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Volunteer street patrols: responsibilised and motivated volunteering in community safety

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Abstract

Purpose – *This paper aims to contribute towards our knowledge and understanding of volunteer street patrols working within community safety and pluralised policing. Through the increased responsibilisation of communities and individuals, volunteers are taking to the streets to help others in need and support the community safety infrastructure. The example of volunteer street patrols is used to explore the motivations of individuals participating in the local delivery of community safety and policing.*

Design/methodology/approach – *This research is drawn from ethnographic research consisting of 170 hours of participant observation on the streets of a northern UK city, Manchester, supported by 24 semi-structured interviews with volunteers and stakeholders who participate in a street patrol and those working alongside them.*

Findings – *Using a three-paradigm perspective for volunteer motivations, the themes altruism, civil connection and volunteering for leisure are applied to explore volunteer motivations. Through their actions, volunteers in the street patrol are motivated volunteers who can offer an additional and important resource within the local community safety and pluralised policing infrastructure.*

Originality/value – *This paper highlights volunteer street patrols offer a caring and supportive function to people in need on the street, one in support of the police and other agencies. It contributes to the growing understanding of those who volunteer in policing and community safety landscapes. As responsibilised citizens, they have an increased awareness of social problems. They are motivated individuals who wish to create and maintain safety and play an important role in policing the night-time economy.*

Keywords *Motivations, Empowerment, Policing, Volunteering, Community Safety, Responsibilisation*

Paper type *Research paper*

Background

The pluralisation of policing is well documented within literature (Bayley and Shearing, 1996; Crawford, 2006, 2013; Crawford and Lister, 2004; Loader, 2000). The involvement of private providers in the delivery of policing and safety is common. Volunteering in and with the police has begun to receive more attention from scholars interested in the policy and focus of volunteering (Bullock, 2014; Millie and Wells, 2019). Wider shifts within society, not simply connected to measures of austerity, add to the growing need for pluralisation. These include a growing acceptance of crime and fear of crime becoming "normal social facts", coupled with a steady decline of secondary state control agents (Crawford, 2006). The state suggests police cannot and should not have full responsibility for policing, with the community and individuals being required to accept increasing levels of responsibility for their individual safety (Garland, 1996; Crawford, 1999, 2006).

One perspective to consider the involvement of others in policing is the responsibilisation strategy (Garland, 1996, 2001; Hinds and Grabosky, 2010). Responsibilisation sees an extended state encouraging and supporting informal action in the control of crime and

safety. The need to take responsibility for crime and safety, previously under the remit of the state, is encouraged from individuals and those not typically associated with the crime control arena. This can result in enhanced and extended networks of informal control (Loader, 2000). Garland (2001) argues a set of ideals inviting different ways of thinking about the control, management and responsibility of crime control exist, and feature a constant exhortation to "take responsibility". This may lead to households and individuals becoming responsibilised for crime and safety through changing their behaviour and actions. We see the growth of individuals and communities becoming more responsibilised (Hinds and Grabosky, 2010). The wider involvement of the responsibilised individual, found within successive governments' political discourse, has been focused on the objective of empowerment. The legislation changes in the 2011 Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act, suggest wider citizen involvement as does the 'Civil Society Strategy', (2018), featuring plans and visions for wider local community empowerment and involvement.

Volunteering in policing and community safety

Individuals volunteering to improve the welfare of others is nothing new (Hamlyn *et al.*, 2015) and policing is no exception to the responsibilisation ideal. Volunteers have been part of the historic and contemporary policing landscape for decades. The current Policing Vision 2025 places importance on creating further opportunities for members of the community to volunteer within the police (NPCC, 2018). Special Constables and Police Support Volunteers are common examples of direct volunteering for the police (Bullock and Millie, 2018), alongside wider or indirect examples of volunteering such as neighbourhood watch and volunteer street patrols (Bullock, 2014; College of Policing, 2017; NPIA, 2010).

