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**Explaining Police Activities Across Urban Neighborhoods
Graduate Research Fellowship Program
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Executive Summary

The National Institute of Justice

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FINAL REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

Community policing is the current watchword in policing (Cordner, 1997; see also Rosenbaum and Lurigio, 1994; Eck and Rosenbaum, 1994). Indeed, Kelling (1988) has suggested that there is a "quiet revolution" taking place in policing as more and more police agencies advocate the merits of community policing. Presently, however, there is considerable debate over what this strategy entails and how it is to be implemented (Cordner, 1997; Kratcoski and Dukes, 1995; Mastrofski et. al., 1995; Oliver and Bartgis, 1998). There are numerous theoretical pronouncements on community policing and implementation can take various forms. Despite this confusion several common themes seem evident in the theoretical literature and in the various methods of implementation (Goldstein, 1987; Oliver and Bartgis, 1998; Seagrave, 1996; Riechers and Roberg, 1990; Rosenbaum and Lurigio, 1994). The major themes are increased interaction between police and citizens, increased citizen input, and police responses tailored to specific community needs and desires (Alpert and Dunham, 1988; Alpert and Moore, 1993; Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), 1994; Cordner, 1997; Goldstein, 1987; Skogan, 1990; Webb and Katz, 1997).

Proponents of community policing suggest that it is necessary for the police to work together with citizens (BJA, 1994; Goldstein, 1987; Reiss and Tonry, 1986; Skolnick and Bayley, 1987; Whittaker, 1980). Indeed, community policing entails not only a greater concern for citizens as the police audience, but also entails changing the way policing is performed. For instance, policing has historically been reactive, with police activities focused on law enforcement responses to criminal occurrences. In contrast, community policing proposes using a much broader variety of policing strategies. For example, the daily activities

of community police officers might include such things as foot patrol, problem-solving activities, attending community meetings and networking in addition to traditional law enforcement.

Further, proponents also suggest that the police must tailor their services to the unique needs of the communities they serve (Alpert and Dunham, 1988, 1986; Alpert, Dunham and Piquero, 1997; Alpert and Moore, 1993; BJA, 1994; Webb and Katz, 1997; see also Cordner, 1997; Skogan, 1990), or in other words, “customize police services to the needs of each community” (BJA, 1994:51). Thus, it is inferred that the daily activities of officers should not only differ from those of traditional officers, but should vary depending on “unique characteristics [that] can aid the police officer in increasing his/her effectiveness in different neighborhoods” (Alpert and Dunham, 1988:121). For instance, community police officers assigned to a largely commercial, retail neighborhood may engage in frequent foot patrol to discourage the victimization (pick pockets, purse snatching) of customers moving from store to store. On the other hand, officers working in a predominately residential neighborhood may be more concerned with burglaries of homes.

Despite the growth and popularity of community policing, we have very little information on whether or not different neighborhoods within cities receive uniquely tailored services. We do know that the activities of community police officers vary across jurisdictions, but not whether they vary within cities and what role, if any, community characteristics play in determining the specific activities engaged in by police officers. In fact, the underlying assumption that community policing varies within a city has never been subjected to empirical scrutiny. Rather, this remains an assumption about how community

policing should be implemented rather than how it is being implemented (see Riechers and Roberg, 1990). Indeed, we do not yet have a clear picture of the relationship between neighborhoods and the activities of community policing officers.

PRESENT STUDY

The present study examines the activities of both community oriented and traditional beat officers across neighborhoods within a single city. Further, it examines the factors which influence the activities of officers during their typical work day. Thus, the present study proposes to determine whether officer activities vary across neighborhoods and also proposes to assess whether variation is unique to community policing or whether it is a characteristic of traditional policing as well. Lastly, it assesses the extent to which various characteristics of neighborhoods and officers influence the activities of both traditional and community police officers. Thus, it will help to determine if unique characteristics of neighborhoods are in fact influencing the activities of officers as suggested by proponents of community oriented policing.

IMPORTANCE OF STUDY

If we are to assess the current status of the implementation of community policing, we must address the central tenet of differential policing based on neighborhood characteristics. In other words, we need to determine if officers are doing different things in different neighborhoods.

