type of contact that each respondent had experienced, both during the current contact and during prior experiences.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Respondent Characteristics

The race and sex of individuals returning usable surveys seemed to be representative of the district population, which is 5 1% male and 7 5% white. The average age and education level of district residents is unknown. The sample was 54% male, 80% white, with an average age of 41 years (range 18-80). However, nearly two-thirds of this sample had at least some post-secondary education (28% had a college degree, 35% had some college education); 29% had a high school diploma/GED and no college experience, and only 8% had less than a high school education. Although those with less than a high school diploma were probably under-represented in this sample, this might not be the case given that the district encompasses the area around and including the campus of the University of Louisville. Therefore, these education levels may indeed accurately represent the district.

One caveat in comparing the district population demographics to those of the survey respondents is that those victimized were not necessarily district residents. The district in question is located in an urban area, contains a major urban university, and is characterized by significant foot and vehicle traffic activity. It is highly possible that non-district residents were victimized, so comparative statements referring to the district population characteristics are probably unwise. Future surveys should ask respondents to indicate whether they reside within or outside of the district under study.

Contact Experiences

Respondents were individuals who generally had recent contact with the Louisville Division of Police. Within the past year these respondents had "called the police, for any reason" an average of nearly four times. Similarly, almost all respondents reported that LPD officers came to their homes as a result of their most recent call, with officers visiting them an average of 1.7 times. Fully one-half of all respondents reported at least two visits from an LPD officer, with nearly all of them (94%) personally speaking with at least one officer as a result of their most recent call to the police.

Generally, when citizens call the police, it is primarily to seek assistance with a crime that already has been committed against the individual making the call for service. More than one-half (57%) of these respondents called the police to report a crime that already had occurred, 22% called for "other" reasons (typically complaints about neighborhood nuisances), 17% for crimes in progress, and 4% for non-crime problems. Three-quarters of all calls were to report a problem at the caller's home; 23% were to report something in the caller's neighborhood, and 2% were calls for a neighbor. Based on this data, it is reasonable to say that individuals who responded to the survey had enough contact with Louisville Division of Police officers to have a foundation upon which to base their survey responses.

Citizen Satisfaction

The goal of this research was to determine levels of satisfaction among crime victims within a particular urban district, and to assess what factors contribute to these levels. To measure satisfaction, respondents rated their most recent contact with officers from the district on a 10-point ordinal scale (1 =low, 10 =high). Respondents were asked to rank their satisfaction with the officers on five items: (1) officer courtesy /politeness; (2) speed of response; (3) officer concern for the individual; (4) officer helpfulness; and (5) overall satisfaction with the contact. Percentages of respondents rating officers at each level are presented in Table I. In most areas, large percentages of respondents highly ranked their satisfaction levels. Specifically, citizens are extremely satisfied with the courtesy and politeness of district officers. Not only do a majority of residents (59.2%) give officers the highest rating on this item, nearly 81% rate the officers they have encountered at a score of 8 or above. Citizens were the least satisfied with officers' speed of response. However, over one-third of the citizens (36%) report complete satisfaction (i.e., rank of 10) in this area. Speed of response is traditionally one of the complaints that citizens have against police, regardless of the actual length of time

TABLE I Citizen Satisfaction Ratings in Five Areas (N =50) Percent of Respondents.

	Courtesy	Speed	Concern	Helpfulness	Overall satisfaction
1		6.0	2.1	4.1	8.0
2				2.0	
3	2.0			2.0	
4	2.1		2.1	2.0	4.0
5		12.0	6.1	4.1	
6	6.1		6.3	4.1	2.0
7		10.0	6.3	8.2	8.0
8	12.2	24.0	10.4	14.3	14.0
9	18.4	12.0	12.5	14.3	14.0
10	59.2	36.0	54.2	44.9	50.0
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

it takes for officers to respond to a call. Perhaps most important, however, is the rating of the district officers on overall satisfaction. According to this data, citizens in the district generally have satisfying interactions with LPD officers; 88% give the officers ratings higher than five, and one-half indicate complete satisfaction with ratings of 10.

