

Police Theory Applied in Wyoming

Hannah St.Clair

Honors Program, University of Wyoming

Abstract

Police departments come in all shapes and sizes, although the literature does not always account for that. While previous studies have come up with numerous suggestions for how police should conduct their business, some of these suggestions do not account for small departments with limited employment of officers. The purpose of this research is to first create a review of the previous literature and their suggestions and then compare those suggestions to the conduct and policies of police departments in Casper, Laramie, and Cheyenne-Wyoming. The findings of this research convey that small departments in Wyoming do not follow all suggestions found in the research outlined here, although they do follow some. Furthermore, small-town police departments do not have the resources available to fully follow the suggestions while also serving their communities in the best way possible. This study calls for further research focused on small-town, limited resource police departments to determine what their best practices are, independently of larger police departments.

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Current events have brought about major concern for policing practices around the United States, including the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and more by police officers. The killing of George Floyd took place on the street in Minneapolis (Minnesota), a city with a population of 429,606 (Hill et al., 2020; United States Census Bureau, 2019). Breonna Taylor was killed in her home in Louisville (Kentucky), where the population is 617,638 (Oppel, Taylor, & Bogel-Burroughs, 2020; United States Census Bureau, 2019). In larger populations, police brutality and misconduct are at the forefront of the media throughout the nation, but police departments in smaller populations are not perfect either. In Laramie (Wyoming) in November of 2018 an officer with the Albany County Sheriff's Office shot an unarmed Robbie Ramirez three times, two of which were in the back, and killed him (Acoppwy, 2019). The population of Laramie is 32,711 (United States Census Bureau, 2019). The purpose of this research is to start at the bottom, to determine if the smaller police departments, the departments of Wyoming, are doing what police research says works, before examining larger departments.

Literature Review

Evidence-based policing should be the backbone of every police institution. Thankfully, there is evidence for many aspects of policing. In terms of prevention, prevention strategies have been extremely useful in the reduction of crime. In New Zealand, this meant that policing should be focused on "professional crime fighting" (Heyer, 2016). They focused on "the five drivers of crime; alcohol, families, organized crime and drugs, road policing and youth" in their prevention tactics (Heyer, 2016). When implementing their strategies in a program they called "Prevention First," New Zealand reduced overall crime by 13 percent, decreased apprehensions by 19 percent, and increased prevention output by four percent. Police effectiveness and efficiency

were also increased during this program which led to saving money in the police budget (Heyer, 2016).

For overall strategy, Suve, Selg, and Sootla (2015) argue that public law enforcement institutions should keep their mission narrow so as not to overextend themselves. They also argue that, in order to get compliance with the law, police should use the understanding of power and authority built from post-structuralists theory (Suve, Selg, & Sootla, 2015). This means police need to emphasize direct enforcement of the law along with detection. This strategy is understood as the professional policing model. On the other side there is the community-oriented policing model. This model has a focus on the community and improving community facets and building relationships with citizens. Many people see this model as important and beneficial to society. However, it is not without its problems. It can be more expensive to operate this strategy and it may be difficult to assess its efficacy. Suve, Selg, and Sootla (2015) further assert that neither of these strategies are enough on their own. There needs to be integration of both the professional model and the community policing model in order for policing to be effective (Suve et al., 2015). James (2003) agrees with this assertion saying that, “recent reports recognize that police cannot control crime without the support of the communities they serve.” Also on the side of community-oriented policing, decentralized organizations (those controlled by local authorities rather than one state authority) are able to provide more autonomy and have more discretion which is an important facet of community-oriented policing and its success (Suve et al. 2015). There have also been studies that focus on marketing and reinvention of police departments and the importance of marketing in community policing and community relations (Adhia, 2010). Some have argued that marketing does not matter for police because citizens have to use them while others argue that marketing is important for community relations. Reinvention,

however, is seen as a necessity for community relations. In terms of reinvention for police, departments should focus on understanding their activities, showing citizen friendliness, monitoring themselves properly, making a good mindset for their employees, and holding employees accountable (Adhia, 2010). For a more specific aspect of strategy there is clear research on traffic citations.

Research has shown that the current strategy of police to give traffic citations has created a lower risk of recidivism among speeders assuming that they appear in court for the initial ticket (Li et al., 2011). They also have a lower risk of being involved in future crashes. Those who simply incur fines for speeding tickets or are found not guilty, on the other hand, have a higher risk for recidivism and being involved in a crash in the future (Li et al., 2011). This ties into policing specifically because it explains that police are right to issue citations to those that are guilty of speeding in the hopes that they will go to court and lower their risk of further speeding and crashes. On top of spending time in court, officers should be policing crime hot spots.

