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# Police Community Partnerships: A Review of the Literature

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# Building Police Community Partnerships

Summer

# 2011

A Review of the Literature

Portland State University

Criminology and Criminal Justice Senior Capstone Class:

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## Introduction

In an effort to reduce crime more effectively and efficiently, many law enforcement agencies are establishing collaborative partnerships within their communities. These relationships help to facilitate trust between community members and police organizations (Skogan, Steiner, DuBois, Gudell, & Fagan 2002a, p.10). Partnerships may include police officers, business owners, community leaders, social service and healthcare providers and other community members.

In the past, the community's involvement in law enforcement efforts has been limited. Many policing agencies are learning, however, that community members can be a valuable source of support and information. Citizens can provide the police with insight into the specific crime problems occurring within their neighborhoods and can aid officers in their investigations. The collaborations are beneficial to both the police and the community.

To better understand community/police collaborations, this study researched several different types of successful partnerships. Our objective was to learn why the partnerships were formed and who was involved. Our research also sought to determine the goals of the partnerships, and the methods used to achieve those goals. The study also highlights several practices used by police agencies successfully to solve community problems.

## Definition and Prevalence

An examination of the crime prevention literature uncovered eight articles containing definitions of crime prevention strategies as well as theories and data regarding the prevalence of police/community partnerships. Our review of the research found there are many types of crime prevention programs and partnerships. Three of the most prevalent crime prevention programs utilized by law enforcement agencies include community policing, regional data sharing/problem solving, and coordinated sexual assault task forces.

During the past twenty years, community policing has gained popularity in police agencies nationwide. Community Oriented Policing (COP) is an approach which engages the community as an equal partner with law enforcement agencies in solving local crime and disorder problems. Officers are trained in public relations, community partnerships, and problem-solving techniques. Studies show community policing helps establish legitimacy and trust through meeting with community stakeholders on a regular basis to address issues or concerns. The result is an increase in public support and cooperation with the police, leading to a more effective means of combating crime. By the mid 1990's, more than 90 percent of police agencies serving populations larger than 25,000 had adopted COP strategies (Morabito, 2010, p.564). According

to the U.S. Department of Justice (n.d.), 58 percent of all local police departments (employing 82 percent of all officers) had implemented some form of community policing by 2003.

During the past decade, there have been significant advances in joint data-sharing and problem solving initiatives (Boba, Weisburd, & Meeker, 2009, p.23). Regional data sharing and problem solving refers to the idea that crime related problems can be solved more effectively when police departments collect data and share their findings with other local police agencies. The use of a geographic information system (GIS) allows law enforcement agencies to collect data on crimes and to collaborate more easily and effectively with other agencies (Boba et al, p.23). This also makes crime analysis more accurate. On-line geographic tools are currently in use to assist in distributing information to other law enforcement agencies, residents and potential residents (Wilson, 2009, p.15).

Another prominent practice used to build a bridge between community members and police agencies is coordinated sexual assault task forces. Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE), Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), Sexual Assault Task Force (SATF), and Sexual Assault Interagency Councils (SAIC) were developed to coordinate community responses to sexual violence (Cole & Logan, 2010, p.337). These coordinated responses to sexual assault provide more comprehensive care to victims, minimize trauma during the initial crisis period, and increase the ability of law enforcement personnel to collect forensic evidence. Many communities have developed formal crisis teams to respond to sexual assault victims (Cole, 2011, p.360). Sexual assault is a physically intrusive and life threatening event, and those who have been victimized are at higher risk of depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and substance abuse. Finding support within the community is shown to be important in a victim's recovery process (Kaukinen & DeMaris, 2009, p.1333). In similar fashion, intimate partner violence is an issue affecting the mental and physical health of victims. Coordinated health and community response teams have also been established for these individuals (Post, Klevens, Maxwell, Shelley, & Ingram, 2010, p.75).

These are just a few of the programs and partnerships utilized by law enforcement agencies around the country. Community involvement can be an important part of policing agencies' problem solving strategies. Collaborative work allows for more substantive roles for community members and can be a helpful tool for law enforcement.

## **Who and Why**

Our research found 13 articles which described some of the many community partnerships formed with law enforcement agencies. There are a variety of motives for forming partnerships. One of the most important reasons for law enforcement agencies to form alliances with community organizations is to attempt to reduce crime and improve quality of life for members of the community. For example, Community Oriented Policing is being practiced in many

jurisdictions. According to Morabito (2010), in COP partnerships, citizens are considered "co-producers of public safety" (p.570). These collaborations, she states, are designed to develop the community as a partner against criminal activity (pp.565-566).

