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Community Oriented Policing: Addressing Problems Past and Present

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ABSTRACT

Community oriented policing is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because it addresses a bond that was created between law enforcement and the communities they serve. Historically, a wall existed between law enforcement officers and the community. Officers were trained in a traditional, paramilitary style. When the community oriented policing philosophy expanded, a bond was established. Officers and citizens entered into a partnership and began to rely on each other.

In 2008, the United States economy reached an economic crisis level. It was time for everyone to cut back expenses. States received major reductions in government monies, which is leading to a reduction in crime prevention programs. At a time when the communities need to trust that the police would be there, fewer officers are available. The economy is affecting so many people, the stress on individuals and families can only intensify. Crime trends are expected to increase to a point where drastic budget cuts impact the crime prevention programs needed to deal with the increases. The position of the researcher is that it should be the priority of government and administration in law enforcement agencies to evaluate their resources. They should make adjustments in order to maintain the highest standard of protection for the officers and the community while cherishing the trust that took so long to achieve. The types of research materials used for this paper were obtained from online journals, magazine, class instructors, books, and online articles.

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INTRODUCTION

McGowan (2008) described three types of policing models. They are traditional, problem solving policing, and community oriented policing services. In the traditional policing model, an officer responds to a crime that has occurred. The officer takes the report and passes it on to investigations for follow up. The officer clears the call with little interaction and prepares for the next call. It is a reactive form of policing. The television show *Dragnet* is an example of this type of policing.

According to Ellison (2006), traditional law enforcement is focused on crime fighting: "The traditional model of law enforcement focuses on catching the "bad guys," operates reactively, and seeks to remain autonomous from external influence" (p.13). Community policing operates, however, on the theory that the community can assist law enforcement in determining what the problems are. This allows law enforcement to focus on those issues and become more proactive (Ellison, 2006).

The problem solving policing model focuses on crime prevention. Although more proactive in nature, it is based on discovering the pattern in which crimes are committed. Once discovered, it focuses on ways to prevent the continuation (McGowan 2008). The television show *Profiler* is an example of this type of policing.

Community oriented policing services is a high visibility model. The officer has a district in which they focus on presence and working with the community anyway they can. It is trust-based on both sides, yet the trust may take years to build it. It opens a dialect and the community watches out for the officer as the officer watches out for the community. It is comically compared to Andy Griffin in the television show *Mayberry*

(McGowan, 2008); however, this example is classic of the community pulling together after 9/11.

Violent crime was on the increase, and in 1994, communities across America were called to join forces with law enforcement officers in a pro-active manner. The community oriented policing services grants provided funding to increase the number of law enforcement officers in the community as well as the amount of training. Law enforcement agencies reached out to their communities, requesting assistance to join the war on crime. Citizen police academies opened the door for education to begin. Once the specific needs were established, programs were coordinated to meet those needs. Communication was essential for the programs to be effective. The combined efforts of citizens and officers established a new sense of understanding for the others position. Crime rates began dropping even with the population increasing.

Task forces were formed to target specific crimes. Community service officers were hired by agencies and sent to school to learn the basic principles of community oriented policing. In turn, they passed the principles on to the patrol officers, and information obtained on the road was shared with investigators. The Disaster Center ("United States crime rates," n.d.) documented the United States Crime Index Rate as declining from 1993 through 2010.

The United States economic crisis has caused concern with the communities and law enforcement agencies. It is facing the biggest fiscal crisis since the Great Depression (U.S. Department of Justice, 2011). Drastic cuts in federal funding have led to a reduction in officers. Specialized units are being dissolved and the officers are being forced to return to patrol.

POSITION

The researcher's position on the topic is that the established trust with the community has reached a new level since the expansion of community oriented policing services. Community policing operates on the theory that the community can assist law enforcement in determining what the problems are. This allows law enforcement to focus on those issues and become more proactive (Ellison, 2006).

During hard economic times, it is important that the citizens and officers remember the highest priority is the safety of the citizens and officers. It is crucial that the community and law enforcement keep the lines of communication open. Reiterating the importance of the community and asking for their suggestions will reinforce the value of their opinion. As Alexander (2010) stated, "crime prevention is not cheap." Continuing to establish the community needs must be addressed. Continuing the public education programs will keep the flow of information solvent. In as much as lighting a dark area is a crime deterrent, the presence of a police officer has the same impact. Programs that once put more officers on the street and are reducing the funding needed to maintain the positions. Pulling police forces back must be addressed as a necessity and not an option (Bohn, 2008).

