POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY:

CURRENT ISSUES AND RESEARCH NEEDS

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National Institute of Justice
Police Planning Research Workshop

Washington, DC
November 28-29, 2006

INTRODUCTION

Accountability is a vital element of American policing. Both individual officers and law enforcement agencies should be held to account for their actions. Effective accountability procedures are essential if the police are to achieve their goals of lawfulness and legitimacy, as defined by The National Academy of Sciences. Lawfulness refers to compliance with the formal requirements of the law, including statutes and court decisions. Legitimacy refers to the perception that police conduct is both lawful and consistent with public expectations (National Research Council, 2004).

Lawfulness and legitimacy, in turn, are essential if the police are to achieve their goals of reducing crime and disorder, enhancing the quality of neighborhood life, and serving community needs. A lack of legitimacy inhibits the development of working partnerships that are an essential ingredient in community policing and problem-oriented policing (Goldstein, 1990, Scott, 2000). Contrary to the popular view that effective crime control and respect for constitutional principles are competing values in policing (Packer, 1968), experts today increasingly recognize that lawful conduct and accountability are essential for crime-fighting (Bayley, 2002)

This paper examines the social science literature on police accountability procedures related to the conduct of individual officers. From the perspective of evidence-based policy-making, it seeks to determine whether there is reliable evidence that particular accountability procedures are effective.

A Definition of Accountability

It is a fundamental principal of a democratic society that the police should be held to account for their actions. Accountability includes both what the police do and how they perform. Agency-level accountability involves the performance of law enforcement agencies with respect to controlling crime and disorder and providing services to the public (National Institute of Justice, 1999). Individual-level accountability involves the conduct of police officers with respect to lawful, respectful, and equal treatment of citizens.

Individual-level accountability procedures fall into two general categories: internal

and external. Procedures that are internal to law enforcement agencies include controlling officer conduct through written polities, routine supervision, regular performance evaluations, and the investigation of allegations of misconduct, and early intervention systems (EIS). External accountability procedures reviewed in this paper include citizen oversight agencies. For reasons of length and focus, this paper does not review external accountability procedures involving criminal and civil litigation against law enforcement agencies.

Increased Interest in Accountability

Interest in police accountability on the part of police managers, policy-makers and police scholars has increased in recent years as a result of three developments.

First, Section 14141 of the 1994 Violent Crime Control Act authorizes the U. S. Justice Department to bring suit against law enforcement agencies where there is a "pattern or practice" of abuse of citizens' rights and to seek organizational reforms designed to end those abuses (Livingston 1999, 2004; Walker, 2005a). Under that law, the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department has since 1997 reached settlements (consent decrees, memoranda of understanding, and letters) with about twenty agencies (U.S. Department of Justice, nd). These settlements include a roughly similar package of reforms. Most require agencies to adopt state of the art policies on the use of force, including both deadly and non-lethal force, to improve their citizen complaint procedures, to implement an early intervention system, and to improve training related to these matters (U.S. Department of Justice Special Litigation Section, nd; Walker, 2005).

Second, early intervention systems (EIS) represent an important new management tool designed to enhance accountability. An EIS involves a computerized data base on officer performance that permits analysis by police commanders for the purpose of identifying officers who appear to have recurring performance problems (e.g., high rates of use of force, citizen complaints, etc.). Officers who are identified are then subject formal interventions (typically counseling or retraining) designed to correct the performance problems (Walker, 2003; Walker, Alpert and Kenney, 2001). An EIS is now required by the Commission on the Accreditation of Law Enforcement Agencies (Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, 2006:35.9.1).

Third, there has been a steady growth in the number of external citizen oversight

agencies across the country. Civil rights and civil liberties activists have demanded external procedures for reviewing citizen complaints, arguing that they will be more effective than internal police complaint review procedures. The number of oversight agencies has grown from one in 1970 to 38 in 1990 and over 100 by 2001 (Perino, 2006; Walker 2001:6). Additional cities and counties have established oversight agencies since then.

All three of these developments reflect growing public concern about police accountability, and in particular the reduction of incidents of officer misconduct. They also reflect the willingness of many law enforcement agencies to adopt new accountability procedures voluntarily, and in a number of cases the willingness of elected officials to impose citizen oversight over the objections of their law enforcement agency. Despite this growing concern, little is known about the effectiveness of accountability procedures (National Research Council, 2004: 252-326). This paper is designed to fill that void in our knowledge about policing.

An Evidence-based Policy-making Perspective

This paper is guided by the standards of the evidence-based policy-making movement (Committee on Law and Justice, 2005). Evidence-based policy making determines public policies to be effective only where there is evidence from scientific studies that embody the highest standards of research. This excludes purely descriptive literature and claims of effectiveness based on good intentions or flawed methodologies (University of Maryland, 1997).

