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The Potential of Community-Oriented Policing

A Report to the MidNorth Public Safety Committee

This report assesses the academic literature on community-oriented policing (COP) in regard to three shared goals of the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department (IMPD) and the MidNorth Public Safety Committee (MPSC): decreasing crime rates, limiting fear of crime, and increasing community empowerment. The report recommends specific strategies that can be integrated into IMPD's community policing efforts. It also identifies the appropriate role for MPSC to play.

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Executive Summary

In the past two decades, the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department (IMPD) has joined in the national shift from traditional policing to community-oriented policing (COP). The MidNorth Public Safety Committee (MPSC)—a coalition of neighborhood associations in IMPD's North District—has enthusiastically supported this ideological shift. Yet, MPSC currently has some concerns about the practical, programmatic implementation of COP ideals.

This report assesses the academic literature on COP in regard to three shared goals of IMPD and MPSC: decreasing crime rates, limiting fear of crime, and increasing community empowerment. The report comes to two important conclusions. First, to accomplish their shared goals, MPSC and IMPD have a shared interest in establishing and supporting very specific components of COP. They include the following:

- Pairing a problem-oriented approach with hot-spot policing;
- Strengthening the policing of incivilities (panhandling, public drunkenness, etc.);
- Establishing a media campaign to educate the public about COP;
- Fostering officer–citizen relationships through door-to-door police contact, foot patrols, and involvement of existing informal community leaders (e.g., pastors); and
- Increasing community meetings between officers and citizens and making a concerted effort to locate these meetings within minority neighborhoods, areas with a high concentration of renters, and/or communities with higher crime rates.

Second, the report finds that as a community organization, MPSC has unique characteristics that can assist the IMPD COP program in being successful. They include the following:

- Distinct information about crime within the neighborhood. MPSC's statistical database paired with its informal role as a sounding board for resident concerns qualifies the members of MPSC as (a) appropriate members of committees and participants in conversations that intend to establish public safety standards and (b) ideal key informants and/or evaluators as part of officer and agency reviews.
- Established ties and working relationships with IMPD, as well as integration into neighborhood organizations.

These two complementary characteristics place MPSC in a unique position to mobilize community leaders/organizers and spearhead the essential, informal aspect of COP educational campaigns.

In sum, the existing literature suggests that MPSC should continue its enthusiasm about the COP program on a conditional basis. MPSC's desire to reduce both crime rates and fear of crime, as well as their goal of empowering citizens, depends on the adoption of specific COP-related strategies. Furthermore, IMPD's COP program will be more likely to succeed if MPSC's assets are recognized and fully integrated into agency efforts.

The Potential of Community-Oriented Policing:

A Report to the MidNorth Public Safety Committee

The Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department (IMPD) has joined the dominant, national policing paradigm with its move toward community-oriented policing (COP). Since 1995, over \$6 million have been allocated and dispensed by the Indiana State Legislature and Federal Government to fund COP initiatives in Indianapolis. These initiatives have been diverse, representing varying degrees of practicality, creativity, and cultural responsiveness. As such, IMPD has made changes ranging from helping officers learn Spanish in an effort to reach an increasingly diverse Latino population to increasing technological communication capacities across jurisdictions.

The MidNorth Public Safety Committee (MPSC) is committed to actively supporting IMPD's movement to COP, but the committee has legitimate concerns about the current state of the COP initiative, as well as skepticism about the future probability of success. This report aims to provide MPSC with a balanced picture of the potential of COP. The intention is to (a) accurately describe both the promise and the limitations of COP in regard to MPSC goals, (b) identify specific strategies associated with successful COP programs, and (c) link MPSC assets to these specific strategies.

Background

What is COP?

Decidedly, there is no specific, shared definition of COP (Fielding and Innes 2006). COP's most distinctive quality is defining a wide variety of community problems (not just crime) as police problems. COP emerged from overwhelming evidence in the 1970s and 1980s that relationships between various urban communities and their police departments were unstable at best. For example, in 1970 Dr. William Westly found that only 12% of police felt that the public had positive feelings toward them (Forman 2004). Thus, although some practitioners and academics have questioned the motives behind the movement to COP (Liederbach, Fritsch, Carter, and Bannister 2008), taken at its word, COP intends to improve police efficacy by strengthening citizen–officer relationships.