Areas with higher crime rates (hot spots) should be policed with more resources and at a higher rate (Lazzati & Menichini, 2016). Research has shown that during hot spot policing, crime seems to simply relocate (Taylor, Koper, & Woods, 2011; Ratcliffe, Taniguchi, & Taylor, 2009; Weisburd et al., 2006). This is not true in all cases as there are things that can be done to follow and diminish crime in the displacement areas (Lazzati & Menichini, 2016). Crime becomes more comfortable for offenders when others are doing crime in the same spot, which is what leads to hot spots. Police need to patrol and allocate resources to hot spots to make them less attractive and continue to do the same in areas where crime may flock to afterwards (Lazzati & Menichini, 2016). In terms of hot-spot policing though, general patrol and enforcement of the law are not enough (Taylor, Koper, & Woods, 2011). It is necessary to also practice preventive

and problem-solving strategies. Strategies that simply put more officers on certain streets, such as the Safe Streets program in Philadelphia, are not as effective as programs that implement patrol and prevention strategies (Taylor, Koper, & Woods, 2011). For non-hot spot patrol, there is a plethora of evidence against it and its ability to prevent crime (James, 2003). Hutt, Bowers, Johnson, & Davies (2018) explain that “patrols of 10-20 minutes in a given police shift have a significant impact on reducing crime; however, patrols of less than about 10 minutes and more than about 20 minutes are ineffective at deterring crime.” The specificity in time of a patrol needed may be an indication of its inability to deter or prevent crime. Assuming that this is the case, are departments timing their patrols, not using patrols, or patrolling inattentively? On another type, foot patrols have also been found to not be an effective way to combat crime, making hot spots the most effective method if properly implemented (Ratcliffe, Taniguchi, Groff, & Wood, 2011). There are also arguments toward single versus two-officer patrols.

In understanding the number of officers that should be allocated to each patrol unit, it should be known that two-officer patrols have been shown to respond to incidents faster than one-officer patrols (Blake & Coupe, 2001; Chelst, 1986). Two-officer patrols reach the scene first 75% of the time. The decrease in travel time in these cases was associated with the ability for two officers to operate the vehicle and computer mechanics at the same time (Blake & Coupe, 2001). Two-officer patrols also have a higher rate of success in making arrests when called to a scene. While the evidence shows an advantage toward two-officer patrols in arrival time, when all patrols are two-officer the number of units in a community is cut in half, therefore meaning that travel times may be even longer in case of an incident (Blake & Coupe, 2001). Two-officer patrols improve officer communication, provide training opportunities, and increase overall safety (Chelst, 1986). However, most calls do not require two officers and the officers

may distract each other if not professional. One-officer patrols, on the other hand, provide more area coverage, increase community security due to visibility, and have more personal responsibility. There is also a greater opportunity for corruption, more fatigue, and less safety (Chelst, 1986). Lastly, having all single-officer patrols is more costly as there is a need to provide vehicles for all patrols at that point (Blake & Coupe, 2001). The question of which option is better is dependent on the goals of a department and whether they value officer safety and response time more or community perspective and efficiency. Some of the disadvantages of single-officer patrols, such as possibility for corruption, could be helped through the use of body worn cameras.

In terms of wearing body cameras, research shows that the use of body cameras does not affect the use of force by police on the public (Ariel et al., 2016). Furthermore, research has found that the likelihood of an officer to be assaulted while working is increased by 14% while wearing a body camera (Ariel et al., 2016). This information suggests that departments may be justified in not using body cameras, if they choose to do so. On another side, it has been argued that there are issues with body worn cameras and officer discretion (Taylor, 2016). If the footage can be reworked or deleted, or the cameras can be turned on or off as an officer pleases, there is no accountability brought on by body worn cameras and they are purposeless (Taylor, 2016). With this, it is clear that if a department elects to have body worn cameras, they should limit the power that the officers have to change/edit/delete footage (Taylor, 2016). One of the main advantages of body worn cameras is that they create peace of mind for citizens and can improve police-citizen relationships (Gonzales & Cochran, 2017). Body cameras make it possible to have a witness in most police encounters, however, how people perceive or interpret the footage can change depending on multiple factors including race and gender (Gonzales & Cochran, 2017).