The evidence-based policy movement is a new phenomenon that originated in the United Kingdom and has since spread to the United States and other countries. It has been applied to the areas of health care (Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine, nd), education (Coalition for Evidence-based Policy, 2002; Oakley, 2002), criminal justice (Committee on Law and Justice, 2005; Tilley and Laycock, 2002; MacKenzie, 2000; Petrosino, et al. 2003; Sherman, 1999; University of Maryland, 1997), and other areas of social policy. The movement is institutionalized in several professional associations (Campbell Collaboration, nd; Evidence Network, nd).

The Scope of This Paper

This paper is limited to policies and procedures related to holding individual officers accountable for their conduct. As already noted, agency-level accountability is not covered in this paper. The paper focuses on a selected set of accountability procedures. They include:

(1) Formal agency policies on the use of police authority;
(2) Routine supervision of officers by first-line supervisors;
(3) Regular performance evaluations;
(4) Early intervention systems designed to identify performance problems;
(5) Procedures for investigating allegations of officer misconduct.

This list is not exhaustive. It includes those procedures that are generally regarded as the most important in routine police management There are, of course, many other aspects of policing that have some impact on officer conduct: recruitment and training standards, the leadership of the chief executive, the police union (where one exists) and collective bargaining contract provisions, the informal police subculture, and the external political culture. Many community activists, meanwhile, have sought to improve police accountability through the courts, using strategies of criminal prosecution, tort litigation, and constitutional law change. These other approaches to accountability are not discussed in this paper largely for reasons of space and focus, and deserve proper consideration elsewhere.

For all practical purposes, the subject of this paper overlaps with the question of controlling police discretion (Davis, 1975; Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 1988; Mastrofski, 2004; Walker, 1993). The accountability procedures examined here generally seek to reduce misconduct involving the misuse of discretion, either directly through a policy directive, or through improved supervision or through a deterrence-based disciplinary action. Mastrofski (2004) points out that the literature on this subject is extremely limited, noting that the National Academy of Sciences (2004) report says very little about the control of discretion.

CONTROLLING THE USE OF POLICE AUTHORITY THROUGH FORMAL AGENCY POLICIES

The Concept of Administrative Rulemaking

The first accountability procedure to be considered involves the direction and control officer use of police authority through formal agency policies. This approach, generically known as administrative rulemaking, is a basic feature of modern police management, if not all public and private sector organizations. Administrative rulemaking consists of three elements: specifying approved and forbidden actions in written policies; requiring officers to file written reports on specific actions; requiring administrative review of officer reports (Davis, 1975; Goldstein, 1977:93-130; Walker, 1993).

The discussion that follows examines a few selected aspects of police discretion that are covered by administrative rulemaking. They are selected in part because they are particularly relevant to this discussion. A comprehensive review would include all critical incidents where the exercise of police authority poses some potential danger to the life, liberty, or safety of citizens. Administrative rulemaking first developed with regard to the use of deadly force. Over the last three decades it has extended to the use of non-lethal force, vehicle pursuits, domestic violence incidents, the deployment of canines, and other actions.

Deadly Force

Administrative rulemaking in policing is most highly developed in the area of police use of deadly force. Departmental policies on this subject are arguably the most detailed of any area of police conduct. Despite some variations, a rough national consensus currently exists on the best policy, specifically that the use of deadly force should be limited to the defense of the life of the officer or other citizens. At the same time, the literature on the effectiveness of deadly force policies is arguably larger than any other area of police conduct (Fyfe, 1979; Geller and Scott, 1992).

In the pioneering study on the subject, Fyfe (1979) found that a new policy restricting the use of deadly force in the New York City Police Department was effective in reducing the overall number of firearms discharges. Additionally, the new policy did not result in any unanticipated adverse consequences such as officer deaths or injuries or an increase in the crime rate. Finally, Fyfe's data indicated only minimal attempts by officers to evade the requirements of the policy. Fyfe later played an important role in the Supreme Court case of Tennessee v. Garner (1985), and that decision spurred the

adoption of restrictive shooting policies by agencies across the country (Geller and Scott, 1992).

Additional evidence supports Fyfe's original study. Sparger and Giacopassi (1992) found a reduction in the overall rate of shootings by the Memphis Police Department following the adoption of a restrictive deadly force policy. Most notably, the policy completely eliminated all reported shootings in the most questionable shooting category of unarmed and non-assaultive persons. Finally, the Memphis data indicated a significant reduction in the racial disparity among persons shot and killed –primarily as a result of eliminating the shooting of unarmed and non-assaultive persons. National data on persons shot a killed between 1976 and 1998, meanwhile, support the latter finding. The disparity between African Americans and whites shot killed by the police was cut in half. This period coincided with the adoption of restrictive deadly force policies across the country (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001). No study to date has identified adverse unwanted consequences of restrictive deadly force policies.