Due to the rapid population growth of certain minority groups, it is critical for criminal justice agencies to learn ways to overcome perceptions of corruption and distrust, and to find ways to connect with members of these communities (Skogan, Dubois, Gudell, & Fagan, 2002a, p.3). As a result, many communities have implemented partnerships between minority residents and law enforcement in an effort to strengthen minority confidence in the police and increase their willingness to participate in crime prevention activities (Wehrman & DeAngelis, 2011 p.12). In Chicago, the police have formed an alliance with members of the Latino community. The affiliation educates citizens about the law in an attempt to help them avoid involvement in criminal activity (Skogan et al, 2002a, p.12). Wehrman and DeAngelis (2011) found these types of alliances connect minority communities with law enforcement and create beneficial relationships between officers and citizens (p.50).

Some community policing practices partner with specific groups of people within the community. In New Britain, Connecticut, for example, law enforcement officers meet with business owners and other community representatives on a regular basis as part of the "Weed and Seed" program. The program was created to help identify, arrest, and prosecute violent offenders in targeted areas and enhance the quality of police-citizen interactions (Costanza, Helms, Ratansi, Kilburn, & Harmon, 2010, p.51). The Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) program is an example of another community outreach program. This program involves residents of the community participating in meetings with the police and being involved in decision-making. The collaboration was created to improve how members of the community view the police (Skogan, Steiner, DuBois, Gudell, & Fagan, 2002b, p.2).

There are also community partnerships which have been created to support victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse. Coordinated community response (CCR) is an example of collaboration between police and social service agencies, such as women's shelters, hospitals and family services. The police work with these agencies to reduce intimate partner violence (Post et al, 2010, p.75). In England, police have partnered with local social service agencies to facilitate better responses to calls involving children and domestic violence (Stanley, Miller, Richardson, Foster, & Thomson, 2011, p.2373). Other partnerships involve police working with healthcare practitioners to improve responses to sexual assault victims (Cole & Logan, 2010, p.337). In Tanzania, a relationship between police and members of the healthcare system was created to improve the treatment of rape victims (Muganyisi, Nystrom, Axemo, & Emmelin, 2010, p.2). These collaborative efforts were created to provide better response and services to the victims.

Some associations have been developed specifically to target youths. In Scotland, law enforcement work with the Scottish Coalition for Young Runaways to reduce the number of

juveniles who have run away from home (Malloch & Burgess, 2011, p.62). Another alliance was formed in Vietnam between the local communist party, community-based professionals, and families to encourage more child-centered practices in the courts (Cox, 2010, pp.231-233).

Our research has found, overall, there are many types of police-community partnerships and individuals involved in these partnerships and the reasons for the affiliations are diverse. The one common theme is they all strive to build better community relationships and improve the quality of life for the members of the community.

## Goals

In order to measure the impact police-community partnerships have on an issue, the goals of the partnership must first be clearly stated, measurable, and reasonably attainable. Twelve articles highlighted some of the goals police-community partnerships aim to achieve.

There are many goals associated with community-based policing programs. The objectives can be as simple as enhancing communication between police and child welfare agencies or as complex as reforming national child welfare laws. All community policing programs, however, strive to establish and maintain successful working relationships between law enforcement agencies and the public with the intent to reduce crime (Wehrman & DeAngelis, 2011, p.50-51; Chappell, 2009, p.7). Gilbert and Settles (2007) say, “neighborhood-restorative community justice should be indigenous to the neighborhoods served. Such programs are not imposed from the outside; they emerge from discussions about neighborhood problems and how best to respond to these problems by residents of the neighborhood” (p.20). These partnerships are created to build constructive solid relationships between local business owners and police officers. The amount of information exchanged between police agencies and citizens is important to the success of any community policing program and the public’s willingness to cooperate is evident by the amount of information citizens are giving police officers regarding crimes occurring within their neighborhoods (Wells, Schafer, Varano, & Bynum, 2006, p.525).