Given that these rankings are ordinal, analysis is limited to procedures that are suited to ordinal data. The Mann-Whitney U test is appropriate to compare ordinal rankings when a particular independent variable is dichotomous, and the Kruskal-Wallis test is used to compare ordinal rankings when the independent variable has more than two categories. In this analysis, the demographic variables of race, sex, and age were dichotomized; race as White/Non-White, sex as male/female, and age as 39 and under/40 and over. Education level was categorized as (1) less than high school; (2) high school/GED; (3) some college; and (4) college degree.

Experiential independent variables included type of call (crime in progress, prior crime, non-crime problem, or other), number of visits by officers, or whether the caller perceived the problem as a neighborhood problem or a personal problem. Nonparametric correlations also were examined to determine which variables were significantly related to the ordinal rankings.

Only one demographic variable seemed to impact a citizen's overall satisfaction. There were significant differences in the satisfaction ratings based on the respondent's sex. Women were significantly more likely to give a high overall satisfaction rating to officers (U = 1 73, z = - 2.343, p < 0.02). To interpret, the simple fact of knowing a respondent's sex reduced the error in predicting his/her satisfaction ranking by about 37% (tau-c = 0.369, p = 0.0l) or, viewed differently, fully 86% of women, but only 68% of men reported an overall satisfaction rating of 8 or higher. More than two-thirds of women (68%) report an overall satisfaction rating of 10 (see Fig. 1). There were no significant differences in rankings among respondents based on age, race, or education level.

Overall satisfaction ratings were not related to experiential variables, such as type of call, and amount and type of contact citizens reported. How satisfied a citizen was with his/her interaction with officers had little or nothing to do with his/her reason for contacting the police or the number of times that he/she previously had interacted with officers.

Number at Each Rating
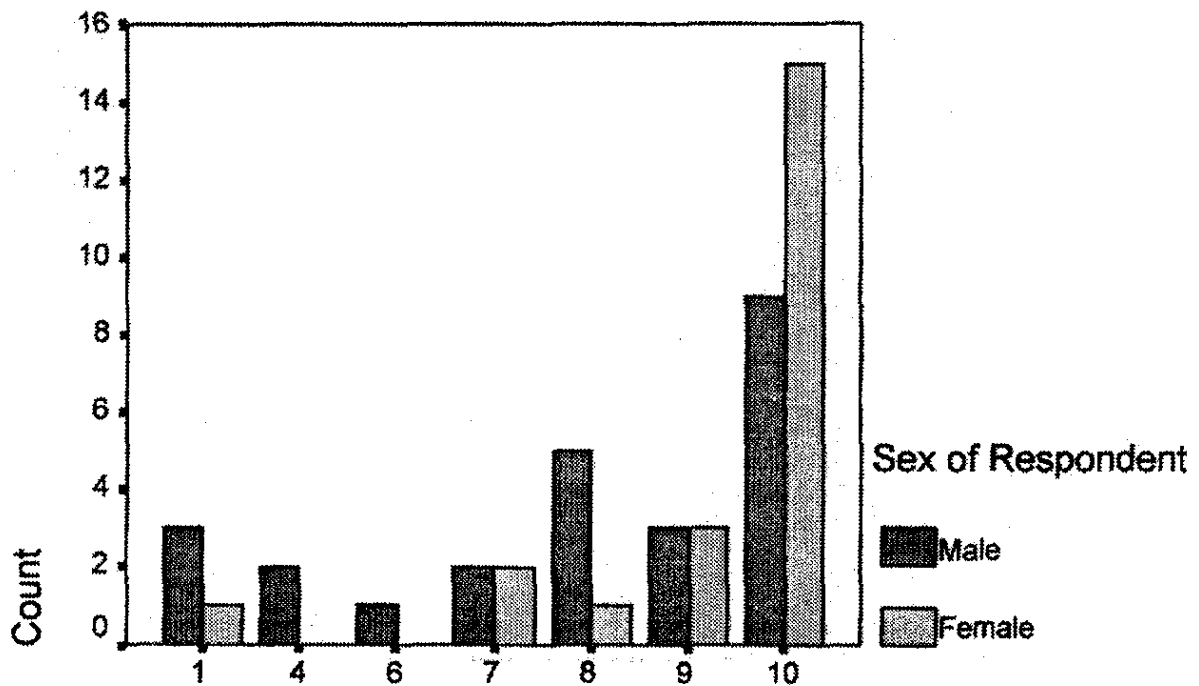
Overall Satisfaction Rating
FIGURE 1 Overall satisfaction rating by sex of respondent (*N*=50).

