

Reducing the cost of crime through reserve police officers and volunteer citizen patrol

James Larson
National University

Victor Lewis
National University

Kenneth D. Kay
National University

Chandrika Kelso
National University

ABSTRACT

Law enforcement agencies are entrusted with the protection and safety of society. They are often faced with tasks that are tedious and time consuming. In our changing society, the police are expected to be involved in both the apprehension of criminals and in the reduction of crime through a relationship with the society they serve. The better the relationship with the community, the more successful the police are in apprehending criminals and reducing crime. The better the relationship with the community, the more trust the community has in their police departments.

A secondary problem police department's face is the lack of funds to accomplish the tasks required of them. Governments are expected to serve the communities in multiple areas. Citizens expect to have city parks, public libraries, well maintained roads, community recreation centers, and the best schools. They also expect to be protected against the criminal elements in society. And they expect all of these services without their taxes being raised. Using volunteers is one way to fulfill the duties expected of the police without an increase in tax dollars. The Police Reserve Officer and Volunteer Citizen Patrol are two of the volunteer programs that are currently in use by both large and small police departments. This paper will examine whether the use of reserve police officers and volunteer citizen patrol are effective means of reducing the cost of fighting crime and furthering a good relationship between the police and the communities they serve.

Keywords: reserve police officer, citizen patrol, community, fiscal responsibility, volunteers

INTRODUCTION

One of the problems public administrators encounter is how to efficiently use the taxpayer's money. In today's economy this situation has become even more important. Cities across the country are going bankrupt or on the verge of bankruptcy. Financially strapped municipalities have often turned to the federal government for financial assistance. The federal government is not such a good option today. The U.S. has been on the verge of a recession for years, and just this month the federal government made it official; the U.S. is formally in a recession. The well of money available from the federal government to help communities is drying up (Crutsinger, 2008).

Elected officials have a duty to spend the taxpayer's money in the most practical and efficient manner available. That means they also have a duty to research methods and ideas that would save money and help the different departments within the city to operate in the most efficient means available. With the current recession and many cities on the verge of bankruptcy, it is even more important to spend those valuable dollars in a method that citizens would accept as being practical and efficient (City of Alameda, *City of Alameda NOT Filing for Bankruptcy*, 2009 n.d.). One way to achieve this goal is to involve citizens in the decision making process. Within law enforcement agencies there are several proven methods that include citizen involvement on how their communities are protected. The more involved the citizens are in law enforcement, the more effective the law enforcement agencies are in delivering the service demanded by the citizens to those citizens. Law enforcement agencies must not forget that they in fact are serving their communities and have a duty to do so in the most efficient manner possible. Some of the current methods used to involve citizens in the policing of their communities are Community Oriented Policing, Problem Oriented Policing, Police Reserves, and Volunteer Citizen Patrol (Goldstein, 1992). All of these methods should be used together for services to be delivered in the most effective way.

POLICE AND THE COMMUNITY:

Police departments depend on a good relationship with the community in their efforts to control crime and make the communities as safe as possible. The better the relationship between the police and the community, the more effective the police are in controlling crime. Their primary obligation is to the community they serve. Governments have a duty to make the communities they are serving as safe as practical given the limited funds available to them.

Police departments are constantly coming up with new or redefined ideas to improve community relations and to be more effective in their crime fighting efforts. Community Oriented Policing (COP) has been one method the police have been using since the early 1960's ("Police: Community Policing - Origins And Evolution Of Community Policing" n.d.). Purists would say that Sir Robert Peel, Home Secretary in Lord Liverpool's Tory Cabinet, was the originator of COP with his establishment of uniformed police on the streets London on September 29th, 1829. They were affectionately and commonly referred to as 'Bobbies' in reference to their creator ("Welcome to History UK - the History of England!" n.d.). Most U. S. historians would agree that COP became popular in the U.S. since the civil rights movement in the 1960's. During this period of unrest the weaknesses of the traditional policing model were exposed. Even though its origin can be traced to this crisis in police-community relations, its