Wehrman & DeAngelis (2011), suggest the underlying goals of police-community partnerships should be seeking out ways for police departments to build stronger relationships with their communities. This can be done through gaining residents’ confidence in the police, which will in turn create more willingness to work with police in anticrime initiatives. Some of the anticrime initiatives include: foot, bike, and Segway patrols. These initiatives take officers out from inside their vehicles, which many have historically been seen as a barrier between the community and law enforcement, and places them in position for more personal contact with citizens. The goals of Community Oriented Policing, itself an alternative initiative to traditional law enforcement approaches, have shown the importance of increasing law enforcement interactions with the community (Hickman & Reaves, 2001, p.9), which modernizes how the police operate.

Protecting children is a vital and necessary goal for any community-policing program. In England, partnerships between police agencies and child protective services were created to provide children with care and support after being involved in domestic violence situations (Stanley et al, 2011, p.2373). Other police/community collaborations that strive to help youth attempt to reform laws surrounding the treatment of children as victims, witnesses and offenders Proposed reforms include developing different approaches to counseling and interventions in the hopes of enhancing the treatment of children involved in the legal system (Cox, 2010, p.229). Mallach and Burgess note a Scottish Executive designed to encourage professionals who work with children to develop local protocols directed towards the needs of runaways (2011, pp.62, 65).

Many community policing efforts focus on reducing juvenile delinquency by addressing various issues. The goals of truancy reduction programs include establishing strong student/teacher relationships that encourage attendance and increasing students' scholastic performance. Providing students access to school-based health care and free medical services is one way a school district can achieve this goal (Dembo & Gullledge, 2009, p.444). Another type of community partnership supports the needs of victims. Some alliances are formed between police and medical professionals to support victims of sexual assaults or domestic violence (Kaukinen & DeMaris, 2009, p.1335; Javdani, Allen, Todd, Anderson, 2011, pp.361-362). The goal of another partnership, Policing Hate Crimes, aims to educate police about diversity issues (Dittman, 2003, p.287).

## Methods

Our research found nine articles that detail the different methods used by police/community partnership teams to reach specific goals. While police/community partnerships are usually formed and directed by agency or neighborhood leaders who can drive change, for the best results, everyone involved must feel that he/she is part of the process (Dittman, 2003, p.286). Officers can identify issues by engaging local business owners, schools, and other community agencies as well as keeping track of existing offenders through ongoing communication with probation and parole officers (Connell, Miggans, & McGloin, 2008, p.134). To build relationships, police can also offer opportunities to expose criminal justice students to COP practices, participate in activities which encourage trust between the police and residents, and provide needed items for low income children (Chappell, 2009, p.12). To help build collective efficacy, communication must exist with both residents and police providing a clear message that their neighborhoods do not accept violence as a norm (Mazerolle, Wickes, & McBroom, 2010, p.6).

Partnerships are often formed based on geographic location in order to facilitate Community Oriented Policing (COP). Some police agencies give patrol officers permanent assignments to



specific geographic areas so they can be involved in community organizations, establish ongoing communication with other agencies, and orchestrate opportunities for police-community interactions (Chappell, 2009, p.12). Other agencies employ an officer-initiated approach expecting officers to be responsible for their assigned geographic area even when they are off-duty. This method holds officers accountable for effective community policing by giving them monthly ratings to assess their progress (Connell et al, 2008, p.133).

COP is developed through organizational change within law enforcement to allow community participation. To this end, technology and community resources are being used to facilitate this integration and adapt to the differing needs of each community (Morabito, 2010, p. 565). Some police agencies are developing websites to create a stronger bond between the police and the community. Benefits of using websites are an increased perception of openness and accessibility to police departments, increased community trust, and the increased ability to inform the public about crime (Rosenbaum, Graziano, Stephens, & Schuck, 2011, p.26).

In addition, law enforcement agencies attempting to engage in regional data sharing with other agencies often use data collection systems such as Community Mapping, Planning, and Analysis for Safety Strategies (COMPASS) programs funded by the National Institute of Justice to collaboratively solve regional problems. COMPASS allows agencies to collect and share data in a more systematic fashion by utilizing geographic information systems (GIS) technology (Boba et al, 2009, pp.24- 25).

Sexual assault task forces attempt to coordinate sexual assault victim responses by law enforcement officers, medical system personnel, victim advocates and community service organizations. Methods to promote this partnership include creating formal letters of agreement between these agencies, appointing Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) coordinators to oversee operations at each site, and promoting a collaborative relationship between hospitals treating sexual assault victims in a given area (Cole, 2011, pp.363-364).

The Boston Reentry Initiative (BRI) is a partnership between law enforcement and the community service organizations to provide a variety of services for inmates upon release from prison. Formalized panel sessions which include inmates selected by the Boston Police Department and representatives from participating organizations take place to draft concrete transition accountability plans specifying their coordinated goals (Braga, Piehl, Hureau, 2009, pp.417-420).

