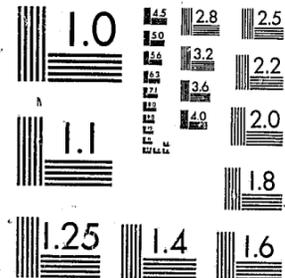


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H.M. McCullough (*Royal Ulster  
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Police Patrol Operations in Illinois by  
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Illinois, Champaign, Illinois, U.S.A.*) 83395

# Police Studies

The international review of police development

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## What is Patrol Work?

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*The author thanks Robert Worden for his assistance with data analysis and Stephen Mastrofski, Roger B. Parks, and Pat Sanford for their comments and suggestions. This research was supported by Grant No. 78-NI-AY-0086 from the National Institute of Justice. The opinions and interpretations expressed are the author's own.*

Police themselves have done little to describe the full range and importance of their activities. The typical report of a police agency will bury large volumes of highly significant work in statistical entries that record the number of calls received for service or the number of miscellaneous complaints handled. Numerous incidents are classified in such broad categories as "disturbances," concealing the range and diversity of situations the officer encounters. Police officers who are occasionally requested to fill out job-classification forms as part of a personnel study will consistently sell themselves short by understating the variety and significance of what they do (p. 25).

Herman Goldstein (1977)

As Goldstein notes, most police departments themselves have little systematic information about how their officers spend their time or the range and frequency of actions they take toward citizens. Even for patrol, which constitutes the largest part of almost all police departments' operations, there is little systematic data available about what officers do. Research on police patrol activities has begun to shed additional light on what goes on in some departments, but these studies are reported in scattered places. The most comprehensive review is by Cordner (1979). That review does not include some of the most detailed, more recent studies of patrol work. This paper reviews a number of the more detailed recent studies and contrasts their findings with those from observations of patrol operations in 24 other departments, which have not been previously reported.

This overview of patrol work is organized in

three sections: how officers spend their time on patrol; what problems patrol officers deal with in their encounters with citizens; and what actions officers on patrol take to control some citizens and help others. Throughout, the categories used by each of the different research teams have shaped the sorts of data that are available from their studies. Because they used different categories and definitions, it is often difficult to make exact comparisons of patrol work in the various departments. Despite this limitation, it is possible to compare and contrast these studies to expand our understanding of the content of police patrol operations. In addition to previously reported data, this paper also makes use of data from the Police Services Study.<sup>1</sup> These data on patrol operations in 60 neighborhoods served by 24 departments were collected using a standard set of categories and definitions and consistent observation and recording procedures. The departments studied were in the Rochester, New York; St. Louis, Missouri; and Tampa-St. Petersburg, Florida, metropolitan areas. The study was conducted during the summer of 1977. These data increase considerably the confidence we can place in the general picture of patrol work which emerges from this review.

### How Officers Spend Their Time

Answering assigned calls and conducting general surveillance by "patrolling" are the two most time-consuming sorts of patrol activity. There is great variation in the amount of time officers on patrol spend answering assigned calls. In most places, however, assigned calls take considerably less than half of officers' work time. Patrolling the beat usually occupies a higher proportion of officers' time. However, "patrolling" also typically takes less than half of the time of officers assigned to patrol.

Most studies of how officers spend their time are based on calls for service (or dispatch) records and consequently focus primarily on time answering calls for service. Dispatch records from Wilmington, Delaware, for example, indicate that patrol officers in that city spent almost three hours (174 minutes) of every eight-hour shift answering calls for service (Tien *et al.*, 1978:4-15). In contrast to average time on calls for service in four other departments, the Wilmington figures seemed rather high to Tien and his colleagues. They calculated that average time on calls for service per eight-hour shift was 134 minutes in Worcester, Massachusetts; 96 minutes in St. Louis, Missouri; 89 minutes in Kansas City, Missouri; and only 72 minutes in Arlington, Massachusetts (pp. 4-19). They concluded that:

Wilmington has the *highest* known unit utilization factor ["fraction of time a patrol unit is responding to calls for service during an eight-hour tour"]. The paucity of available workload or productivity-related data suggests that an intensive national effort should be undertaken to fill this important gap (pp. 4-20).