Less Lethal Force

Less lethal force by police involves officer actions that utilize either an officer's body (e.g., hands, feet) or a less lethal weapon (baton, chemical spray, electromagnetic device, etc.) (Alpert and Dunham, 2004; Garner and Maxwell, 1999). The term "less lethal" has recently replaced "less than lethal" in recognition of the fact that weapons other than firearms are in fact potentially lethal.

Virtually all police departments have written policies governing the use of force, although policies vary considerably across departments with respect to many important details. Use of force policies typically specify the legitimate purposes for which force may be used, the types of force that are authorized and not authorized. and also the specific circumstances in which force is authorized or forbidden. Policies increasingly include a use of force continuum that relates the permissible use of force to the citizen's behavior (Department of Justice, 1999:37-38).

Virtually all of the research on police use of less lethal force investigates patterns in the use of force, particularly the situational factors associated with its use, the characteristics of citizens against whom force is used (Alpert and Dunham, 2004; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1999). There are no studies that directly investigate

whether restrictive policies on the use of force reduce either the overall rates of force or the incidence of excessive force by police officers (National Academy of Sciences, 2004:283-286). Although the evidence on the effectiveness of restrictive policies on the use of deadly force suggests possible effectiveness with regard to less lethal force, the two types of force are different in important respects, and caution is advisable in the absence of empirical evidence. Less lethal force incidents are far more numerous and ambiguous than are deadly force incidents.

While the impact of restrictive policies on the use of force has not been investigated directly, there is indirect evidence from several studies suggesting that certain organizational characteristics of police departments are effective in reducing the incidence of the use of force. Alpert and MacDonald (2001) found that departments that require a supervisor or some other official to complete use of force reports have lower use of force rates than departments where the officer involved in each incident complete force reports. Presumptively, requiring a supervisor to complete use of force reports represents a more intensive level of supervision and accountability (in the sense that the reporting process is more independent therefore objective). Terrill (2001), meanwhile, found that close supervision was associated with lower levels of use of force by officers. Alpert and MacDonald (2001), meanwhile, found that departments that use force reports for a specific purpose have higher overall use of force rates. This finding is subject to different interpretations. One interpretation could be that using force reports for a specific purpose represents a more intensive level of supervision and accountability, in the sense that the department wants more information about officer conduct. The resulting higher rate of use of force is also a step in the direction of greater accountability to the extent that fewer force incidents are hidden from the purview of police commanders.

Several major methodological problems confront any attempt to measure the impact of restrictive policies on the use of force, particularly in multi-site studies (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1999:61-74). First, as already noted, use of force policies vary considerably from department to department in terms of what kinds of force are mentioned and authorized, which kinds of force are required to be reported, and the process for reviewing force reports. Second, policies within individual departments are continually being revised, making retrospective studies difficult. Third, as Alpert and MacDonald (2001) found, force policies vary in terms of the use made of such reports (e.g., the level of review or analysis). By comparison, official data on the use of deadly force is relatively simple: a weapon was discharged or not discharged; a citizen was struck by a bullet or not struck; the shooting was fatal or not fatal.

There are also serious methodological problems with regard to the consequences of uses of force which might be used as outcome measures. Official citizen complaint data are highly problematic as a police performance measure (Walker, 2001:119-142). Civil litigation data are also very problematic, as a variety of local factors (the availability of local counsel; community activist group support; the local legal culture) affect the rate at which potential litigants actually file suits (Walker, 2005a:29-35).

Deployment of Canine Units

The deployment of police canine units is increasingly recognized as a form of police use of force (Cambell, Berk, and Fyfe, 1998; Hickey, 2003; Mesloh, 2006). Bites by police canines inflict pain and possible injury. Allegations about the uncontrolled deployment of canine units led the U.S. Department of Justice to include a requirement that the department develop policies controlling deployment in some of its consent decrees with law enforcement agencies (Memorandum of Agreement Between U.S. Department of Justice and the City of Cincinnati, 2002).

There are few studies investigating the impact of formal policies governing the deployment of canine units. Mesloh (2006) found that the more restrictive "bark and hold" training for canines was associated with higher bite ratios than "bite and hold" training. The reports of the Special Counsel to the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, however, found a 90 percent reduction in the number of citizens bitten by LASD canines following the development of a restrictive deployment policy (Bobb, 1993, 1998, 1999). The Special Counsel's reports do not meet the standards of evidence-based policy-making, but the evidence certainly suggests a positive impact of restrictive policies.

Vehicle Pursuits

Vehicle pursuits are a potentially extremely dangerous police action. Research has found that pursuits can result in unacceptable rates of accidents and injuries and deaths to officers and citizens (Alpert and Dunham, 1990). Because the involve a discretionary decision that can result in injury or death, they can be considered a form of police use of force.