COP has gone through many changes, yet it remains the leading innovation in criminal justice practices (Kahan 2002; MacDonald 2002; Weisburd and Eck 2004). COP is often characterized by data sharing, community safety initiatives, and general partnerships within the community (Ford 2007; Forman 2004; MacDonald 2002). Frequently the first step in establishing COP initiatives in a community involves a reorganization of the police agency to address the changing needs of the community. Evidence of this restructuring often includes satellite police stations, foot and bike patrols, and regularly scheduled meetings with the community to discuss problems and concerns (Adams, Rohe, and Arcury 2002; Forman 2004). For Indianapolis, this translates into activities such as more police on the Monon Trail and Town Hall–style meetings aimed at capturing views on community problems.

The goal of COP initiatives is to create a neighborhood environment that is not necessarily problem-free but one that has active and effective problem management. It does this by addressing a major barrier to public safety: rapport and the associated trust between police officers and the community (Reisig and Parks 2004). Essentially, COP initiatives are designed to reduce fear, increase awareness, and provide resources to community residents (Kahan 2002; Weisburd and Eck 2004; Xu, Fiedler, and Flaming 2005). The strategies to do so have evolved over time from focused changes in police practices (e.g., foot-patrols) to wide-ranging changes in culture (e.g., creating reciprocal relationships between local churches and police departments) (Kahan 2002; Lilley and Hinduja 2006). This evolution has depended as much upon the popularity of complementary policing models as on the core principles of COP.

Competing and Complementary Models

Policing strategies have evolved over time to simultaneously address the changing needs of the community *and* police departments. In 1998, 95% of IMPD officers reported that a large majority of their shift time was used for “self-directed activities” (Mastrofski, Reisig, and McCluskey 2002). This is in direct opposition to the traditional or warrior model of policing, which remained the dominant policing paradigm into the 1990s (MacDonald 2002; Xu, Fiedler, and Flaming 2005). Taking a “one-size-fits-all” approach to crime fighting, this model’s central tenets are enforcing the law and spreading resources equally across the jurisdiction (MacDonald 2002; Weisburd and Eck 2004). Thus, steadily growing police forces and random patrols across all areas of the community are primary elements of this model (Kahan 2002; Weisburd and Eck 2004). Rapid response time is also a core concern of this model, which assumes that the faster police react to the scene of a crime, the more criminals will be caught and the lower crime will be (Weisburd and Eck 2004). The distinctive characteristic here is that the community is completely removed from both decision-making and crime-solving activities. Thus, for better or for worse, the traditional or warrior model of policing is becoming a thing of the past (Forman 2004; MacDonald 2002; Weisburd and Eck 2004).

One of the earliest, most influential challenges to the traditional model of policing was the “broken windows” hypothesis (Wilson and Kelling 1982). This theory hypothesizes that physical disorder (e.g., abandoned houses, deteriorated landscapes, excessive trash, etc.) and social disorder (drunkenness, loitering, etc.) lead to increased crime rates because they send a message to prospective criminals (those committing more serious crimes) that there are low levels of social control within the area. Zero-tolerance policing of incivilities resulted from this hypothesis and began the shift away from the traditional emphasis on even distribution of departmental resources across jurisdictions, as well as the trend toward redefining high-priority crimes.

Problem-oriented policing (POP) strategies take this critique a step further because they more fully integrate the community into the process of defining community problems (Forman 2004; MacDonald 2002). This model also incorporates “focused accountability” into policing strategies (sometimes to the point of inflexibility) (Kerlikowske 2004). POP strategies are designed to address the underlying factors that lead to various types of crimes—not to individual incidents

themselves. Moreover, the community often directs and/or informs discussions about the sources of these problems (Reisig and Parks 2004). The primary benefit of this model is the transition from looking at crimes as individual occurrences to the idea that different crimes have a shared cause. This shifts police focus from responding to individual crimes toward preventing or managing general crime trends.

Often, the recognition that several crimes share a common cause is spurred by evidence that these activities cluster in similar geographic areas. Hot-spot policing identifies specific localities with high crime rates so police agencies can focus their activities in this area (Weisburd and Eck 2004). This method often depends on citizens' identification of residences or points of local interest that are overrun with crime. One benefit of this approach is that it can focus needed attention on areas that have gone undetected by law enforcement (Lilley and Hinduja 2006).

In that they challenge the traditional model of policing, all of these approaches—zero-tolerance, hot-spot, and POP strategies—have commonalities with COP. However, COP is a more extreme ideology, where reciprocity between citizens and officers is valued, and community residents' expertise is appreciated. In COP models, communities gain both power *and* responsibility. Thus, integration of informed, reliable community organizations that can represent the wishes of the larger community is imperative to COP programs.