In fact, however, the range of time on assigned calls is even greater than Tien *et al.* described. Another study which appeared about the same time indicates a substantially higher percentage of patrol officer time spent on calls for service. In their study of patrol staffing in San Diego, Boydston and colleagues (1977:53) found that officers averaged more than 270 minutes (four and a half hours) on calls for service per eight-hour shift. These figures were obtained from dispatch records for San Diego's Central Division where the staffing study was conducted.<sup>2</sup> Although over half of each eight-hour shift in San Diego's Central Division was, on the average, devoted to calls for service, this high average was not characteristic of the city as a whole. Boydston and Sherry (1975:60), in their study of the Community Profile Project, report that only about 120 minutes (2 hours) of each eight-hour shift were spent answering calls for service in San Diego's North Division. The Community Profile Project was conducted two years before the patrol staffing study, but it is unlikely that the average time spent on calls for service more than doubled in that period. It is more probable that differences between the

areas being policed account for the differences in how officers spent their time.

Calls for service or dispatch records usually do not provide a complete account of the time officers on patrol spend on encounters with citizens. Calls records are maintained by the dispatcher, who does not know about (or knows about, but does not record) many encounters which are initiated by officers or citizens "in the field." Field interrogations, for example, are often excluded from calls for service records. Traffic stops are also frequently not recorded by the dispatcher unless a citation is issued. On the other hand, dispatch records may include meal breaks, errands, maintenance stops, and dispatched runs in which no police encounter with a citizen resulted. Thus, the total time accounted for on these records may miss some encounter time and include some non-encounter time. Practices vary from department to department.

Another source of inaccuracy in dispatch records of officers' use of time arises from self-reporting of the time spent on each call. Because the officer's report that an encounter is ended indicates that the officer is free for reassignment, an incentive exists for officers to delay such reports. This management use of the report that an encounter is ended conflicts with its use as a source of data about time devoted to encounters.

Two other sources of data on patrol officers' use of time are available: officer logs and observer reports. Both may be freer of bias than dispatch records because they are less likely to be used for management of individual officers. Officer logs from Wilmington, Delaware, indicate that officers there spent an average of 166 minutes (two and three-quarter hours) per eight-hour shift on both field-initiated and dispatched encounters with citizens in 1976 (Tien *et al.*, 1978:4-18). This is quite similar to the average of 174 minutes per shift calculated from Wilmington calls for service records, suggesting that in Wilmington officers either tend to report all field-initiated encounters to the dispatcher or else fail to record on their own logs encounters which they do not report to the dispatcher. Another piece of information from officer logs is the amount of time spent on administrative and personal activities (and thus not spent patrolling). Officers in Wilmington reported an average of about 90 minutes per eight-hour shift on meals, breaks,

car checkups, arrest processing, phone calls, and so forth (Tien *et al.*, 1978:4-18).

Observer reports are a more expensive form of data collection, but they can also give a fuller picture of police activities. They remove the bias often present in officer self-reporting, yet, if carefully conducted, avoid interfering with officer activities. Observers in the Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment indicate that almost 40 percent of each shift was spent on encounters with citizens (both dispatched and field-initiated) (Kelling *et al.*, 1974:500). Thus about 190 minutes (just over three hours) of every eight-hour shift were, on the average, spent on citizen-police encounters. Another 75 minutes per shift were devoted to report writing and other administrative tasks. An average of 73 minutes per eight-hour shift were spent on personal breaks and errands (see pp. 504-509). This is considerably more time on administrative and personal activities reported for Kansas City than for Wilmington, but it is important to remember that the Kansas City estimates are from observer records while the Wilmington estimates are from officer logs. Some difference is probably due to variation in police practices between the two cities, but some of the difference is also likely to result from officers' tendency to be quite conservative in reporting how much shift time they spend on personal errands.