To reduce the potential risks, most police departments have adopted formal policies governing pursuits. Existing policies vary considerably with respect to their degree of restrictiveness (Alpert and Dunham, 1990; Wells and Falcone 1992). Existing policies typically restrict pursuits based on consideration of the suspected offense, weather and road conditions, and other risks to officer or citizen safety. Policies also typically limit pursuits to two police vehicles and forbid potentially dangerous tactics such as ramming a fleeing vehicle. Policies typically authorize supervisors and/or dispatchers to terminate pursuits when they feel the risks outweigh the potential benefits. (Alpert and Dunhan,1990).

The evidence also indicates that restrictive policies on vehicle pursuits reduces accidents, injuries and deaths. Studies have consistently found that relatively more restrictive policies reduce the overall number of pursuits and the adverse consequences of pursuits, including accidents, injuries and deaths to both officers and citizens (Alpert 1997; Crew, Kessler, and Fridell, 1994; Wells and Falcone 1992).

Traffic Enforcement and Racial Profiling

Allegations of racial discrimination in traffic enforcement –referred to popularly as "racial profiling" or "driving while black" – have been a major controversy in policing since 1999 (ACLU, 2001; Fridell, et al 2001; Fridell, 2004; Harris, 2002). Civil rights groups alleged that people of color are stopped by the police on the basis of their race or ethnicity rather than suspected criminal activity (ACLU, 1999).

Several different strategies have been proposed and/or adopted in an effort to eliminate discrimination in traffic enforcement: traffic stop data collection (Fridell,2004), formal policies controlling the use of race or ethnicity in traffic enforcement (Fridell, et al., 2001:51-53), formal policies governing procedures for all traffic stops (U.S. v. State of New Jersey, 1999), and training for police officers.

There are no studies investigating whether formal policies related to traffic stops and/or the use of race in traffic enforcement reduce the incidence of racial bias in traffic enforcement. Arguably, the most detailed set of controls over traffic stops in any law enforcement agency were imposed by the consent decree between the New Jersey State Police (NJSP) and the U.S. Department of Justice in 1999. These controls include a requirement that troopers report to a dispatcher when each stop is being initiated, to report data about the nature of the stop, to activate audio and video recording

equipment at the beginning of each stop, to conduct consent searches only under certain circumstances, and to complete a detailed report of each stop. Additionally, supervisors are required to review both stop reports and the audio and video recordings of stops. The court-appointed Independent Monitor found that the NJSP successfully complied with all the required terms of the consent decree at the end of the specified five-year period (Public Management Resources, 2006). While extremely thorough, the Monitor's report is a compliance audit and does not meet the standards of evidence-based policy-making.

A General Accounting Office (2000) report on new controls over searches for contraband by U.S. Customs suggests that such controls can be effective. It found that a new and restrictive policy on searches that, among other things, specified criteria for the decision to conduct a search and required supervisor approval for certain actions reduced the overall number of searches for contraband, reduced racial disparities, and increased the percentage of searches that successfully found contraband, (or the"hit rate.") (Harris, 2002:208-222). The GAO report, however, does not meet the standards of evidence-based policy making.

Summary: The Impact of Formal Policies

The literature on the impact of formal policies on the exercise of police authority is extremely limited and leaves many questions unanswered. A small number of studies do meet the standards of evidence-based policy making and find that written policies that restrict the exercise of police officer discretion are effective in reducing undesirable outcomes. These studies are limited to the use of deadly force and vehicle pursuits. Some limited evidence from other studies, meanwhile, suggest that more intensive supervision reduces officer use of force. In most areas of police use of authority, however, the impact of formal policies has not been investigated.

Research Questions

The limited literature on the impact of policies and procedures raises a number of questions for research.

1. To what extent do officers comply with specific policies and procedures?

1a. Are certain situational or organizational factors associated with different levels of compliance?

1b. Does the level of compliance vary from agency to agency? If so, what organizational factors account for these variations?

1c. Does the level of compliance vary according to the nature of the police activity involved, suggesting that some police actions are inherently more controllable than others (e.g., pursuits vs. less lethal weapons)?

2. Do policies and procedures achieve their intended effect?

2a. Are restrictive policies on the use of less lethal force associated with lower levels of reported excessive force or inappropriate use of force?

2b. Are restrictive policies on less lethal force associated with fewer citizen complaints and/or civil suits against the agency?

2c. Do official policies prohibiting or limiting the use of race in traffic enforcement reduce or eliminate racial bias in traffic enforcement? What is the relative impact of such policies compared with other factors (e.g., training, close supervision)?

2d. Are restrictive policies on the deployment of canine units associated with fewer bites of citizens by canines, lower levels of civil litigation,

3. Do restrictive policies and procedures have unintended and undesirable consequences?

3a. Are restrictive policies on the use of less lethal force associated with higher levels of officer injury or death?

3b. Do official policies on the use of race in traffic enforcement inhibit officers from effective traffic enforcement ("depolicing") and/or contribute to higher levels of criminal activity?