This can make it ambiguous as to whether an interaction is positive or negative and has the ability to create tension in police-citizen relationships. There are also issues concerning privacy of citizens when it comes to body worn cameras. The question then comes up of whether officers should have the ability to turn their cameras on and off again (Gonzales & Cochran, 2017). To combat the privacy issue, some have also suggested that officers inform the public that they are being recorded whenever practical or wear a sign saying so. Without clear rules of conduct concerning body worn cameras, they may not be effective in doing what they are meant to do and may even harm police-citizen relationships and impede on privacy (Gonzales & Cochran, 2017). The use of body worn cameras, however, is made easier by employing honest and responsible officers as opposed to problem officers.

Understanding problem-officers is important, however, it is impossible to fully understand them without examining the organization in which they work and are trained (Miller, 2004). A top-down approach of organizations is ideal for leading police reform and allowing for altering of organizational factors that may lead to problem-officers in an organization. If the leaders of the organization lack the grit to watch for and mitigate corruption, they actively let it foster and the bad apples infect the entire barrel. To deal with problem-officers, an organization must not only inspect personality issues that an officer might have but also issues of the organization and what might have fostered said issues (Miller, 2004).

There is a lot of information available about what practices seem to be best for police or police departments to engage in. There is everything from not spending time patrolling on foot to how many officers you should have in a patrol vehicle at one time. The purpose of this paper is to determine if police departments in Wyoming are following these evidence-based suggestions. This is important to examine in order to understand if police departments in Wyoming are doing

what the research says is best for reducing crime, creating relationships with the community, and more.

Methods

To explore this question, I first had to understand what the research indicates about best police practices. Using both Google Scholar and the University of Wyoming Library System, I found many articles highlighting best practices and outlined them in the literature review above. The information found there was then used to produce questions so that I could compare what the literature says to what department actors say happens in their police force. The questions asked are reported in figure 1, along with the answers from each department interviewed.

For the interviews, I completed two interviews over the phone and one over Zoom Web Conferencing. These interviews were with Chief Dale Stalder of the Laramie PD, Detective Sergeant Brett Durante of the Cheyenne PD, and Chief Keith McPheeters of the Casper PD. I chose Laramie, Cheyenne, and Casper-Wyoming as my target locations for police department interviews because they are some of the largest departments in Wyoming. All of the interviews were done by me and all of the interviewees were asked the same set of questions. Interview times ranged from 16 to 36 minutes and were conducted on different days. Once the interviews were done, the answers given by the department actors were summarized and presented in figure 1.

Figure 1

Question	Laramie*	Cheyenne**	Casper***
What are their prevention strategies?	They have a full-time crime prevention officer trained in giving suggestions to increase security. This officer also talks about protection/scams/etc... with the community. A program called "safety city." Bike safety every summer. And more.	Prevention is based on yearly goals. They focus enforcement toward meeting their goals. They also create what they call a VIP list, a list of people known to commit crime, and they keep eyes on them.	They work on crime prevention through environmental design and smart engineering within the community along with creating relationships with citizens to help identify and address needs for preventing crime.
How do they measure if their prevention strategies work?	Measurement depends on the type of crime they are trying to prevent, however, they generally use a decrease in crime in each type to gauge whether it is working or not.	Measurement is based on crime data and whether the prevalence of crime has decreased for target crimes.	Measurement of prevention strategies is based on crime data and prevalence of targeted crime.
What are some of their community policing strategies?	They encourage officers to go to their children's classrooms to speak about what they do. They work with community members to create safe environments. They engage in programs like "shop with a cop."	They conduct a citizens police academy a couple of times every year, participate in "shop with a cop," have an explorer program to mentor youth that are interested in law enforcement, and more.	They participate in programs such as "shop with a cop" and teach active shooter trainings along with creating relationships within the community.
How do they measure if their community policing strategies work?	The city conducts a community survey every three years.	They have quarterly meetings with the community in every district of town. They also do occasional surveys.	They conduct customer satisfaction surveys and engage in community forums. They are also starting a new program where individuals who dial 911 will be sent a survey after their police interaction.
Do they use hot spot policing?	Yes. Hot spots are determined by daily crime mapping, although crime is not generally concentrated in Laramie.	Yes. Hot spots are determined based on data.	Yes. Hot spots are determined through monitoring crime trends and statistics.
How do their officers generally enforce the laws?	Vehicle patrol.	Vehicle patrol.	Vehicle patrol.
How many officers generally make up a patrol unit?	1	1	1
Is there a time limit for patrols to spend in one area?	No	No	No
Do officers use foot patrol?	Only for special circumstances or events.	For specific events and more often when the weather is nice, but not generally.	Foot patrol is not utilized unless under certain circumstances.
How does the department market themselves?	Laramie PD is very vocal on Facebook and connects with the community through community policing strategies.	They do ads in the school for things like seatbelt enforcement, they are active on social media, and they have a public information officer.	Casper PD engages in marketing through social media along with marketing through community policing strategies.
How much time do officers spend in court defending traffic citations?	Very little time.	Very little time.	Officers are given blocks of time to appear in court, however, there are no time limitations and court appearances are encouraged.
Do their officers wear body-worn cameras?	Yes	Yes	Yes
If officers wear body-worn cameras, do they inform the public that they are being filmed?	No	No	No
How much discretion do their officers have in terms of turning on/off their cameras and turning in footage?	None, all the officers can do is classify what information is in the video, such as if it shows a use of force.	Some with turning it on/off, but their policies in terms of when it must be on are clearly stated. None in terms of footage.	None, all officers conducting a function of police work are expected to be recording. Footage uploads automatically.
How often does their department participate in performance reviews?	Annually, but supervisors are able to continually add to an officer's performance file.	Annually	Annually, with supervisors meeting with their officers quarterly to discuss performance and goals.
<p>*Information for Laramie was gathered from a Zoom interview with Chief Dale Stalder of the Laramie Police Department **Information for Cheyenne was gathered from a phone interview with Detective Sergeant Brett Durante of the Cheyenne Police Department ***Information for Casper was gathered from a phone interview with Chief Keith McPheeters of the Casper Police Department</p>			