Observers using consistent coding rules and observation techniques in several different departments can provide data which permit a better estimate of the extent to which the activities of officers in different departments differ. In the Police Services Study (PSS), observers recorded how officers spent their time and what they and citizens did in encounters for approximately 120 hours in each of 60 residential neighborhoods. Officers from 24 departments were observed. In each case, observations were made for 15 shifts at the same time of day and day of the week in each neighborhood.<sup>3</sup> With these data it is possible to compare officer activities across neighborhoods within the same department's jurisdiction as well as to compare officer activities across departments. It is important to note that these data relate to patrol in residential areas where commercial activity varied from moderate to nil.

Officers in all 60 PSS neighborhoods devoted considerably less than half their time to assigned calls and field-initiated encounters. The

average for all neighborhoods was 128 minutes (just over 2 hours) per shift. On the average there were 6 encounters per shift, for an average encounter length of just over 20 minutes. The most time spent on encounters was an average of 217 minutes (over three and a half hours) per eight-hour shift. The least time spent on encounters was an average of 53 minutes per eight-hour shift. In half of the neighborhoods officers averaged less than 130 minutes (two hours and ten minutes) per eight hours on encounters with citizens. There was also considerable variation within departments in officers' use of time. In the city with the highest overall average, time on encounters ranged from 217 minutes to 103 minutes per shift for the neighborhoods studied.

It is useful to divide time on encounters according to whether the encounter was assigned or officer initiated. On average, 95 minutes per eight-hour shift were spent on encounters resulting from assigned calls. These findings suggest that Tien and colleagues were correct in asserting that Wilmington's average time on assigned calls is high. The national norm is likely to be between an hour and a half and two hours per eight-hour shift on encounters resulting from assigned runs.

Administrative activities, report writing, and police assignments other than calls for service took an average of 68 minutes per eight-hour shift in the 60 PSS neighborhoods. This compares with an average of 75 minutes on such activities in Kansas City during the Preventive Patrol Experiment. Again, there is considerable difference among the 60 neighborhoods in the Police Service Study. In one low-income neighborhood of a large city, an average of 153 minutes per eight-hour shift was devoted to report writing, administration, and other assignments besides calls for service. This was the highest average PSS observed. In a middle-class neighborhood in another large city, officers averaged only 34 minutes per eight-hour shift on these kinds of activities. This was the lowest average observed.

The amount of time officers have available for "proactive" police work also varies considerably from place to place. If we combine the time officers spend answering assigned dispatches and the time they spend on reporting and other administrative duties, we get the total "assigned time" they have. For the 60 PSS neighborhoods, assigned time averaged

167 minutes per eight-hour shift. This left an average of 313 minutes per eight hours (or two thirds of a shift, on the average) "unassigned." It is this unassigned time which officers use for initiating encounters in the field, for conducting general surveillance ("patrolling"), and for meals and other personal activities. The least unassigned time for the 60 neighborhoods was an average of 202 minutes (less than three and a half hours) per eight-hour shift. The most was 398 minutes (more than six and a half hours) per eight-hour shift. The average of 67 percent unassigned time found in the PSS study is considerably higher than the 55% "uncommitted" time reported by Cordner for a midwestern city and also higher than the 60% reported by Kelling *et al.* for Kansas City.

About 10 percent of officers' *unassigned* time was spent on officer-initiated encounters with citizens in the 60 neighborhoods observed by PSS. An average of 29 minutes per eight-hour shift was allocated to encounters which officers themselves initiated. Most of these were traffic stops. Overall, PSS observers reported an average of one traffic stop per shift. In five neighborhoods, officers averaged more than two traffic stops per shift, while in two other neighborhoods PSS observers noted only a single traffic stop in the 15 shifts studied. Officers in the 60 neighborhoods were less likely to stop people for reasons other than traffic or vehicle violations. PSS observers recorded non-traffic stops in an average of two out of three shifts. In one neighborhood there were nearly two such stops per shift; in another neighborhood there was only one in the 15 observed shifts. An average of once every two shifts, patrol officers observed by PSS themselves initiated a follow-up investigation of a problem or case they had dealt with before. In four neighborhoods there was an average of at least one such encounter per shift, while in another neighborhood no officer-initiated follow-up investigations were observed. Officers provided unassigned assistance to fellow officers an average of about once every five shifts. In only one neighborhood was there an average of one such encounter per shift. In seven neighborhoods no officer-initiated backup was observed.