ROUTINE SUPERVISION

The Role of First-line Supervision

It is an established principle in policing that first-line supervisors –sergeants– play a critical role in directing and controlling the behavior of officers in police-citizen interactions. Additionally, sergeants play a critical role in all of the other accountability mechanisms discussed in this paper. Sergeants review incident reports related to the exercise of police authority (Geller and Scott, 1992), prepare official performance evaluations (Oettmeier and Wycoff, 1997), and deliver the "interventions" in early intervention systems (Walker, 2003).

Despite their importance in policing, however, sergeants have been seriously neglected in police research. The report of the National Academy of Sciences (2004), for example, is virtually silent on the subject. There is minimal research, at best, on what sergeants do and how they interact with officers under their command. Engel (2000, 2001, 2002, 2003) identified four different styles of supervision.

The issues involving the impact of first-line supervision include both individual-level and organizational-level factors. Individual-level factors involve the attitudes and supervisory styles of individual sergeants (Engel, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003). Organizational-level factors include the ratio of sergeants to officers (generally referred to as the "span of control"). Many departments have official policies requiring a ratio of, for example, one sergeant for every eight officers. Some investigations have found that misconduct problems have occurred where departments failed to meet their own span of control standard (Bobb, 2002:16). Other organizational factors include the formal role of the sergeant with respect to completing use of force reports.

There is little research on the impact of supervisors on officer conduct. Terrill (2001) found that close supervision was associated with lower levels of use of force by officers. A study in New York City found that close supervision resulted in lower levels of officer misconduct (Davis and Mateu-Gelabert, 1999).

Little is known about the factors that shape supervisory styles. It is not known whether they are entirely the result of individual preferences or influenced in varying degrees by organizational factors such as leadership, training, organizational culture, or other factors.

Research Questions

The very limited literature on routine supervision in policing raises the following

research questions.

      4. Are certain styles of supervision associated with higher levels of compliance with departmental policies and procedures?

          4a. Are certain styles of supervision associated with a lower incidence of excessive force, fewer citizen complaints, etc?

      5. Are certain styles of supervision associated with higher levels of officer job satisfaction?

      6. Are certain training programs for supervisors more likely to ensure a uniform and desirable style of supervision?

      7. Are certain style of supervision more prevalent in certain departments compared with other departments?

          7a. What organizational factors are associated with the prevalence of certain supervisory styles in different departments?

      8. Are formal policies specifying the ratio of officers to sergeants (the "span of control") effective in ensuring proper supervision?

          8a. What is the prevalence of formal department policies regarding the ratio of officers to sergeants?
          8b. To what extent to departments with such policies comply with their own requirements on a routine basis?
          8c. Is compliance with a recommended span of control associated with a lower incidence of excessive force allegations, fewer citizen complaints, or lower levels of civil litigation?

      9. Is it possible to identify specific "best practices" with regard to sergeant-officer interactions that are associated with positive outcomes (e.g., compliance with policies, higher levels of job satisfaction, fewer incidents of excessive force, etc.)?

IV. PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS

The Role of Performance Evaluations

Regular performance evaluations are a basic element of the personnel process in policing, as is the case throughout the private and the public employment sectors. Regular evaluations are designed to identify and reward desirable performance, to identify and seek to correct performance shortcomings, and to terminate employees whose performance is substandard.

Existing performance evaluation procedures in policing have been severely criticized. A 1977 Police Foundation study found that they did not adequately reflect actual police work and generally provided inflated assessments of officer performance (Landy, 1977). A 1999 report, prepared in the context of community policing, made essentially the same criticisms, suggesting that little progress had been made in 20 years (Oettmeier and Wycoff, 1997). Consistent with these critiques, Falkenberg, Gaines, and Cordner (1991) also found serious definitional problems in the performance evaluation categories used in one medium-sized department. Lilley and Hinduja (2006), meanwhile, found that a large proportion of agencies surveyed had not incorporated community policing principles into their performance evaluations.

There is very little research on the impact of performance evaluations. The National Academy of Sciences (2004) report contains no references to the subject. There are no studies investigating whether one particular approach to performance evaluation (e.g., regularity of evaluations, categories of performance evaluated, type of evaluation utilized, etc.) is associated with lower levels of undesirable outcomes (use of force, citizen complaints, civil litigation) than other approaches.

Research Questions

The very limited literature on performance evaluations raises the following research questions.

10. What is the current state of performance evaluation in American police departments?

10a. What percentage of departments have/do not have regular

performance evaluations?

      10b. What is the prevalence of annual, semi-annual, quarterly performance evaluations?

      10c. What are the basic types of performance evaluation systems/procedures, and what is the relative distribution of each type?

    11. Are certain types of performance evaluation more effective than others in shaping officer behavior?

      11a. Are certain types of performance evaluation associated with reduced officer misconduct (citizen complaints, excessive force incidents, etc)?

      11b. Are certain types of performance evaluation associated with higher levels of officer morale, productivity, and job satisfaction?