Examining the factors associated with officer activities will also contribute toward our general understanding of police behavior. Indeed, research on police behavior has focused almost exclusively on a very narrow range of behavior. Extant research has mostly examined

the outcomes of police-citizen encounters with little focus on the activities which precede and may in some cases precipitate an encounter with a citizen. Further, if officer activities do not vary across neighborhoods, examining the factors associated with officer activities may help to identify obstacles to differential policing across neighborhoods. This study addresses four separate but related research questions:

1. **Do the activities of community police officers vary across neighborhoods?**
2. **Do the activities of traditional beat officers vary across neighborhoods?**
3. **What factors help to explain the activities of community oriented officers?**
4. **What factors help to explain the activities of traditional beat officers?**

METHODOLOGY AND STUDY DATA

This study uses a number of different data sources to examine the activities of police officers. Five different types of data were used for the present study: 1) systematic social observations, 2) surveys of police officers, 3) land use data, 4) census data, and 5) crime data.

First, data on the activities of police officers were obtained from an earlier observation study of police officers.¹ The data include observations over a thirteen-month period with 131 different beat officers (236 observations for a total of approximately 1,888 hours observed) and 31 different community oriented police officers (206 observations for a total of approximately 1,648 hours observed). A total of 442 shifts were observed or approximately 3,536 hours. Responses to surveys of officers were also obtained from this project. In addition to these two sources of data, census, crime and land use data were

¹ Data on the activities of both community oriented and traditional beat officers were collected during systematic observations of police officers conducted as part of a project funded by the National Institute of Justice (Grant # 96-IJ-CX-0075).

collected as indicators of neighborhood characteristics.

OFFICER ACTIVITIES

Prior to an examination of variation in activities we must first establish what it is that neighborhood and traditional police officers do during a typical day and if what these officers do differs. This provides a context in which to exam variation in officer activities.

Using systematic observation data, all observed officer time was categorized into 16 categories. Below are the general findings:

- Officers in Cincinnati spend almost no time on foot patrol (less than 0.3% or ½ hour per month).
- Motorized patrol on the other hand is engaged in during approximately 26 percent of a police officers day (more than two hours per shift).
- Time spent on crime-related activities consume approximately 16 percent or roughly one hour and 20 minutes per shift. Crime-related activities include responding to criminal incidents (10%), conducting crime-related administrative tasks (2%), and conducting investigations (4%).
- Together, the two activities traditionally considered the core of police work (crime-related and patrol) account for a substantial proportion of the observed time. Specifically, they account for 43 percent or approximately three and one-half hours of an officers working day.
- Traffic enforcement, order maintenance and service activities are all conducted for 5 percent or less of an officer's day.
- Officers spend about 8 percent of their day or 38 minutes on nontraditional police activities such as ordinance enforcement, community-based service, problem focused tasks, information gathering and meetings with other service providers.
- Officers in Cincinnati spend one hour 30 minutes (19%) per shift on general administrative duties such as roll call and shift preparation, 10 percent or 48 minutes per shift en route to locations and waiting for the arrival of other police, and 10 percent or 48 minutes per day on personal time (e.g., meals, personal errands).

Officers in this city spend a large portion of their day on patrol, responding to criminal incidents, engaging in administrative work, en route to locations, and taking personal time. The remaining 25 percent of their days are spent on various other activities (e.g., order maintenance, service and, problem focused). However, it should also be noted that although the findings are similar to other studies, community police officers in this site spend a significant portion of their day on nontraditional police activities (e.g., community-based service).

COMPARISON

The second important step to providing a context for this study is to determine if officer activities differ between the two groups (neighborhood and beat). To summarize, the typical day of a neighborhood police officer in Cincinnati looks different from the typical day of a beat officer. Neighborhood officers spend significantly more time on what are commonly considered community policing activities and significantly less of their day on some of the more traditional police activities (crime, traffic enforcement) when compared to beat officers. While neighborhood officers still spend a significant proportion of their day on traditional activities, the findings suggest that, at least in this site, there is a substantive difference in the way these two groups of officers spend their day.

VARIATION IN ACTIVITIES

A central tenet of community policing, and a central theme of this study, is the notion of differential policing based on neighborhoods. In order to examine variation in activities, observed officer time was collapsed from the original sixteen into six activity categories (patrol, order maintenance, crime-related, traffic enforcement, service, and community

policing).