Much less unassigned time is used by officers in response to requests they receive directly from citizens: an average of only five minutes per eight-hour shift. Overall, PSS observers noted one encounter of this type for every two observed shifts. In three neighborhoods there

was an average of more than one encounter of this kind per shift, but in another there was none. In general, about one encounter in six is initiated by an officer or citizen (on the street). Five in six are dispatched.

Making security checks and issuing parking tickets are two other activities officers may perform during unassigned time. Officers conducted security checks of commercial buildings in all of the 60 PSS neighborhoods, but at substantially different rates. In only three neighborhoods did officers average one commercial security check per hour of unassigned time. In 15 of the neighborhoods officers averaged fewer than one commercial security check in every 10 hours of unassigned time. The PSS neighborhoods were primarily residential and varied in the extent to which they included commercial areas. Some of the difference in frequency of commercial security checks is therefore due to less opportunity for these activities in neighborhoods with very few commercial structures. But while all 60 neighborhoods afforded ample opportunity for residential security checks, these were much less frequent than commercial checks. No residential security checks at all were observed in 10 of the 60 neighborhoods. In only three neighborhoods was there more than one residential security check per two hours of unassigned time. Officers issued parking tickets even less frequently. Obviously, residential security checks and parking control in residential areas are not high priorities in most of these areas.

The major part of *unassigned* time is spent patrolling. This consists of driving about the beat, looking for problems which may require police action and demonstrating the presence and ready availability of police. These activities are usually not directed either by supervisory personnel or by conscious planning of the patrol officers themselves. In some neighborhoods as few as two hours per eight-hour shift were spent patrolling, but the average for the 60 PSS neighborhoods was 214 minutes (about three and a half hours) per shift. In one neighborhood an average of more than five hours in eight were spent this way. Thus, undirected patrol takes more time than any other activity in most departments, although often less than half of a patrol officer's time is spent this way.

In the 60 neighborhoods observed by PSS, patrol officers spent an average of 65 minutes per eight-hour shift on meals and other personal activities. This is about 8 minutes less

per shift than Kelling *et al.* (1974) report for Kansas City and about the same as Cordner reports for an anonymous midwestern city. There was considerable variation both among and within the 24 PSS departments. In three neighborhoods officers averaged more than 100 minutes per eight-hour shift on meals and personal activities. In two neighborhoods officers averaged less than 30 minutes per shift on these activities. The highest average time (109 minutes per eight hours) was recorded in a middle-income neighborhood of a large city. In another neighborhood of that same city, officers averaged only 43 minutes of meal and personal activity time per eight-hour shift. The lowest average time (19 minutes per eight-hour shift) was recorded in an inner city neighborhood in another large city. In that city the highest average time on these same activities was recorded at 54 minutes per eight hours.

Overall, officers assigned to patrol spend about one third of their time on specific assignments: responding to dispatches and carrying out administrative duties. The remaining two-thirds of their time is spent on patrolling the beat, officer-initiated encounters with citizens (mostly traffic stops), citizen-initiated encounters (begun directly on the street), and personal business of the officer. Patrolling accounts for most of this unassigned time. These overall averages conceal a wide variation, however. Not only do individual shifts vary greatly from each other, but the pattern of officers' use of time varies by beat and by jurisdiction. Data from one department, or even averages from a number of departments, can not be used to estimate how officers do or should spend their time in another department. The kinds of problems areas present vary so greatly that wide variation in officers' use of time is to be expected.

#### The Kinds of Problems Officers Deal With in Encounters

In general, crime is involved in a minority of the calls police are assigned to handle. Webster (1970:95) reports that fewer than 17 percent of the "dispatches" in "Baywood" involved crime. This contrasts with almost 40 percent of all "dispatches" which were for "administration." Another 17 percent were for "social services," 7 percent for "traffic," and 20 percent "on view." This is a striking statement of the extent to which police patrol involves work on non-crime matters. It is an overstatement.