Exploring why individuals participate when empowered contributes to our understanding of legitimate citizen involvement and actions of vigilantism (Crawford and Lister, 2004; Williams, 2005). The need to establish a fine line between vigilantism and people acting in support of others is paramount (Williams, 2005). Vigilante justice entails a person(s), who is not a member of a law enforcement agency, pursuing and inflicting punishment on someone suspected of law breaking or committing crime. Often, their motives are based on the criminal justice system not treating the matter with sufficient seriousness (Johnston, 1996; Joyce, 2017; Williams, 2005). However, volunteers can also be considered from a care and support perspective not based on acts of apprehension justice (Bullock, 2014; Williams, 2005). Within the context of responsibilisation, a further interest or awareness is noted towards crime and vulnerability in those engaging in volunteering for and within the police and policing (Hinds and Grabosky, 2010). As Bullock (2014) suggests, volunteers who come together in a street patrol fit the discourse of responsibilised citizenry.

Volunteering related to community safety and in a street patrol comes with several motivations centred in support of others (Bateson *et al.*, 2002; Johns *et al.*, 2009; Middleton and Yarwood, 2015), accordingly the three perspectives offered by Rochester *et al.* (2010) are utilised to explore voluntary action in a street patrol and includes the following:

1. volunteering viewed in the dominant paradigm, which sees participation for altruistic motivations with the donation of free time to assist others;

2. the civil society paradigm, places the social context of the voluntary action with the motivation of the individual to help those less fortunate or to offer aid; and

3. the serious leisure paradigm sees voluntary participation in pursuit of a goal, hobby or self-interest, which is not in aid of an individual's work or career goals but remains intrinsic to their nature.

Wilson (2012) suggests volunteering is to 'satisfy a need' either individually or within a group. The responsibilised individual has responded to a need created by the changing role of the state in times of austerity (Hinds and Grabosky, 2010).

Volunteer street patrols

Volunteer street patrols in the UK are firmly situated in the policing landscape (ACPO, 2010; Bullock, 2014). The development of volunteer patrols is part of the rediscovery and involvement of the individual within the policing and safety framework (Bullock, 2014). The role of volunteer patrol fits within the responsibility discourse. Volunteer patrols are often associated with the US example of the Guardian Angels, known for their crime fighting actions and centred on the apprehension of criminals, the control of crime and self-proclaimed peace keeping (Kenney, 1986). Often cited as vigilantes, members of this group were noted for taking the law into their own hands, resulting in strained relationships with the state, local government and law enforcement (Bullock, 2014; Kenney, 1986). Contemporary UK examples of volunteer, citizen, street or civilian patrols differ from international examples focusing on care and compassion over apprehension and control. They are predominantly found within two main groups: The Street Pastors and the Street Angels who are linked to the Church of England and the Christian faith respectively.

In the UK, the growing movement of the Street Pastors and Street Angels comprises of around 13,000 volunteer Street Pastors and 130 groups of Street Angel patrols (Ascension Trust, 2017; Christian Nightlife Initiative, 2017). Their focus is offering support, care and practical and spiritual help to people who are vulnerable (Bullock, 2014; Johns *et al.*, 2009; Swann, et al, 2015; van Stenden, 2018). They also fulfil an important social function supporting those in need within the night-time economy with or without the presence of the police (Barton *et al.*, 2011; Johns *et al.*, 2018; van Steden, 2018). This paper explores the motivations of volunteer street patrols and how they contribute to the policing and community safety landscape of the weekend night-time economy in Manchester. Although numerous voluntary sector organisations operate in the city at night, only three examples of a street patrol operated in the city. They worked with several public sector organisations including the police and ambulance service. They are the Street Pastors and Street Angels, plus a local example of the Village Angels, a group with no religious affiliation who form part of the outreach arm of an LGBT charity.

The street pastors

Manchester Street Pastors are part of the international network of Street Pastors under the governance of the Ascension Trust. The Street Pastor movement was established in the UK in 2003 and comprises of interdenominational Christian volunteers. They were originally founded to tackle gun and knife crime in London, and now see themselves as part of the 'urban trinity': a partnership between the police, local authority and the church (Ascension Trust, 2017; Isaac and Davies, 2014). The Street Pastors believe the Christian value of compassion, as demonstrated by listening to people, can make a difference when helping vulnerable people (Isaac and Davies, 2014). Their actions are based on their religious values and include compassion, addressing vulnerability and providing support, rather than apprehension or control (Johns *et al.*, 2009; Middleton and Yarwood, 2015; van Steden, 2018). Their activities on the street include listening and sometimes praying for those in need, helping those who are vulnerable by offering guidance or support, or distributing water, tissues or flip-flops to help assist with small problems on the street (Ascension Trust, 2017).