      11c. Are certain types of performance evaluation associated with the promotion of officers who prove to be more successful supervisors?

EARLY INTERVENTION SYSTEMS

The Nature and Purpose of Early Intervention Systems

Early intervention systems (EIS) involve a performance data base that permits police managers to identify officers with patterns of problematic conduct and then to provide specially tailored interventions designed to correct those conduct problems (Walker, 2003).

EIS vary considerably in terms of their scope, particularly the number of performance indicators they include. Some include as few as five indicators while others include as many as twenty or more. EIS also vary considerably in terms of the procedures for identifying officers with conduct problems (referred to generally as the "thresholds" problem), as well as the process for prescribing and delivering interventions. In short, EIS are extremely complex administrative tools and are not

comparable across departments.

Additionally, understanding of the potential uses of EIS has evolved since the concept first appeared. Many experts in the field argue that the principal role is not to discipline but to help officers whose performance is substandard. Current rhetoric involves professional development and "saving" careers (Walker, 2005b:5-6). Additionally, some agencies are attempting to use their EIS to identify "top performers" (Walker, 2003:11). At least one police department uses its EIS to hold supervisors accountable (San Jose Independent Police Auditor, 2001; Walker, 2005b:10-13). Some experts, finally, have discussed the potential for using EIS data (e.g., aggregate data on use of force trends) to engage community groups on the issue of accountability.

An evaluation of EIS in three large departments found that they were successful in identifying officers with more serious conduct problems and also effective in reducing officer misconduct among officers subject to interventions (Walker, Alpert, and Kenney, 2001).

The evaluation of EIS involves some difficult methodological issues. Evaluations that focus on the impact of interventions on individual officers are relatively simple to design (controlling for assignment, did the number of adverse performance indicators decline following formal EIS intervention?). Evaluations that seek to investigate the impact on overall departmental performance are far more difficult. They face the same problems discussed above with respect to the impact of formal written policies. Official data on use of force are not necessarily comparable over time within one department or among different departments. Similarly, citizen complaint data and civil litigation data are also highly problematic.

Research Questions

The limited literature on early intervention systems raises the following research questions.

12. Are EIS interventions successful in correcting officer conduct problems?

12a. Do officers subject to formal EIS intervention experience

improved performance in the months following intervention?

12b. Are certain officers and/or behavior patterns more susceptible to effective intervention?

12c. Are certain types of intervention more successful than others? Is it possible to develop a formula for matching officers and performance problems with different interventions?

13. What is the proper size and scope of an EIS with respect to performance indicators?

13a. Is there an optimal number of performance indicators (e.g., 5, 10, 20)?

13b. Are EIS with a relatively large number of performance indicators better able to identify officers with performance problems than What is the trade-off between the efficiency of a small EIS and the greater applicability of a larger EIS?

14. What is the best system of "thresholds" for selecting officers in need of intervention?

14a. If a fixed threshold system is used (e.g., 3 complaints in a 12 month period), what is the best formula?

14b. If only some officers identified by the EIS are selected for intervention, what procedures are both most effective and fair in making those selection decisions?

14c. Is a system of "internal benchmarking" (comparing officers with peers working the same assignment) an effective alternative?

15. Can an EIS be used to identify top performing officers?

15a. What formula is effective in identifying top performers?

15b. Can an EIS data be used effectively as a formal part of the promotion process?

16. Can an EIS be used effectively to hold supervisors accountable?

16a. What formula can be effectively to identify supervisors who

appear to be failing to supervise properly?
16b. Can an EIS be used to identify top performing supervisors?

17. Can an EIS data base be used effectively to identify important trends related to accountability of a department as a whole (e.g., trends in citizen complaints, vehicle pursuits, use of sick leave)?

17a. Can EIS data be used in a manner similar to COMPSTAT data to identify problems (e.g., increase in use of force complaints) that require prompt administrative attention?

MISCONDUCT INVESTIGATIONS

Internal versus External Misconduct Investigations

Allegations of officer misconduct may come from either internal or external sources. Internal allegations involve reports by supervisors or other department employees. External allegations involve formal or informal complaints by citizens. All internally generated allegations are investigated by the Internal Affairs Unit (IAU) or Professional Standards Units (PSU). A number of cities and counties have established external citizen oversight agencies with original jurisdiction for investigating citizen complaints (Walker, 2001). While many of the issues related to internal and external misconduct investigations overlap, it is necessary to discuss them separately.

Internal Misconduct Investigations

The nature and quality of police internal investigations of citizen complaints have been a major part of the police-community relations problem. Civil rights groups have attacked police departments units for failing to investigate citizen complaints thoroughly or fairly. These allegations have been documented by external investigating commissions (Christopher Commission, 1991:151-180; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1978, 1981, 1994; Mollen Commission, 1994:70-89; National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968:310-312).