Webster's classification of all incidents in which the officer took a report of a crime under the heading "administration" reduces the percentage of calls classified as dealing with crime. Moreover, Webster includes in "administration" (and hence in the total number of "dispatches" on which all the percentages are based) officers' meals, errands, and court time. Bearing those classifications in mind, Webster's report for types of calls in Baywood does not differ greatly from that of Boydston *et al.* (1977) for the Central Division of San Diego. They suggest that while only about 20 percent of all calls assigned involved "current" Part I and Part II crimes, another 15 percent involved taking reports of crimes which had already occurred and 8 percent involved checking on suspicious persons or circumstances (pp. 22, 28). Thus, a total of about 43 percent of the calls for service answered by San Diego's Central Division patrol officers involved crime. About 30 percent of the San Diego Central Division calls were related to peace-keeping, 10 percent to traffic, 10 percent to medical emergencies, and 7 percent to other miscellaneous problems. Officers' meals, breaks, and errands are not included in these figures.

Wilmington, Delaware, appears to be an exception. Records show the majority of calls there concerned crime. Tien and colleagues (1978:4-4) use a somewhat different classification in reporting types of problems dealt with by Wilmington patrol officers. Table 1 presents the breakdown they report. Note that they show 63 percent of all calls involved crime in 1974-75, and 57 percent in 1976. These percentages exceed those reported for both Baywood and San Diego. The coding rules are different, but there may also be real differences among the cities. Certainly there appears to have been a decrease in Part II crimes dealt with by patrol officers in Wilmington in 1976. This may be partly due to a change in classification. Note that traffic calls became less numerous, while miscellaneous calls increased substantially. It seems possible that at least some of the kinds of calls which were classified as Part II crimes and traffic in 1974-75 were included in the miscellaneous category in 1976.

We have seen that from 43 to 63 percent of the calls police handled in Wilmington and Central Division San Diego were related to crime. These estimates are based on dispatch records. Differences in coding from one city to another may account for much of the apparent

**Table 1**  
Average Daily Calls for Service Dispatched  
in Wilmington, Delaware

Types of Calls Assigned to Primary Patrol Units	1974-75		1976	
	Daily Average	Percentage	Daily Average	Percentage
Part I crime	24.4	16.3	25.8	16.7
Part II crime	70.0	46.9	62.2	40.2
Traffic	28.7	19.2	21.0	13.6
Medical	3.1	2.1	5.2	3.4
Alarm	12.9	8.6	12.2	7.9
Miscellaneous	10.4	7.0	28.1	18.2
Total per day	149.4		154.6	

Source:  
Adapted from James M. Tien et al., *An Alternative Approach in Police Patrol: The Wilmington Split-Force Experiment* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office), 1978.

difference in the kinds of problems their patrol officers deal with, but it is also possible that differences in coding rules make an apparent difference *less* than it actually is. Without data collected in some standard way, we do not know. Patrol observer reports using a standard set of categories shed some light on the range of problems patrol officers actually work on. PSS researchers observed a total of 5,688 encounters between citizens and officers in the 60 neighborhoods they studied. Each encounter concerned one or more "problems" which occasioned police action.

Crime was the primary problem in only 38 percent of the encounters observed by PSS. This is considerably less than the proportion reported for Wilmington and also less than the proportion reported for San Diego. Comparisons of the kinds of problems officers deal with on patrol are difficult to make when they must rely on reports from different sources. In general, however, it appears that patrol observers record more traffic-related encounters than are found in dispatch records. Thus, the total number of encounters includes more traffic encounters and this reduces the proportion of all encounters which concern crime. As Table 2 shows, one fourth of all encounters observed by PSS involved traffic accidents or violations. (For 22 percent of all encounters, traffic was the *primary* problem in the encounter.) Observers record more traffic encounters because these are officer-initiated and not reported to dispatchers. Only 20 percent of these traffic en-

counters were dispatched runs: 77 percent were officer-initiated, and the rest were initiated by citizens in the field.