The street angels

Street Angels were established in 2005 by the Christian Nightlife Initiative (CNI hereafter). CNI supports around 130 individual Angel groups throughout the UK, acting as an umbrella organisation providing governance and administration (CNI, 2017). Volunteers are drawn from local churches, although not strictly enforced, with a view to helping those in need. Like the Street Pastors, the Street Angels support vulnerable people and work in partnership with the emergency services, particularly the police (Blakey, 2013). They offer support and

guidance, give directions and provide first aid. Examples of the groups diffusing volatile situations are documented on the organisation's website (CNI, 2017). At the time of this research the Manchester Street Angels, founded due to the deaths of several young people on the city's streets (CNI, 2014; Johnson, 2014), operated in the city on Friday evenings.

The village angels

The Village Angels were established in 2012. They are part of the LGBT Foundation, a charity based in Manchester. "The Village Angels are an LGBT Foundation street safety project, where trained volunteers help to keep Manchester's gay village safe and fabulous every weekend until 3a.m." (LGBT Foundation, 2017a). A further example of this voluntary action exists in London's Soho area as part of the work of the LGBT Foundation nationally, named the Soho Angels (LGBT Foundation, 2017b). The LGBT Angels project was developed in response to a rise in hate incidents and crimes with the gay village and now encompasses a range of other vulnerabilities found within the community (Manchester City Council, 2016; LGBT Foundation, 2017a). Their work centres on making the gay village a safer place. Wider outreach takes place, such as distributing safer sex packets or drug advice. Unlike Street Pastors and Street Angels, Village Angels is not a specifically church-linked organisation. Volunteers from the LGBT or any community volunteer with the organisation.

Methodology

This paper is based on findings taken from an ethnographic study, which explored the contribution, motivations and relationships of volunteer street patrols. In total, 170 hours of participant observation took place at weekends over twelve months from 2016 to 2017. The annual life-cycle of the city was captured along with major events including music concerts, public holidays and LGBT pride events. Volunteers were observed during their patrol, training and social events. Patrols occurred during all four seasons of the year and varying weather conditions. Volunteer patrols typically began at 9pm, lasting into the early hours of the morning. Observations took place on the street with the researcher following the volunteers during the patrol. Field-notes or 'descriptive observations' (Spradley, 1980) were made immediately or after the patrol due to the environment in which the patrols took place. Reflection and focused observations took place following observed events (Lofland and Lofland, 1984; Spradley, 1980).

To supplement the observational data, 24 qualitative interviews were conducted in the last four months of the data collection, informed by the field-notes and observations from the participant observation. Twelve interviewees were from the three street patrols. The remainder were stakeholders including local police, ambulance service, councillors, door staff and a charity CEO. Semi-structured interviews were adopted to capture the rich narratives and experience of volunteers and those working with them. A thematic analysis was used to continually analyse the data throughout the research process (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Data was analysed for similarities and differences, missing data, repetitions and links to theoretical concepts (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). It should be noted this research is based on three volunteer groups in one geographical area. The voices of the participants have informed the research throughout the process, adding a degree of authenticity; however, it is acknowledged the findings may not be representative of all volunteer street patrols. Data are presented from observation extracts and interviews with volunteers.

Manchester's volunteer street patrols

Taking action. A key factor informing the motivations of volunteers is the actions and the contribution they make towards policing and community safety. Volunteers engaged in a range of interactions to help others. These actions reflected the level of vulnerability of a

person, ranging from saying 'Hello' to delivering lifesaving CPR. At times, volunteers provided first aid treatment or waited with somebody until an ambulance or police arrived. Volunteers remained motivated to deal with people in vulnerable situations, regardless of the cause:

> We're here to help vulnerable people in a first aid capacity and also a social capacity. If they've lost their friends, we can get them back together hopefully or get them home. That's what we do. (Street Angel)

The three groups walked the streets of the city, offering support and guidance, but also directly intervening if required (Bullock, 2014; Johns *et al.*, 2009; Middleton and Yarwood, 2015).