Elements of Citizen Satisfaction

To continue eliciting high levels of satisfaction from citizens, agency administrators and officers need to understand not only how community members perceive them, but also what factors most contribute to reported levels of satisfaction. A nonparametric correlation matrix indicated the strength and nature of the relationships among several variables. The variables in this case are the five different areas within which citizens were asked to rank their satisfaction. Of particular interest was determining which satisfaction ranking (courtesy, speed of response, concern, or helpfulness) contributed the most to overall satisfaction. That is, it was important to understand the impact a citizen's ranking in particular areas might have had on his/her overall satisfaction with that officer and the interaction.

Table II presents the nonparametric correlations. What immediately stands out is the fact that all of the satisfaction rankings are highly correlated; a citizen's satisfaction in one area impacts his/her satisfaction in each of the other areas. An additional valuable piece of information from this table is that it indicates which area

TABLE II Non parametric Correlation Matrix: Overall Satisfaction and Elements of Satisfaction.

Overall satisfaction	Courtesy	Speed of response	Display of concern	Perceived helpfulness
Spearman's rho (r)	0.613	0.475	0.788	0.863
PRE measure (r^2)	0.376	0.226	0.621	0.745
Significance (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

is most strongly correlated to overall satisfaction. A citizen's satisfaction ranking of an officer's perceived helpfulness is the strongest contributing factor to that citizen's overall satisfaction rating (r = 0.863, p < 0.00). In fact, this relationship is so strong that knowing someone's helpfulness ranking will reduce the error in predicting overall satisfaction ranking by about 75% (r2 = 0. 745). The second strongest contributing factor was concern (r = 0. 788, p < 0.00), which would reduce pre-diction errors on overall satisfaction by about 62% (r = 0.621). The weakest correlate of overall satisfaction was speed of response (r = 0.475, p < 0.00), even though it was still significantly correlated with overall satisfaction and would reduce prediction errors by about 23% <? = o.226).

CONCLUSION

Despite the negative press that police officers in general tend to receive, and despite the negative public perceptions evolving from highly publicized cases of real and alleged police misconduct, citizens in Louisville generally are well-satisfied with police responses to their calls for service. In particular, the most satisfied citizens were those who perceived the officer as helpful, concerned, and courteous.

While individuals were the least satisfied with speed of response, this factor still was ranked fairly highly, and also contributed little to ratings of overall satisfaction. This is somewhat contrary to previous findings that indicated speed of response was important to citizen satisfaction (e.g., Hirschel, Lumb, and Johnson, 1998).

The strongest contributing factor to a citizen's overall satisfaction was an officer's perceived helpfulness. Perceived helpfulness encompassed the officer providing "important information that helped [the respondent] better deal with [his/her] situation" and "referrals of contact information for other resources, if necessary." The second most important factor was display of concern, in which the officer "seemed to care about [the respondent's] well-being, asked about possible injuries . . ." and "indicated concern for [the respondent's] future safety."

This suggests, then, that law enforcement agencies and officers have opportunities to positively influence citizen perceptions. The strong correlations among perceived helpfulness, displays of concern, and courtesy suggest that the specific ways in which officers present themselves and interact with citizens during the course of their duties have significant roles in shaping attitudes among community members. Apparently, patient and thorough explanations of situational specifics, available options, and the expected outcomes of police intervention are mechanisms for influencing perceptions. Clearly, providing information in a way that communicates empathy and professionalism is one means by which police can best meet the needs of, and satisfy, citizen constituents.

A second important finding of this research is the fact that victim demographics had little impact on satisfaction, with the exception of the individual's sex. This is in contrast to prior studies that indicate no differences in satisfaction based on respondent sex (Kusow, Wilson, and Martin, 1997). Female crime victims were significantly more satisfied than male residents with police services. This is not wholly unexpected, however. Previous research in Louisville, and in the study

district specifically, has suggested that women may hold more positive attitudes toward the police than do men (Hartlage, 2000). The reason for this is unclear, however. It may be due to a tendency of women to report more positive views about services in general, or it may be a function of the form and tone of officers' interactions with men and women in the community. Future research needs to address this issue in more depth.