The citizen's police academies were established to teach the community what the police do, why they do it, and why they do it the way they do it. Alumni associations branched from the citizen academies and became an additional asset to law enforcement. Understanding officer safety issues brought a new relationship between them. It put a face with a name. The decrease of government support has curbed several crime prevention resources that were created to target specific crime concerns.

Specialized units that had been created to target specific crimes were on the verge of being dissolved. Task forces began combining agencies to split costs and share resources. Many of these units were created from patrol officers reassigned to concentrate on these issues. They received specialized training for programs like disruption teams, SWAT teams, K-9 officers, narcotic, gang and DWI task forces, as well as community service officers. This allowed patrol to work with the daily calls and provide intelligence information to the specialty units.

Community oriented policing services grants that established promotion of community service and crime prevention officers soon utilized the officers in dual capacities. These officers were sent to schools to train in areas such as proactive crime reduction, insurance premium discounts, establishing cellular on patrol, and neighborhood watch. They encouraged block parties to enhance community awareness. They became the liaison for the department with many groups.

Johnson (2009) reported that one million criminal gang members the United States are responsible for 80% of the crime. It is estimated that their membership has increased by 200,000 since 2005. Officers are being forced to return to patrol as the threat of increased crime begins to rise.

Police agencies are being met with hiring freezes and reduction in force. These agencies must have patrol officers and investigators for basic work. The United States Bureau of Justice Statistics reported the first increase in violent crime occurred in 2011. The increase was quite unexpected as 2010 displayed historically low crime levels. The report indicated an 18% increase in violent crime, and an 11% increase in

property crimes. It is the first rise in nearly 20 years. The increase was caused by a rise in assaults ("Violent crime increased," 2012). Crime is still strongly reduced from 1993, yet the first increase is alarming as the economy is still struggling to recover. No increases in additional resources to law enforcement agencies are expected in the upcoming budgets.

Bohn (2008) reported that cities have cut crime prevention programs and training and are preparing for law enforcement officer layoffs. Some agencies may stop responding to minor calls, while others may have a delay in response times. He further reported that Chief Rohrer of Fairfax County expressed concerns that the collaborative programs they have done for the last 20 years are at risk. While Rohrer is preparing for possible officer layoffs, he has cut gang and alcohol enforcement programs. A poll of 200 agencies reported that 39% had cuts in their operating budget, and 43% blamed the economy for affecting their ability to deliver services.

The United States deficit is causing a budget strain on law enforcement agencies that is forcing an end to many crime prevention programs. The additional officers that were brought in by the community oriented policing services grants are being reduced in numbers. Many of those officers are being reassigned to patrol due to positions being frozen for budget constraints. Training budgets are being slashed, and cities are being forced to share resources which causes a delay in obtaining those resources. Having fewer law enforcement officers on the streets is reflected in an increase in crime statistics. The more victimization that occurs, the greater the distance becomes between law enforcement and the community they serve.

COUNTERPOINT

Law enforcement agencies historically were provided with government funds to assist in training and community oriented policing programs. The increase in the number of officers allowed departments to create task forces to directly attack specific crimes. New officers entering the field were trained in community oriented policing philosophies. The partnership with the community and law enforcement was a success. States began reporting reductions in crimes. The community could put a face with an officer's name and felt less intimidated by law enforcement.

According to the Congressional Budget Office in Washington, a deficit of approximately \$1.1 trillion was recorded for the year 2012. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell was reported as saying the deficit was determined to be over \$16 trillion ("U.S. 2012 budget," 2012). The government was forced to reduce monies in order to strengthen the economy. The effect of the United States economy struck a crisis economic level. It reached a deficit that is so high, the future of many community policing programs may be jeopardized. In order to restore the budget, it will take a joined effort for the American people to tighten their belts and live more within their means. With the reduction of government monies, law enforcement must maximize their resources. The priority will be on the safety of the community. Patrol officers and investigators will be the primary units. The community oriented training will be of the highest importance to avoid regression back to the traditional policing days. It will be paramount to maintain the relationships built in the community.

Baker (2009) reported that New York City predicted crime would increase after the devastation on September 11, 2001. However, this was a time in which the United

States pulled together. The result was a 30% decline in overall crime reported in 2007. Again the predictions are calling for an increase in crime, but this city reports it has not happened yet.

The last 20 years in law enforcement have been focused on being involved with the community. There are several ways to stay involved without the direct, one on one communication. Establishing neighborhood watch programs need very little involvement and is a cost effective way to prevent crime. Law enforcement agencies can set up websites with crime data the community can access. The community can call in minor crimes to assist with less officers being on the road. City websites can establish code compliance and traffic complaint type issues. All these programs are cost effective, but the one on one relationship will be lessened.