The literature on IAUs is extremely limited. The only descriptive survey of IAUs is over twenty years old (West, 1988). While anecdotal evidence indicates considerable variations with respect to the structure, staffing, and procedures of IA/PSU units (Chevigny, 1969; Human Rights Watch, 1998; Mulcahy, 1995; Pate and Fridell, 1993; Sherman, 1978; West, 1988), there are no recent surveys specifying these variations. The most detailed information about IA/PSU units are the reports published by various citizen oversight agencies (Bobb, 2000; Office of Independent Review, 2005:17-31). The role of the police auditor style of oversight primarily involves conducting detailed reviews of internal police procedures and publicly reporting the findings on a regular basis (Walker, 2005a:135-170).

The social science literature on IA/PSU units is extremely limited. As already noted, current descriptive literature on the structure, staffing and procedures of internal investigation units is non-existent. Substantial anecdotal evidence indicates not only great variations in the organization and management of such units but also a process of steady change in such units over the years (Office of Independent Review, 2005:17-31; Office of Integrity and Accountability, 1999). U.S. Justice Department investigations related to "pattern or practice" of abuse of citizens have found substantial shortcomings in internal investigations in a number of departments across the country. These shortcomings include inadequate use of force policies, the failure of officers to complete required reports, and the failure of supervisors to review reports (U.S. Department of Justice, 2003, 2004)

There are no studies evaluating police internal misconduct investigations that meet the standards of social science research. That is to say, there are no studies indicating that one approach to the structure and management of internal affairs units is more effective than alternative forms in reducing citizen complaints, use of force, or other unacceptable conduct. There are no studies indicating that certain investigative procedures (i.e., procedures for interviewing complainants, officers, or witnesses; policies for evaluating conflicting testimony; standards for determining whether a complaint should be sustained, etc.). The current CALEA Accreditation Standards include only a minimal list of required procedures for investigating complaints (Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, 2006:52-2). These requirements, however, are far less detailed than those adopted by some citizen oversight agencies (San Jose Independent Police Auditor, nd; Walker, 2005a:62-68).

Meaningful evaluation of internal misconduct investigations is severely limited by a lack of discussion of the evaluation criteria. Misconduct investigations, whether

internal or external, have multiple goals. These include providing thorough and fair investigations, deterring future misconduct, providing satisfaction to citizen complainants and to subject officers, improving public attitudes toward the police, and enhancing the professionalism of the department. While there is concern about the percentage of citizen complaints sustained in favor of the complainant (the "sustain rate"), there has been little informed discussion of what a reasonable standard should be (Walker, 2001:56-60).

Hudson (1972) attempted to compare the internal affairs unit of the Philadelphia Police Department with the (long since abolished) Police Advisory Board, but concluded that they could not be compared because of very different mandates which resulted in their handling different kinds of cases. Hudson's study, moreover, is more than thirty years old and uses data that are more than forty years old.

External Misconduct Investigations

There is a significant body of descriptive literature on external citizen oversight agencies and procedures. Several articles and books have developed classification schemes for external agencies identifying different roles, structures, and procedures (Goldsmith, 1988; Perez, 1994; Walker, 2001). Not all citizen oversight agencies have authority to independently investigate citizen complaints. Many simply involve the review of completed investigations by IA units, with authority to recommend a different disposition or that the case be reinvestigated. No external citizen oversight agency has the power to impose discipline of officers against whom complaints are sustained.

There are no studies evaluating the effectiveness of external citizen oversight agencies. As is the case with internal misconduct investigations (see above), there are no studies attempting to assess whether a particular organizational structure or procedure is more effective than another. Nor are there any studies attempting to assess whether the investigation of officer misconduct by external oversight agencies is more effective investigation by internal units. And also as is the case with internal misconduct investigations, there is only very limited discussion of the multiple goals of external misconduct investigations (Brereton, 2000).

As already noted with respect to internal complaint investigations, there is only very limited discussion of the multiple goals of external citizen oversight agencies:

thorough and fair investigation of complaints, deterrence of officer misconduct, providing a satisfactory experience for both complainants and officers, recommending alternative department policies and procedures, improving police-community relations (Walker, 2001:56-60).

Research Questions

The very limited literature on both internal and external misconduct investigations raises the following research questions,

18. What are the current management practices with regard to IAUs staffing levels, location of the unit, supervisory practices, investigative practices)?

19. Are certain IAU management practices associated with more effective investigations, lower rates of misconduct, greater satisfaction among complainants and officers, and improved police-community relations?

19a. Is there an optimal ratio of IAU investigators to sworn officers?
19b. Do police departments provide special training for IAU investigators? Is there any evidence that certain types of training are more effective than others?
19c. Do police departments maintain procedure manuals related to the investigation of misconduct allegations? Is there any evidence that certain procedures are more likely to result in more thorough and fair investigations?

20. Are external citizen oversight agencies or procedures associated with lower levels of officer misconduct?

20a. Are particular forms of citizen oversight more effective than other forms with respect to officer misconduct?