Desired Outcomes

There are various reasons that police departments would want to move toward COP. The MPSC shares several of these interests, namely reduced crime rates, decreased fear of crime, and increased community empowerment. The question becomes whether COP programs have been proven to lead to these desired outcomes. The following literature review outlines the overall evidence of success and identifies specific strategies that contribute to these successes.

COP and Reduced Crime Rates

Traditionally, it was generally accepted that the police's primary function is controlling crime, and police departments as well as individual officers have been judged according to this standard (Xu, Fiedler, and Flaming 2005). COP adds to this definition, rather than rendering it obsolete. Hence, both the IMPD and MPSC value COP for its potential to reduce crime.

However, there is little evidence that general community policing initiatives are related to lower rates of urban violence (MacDonald 2002). In an extensive review of the available literature, MacDonald (2002) finds that specific COP procedures such as neighborhood watch have no effect on violent crime. He also extends these nonfindings to foot patrols—a finding that is echoed in a review by Weisburd and Eck (2005). The only distinct COP activity related to lower crime (Sherman 1997) and disorder (Skogan 1992) is door-to-door police contact with citizens.

Regardless of the ineffectiveness of COP programs on reducing crime, the previously discussed, complementary strategies show more promise. Findings on the effectiveness of POP are mixed. Some studies have reported significant reductions in robberies (Braga 2006; Eck and Spelman 1987), but others find that it is not effective in reducing violent crime (White, Fyfe,

Campbell, and Goldkamp 2003). Hot-spot policing seems to be the most effective in this regard (MacDonald 2002).

In various studies of hot-spot patrols, Sherman (1990; Sherman and Rogan ; 1995b) shows that this strategy is effective at addressing drug crimes specifically and has at least a short-term effect on crime in general. Sustained effects are more likely when police contact landlords immediately following traditional policing efforts and maintain these relationships (Eck and Wartell 1996). Furthermore, the most successful hot spot–policing efforts seem to be those that take a problem-oriented approach (Weisburd and Eck 2004). Thus, hot-spot strategies show promise—and may even be associated with decreased crime in immediately surrounding areas—but the jury is still out on whether these efforts simply displace crime to other areas (farther than two blocks) throughout the city.

In sum, the most promising COP-related practices for reducing crime rates include door-to-door police contact with citizens and hot-spot policing, which is even more effective when paired with a problem-oriented approach and the enduring contact between police and landlords following raids.

COP and Fear of Crime

According to community policing principles, successful police departments meet citizens' needs and address their concerns. As such, fear of crime may be a more important indicator of police success than actual crime rates are. This is because, “what citizens are most concerned with and confront daily is their fear and the (perceived) quality of life within their neighborhoods” (Xu, Fiedler, and Flaming 2005).

There is strong evidence of the ability of community policing to reduce fear of crime (Fielding 2002; Fielding 2005; Weisburd and Eck 2004). Most of this effect seems to result from addressing social disorder. Stemming from the “broken windows” thesis (Wilson and Kelling 1982), social disorder refers to incivilities such as drunkenness, gambling, prostitution, etc., as well as physical decay. A wide body of research indicates that these types of activities are an important source of resident fear (Reisig and Parks 2004; Xu, Fiedler, and Flaming 2005). Community policing efforts that focus on addressing these issues—formally and informally—have identified an important avenue for reducing residents' fear of crime.

Furthermore, communities' level of fear seems to be lowest when there is individual-level community–police interaction. Even if the previous review revealed that these strategies do not reduce crime rates, there is strong evidence that strategies such as community police stations, foot patrols, citizen contract patrols, and “ombudsman policing” decrease overall levels of fear within neighborhoods (Grabosky and Criminology 1995; Pate, Wycoff, Skogan, and Sherman 1987).

Based upon the community policing beliefs and these findings, various researchers and practitioners have long called for measures of citizen fear to be included in police departments' evaluation procedures (Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux 1992). To this end, Fielding and Innes

(2006) argue that these “soft” measures are as valid as the traditional “hard” measures of police efficacy.

Thus, COP programs may be able to reduce fear of crime but only if they focus on

- policing incivilities (e.g., drunkenness, prostitution, disorderliness, and physical blight); and
- establishing consistent and systematic, individual-level interaction between police and community members (e.g., foot patrols, door-to-door visits, and community police stations).

COP and Community Empowerment

Community empowerment is often one of the driving factors in police departments’ shift to a community policing model. Yet, the concept of “empowerment” is vague, and police departments rarely define this term uniformly or at a concrete level. Thus, it is difficult to review the literature/evidence regarding the relationship between community empowerment and COP programs.

