



# National Institute of Justice

## Research Preview

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November 1995

# Community Policing Strategies

With rising concerns about violence, drugs, and crime, citizen collaboration with the police is increasingly seen as the most effective way to safeguard lives, neighborhoods, and cities. Community policing represents a shift from reactive, incident-driven police service to a proactive, problem-solving approach.

A National Institute of Justice (NIJ)-sponsored 1993 survey of more than 2,000 law enforcement agencies found strong support nationwide for the community policing approach coupled with a need for developing training for practitioners.

## Method

The survey covered a random, stratified sample of 2,314 municipal and county police and sheriff's departments. State police, special police agencies, and agencies with fewer than five sworn officers were excluded. Larger agencies were preponderant as they were likely to have more resources than smaller agencies and might also have a greater need to implement community policing. However, analyses were based on weighted data so that they reflect attitudes and conditions as they would be distributed in the population of agencies from which the sample was drawn.

The self-administered survey collected information about the attitudes and perceptions of law enforcement chief executives about community policing. After a pretest and four followups to the initial survey mailing, 1,606 responses were deemed suitable for analysis.

The study did not strictly define community policing beyond stating that it seeks to increase interaction between police and citizens to improve public safety and quality of life in the community. Respondents were asked to "think about community policing as you understand it" in answering the questions.

## Support for community policing approach

Almost half the respondents had either implemented community policing (19 percent) or were in the process of doing so (28 percent). Implementation was most likely to

be reported by medium (50+ personnel) and large (100+ personnel) agencies. Community policing was most frequent in the West, followed by the South, Midwest, and Northeast.

**Executive attitudes.** Police chiefs and sheriffs overwhelmingly endorsed the concept of community policing and were sanguine about these benefits:

- Fewer problems on issues of concern to citizens.
- Improved physical environment in neighborhoods.
- More positive public attitudes toward law enforcement agencies.
- Decreased potential for conflict between citizens and police.
- Increased officer/deputy satisfaction.
- Reduced crime rates.

As for potential negative consequences, 81 percent of the executives thought that crime might be displaced to a noncommunity policing area, 43 percent believed that responsiveness to calls for service would decline, and 15 percent anticipated an increase in officer/deputy corruption.

**Impact of community policing.** Among agencies that had implemented community policing for at least 1 year, 99 percent reported improved cooperation between citizens and police, 80 percent reported reduced citizens' fear of crime, and 62 percent reported fewer crimes against persons.

## Implementation issues

Almost half (47 percent) of the police chiefs and sheriffs were unclear about the practical meaning of community policing. Forty-eight percent agreed that implementation would require major changes in organizational policies or goals, and 56 percent anticipated that rank-and-file employees would resist such changes.

When asked about lessons learned from experiences, agencies most frequently mentioned the need for pre-implementation training of personnel, the importance of taking a long view of the change process, the need for

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support from elected officials and other city agencies, and the importance of listening to and involving the community. Eighty-three percent of respondents strongly supported the need for training in community policing and believed that existing training efforts were inadequate.

## Operations of community policing agencies

Researchers compared characteristics of agencies that reported implementation of community policing with those that did not.

**Programs and practices.** Operationally community policing agencies were more likely than other policing agencies to report:

- Permanent neighborhood-based offices or stations.
- Designation of “community” or “neighborhood” officers.
- Foot patrol as a specific assignment or periodic expectation.
- Regularly scheduled meetings with community groups.
- Specific training and interagency involvement in problem identification and resolution.
- Use of regulatory codes to combat drugs/crime.

**Organizational arrangements.** Community policing agencies were also more likely to report command or decisionmaking responsibility tied to geographically defined areas, beat/patrol boundaries that coincided with these boundaries, physical decentralization of field services, and specialized units for problem solving and crime prevention.

**Citizen participation.** Citizens in community policing jurisdictions were more likely to participate in a Neighborhood Watch Program, serve as volunteers within the agency and on agency-coordinated citizen patrols, and attend a citizen police academy.

Characteristics that did NOT distinguish community policing agencies from others included use of radio or television to inform the community about crime issues, assignment of personnel to fixed shifts, and involvement of citizens in police personnel issues such as helping review complaints against police.

## Implications

Despite broad support for community policing, no single approach emerged as a model. Community partnership and problem solving—the two core components of community policing—can be accomplished in a variety of ways. The means selected should fit the community’s needs and the agency’s resources. Findings also indicated that professional and training organizations should develop curriculums for all police levels (officers and managers) that address the issues associated with implementing community policing.

Since the survey was self-reported, the findings represent the perceptions of police executives and may not reflect actual levels or stages of community policing operations. It provides baseline data about programs, practices, community policing roles, and organizational arrangements in 734 identified agencies (out of the 1,606 analyzed) that reported having implemented community policing since 1992. The data are available to researchers for further analysis. Police managers can use the study to communicate with other departments about community policing efforts.

The report of this study, *Community Policing Strategies*, by Mary Ann Wycoff, the Police Foundation’s Director of Research, will be available in the near future from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service: call 800-851-3420 or e-mail [askncjrs@ncjrs.aspensys.com](mailto:askncjrs@ncjrs.aspensys.com) for more information.

Points of view in this document do not necessarily reflect the official position of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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