Another source of the difference may be the information requests. Citizens' requests for information from officers were the sole basis for six percent of the PSS encounters. Eighty percent of these requests were initiated by citizens in the field. Such encounters were probably rarely if ever included in the San Diego or Wilmington data. It is also possible that some of the incidents Tien and his colleagues classified as Part II Crime in Wilmington would be classified as interpersonal disputes or nuisances in PSS categories.

The lower proportion of crime-related encounters in the PSS study may thus be due in part to including more traffic and information encounters in the total number of encounters on which the percentages are based, as well as to differences in categories. But there are also differences in the kinds of problems officers confront in different places.

A clearer picture of the extent to which police patrolling different areas deal with different types of problems can be gained by closer examination of the PSS data. Table 3 presents the median and range for types of problems in the 60 neighborhoods. In two of the 60 neighborhoods, over half of all encounters between patrol officers and citizens involved crime. In one neighborhood about 54 percent of the encounters concerned crime as defined by the PSS typology; in another, 51 percent con-

**Table 2**  
Kinds of Problems Dealt With by Police  
in Their Encounters With Citizens  
(Police Services Study)

Problem Category	Percentages of All Encounters With Any Problem of This Type	Percentages of All Encounters With This Primary Type of Problem
<i>Crime</i>	39%	38%
Violent crime	4%	
Non-violent crime	18	
Morals offense	2	
Suspicious person/circumstances	11	
Other (warrants, assist officers, etc.)	4	
<i>Disorder</i>	23	22
Interpersonal dispute	10	
Nuisance	13	
<i>Service</i>	26	18
Medical	4	
Dependent persons	6	
Information request only	6	
Other assistance	10	
<i>Traffic</i>	26	22
Total	114%	100%
Total Number of Encounters	5,688	5,688

\*Does not sum to 100% because some encounters involved two or three types of problems.

cerned crime. The lowest percentage of encounters concerning crime was recorded in a middle-income suburb. There were also considerable differences within jurisdictions. In the city where 54 percent of the encounters dealt with crime in one neighborhood, only 27 of the encounters in another neighborhood dealt with crime.

In one of the 60 neighborhoods PSS studied, 46 percent of all encounters dealt primarily with traffic. Officers assigned to patrol in that city devote a substantial part of their efforts to traffic. (In the two other neighborhoods which PSS observed in that same city, 31 percent and 37 percent of all encounters involved traffic problems.) In contrast, 9 of the 60 neighborhoods had fewer than 10 percent of all encounters in which traffic was the primary problem. In two of the study neighborhoods in a large city, only 5 percent of the encounters dealt with traffic problems. There was considerable variation within that city, however, since in another of its neighborhoods, PSS observers

found that 28 percent of the encounters concerned traffic.

The percentage of encounters where officers dealt with disorders ranged from 43 percent in one PSS neighborhood to 8 percent in another. Encounters dealing primarily with services other than those concerning crime, traffic, and disorder accounted for a high of 33 percent of all encounters in one neighborhood and a low of 8 percent in another. Clearly, police officers assigned to patrol deal with a great variety of problems, and in only a few areas is crime their most common problem.

**Officer Actions to Control and Help Citizens**  
Officers' actions during encounters with citizens are an important aspect of their work. A wide variety of actions are involved in dealing with suspects, and with witnesses, victims, and others who need police assistance. Table 4 presents the percentages of encounters observed by PSS in which officers took some common actions.

**Table 3**  
**Kinds of Problems Dealt With by Police**  
**in Their Encounters With Citizens:**  
**Differences Among Residential Neighborhoods**

Problem Category	Percentage of Encounters With This as Primary Problem		
	Minimum Neighborhood	Median Neighborhood	Maximum Neighborhood
Crime	22%	38%	54%
Disorder	8	20	43
Service	8	18	33
Traffic	5	23	46

Information gathering was the most frequent officer activity. Both those who were to be helped and those who were to be controlled were the subject of police inquiry. Officers interviewed witnesses or persons requesting services in about two-thirds of all encounters involving crime, disorder, or service. In almost three-quarters of all traffic-related encounters, but in less than half of the crimes and disorders, officers interrogated suspects. The high percentage of interrogations for traffic encounters reflects the circumstances of these encounters. Most of these involve stopping drivers suspected of traffic violations. The others are investigations of traffic accidents where one or more of the drivers present was suspected of violations. Searches and visual inspections were less common, but occurred in over 40 percent of all encounters dealing with crime.