MPSC, on the other hand, has clearly defined two aspects of community empowerment within their stated organizational goals:

1. “Promoting and facilitating partnerships that effectively combat and reduce crime.”
2. “Setting public safety standards, establishing public safety priorities, and shaping public policy...”

These two goals coherently align with the COP ideology. Thus, the discussion of community empowerment will be separated into these topics: promoting and facilitating partnerships and establishing a community voice in setting standards, priorities, and policy.

Promoting and Facilitating Partnerships

The COP program attempts to improve police performance by increasing relationships and cooperation between *every tier* of the police department and community organizations/members. To do so, many departments have internally decentralized decision making and established new programs to cultivate relationships between the police and the public (MacDonald 2002). Kahan (2002) reports that the most successful community policing programs have included *systematic* “reciprocal cooperation” between community organizations and the police. However, this cooperation does not occur naturally. Ford (2007) outlines four organizational changes that are essential if community policing efforts are going to be successful. These changes must be incorporated into both the planning and implementation of the new program. The changes are (a) enhancing partnerships, (b) reorganizing internal operations, (c) restructuring the organizational hierarchy, and (d) adopting a problem-solving approach.

Even though these complex changes are needed, “the evidence on the effectiveness of COP strategies to partner with the community is mixed” (MacDonald 2002). One of the greatest difficulties faced by police administrators is integrating community concerns into the activities of street-level officers (Liederbach, Fritsch, Carter, and Bannister 2008). As was discussed in regard to fear of crime, often residents are more concerned with “incivilities,” which police officers may interpret as “social issues” outside their domain—or at least not of high priority. Furthermore, neither citizens nor officers may believe that it is in their best interest to act collaboratively. Some citizens feel that reporting crimes exposes them to risk or retaliation; similarly, some officers believe civilized and polite engagement with citizens limits their ability to obtain information (Kahan 2002). To combat these issues, Leiderbach (2008) suggests that organizations and institutions attempt to develop strategies that encourage a convergence of officer and citizen attitude regarding (a) prioritizing problems, (b) valuing community-oriented strategies, and (c) improving police performance.

Some COP programs have seen convergence between officer and citizen attitudes in this regard (see Chicago’s CAPS program), but various others have struggled with establishing working relationships, especially within minority and low-income neighborhoods (Ford 2007; Forman 2004). Police agencies have successfully fostered relationships with citizens *primarily* within wealthier, racially dominant, lower crime areas that have established, organized community organizations (Liederbach, Fritsch, Carter, and Bannister 2008). For example, a review of Houston’s community policing initiative reveals that renters and African-American and Hispanic residents benefited least from the program. Part of this limited benefit was due to meetings being held exclusively in a part of the neighborhood dominated by White residents and owner-occupied, single-family homes (Forman 2004). In contrast, Chicago’s CAPS program successfully integrated racial minorities and poor residents through a mass media campaign and community organizing that included visits to churches, neighborhood groups, and individual residences (Forman 2004).

In addition to these strategies, COP programs need to identify practices that address perceived police disrespect, especial in minority and high-crime areas. A systematic observation of police interaction concluded that officer disrespect toward citizens results in lower citizen compliance with requests (Weisburd and Eck 2004). This is of particular concern to MPSC, as a study of St. Petersburg, Florida, and Indianapolis, Indiana, police departments reveals that officers are more likely to use slurs, belittling comments, or cursing at citizens who reside in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Mastrofski, Reisig, and McCluskey 2002). To combat a similar issue (i.e., police harassment) while trying to implement a COP program, the Boston police department enlisted a group of ministers who had a long history of speaking out against police abuse. These ministers served as an intermediary between officers and citizens, and their involvement led to the establishment of strong police–community partnerships.

Hence, some COP programs have successfully promoted community–police partnerships. Police have been able to partner with all constituents of the community only when

- direct involvement of multiple organizations within a community, including churches and neighborhood groups, is a focus;
- media campaigns to inform the public about the program, including door-to-door campaigns, are included;
- established informal community leaders, such as ministers, are mobilized; and
- meetings are located in diverse locations including minority, renter, and higher crime areas.

A Voice in Setting Standards and Establishing Priorities

Most police agencies that move from a traditional style to a COP style recognize that this change in approach necessitates a change in the management, structure, and even culture of the department (MacDonald 2002). Still, most of these changes have occurred in police departments' *apparent organization* (e.g., official roles, job descriptions, facilities and equipment, geographical locations, etc.). Changes to the *below-the-surface organization* (e.g., values, beliefs, assumptions that inform the system of authority, decision-making processes, and work behavior) have occurred less often (Ford 2007). This reluctance or delay presents a barrier to citizens and organizations like MPSC who desire to have a voice in setting COP priorities and standards.