While the examination of the impact of demographics is important for what it does say about officer/citizen interactions (i.e., that men and women feel differ-ently), it is also important for what it does not say. The data do not indicate any significant differences in satisfaction levels based on race, education, or age. That is, persons of all races, education levels, and ages were equally satisfied with their interactions with officers. Therefore, it appears that media promulgated claims of racial bias, specifically within this district, are not accurate. Unfortunately, this research only considered one residential location (an urban area) and prior studies indicate significant interactions among certain demographic characteristics, such as race, residential location (e.g., urban vs. suburban), and satisfaction (Priest and Carter, 1999; Kusow, Wilson, and Martin, 1997; Skogan, 1978). It is important to note, however, that despite widespread anecdotal evidence suggesting racial disparities in perceptions of police, this study calls such "evidence" into question.

Findings from this study imply that a Joe Friday, "just the facts" approach may not be the best way for officers to relate to residents. This supports the contention that law enforcement officers also have social service roles in which it is important to show concern for residents, while providing helpful referral information, if necessary. This could mean explaining emergency services that are available to a woman who is the victim of domestic violence, which may include providing the name, address, and contact information for shelters and counselors. It could mean explaining to a theft victim exactly what steps will be taken to recover his/her property. It also could mean providing tips to victims on how to avoid repeat victim-izations. Finally, follow-up calls to victims (either in person or on the phone) will assure residents that the law enforcement officers in their community really have their safety and best interests in mind. In short, the ideas and practices of com-munity oriented policing are important for serving and satisfying crime victims.

The results of this study also suggest that a close adherence to the principles of community oriented policing will lead to increased levels of citizen satisfaction. The most important influence on overall satisfaction is perceived helpfulness. At the core of the community oriented policing concept, "it is essential that the police

work closely with all facets of the community to identify concerns and to find the most effective solutions. This is the essence of community policing" (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1994, p. 5). If officers truly practice collaborative problem solving with community members, they are actively seeking to assist citizens, not to merely identify, locate, and apprehend law violators. The only measure of traditional police patrol included in this research (speed of response) had the least impact on overall citizen satisfaction. For several reasons this study should be replicated within other districts of the Louisville Division of Police. The rather low response rate from this one district limits the generalizability of these findings. It is important, however, to determine whether these findings and conclusions are representative of the perceptions and experiences of all Louisvillians, and of urban Americans in general.

Acknowledgements

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APPENDIX A

Cover Letter to Crime Victims

Dear Louisvillian,

Within the past month, you called and requested service from the Louisville Police Department. As part of a continuing effort to monitor the quality of interactions between police officers and the citizens of Louisville, we are sending you the enclosed postcard so that you can provide feedback on your **most recent** contact with them. If the person who most recently called the police is under the age of 18, please have that person's parent or guardian respond to the questions on the postcard.

Although we obtained your name and address from department records, your responses on the postcard will be anonymous. We do not want your name on your response. We are only interested in your perceptions about the officer(s) who responded to your call. The questions about your age, sex, race, and level of education will help us better understand how the police department works.

To help you rate the officers based on certain characteristics (Question #3), we have defined the terms and supplied examples for you:

courtesy /politeness: the officer(s) treated me with respect and listened to me explain the situation; made no inappropriate or rude remarks

speed of response: the officer(s) arrived on the scene in a timely manner, appropriate to the seriousness of the call

concern for you: the officer(s) seemed to care about my well-being, asked about possible injuries (if applicable), indicated concern for my future safety (if applicable)

helpfulness: the officer(s) volunteered important information that helped me to better deal with my situation; provided referrals or contact information for other resources, if necessary

Please be honest in your answers. Honest answers can best help us identify and solve problems. If you have any questions about this project, or about filling in the response card, please do not hesitate to call either Dr. Richard Tewksbury or Dr. Angela West at (502) 852-6567.

The postcard is postage paid, so you need only take a couple of minutes to fill it out. We thank you in advance for your time.

Sincerely,

Dr. Richard Tewksbury;   Dr. Angela West
University of Louisville
Department of Justice Administration
Brigman Hall, 2nd Floor
Louisville, KY 40292

Biography

Richard Tewksbury is a Professor of Justice Administration at the University of Louisville. His research interests include criminal justice organizational management, victimization risk management and sexual deviance.

Angela West is currently an Assistant Professor of Justice Administration at the University of Louisville. Her current research interests are varied and include issues related to HIV I AIDS in corrections, prisoner reentry, and racial profiling.