21. Do departments subject to external citizen oversight experience lower levels of officer misconduct than departments with no external citizen oversight?

22. What is the relative importance of the "code of silence" in inhibiting thorough and fair misconduct allegations?

    22a. What is the prevalence of the "code of silence?"
    22b. Are there certain management practices that reduce the impact of the "code of silence."

23. What is the role of the police union and collective bargaining agreements in inhibiting thorough and fair misconduct allegations?

    23a. Are there particular provisions of collective bargaining agreements that inhibit thorough and fair misconduct investigations?
    23b. Are there particular management practices that limit the adverse impact of collective bargaining provisions?

ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEGITIMACY

Effective accountability is vital to the achievement of the goals of policing. Many experts argue that law enforcement agencies that reduce problematic officer behavior will enjoy greater trust among citizens and, as a result, will receive greater cooperation from citizens in programs designed to reduce crime and disorder (Bayley, 2002; Harris, 2005).

The most important area in this regard involves the perceived legitimacy of the police and relations with racial and ethnic minority groups. Racial and ethnic tensions have beset the American police for over forty years, and persist despite the introduction of many different reforms. At the same time, since community policing is designed to develop effective partnerships with neighborhood groups, it follows that enhanced legitimacy and a reduction in racial and ethnic tensions will enhance the development of community policing (Skogan and Hartnett, 1997).

With these considerations in mind, it is important to ask whether specific accountability mechanisms –or some "package" of accountability mechanisms– enhance legitimacy and public perceptions of the police, particularly on the part of racial and ethnic minority groups.

Research Questions

The absence of any literature on the relationship between accountability procedures and the perceived legitimacy of the police and racial and ethnic relations in particular raises the following research questions.

24. Do accountability mechanisms have a positive impact on police-community relations and the perceived legitimacy of the police?

24a. Are citizens aware of the existence of specific accountability procedures (e.g., a revised use of force policy, an EIS?), and does that perception improve their attitudes toward the police?

24b. Can citizen awareness of accountability procedures be increased through outreach programs on the part of a police department?

25. Are certain accountability mechanisms relatively more effective than others in enhancing perceived legitimacy?

CONCLUSION

Holding individual police officers accountable for their conduct is an essential element of policing. It is directly and indirectly related to achieving the basic goals of policing: reducing crime and disorder, enhancing the quality of neighborhood life, and providing fair, respectful and equal treatment for all people.

As this paper indicates, the state of our knowledge about both traditional and new accountability mechanisms is very limited. In many instances we do not even have basic descriptive data on current practices. With respect to effectiveness, in only a few instances does the existing literature meet the standards of evidence-based policy making. The research needs identified in this paper have direct implications for police policy.

The research needs, in short, are enormous. We should not, however, underestimate the methodological challenges in meeting those needs. Measuring effectiveness raises a number of very difficult methodological issues. As is well-known, use of force data are extremely complex and not always comparable across jurisdictions. Citizen complaint data are extremely problematic. Specifying the impact of a single accountability mechanisms in the context of an organization experiencing several reforms simultaneously is extremely difficult.

Additional Considerations

As indicated at the outset, this paper is not a comprehensive review of the subject of accountability. Primarily for reasons of focus and space, it has concentrated on a few selected accountability procedures. It has not examined criminal prosecution, tort litigation, or constitutional law change as accountability strategies. Nor has it examined the news media or the activities of private public interest groups with respect to bringing about change in police departments.

This has not discussed the subject of the police subculture. For many years, experts have argued that there is a police subculture, that it has a powerful effect on policing, and that this effect is largely negative with respect to accountability (Skolnick, 1994; Westley, 1970). Recent research, however, has found that the police subculture is far more complex and multidimensional than assumed in earlier research (Herbert, 1998; Reuss-Ianni, 1983; Terrill, Paoline, and Manning, 2003). The subject of the police subculture, in turn, cannot be separated from the issue of police unions and collective bargaining agreements they negotiate. Police unions have been seriously neglected by police scholars (Walker, 2006). It is not known to what extent unions and certain provisions of collective bargaining agreements impede accountability. It is not know to what extent unions are a reflection of the subculture in a department, or give legal force to one set of tendencies within that subculture to the exclusion of others.

Finally, as explained at the outset, this paper has not discussed agency-level accountability. The two subjects should not be discussed in isolation from each other. Does the introduction of agency-level accountability procedures (e.g., demonstrable improvements with respect to crime, disorder, quality of life) have some feedback effect on individual-level accountability? Does the very idea of accountability in the one area increase sensitivity to its importance in the other area? Does, for example, training

related to community policing or problem-oriented policing have some positive "spill-over" effect with regard to individual-level accountability?

In short, a comprehensive discussion of police accountability would embrace a range of issues that go far beyond the specific topics covered in this paper.

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