Some of this delay actually reflects a disinclination to fully adopt COP models. Researchers have identified police subculture (i.e., valuing crime fighting and law enforcement over problem solving and community collaboration) as the largest impediment to implementing COP reforms (and other related systems) within police departments (Chappell 2007). Resistance is most likely from midlevel personnel in the department, where new strategies may be perceived as devaluing their expertise and current career positions (Adams, Rohe, and Arcury 2002). Yet, even some top-ranking officials find fault in the COP model of decentralizing decision making and responsibility (e.g., contentions that “command and control in a hierarchical environment is essential”), as evidenced in the address by the Seattle Chief of Police titled “The End of Community Policing” (Kerlikowske 2004).

This reluctance within police agencies is understandable given the priorities of most individual police officers. A wide body of research reveals that—even within agencies shifting to COP—officers assign greatest importance to traditional crime problems (e.g., violent crime, youth gangs, property crime, drug use) (Liederbach, Fritsch, Carter, and Bannister 2008). By and large, citizens assign these same issues highest priority in surveys, representing consensus between police and citizens. Nonetheless, there is a discrepancy in the importance assigned to community disorder problems, with citizens consistently assigning much greater importance to peacekeeping, reducing incivilities, and improving community relations (Liederbach, Fritsch, Carter, and Bannister 2008). It is important to address this lower level of mismatch in expectations, as there is evidence that citizen cooperation and reciprocity increases when institutions (i.e., the police officers themselves but also the decision-making process) are viewed as legitimate by the community (Kahan 2002).

Current studies indicate that alone, changes to the leadership and management styles within police departments have little impact on the success of COP strategies (MacDonald 2002). Transformational change typically occurs when people begin to see their activities as part of a whole system; the command and control mindset is replaced by a norm of high involvement at all levels (including the community), and a data-oriented, community-involved system of monitoring and evaluation is developed (Ford 2007).

Thus, community voice and involvement in every stage of operations (setting standards and criteria as well as evaluating and monitoring performance) is important to the success of COP efforts (Xu, Fiedler, and Flaming 2005). Specific strategies have been proven successful in establishing this involvement (see Lilley [(2006)] for a full discussion). They include the following:

- Integrating citizen satisfaction into police evaluations;
- Placing emphasis on the measurement of employee behaviors rather than traits in police agencies' performance evaluations;
- Implementing annual or biannual concurrent surveys of officers and citizens' priorities to ensure consensus (Liederbach, Fritsch, Carter, and Bannister 2008); and
- Using a KIN model and/or qualitative measures to inform the decision-making process at all levels of program development (including when setting public safety standards) (Fielding and Innes 2006).

The Role of the MidNorth Public Safety Committee

Given all these requirements for success, MPSC is ideally suited to participate in IMPD's COP efforts. The MPSC has unique characteristics that can assist the IMPD COP program in being successful. First, MPSC is a coalition of seven neighborhood associations. This coalition is highly organized, has pooled resources, and continues to establish ties with various institutions and agencies. The coalition offers characteristics of previously successful COP partnerships (i.e., the committee is highly organized and has established relations). At the same time, the coalition allows for easy integration of populations previously isolated by COP efforts: It will bring renters and low-income and minority areas into the fold.

Second, the committee maintains a database of public safety calls to the IMPD, Indianapolis Fire Department, and the Health and Hospital Corporation of Marion County. This database should be used to identify hot spots. MPSC's database has expanded information beyond police statistics. Because of this, the information is more easily paired with problem-oriented strategies. Recall that a problem-oriented approach to hot-spot policing is linked to reducing crime rates and social disorder. The knowledge obtained from tracking these occurrences and *living in the area* means that committee members are highly qualified to have a seat at decision-making tables. Their degree of up-to-date, concrete knowledge should allay some agency concerns about integrating them into the decision-making process.

Third, MPSC has remained a grassroots organization, solely dependent on citizen involvement and volunteerism (with no funding). The grassroots organization allows committee members to serve as key informants and/or provide citizen voice in police evaluations.

Based on these characteristics and roles, the MPSC could play a vital part in the success of IMPD's COP efforts. The MPSC should both recognize and guard its unique and valuable contribution. The literature shows that COP can serve as an important medium to accomplish MPSC's goals. However, given all the nuances of the evidence, organizations such as MPSC seem to be indispensable to COP efforts, while—in its typical, generic form—COP is less crucial to MPSC efforts.

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