## **Best Practices**

Seven articles described best practices related to police/community partnerships. When considering best practices within police and community partnerships, it is important to understand each community is unique. A practice proving successful in building a solid

police/community partnership in one area may not work in another. With that in mind, the following paragraphs highlight some of the best practices found for building solid police/community partnerships.

Community Oriented Policing (COP) is one of the most well-known police-community partnerships. For COP to be successful, law enforcement agencies must develop a comprehensive plan which includes accountability, decentralization, collaboration and problem solving changes within their organizations (Connell et al, 2008, pp.144-145). Law enforcement agencies must also have enough personnel to assign patrol officers small geographic areas to facilitate opportunities for interactions with residents. They should also educate patrol officers and administrators about how to implement community policing practices, offer problem-solving training, provide incentives to compliant officers, and be willing to restructure their management to promote the philosophies of community policing (Chappell, 2008, pp.15-20, 23).

Technology also plays a role in community partnerships. Community crime mapping helps agencies identify and analyze problems which can lead to long term solutions (Hickman & Reaves, 2001, p.9). Regional data sharing partnerships tend to work better when there is a common goal beyond sharing data such as solving a specific, local crime problem. In order to be effective, technology such as GIS mapping systems need to be used by all of the contributing agencies. It is helpful to craft a written agreement between the law enforcement and public agencies involved in data sharing partnerships to combat confidentiality issues and establish problem-solving intentions. Because regional data sharing across jurisdictions can be met with obstacles, it is often more productive to concentrate only on partnerships within one jurisdiction to solve local problems (Boba et al, 2009, p.29).

Modern computer technology has also shown to be a best practice in police/community partnerships. Computer databases have enabled agencies to share vital information, receive feedback, and further interact with the community. Rosenbaum, Graziano, Stephens, and Schuck (2011) found 77.1 percent of agencies using websites allowed citizens to contact the police, and 39.6 percent allowed direct email access to officers (p.36). If a law enforcement agency has the capability to provide a website for community members to access, then these agencies appear more accessible to the public; strengthening police legitimacy and trust.

The success of a positive police/community partnership, as with most community oriented initiatives, hinges on the involvement of each stakeholder. This includes, but is not limited to, businesses, schools, churches, city agencies, and individual community members. Research also suggests an important step when forming community-based partnerships is to take into account cultural influences within the community. Official statistics demonstrate minorities and members of disadvantaged classes are overrepresented in arrest, conviction, and incarceration statistics (Payne & Button, 2009, pg.528). This can lead those belonging to ethnic minority groups to believe issues such as crime and prevention strategies are problems needing to be addressed by

disadvantaged communities and police instead of the community as a whole. Skogan et al, 2002a, pg.19), also suggest police agencies consider the ethnic make-up of communities when attempting to implement police-community strategies. They further advise marketing of a police agency's community policing programs to be conducted in various languages and through various media, such as newspapers, radio, television, and the internet.

## **Conclusion**

Crime prevention is not a goal which can be accomplished through any one program, person or strategy. Police departments, instead, need to have a variety of tools available to address the specific needs of the communities they support. Community oriented policing and police/community partnerships are valuable tools allowing criminal justice agencies to capitalize on the resources of the community and other agencies, thus extending the reach of their crime prevention efforts.

When all is said and done, there are no hard and fast rules regarding police/community partnerships. Research suggests a wide variety of partnerships can be effective, from formal, policy driven programs to informal community outreach initiatives. It is the shared goal of collaboration and crime prevention that is, ultimately, the foundation for success.

A review of existing research and literature, however, can help to construct a framework for when, how, and where police/community partnerships can be most successful. Certain types of crime, such as juvenile offenses and intimate partner violence, provide many opportunities for a wide variety of services, organizations and individuals to pool resources not only to provide treatment to the victims, but rehabilitation to offenders, as well. The level and structure of communication is also closely tied to the success of a partnership, with technology, such as the internet, helping to facilitate the ease and speed with which police and community members can share information.

In the end, researchers agree police/community partnerships can be valuable tools for any law enforcement agency. The key to a successful program though, is to ensure all participants not only share the same goals and values, but that they also take an active role in achieving the desired outcome. A sense of empowerment and commitment to collaboration is critical in utilizing a multi-group approach to crime prevention.

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