Results

From the interviews (figure 1), it is clear that there are many things that these Wyoming police departments do that follow the literature. They all put energy into prevention strategies and have some way to measure if those strategies are working. The same is true for community policing strategies. Every department here also engaged in hot spot policing in their areas and generally patrolled using vehicles, rather than on foot or another way. Departments reported engaging in marketing and that all their officers wear body-worn cameras while engaging in police business with little to no discretion in handling both the camera and the footage. Lastly, they also participated in performance reviews at least annually and reported that performance reviews go all the way up the chain of command to at least the Chief of police.

Contrary to what the research supported, these Wyoming departments generally only utilize one-officer patrol units. The departments also reported having no time limits for how long a patrol unit should spend in one area and were even confused by the question, which may be an outcome of small-town policing. Officers were, in addition, not required to spend a specific amount of time in court and were even reported as spending very little time in court for two of the three Wyoming departments explored here. Furthermore, while officers did wear body-worn cameras, none of the departments reported having a policy on informing the public that they were being recorded and every interviewee stated that the public expects to be recorded by police.

Discussion

From the results it is clear that there are suggestions from previous literature that are rigidly followed by small-town Wyoming police departments but also suggestions that are not followed. When looking at the circumstances of small police departments, however, these results

are not surprising. All of the suggestions outlined in the literature above should be followed as much as possible by police departments. In Wyoming, there are instances where it is not practical to follow suggestions. Yes, two officer units are proven to be better in terms of responding to incidents. When you are in a town like Laramie-Wyoming, though, when you might only have four officers on duty at one time, officers would respond to calls at a much slower rate if the four officers were distributed among two vehicles. Furthermore, departments may not have time limits that they place on being in one area because, with few officers, their officers have very little free time to spend sitting on one area. A low number of on duty and employed officers may explain a lack of a time limit for officers to spend in court defending traffic citations also. With this, it can be argued that it is difficult to compare policing literature that is not geared toward small-town police departments with Wyoming departments at least. It would be beneficial to have research geared toward examining and creating best practices for small police departments, rather than generalizing all departments as having the same best practices. This research is limited in explaining what police departments in Wyoming do, due to a small sample size of three departments (which were some of the biggest departments in Wyoming), and cannot be generalized to all small police departments. It does, however, provide a basis for understanding the need to have policing research specifically looking at small police departments and informing on best practices for them.

Conclusion

Three police departments in Wyoming were examined under a lens of suggestions of best policing practices by the literature. In examining these departments, it became clear that the policing literature cannot be uniformly compared to police departments, especially in the case where they are some of the smallest departments in the country. Keeping the information from

this research in mind, future literature that hopes to inform policing practices for small-town police departments should focus their research and suggestions on those departments. While small departments make efforts to follow the suggestions of evidence-based research, that is not always feasible.

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