Police use several techniques to control citizens' behavior. Officers threatened or used force in about 14 percent of all encounters PSS observed. The threat of force is much more common than its use, however. Force was used in only about 5 percent of all encounters. Most of this was an officer handcuffing or taking a suspect by the arm. Most of the encounters where force was used concerned crime or disorder.

More often than threatening or using force, police lectured people whose behavior they wanted to change. In over 40 percent of the disorder and traffic encounters observed by PSS, police lectured or threatened legal sanctions. Persuasion is another technique officers use in attempting to change citizens' behavior. Officers used persuasion in about 23 percent of all disorders observed by PSS.

Arrests were observed in about 5 percent of the PSS encounters, including over 4 percent

of all traffic and disorder incidents, as well as about 7 percent of all encounters dealing with crimes. The most common instigation of legal proceedings observed by PSS was not arrests, but the issuance of tickets. Tickets were issued in more than one-third of all traffic encounters. On the average, one traffic ticket was issued for every two eight-hour shifts observed. The number of tickets over the 15 observed shifts ranged from one (in one large city neighborhood) to 22 (in another large city neighborhood). A few tickets of various kinds were issued to participants in other kinds of encounters as well. These were misdemeanor tickets for offenses against municipal ordinances.

Overall, officers in the 60 PSS neighborhoods made arrests in somewhat fewer encounters and gave tickets in somewhat more encounters than did the officers observed in the Kansas City Patrol Study. There, officers made arrests in 6.8 percent of all encounters and issued tickets in 6.8 percent of all encounters (Kelling *et al.*, 1974:466). Boydston *et al.* (1977) report San Diego arrests in about 5.6 percent of incidents for which there were dispatch records (pp. 29-30). This is quite close to the PSS average.

Arrests are relatively infrequent occurrences for patrol officers. On the average about one encounter in 20 observed by PSS involved an arrest. Officers observed by PSS averaged a little over six encounters per eight-hour shift. On the average, then, each patrol officer in the 60 neighborhoods was involved in one encounter where an arrest was made once every three working days. Arrests are considerably more frequent in some areas than in others, however. In two of the 60 PSS neighborhoods, 13 arrests were observed in the 15 shifts studied. In contrast, six of the 60 neighborhoods had only one

**Table 4**  
**Officer Actions Taken in Encounters**  
**Involving Each Type of Problem**  
**(Police Services Study)**

Type of Problem Dealt With in Encounter	Percentages of Encounters in Which an Officer Took This Action											
	Interviewed a Witness or Person Requesting Service	Interrogated a Suspect	Conducted a Search or Inspection	Used Force or Threat of Force	Lectured or Threatened (other than threat of force)	Used Persuasion	Made an Arrest	Gave a Ticket	Gave Reassurance	Gave Information	Gave Assistance	Gave Medical Help
Any Crime	64%	34%	43%	17%	19%	7%	7%	1%	28%	24%	8%	1%
Disorder	68	45	15	15	41	23	5	1	30	26	11	2
Service	66	6	18	2	7	2	*	2	22	39	20	5
Traffic	26	74	28	16	48	2	4	35	9	24	8	*
All Encounters	57	40	29	14	28	8	5	9	23	27	11	2

\*Less than .5%.

arrest during the 15 observed shifts. Many police officers (especially those working "quiet" neighborhoods) may go for months without making an arrest. Forst *et al.* (1978:48) report that 46 percent of all sworn officers in the Washington, D.C. department, made no arrests in 1974. Most of these were patrol officers.

Officers do not use legal sanctions at every opportunity, of course. In 10 percent of all encounters, officers remarked to PSS observers that they could have instigated legal action against a participant, but did not do so.