Volunteers actively sought out those who needed help. When offered, help was usually accepted; when refused volunteers watched from afar to ensure the situation did not change for the worse:

> We notice people who are wondering on their own and who look worse for wear. We approach them and ask, 'Are you OK?' Most of the time they say 'Yes' but even if they say, 'Yeah we're fine' we don't just walk off and leave them cos obviously they're quite drunk and on their own. (Street Angel)

Volunteers support those showing signs of vulnerability, which they consider changeable depending on the situation. A key part of their role is spotting vulnerability and taking steps to try to address it.

On rare occasions, volunteers assisted in serious cases such as suicidal people on the verge of ending their life, or supporting victims of rape. They see their role helping others from the small, seemingly insignificant, to the point of crises:

> The support we provide is direct intervention, if people are in some kind of crisis, whether they're drunk, or taken drugs or they've got mental health issues and have ended up in the city on their own, or having thoughts of suicide or whatever. We provide general advice, general information, general signposting to services and then specific interventions whenever necessary. (Village Angel)

In the absence of the state, volunteers accepted the initial responsibility, up to a point, until the police or ambulance arrived (Johns *et al.*, 2018). The range of incidents volunteer street patrols assist with is vast and at times challenging. They contribute to community safety through the actions they take and their presence on the street (Bullock, 2014).

Not all their actions were reactive or direct, with some taken as measures of prevention. Volunteers collected glass bottles on the street, which they saw as important to reduce potential harm and "look after the streets". When asked if this should be their role, the response from the volunteers is:

> We remove them [glass bottles] so nobody gets injured, the police don't tend to do it but someone could fall or be hit with one. (Street Angel)

Volunteer street patrols accept responsibility for taking their own action towards keeping the city safe (van Steden, 2018).

Dominant perspective – motivations of altruism. Volunteering by its very nature is altruistic (Wilson, 2012). For Rochester *et al.* (2010) altruism forms the dominant paradigm for volunteering and suggestive of individuals wanting to donate time and give care. Volunteers in the Manchester street patrols talked about their motivations to help others stay safe in the city:

> It's just about helping people. (Village Angel)

> It's about helping individuals, people who find themselves in a fix. (Street Pastor)

> We're basically trying to keep people safe. That might involve directing people who are lost, having conversations with people who aren't very happy, and it might involve helping people who are so drunk they don't know what they're doing. (Village Angel)

> Observation Extract: The Angels stopped to chat to a rough sleeper, sat next to the cash machine. Despite the wet floor, they knelt down for 10 minutes chatting about a range of topics, not particularly relating to himself. He said it was nice to talk to someone. (Street Pastor)

For one group, The Street Pastors, religion founded the altruistic motivations of the volunteers. Volunteers stated through their sense of duty and connection to their faith they volunteered to take the word of the Lord onto the street. To volunteer with the Street Pastors, individuals must belong to their local church (Johns *et al.*, 2009; Middleton and Yarwood, 2015; van Steden, 2018). Volunteers talked about religion and faith as a motivating factor:

> I wanted to get involved because I'm a Christian and I didn't want to just stay in the church. (Street Pastor)

> I wanted to take my faith out on the streets, do something more to help. That's why I do it. (Street Pastor)

Religion for this group is a central motivation. It prompted the volunteers to act on their faith. The work of street patrols sees them supporting others in challenging situations, with many of the volunteers giving care, support and guidance on the streets to address harm and reduce vulnerability (Johns *et al.*, 2009; Middleton and Yarwood, 2015; van Steden, 2018). Participants expressed this as the reason for specifically volunteering with a street patrol group:

> Being able to sit with someone, to listen to people, to help practically, to encourage people. You can share some hope, for me that's what it's really about. (Street Pastor)

> Some nights you look back and think that was really good. I'm so glad they got home safely. (Street Angel)

Volunteers showed a collective desire to help others from the perspective of care and compassion. A key function of volunteer street patrols is the ability of volunteers to listen and support those who require such. For Rochester *et al.* (2010), volunteering based on this form of motivation falls under the civil society paradigm.

