CRIME FILE

Foot Patrol

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Your discussion will be assisted by your understanding of
how foot patrol was used in the past, how its use changed
with the invention of the automobile, and how recent re-
search findings are germane to future patrolling methods.
Introduction

Foot patrol is regaining popularity as a police tactic. In many American cities, community and neighborhood groups are pressuring reluctant police chiefs to reinstate neighborhood foot patrols. In some cities, political leaders see the popularity of foot patrol as a way to improve relations with the community. How are these changes affecting the way police departments operate? This program brings to you results of a series of experiments conducted by the Police Foundation.

Foot Patrol Strengths

1. **Visibility**
   - Police officers are more visible to the public, which increases feelings of safety and security.
   - Visibility helps officers deter criminal activity.

2. **Community Involvement**
   - Foot patrol officers are in constant contact with the community, which improves police-community relations.
   - Officers can act as informal crime reporters.

3. **Flexibility**
   - Officers can respond to incidents quickly and efficiently.
   - The ability to adapt to changing situations.

4. **Patrol and Enforcement**
   - Officers can target specific crime problems.
   - The ability to enforce local laws.

5. **Public Support**
   - Public support for police activities.
   - Increased public cooperation.

Foot Patrol Weaknesses

1. **Limited Coverage**
   - officers may not be able to cover large areas of the city.
   - Limited ability to respond to calls for service.

2. **Resource Intensive**
   - High cost of maintaining a foot patrol.
   - Limited ability to respond to high-priority calls for service.

3. **Inflexibility**
   - Failure to respond to non-emergency calls.
   - Limited ability to respond to emergencies.

4. **Visibility Issues**
   - Officers may be less visible to criminals.
   - Limited ability to respond to incidents.

5. **Training and Preparation**
   - Limited training for officers.
   - Limited ability to respond to complex situations.

Research Findings

Given such efforts, what empirical evidence is available on the impact of foot patrol? During the late 1970's, experiments in foot patrol were conducted in Newark, New Jersey, and Flint, Michigan. The findings in the two studies were remarkably consistent:

- When foot patrol is added in neighborhoods, levels of fear decrease significantly.
- When foot patrol is withdrawn from neighborhoods, levels of fear increase significantly.
- Citizen satisfaction with police increases when foot patrol is added in neighborhoods.
- Police who patrol with a foot patrol have a greater appreciation of the values of foot patrol neighborhoods than police who patrol the same areas in automobiles.
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The Flint experiment yielded two additional important findings. First, in areas where there was aggressive foot patrol, calls for service via telephone were reduced by more than 40 percent. Second, there was a modest reduction in crime.

In sum, foot patrol has been shown to reduce citizen fears of crime and improve the attitudes of police officers, and improve the job satisfaction among police officers. In addition, foot patrol shows potential for reducing calls for service via telephone, and although the finding is modest, it has some crime reduction potential. The question that remains is: What are the public policy implications of the political popularity of foot patrol and the empirical findings about its impact? Do these findings policy that all cities should immediately return to the wholesale use of foot patrol?

Before these questions can be answered directly, the findings regarding fear reduction need to be discussed.
During the early 1980's, it was discovered that fear of crime was not primarily associated with crime, although that certainly was an important contributor to fear levels. Instead, fear was found to relate to disorder: gangs, disorderly persons, drugs, pushers, street prostitution, and other forms of behavior that were threatening but not necessarily criminal. These findings did not surprise citizens or police officials who had worked closely with citizen anticrime groups.

The anticrime groups had been emphasizing the problem of community disorder and trying to convince the police to do something about them for some time.

These insights helped analysts interpret the finding that police presence in their communities. Citizens, as individuals and in groups, want police to help them keep order and prevent crime as well as to have police take action on their own behalf. It is likely that fear was reduced both as a result of the felt presence of police and of their activities in maintaining order during patrol. Thus, to the extent that police define disorder and citizen fears as significant problems, foot patrol is an important police tactic.

Moreover, according to the analyses, foot patrol also might have some anticrime potential. It may keep minor disorders from escalating into more serious events; it may encourage citizens to take action on their own behalf; and it certainly positions patrol officers to receive and interpret information necessary to solve crimes.

What then is the significance of foot patrol? Should police departments in every city immediately abandon automobile patrol and install foot patrol as the primary tactic? Probably not. The public yearning for foot patrol and the empirical findings regarding its significance suggest that foot patrol is one more important police tactic. In a city like Boston, for example, where population density is very high, foot patrol could be used on a widespread basis. Many areas of New York and Philadelphia have a population density that makes them amenable to the use of foot patrol. In Chicago, Milwaukee, and many other cities, foot patrol would be valuable in some areas. Yet in a bustling city like Houston, relatively few areas lend themselves to foot patrol. Similarly, foot patrol may be more or less valuable during particular times of the day. Foot patrol may be very important in neighborhood shopping centers where merchants need help controlling students who pass through the area after school.

It has become apparent over the past few years that citizens desire a more intimate and pervasive police presence in their communities. Citizens, as individuals and in groups, want police to help them keep order and prevent crime as well as to have police take action on their own. This wisdom—that peaceable communities come about as the result of the social obligation of all citizens to each other and that the police's role is to support and assist in that expression of social obligation—is perhaps the most important conclusion to be gained from police research, not just research into foot patrol, but almost all of the research that has been conducted by police over the last 20 years.

**References**


**Discussion Questions**

1. Do you believe citizens have an obligation to act to keep order and prevent crime as well as having police act for them?
2. Have you had an opportunity to observe police on foot patrol? How effective do you think they are?
3. If we had more police on foot patrol, would we have more order and less crime?
4. If foot patrol does not actually reduce crime, should patrolling continue solely because it makes citizens feel safer?
5. If you were a police officer would you like foot patrol duty? Why?

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