Officers also provide comfort and assistance to those who are distraught or without other sources of help. In almost one-fourth of all encounters PSS observed, an officer reassured someone. This sort of police activity was most common in encounters dealing with disorder. It was observed least often in encounters involving traffic problems. Police gave information in more than one-fourth of the encounters PSS observed. They rendered some sort of

physical assistance other than medical help in more than 10 percent of the encounters and gave medical assistance in about 2 percent of all encounters.

We have seen that in most neighborhoods, police patrol officers are assigned to spend substantial portions of their time in encounters dealing with situations that do not involve crime. Often a majority of their encounters involve non-crime matters. Moreover, in most places police institute formal legal proceedings in only a fraction of the encounters they have with citizens. Many of the encounters in which legal proceedings are begun concern traffic problems or disorders rather than crime. But what police routinely do in one locality is frequently quite different from what they do elsewhere. Both the mixture of problems which confront police and the kinds of police actions taken to deal with those problems vary considerably from neighborhood to neighborhood, even within a single department's jurisdiction.

### What is Patrol Work?

#### Learning More About Activities of Officers on Patrol

How an officer assigned to patrol uses the work time of any given shift depends on department and personal priorities and on the kinds of public problems that come to police attention during that shift. The particular actions an officer takes in dealing with citizens depend on the same sort of personal, departmental, and public factors. We have not attempted here to isolate the contributions each of these factors make to the activities of officers on patrol. Rather, our purpose was to describe the range of patrol officer activities.

Despite their importance for performance measurement and planning, many police activities receive little attention and are not known in any systematic way by public officials, the courtroom workgroup, or the public at large. Indeed, most police departments themselves have no standard reporting procedures or other means for systematically describing what their own officers do. Thus, all too often police themselves, as well as the various other constituents of police performance, have an inaccurate picture of officers' activities.

The few systematic studies which have been reported suggest that police deal regularly with many kinds of problems other than crime. These problems need to be acknowledged in assessing what police accomplish. Police officers also conduct a variety of activities which are neither highly visible nor the subject of much police training. Whether they should continue to do these things (and if so whether they can be helped to do them better) are questions that can only be answered after further careful study of what police do now and how it affects those to whom it is done.

While it is clear that the content of patrol work varies from beat to beat, department to department, and by shift and day, it is also possible to offer some generalizations about its central tendencies. *On the average*, about five hours of an officer's eight-hour shift are allocated at the officer's discretion, while three hours are spent on assigned tasks. An average of over three hours in eight are spent by officers driving around "on patrol." About an hour is spent on personal business. Half an hour is spent on officer-initiated contacts with citizens. An hour and a half more are spent on contacts with citizens which originated as dispatched to the officer. Almost an hour and a half are also spent on administrative matters.

The problems police deal with on patrol are

often complex and difficult to neatly categorize. Moreover, they also differ from place to place and time to time. In general, however, it appears that only about 40 percent clearly involve a response to some reported or suspected crime. The other 60 percent of the problems police deal with are roughly equally divided among disorders, traffic problems, and requests for various other sorts of assistance not relating to crimes.

Police assigned to patrol take a wide variety of actions with the citizens they encounter. Asking questions is perhaps their most common activity. Threats of force are considerably more common than the use of force or the exercise of arrest powers. More commonly, however, officers lecture or seek to persuade those whose behavior they seek to change. Officers also commonly provide reassurance, information, or some form of physical assistance. A patrol officer needs to have a wide repertoire of actions available to deal with the diverse situations he or she is asked to handle.

#### Notes

1. The Police Services Study was conducted by Elinor Ostrom and Roger B. Parks of Indiana University in Bloomington and Gordon P. Whitaker of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill under funding provided by the National Science Foundation, Grant No. 43949.
2. Boydston *et al.* (1977:47) report the mean number of calls and minutes per call for one-officer and two-officer units. The figure of 270 minutes per shift was calculated using these data and the total number of calls for each type of unit.
3. Gay *et al.* (1977) document the patterns of peaks and valleys in calls for service which recur over a week's time. Spreading observations over various shifts and days of the week is necessary to obtain a balanced view of patrol work.

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