A dummy variable analysis was conducted to determine if the proportion of time spent on these six activity categories (activities that community policing theory suggests will differ) in neighborhoods differed from the norm for the city.² The results show that neighborhoods do not receive a significantly different proportion of time on the six activity categories. However, due to the conservativeness of the test a second step was performed in order to further examine the issue.

The proportion of time spent on these same six activities was compared between individual neighborhoods by using bar graphs as a visual aid. This second step provided some insight into variation across neighborhoods. The graphs appeared to show some subtle variation in activities across neighborhoods. Thus, a further test was conducted using analysis of variance. Analysis of variance revealed that officer activities do not appear to vary across neighborhoods. As such, it appears that the variation detected through visual examination of bar graphs is subtle at best and may be due to fluctuations in neighborhoods with smaller numbers of observations. Further, the modest variation shown by bar graphs is not what would be expected considering the emphasis placed on variation by proponents of community policing.

Thus, the sometimes explicit and always implicit assumption that community policing will vary across neighborhoods is largely unsupported by this analysis. Although some subtle variation is detected, the extent of variation suggested by proponents of community policing is clearly not evident in this site.

² Similar results were found using the original 16 categories of activities.

EXPLAINING OFFICER ACTIVITIES

The last research question addressed by this study was, what factors influence the daily activities of both neighborhood and traditional police officers. Multilevel multivariate models including characteristics of neighborhoods, officers and the context of the observation (i.e., weather) were included in six models predicting officer activities (patrol, order maintenance, crime-related, traffic enforcement, service, and community policing). Below are the general findings of these six models.

- Officers with a greater number of years experience spend a significantly greater proportion of their time on routine patrol.
- Officers with positive attitudes toward community policing spend a smaller proportion of their day on order maintenance.
- Officers working in neighborhoods with larger proportions of industrial and commercial properties spend less time on order maintenance.
- Beat officers do not spend a significantly greater proportion of their time on crime-related activities.
- Officers who perceive greater input from supervisors spend a greater proportion of their day on crime-related activities.
- Officers assigned as neighborhood officers spend less time on traffic enforcement.
- Officers assigned as neighborhood officers spend a larger proportion of their day on nontraditional police activities.
- Female officers spend a larger proportion of their day on nontraditional police activities.

Overall, the models are weak predictors of police activities. The six models support the variation analysis findings that officer activities do not appear to vary across neighborhoods in this site. Neighborhood characteristics were not significantly related to

officer activities. Further, the few significant findings in the multivariate models point to the possible influence on behavior of factors other than individual officer characteristics and neighborhood characteristics. Factors such as training and supervision may influence officer activity choices more so than officer behavior in interactions with citizens.

DISCUSSION

The present study is a systematic attempt to specify if patterns of policing vary across neighborhoods, and to examine the factors which explain police officer activities. Three general conclusions can be drawn from the present study's findings:

- First, specialized units designed to engage in community policing can result in officers performing activities commonly associated with community policing.
- Second, if agencies and the citizens they serve desire differential policing across neighborhoods, which is a central theme of community policing, then it may need to be explicitly addressed in the implementation process rather than assumed.
- Lastly, the multivariate findings, when considered in light of previous police-citizen encounter research, indicate that officer activity choices may be influenced by different factors than those which influence officers' decisions to invoke the law during encounters with citizens.

Given the lack of research on this subject it is difficult to generalize beyond this research site regarding variation within cities. However, police agencies and communities which desire variation across neighborhoods in what officers do may need to make this desire explicit. It appears that officers may need to be taught how to tailor police services to the specific needs of neighborhoods. For example, training officers how to conduct citizen surveys is one common method of obtaining information concerning citizen wants and needs. More research needs to be done in other sites on variation in officer activities. Future research can help to determine if this is a common occurrence in the implementation of

community policing.

The issue of explaining officer activities is an important one. The majority of research to date has focused on a very narrow range of police behavior (police-citizen encounters) overlooking police decision-making which may precede encounters with citizens. Future research needs to continue to consider a broader range of police behavior when examining decision-making. It is often noted that officers have wide discretion and that police organizations have limited ability to influence officer decision-making. At present we still know very little about what influences officers' choices of activities, however, the present findings point to the possibility that agencies may have more control over what officers do than how they do it. That is, the decision-making process in encounters with citizens may differ from the decision of what types of activities to engage in during the day. Thus, police agencies implementing community policing should not discount the power of training, supervision and rewards in encouraging officers to perform activities considered appropriate by the agency.

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