Civil society paradigm – identifying with the city. The voluntary sector has an increasing and specialist role within the criminal justice system (Corcoran *et al.*, 2018). Volunteers within criminal justice also have general and specialist motivations (Bateson *et al.*, 2002). For community safety and policing, a motive remains connected to self-interest and mutual aid (Rochester *et al.*, 2010). Volunteers in these three groups all suggested the place, the city, was a significant factor in choosing to volunteer in a street patrol. Volunteers want to help address the problems found on the city's streets:

> Help is needed. I was interested to get to know the issues of the city centre. I mean, there's been a lot reported about homelessness and drug issues and crime. (Street Pastor)

> I thought it would be great to get hands-on experience working in a caring capacity on the street, seeing a bit more of what goes on in the city. (Street Angel)

Volunteers feel empowered to participate and demonstrated an increased awareness of the problems on the street, they want to help address the problems (Bateson *et al.*, 2002).

Volunteering for serious leisure. As Rochester *et al.* (2010) informs us, volunteering as leisure tends to be away from the vocational aims or goals of the participant. Many of the volunteers were serving professionals, several were retired individuals, usually from the medical and caring profession who wanted to use their knowledge and expertise to help:

> My background is medical and first aid, I'm taking some time out, and now I work in a nursing home. (Village Angel)

> Once I retired I went back to basic nursing work to bank as an agency nurse for a while, but I wanted to do something with people, but different to what I'd done before. I came across the Street Angels. (Street Angel)

> Observation Extract: I asked why this kind of volunteering. The volunteer had been a nurse and thought she would be able to offer medical skills to people who need them. It was also a challenge as it took her outside her comfort zone, removed from the health and safety environment of a hospital to the street, where anything could happen. (Street Angel)

Several other volunteers were retired social workers, charity workers and educational professionals. Volunteering offered them a chance to try something new or to fill their spare time whilst using their professional skills gained during their careers. For those still in practice, it allowed them opportunities to develop.

Responsibilised volunteering. This increased awareness of crime, disorder and issues related to safety led to volunteers taking to the streets to help others, address problems and support the state (Johns *et al.*, 2009; Johns *et al.*, 2018; Middleton and Yarwood, 2015). The Street Angel talks about why people initially came together to form the group:

> A lot of people got together and said the reputation of Manchester wasn't the best. They wanted to see positive news in the paper rather than all the tragic stories. They wanted to change the negativity surrounding Manchester. (Street Angel)

Volunteers in this research have a strong awareness of the social problems of the city. They also acknowledge the limited response by the police and the state in times of austerity. To a degree, volunteers in a street patrol have accepted police and state resources are scarce and, as a result, take on some of the burden of helping others (Garland, 2001; Hinds and Grabosky, 2010). As one of the male Street Angels put it:

> They've [the police] got big jobs to do and there's a vacuum at street level they haven't the time or the resources to deal with. Everybody who's sick and throws up on the floor. (Street Angel)

During the patrols, a sense of responsibility was shown towards their community or the city. Some volunteers felt austerity and cuts have led to less police and ambulances on the street, resulting in them stepping in to help:

> It's the public service side, helping police, my brother-in-law works for them [the police], I know how stretched they are and how we can make a difference by dealing with the lower-level staff and stopping things from potentially escalating. (Street Pastor)

Volunteers expressed the need to support the emergency services, a growing trend in the criminal justice voluntary sector (Corcoran *et al.*, 2018; Johns *et al.*, 2018*)*. Joining a street patrol allows participants to contribute. In supporting the police or acting in their absence as responsibilised volunteers, the question of vigilantism comes into play.

Volunteer or vigilante. Care and support remain the focus over crime control and apprehension. Motivations are not based around untoward or misplaced intentions and actions could lead to vigilantism (Williams, 2005). The level of responsibility volunteers are willing to accept is evidenced in their views around criminal behaviour. Described as the 'eyes and ears of the police' (Bullock, 2014), volunteer patrols within this research tended not to report criminal behaviour, such as drug selling. Many of the volunteers explicitly stated routinely informing the police of criminal activity they witnessed, could damage their relationship with the public and the police. They stressed it is not their responsibility. When asked about the role they carry out, volunteers suggested:

> We don't want to be perceived as police, and police have said to us they don't want us to be perceived as police, we're not there to gather information for them. (Street Pastor)

> Drugs? We see it all the time, we just walk past unless someone has too much and is vulnerable. (Street Angel)

> We're not the police, certainly not the paramedics and we're not the door staff. (Village Angel)

Volunteers talk about the need to establish distance between themselves and the state or enforcement organisations, not so they may act in any manner they so choose, but so they can carry out work addressing vulnerability and providing support, regardless of external circumstances.