Citizen's academies will increase the number of citizens that will become educated in assisting law enforcement. Officers can explain that it is okay to call when a situation is getting out of hand even though a crime may not have been committed yet. Many academies meet one night a week for a series of weeks. It is a way in which to have a direct one on one contact between law enforcement and citizens. Many citizen police academy alumni associations have formed from these academies and become invaluable assets to law enforcement agencies.

Citizens on patrol vehicles are replacing many law enforcement officers in the community. Although clearly marked as citizens, the presence of a direct link to on duty law enforcement officers has shown to be a deterrent. The attention shown in higher crime areas tends to send the criminal activity to less watched areas. Cellular on patrol works in the same manner but the criminal is less likely to understand why the law

enforcement officer seems to show up when they are in the process of committing criminal acts.

The most valuable asset the United States has is the American people. Reducing monies that are being utilized to reduce victimization in the communities is unacceptable. Crime rates are beginning to rise and the community is turning to the group they have learned to trust, law enforcement. Alternatives may be a temporary solution, but the deficit does not seem to be a problem with a quick fix. It must be the highest priority for law enforcement to be there when the American people need them the most. What may be a minor crime to law enforcement may not be to a citizen.

According to Ball (2009), the Concord Police Department utilizes state funding to be proactive in reducing the victimization and preventing crimes in their community. As crime began to rise due to the recession, their state funds were cut. In the middle of 2009, the state reduced their allocation by \$16,750. The cut will jeopardize 467 hours of community policing. This department has made a commitment that they will not abandon the programs they committed to. Unfortunately, budget constraints will cause a reduction in manpower hours. Departments committing to officer presence at occasions like National Night Out will continue to show support for the community and their importance while they teach the communities to become more reliant on each other. Taking a stand together will allow strength in numbers and build bonds within the communities.

CONCLUSION

Bohn (2008) reported cities have cut crime prevention programs and are preparing for layoffs. Some agencies may stop responding to minor calls, while others

may have a delay in response times. In staying with the programs that are effective in community oriented policing as well as reducing cost, many departments have started programs like Crime Stoppers and Cellular on Patrol. Varga (2009) described several internet companies that created programs in which crime statistics are entered. The community can log onto the website and monitor crimes in their community. There are many inexpensive crime prevention programs that are available. They focus on the absence of the police officer, yet officer presence is a crime deterrent in and by itself. The absence of the officer and the distance from the public could reduce the effectiveness of the community oriented policing. The partnership, the trust, and the bond that was created could be jeopardized. At a time in history when the community needs to trust someone, it is imperative that law enforcement be there. There is no asset with more value than the American people. If the trust is broken at a time when they are economically stressed, the trust may take a long time to recover.

Reducing manpower in law enforcement may be contributing to the increase in the 2011 violent crimes. A slower response time by officers could allow a verbal disturbance to become physical prior to law enforcement arriving. Fewer officers on the streets would also increase the number of calls each officer would take along with the time involved in paperwork. Computers in the patrol cars can assist with this, but not all agencies have them, and the cost is certainly out of reach for an agency that is already struggling with budget issues. Higher volumes of calls with fewer officers to respond create a fear of returning to the days of traditional policing. Reactive law enforcement could return.

With the economic struggles of the community, the number of volunteers appears to be decreasing. Many families are forced to divide their work hours so that each parent works different times, thus ensuring that one of them is home with the children to help reduce the cost of day care. Other families are forced to work additional jobs to keep up with the rising cost of food, gas, utilities, and insurance. Freeing time to volunteer for community programs has also become more difficult.

Law enforcement agencies are looking for ways to increase revenue. Historically, traffic units and warrant round-ups have provided some relief. With the economy at a crisis level, the fines and court costs of citations has caused an increase in anger to be directed at the law enforcement officer. Courts are finding it more difficult for citizens to pay the full amount of the warrants, yet booking them into jail to serve the time costs the city as well.

For the public, department websites can prove to be beneficial. Posting information on programs like Crime Stoppers, crime prevention tips, ways to pay citations to avoid a warrant being issued, or even payment arrangements on warrants can all be helpful to the citizens. Finding witnesses to crimes, assisting abused victims, locating needy families for programs like Blue Santa, and deterring crime in the neighborhoods still requires the police officer. A police officer who was taught to be patient when dealing with victims, who carries phone numbers for charitable organizations that can feed a hungry family or change their future. An officer who made a positive impact and was described as kind and professional will be the officer that a victim will look for when their world came crashing down.

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