Discussion and conclusion

Volunteers in this research are argued as examples of responsibilised citizens and have motivations based around altruistic desires to help others and provide care. Despite the recent and current climate of austerity, of which volunteers have a strong awareness, responsibilisation for the safety and well-being of others on the street is based on motives of care and compassion, in support of the state, rather than as representatives of it (Garland, 2001). Volunteers in this example have shown their actions address the needs of the vulnerable on the street. They promote keeping safe.

Altruistic motivations (Rochester *et al.*, 2010; Wilson, 2012) remain an important focus in this research. Initially they stem from an increased awareness shown in the volunteers towards problems in the city. In doing so, the nature of altruistic motivations support the work and focus of volunteer street patrols around providing support and care (Johns *et al.*, 2009; Middleton and Yarwood, 2015). The nature of the volunteering and the contribution centres around welfare provision and some cases stem from a religious motivation of helping others (Bullock, 2014; Middleton and Yarwood, 2015). The collective desire to help address problems on the streets is a motivation and suggests the wider responsibilisation discourses influence volunteers and the voluntary sector (Corcoran *et al.*, 2018; Garland, 2001).

Wanting to help address problems on the streets falls within the civil society perspective Rochester *et al.* (2010). This was evident in the increased awareness and desire to act, shown in the volunteers. Hinds and Grabosky (2010) define responsibilised citizenry as those citizens who have higher levels of awareness and acceptance towards problems related to safety and crime. In this research, volunteers achieve this firstly by specifically choosing to volunteer in the community safety arena, and secondly by citing they wish to address problems within the city as a significant motivating factor for their volunteering. The foundations of all three organisations, locally or nationally, are providing a community based social welfare function (Bullock, 2014).

Several of the volunteers in this research participated to share their knowledge and expertise in an environment different from the workplace. A sense of needing to address issues of harm, vulnerability and safety was evident in all three groups. For Rochester *et al.* (2010), this is volunteering as serious leisure. In this research, this is suggestive of the increased realisation of needing to provide support other than the state. Many of the volunteers acknowledged the limitations of the emergency services and the state infrastructure, and made a conscious choice to offer their professional skills to address the gap (Garland, 2001; Loader, 2000). It plays to the debates surrounding the role of the voluntary sector within criminal justice and opens up new avenues to consider around those who can support others (Corcoran *et al.*, 2018; Johns *et al.*, 2018).

The pluralised policing landscape sees the wider involvement of private and third sector providers (Garland, 2001; Corcoran *et al.*, 2018; Loader, 2000). This remains an area of sensitivity. Although this paper argues for the positive contribution of volunteer street patrols

towards the community safety and policing landscape to be acknowledged, questions have emerged from this research concerning the role of volunteers in the place of the state (Johns *et al.*, 2018). For example, through the pluralisation of the policing, vigilantism and blurred boundaries come into play. In exploring the motivations of volunteers, this research suggests crime fighting, criminal apprehension and acts of vigilantism do not feature in this form of street patrol. Blurred boundaries tend to be negated when considering motivations based on altruism, civic duty and professionalism (Williams, 2005). The nature and motives behind this example of citizen participation offer an opportunity to consider citizen involvement in policing and community safety as a welcome one, harnessing the motivated and professional army of volunteers within the wider pluralised policing landscape.

The implications of this study highlight motivated individual's offer a source of support and valuable resource to policing and community safety. For the individual, the opportunity to use their motivation, and in some cases professional experience, to help others in a non-traditional environment is key. For practitioners and policy makers, considering volunteer patrols has merit that should be valued when thinking how towns and cities are policed. Volunteers are motivated to offer a different form of support than the state. The practical implications, however, stem into ensuring volunteers are regulated, supported and involved within the landscape so through inclusion, their contribution is harnessed. The themes identified here offer a basis for further research in different geographical locations, ultimately offering a national picture of this voluntary movement. An increased appreciation of the role of street patrol volunteers and their potential contribution towards policing and community safety, will be sought. Motivated and responsibilised volunteers offer opportunities to enhance local provision. The experiences of such volunteer street patrols maybe different in other cities and in other nations.

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