development has been influenced by a wide variety of factors over the course of the past forty years (“Police: Community Policing - Origins And Evolution Of Community Policing” n.d.). Individual elements of community policing, such as improvements in police-community relations, emerged slowly from the political and social upheavals surrounding the civil rights movement in the 1960s (“Police: Community Policing - Origins And Evolution Of Community Policing” n.d.). The real key to this evolution in policing was the recognition that police departments discovered their hands were tied against effective policing when the relationship between the community and the police was at a low. According to the San Diego Police Department web site the focus of Community Oriented Policing is problem solving (San Diego Police Department, *Community Oriented Policing*, n.d.). According to their web site, some of the benefits to the community include:

- Officers are able to spend more time working with citizens to solve crime and disorder problems.
- With better police-citizen communication, officers can more effectively use and share crime information with the public.
- Officers who know both a community’s problems and its residents can link people with other public and private agencies that can help solve community concerns.
- No single agency can solve complex social problems alone. A combined community-police effort restores the safety of our neighborhoods and business districts (San Diego Police Department, *Community Oriented Policing*, n.d.)

The web site gives the following as some examples of COP:

- A revitalized Neighborhood Watch program consisting on community coordinators, watch coordinators and block captains all working toward a common goal.
- Citizen's Patrol groups throughout the City acting as eyes and ears to observe suspicious activity and eliminate problems.
- Safe Streets NOW! working to get rid of nuisance properties through civil remedies.
- The Drug Abatement Response Team (DART) involves the City Attorney, Housing Inspection and the police in identifying properties that have a long history of ongoing narcotic activities. In a six-month period, over 70 drug houses were targeted for abatement action. (“San Diego Police Department, *Community Oriented Policing*” n.d.)

As one can see, both the benefits and examples of COP, are very dependent on community involvement and a good relationship between the community and the police.

In the late 1970's, Herman Goldstein, a University of Wisconsin Law Professor, suggested that police departments turn their focus from inward measures; number of cars, number of officers, staffing patterns, to outward measures; impacting crime, fear, and disorder (Goldstein, 1992). This concept became known as Problem Oriented Policing (POP). According to the San Diego Police Department web site Problem Oriented Policing is the primary strategy of Community Oriented Policing (San Diego Police Department, *Problem Oriented Policing*, n.d.). The community and police work together analyzing community problems and developing customized responses to them. Problems are identified by the community as recurring incidents or matters of concern. Problems are addressed with a four step process known as the SARA Model.

- **Scanning:** Problems are identified.

- **Analysis:** Questions are asked to learn everything possible about the problem.
- **Response:** Based on careful analysis, a custom-made response to the problem is tried.
- **Assessment:** The response is evaluated to see if the problem was solved or reduced.

(San Diego Police Department, *Problem Oriented Policing*, n.d.)

Examples of Problem Oriented Policing

- The police, community and City Council worked to attack drug and gang problems in the Skyline and Meadowbrook community. Those efforts led to an organized community association, and a reduction in criminal activity.
 - A trolley station was the location of gang fights, violent crimes, and narcotic activity. A squad of officers collected information to show the local transit board that the design of the station contributed to crime. Based on the careful work of the officers, the board agreed to provide funds to redesign the station.
 - Calls of narcotic activity at an 80-unit apartment complex alerted officers to try a problem solving approach. Working with residents, the on-site manager, the management company, the Housing Commission, and other police units, the officers were able to evict problem residents and stop the drug dealing.
- (“San Diego Police Department, Problem Oriented Policing” n.d.)

Once again the identification of the problem and the examples of POP are extremely dependent on a good relationship between the community and the police department. The common thread in both COP and POP is the relationship between the community and the police department. The better the relationship, the more effective the police are in solving crime and community problems that lead to crime.

It is very self evident that an effective police department has a direct relationship to the good relationship that department has within the communities they are responsible for. So why not use some other means to improve even more on this relationship? Use of the Police Reserves and Volunteer Citizen Patrol are other methods that can be used to strengthen the relationship between the police and the community. Both of these groups are made up of citizens volunteering their time to serve both the police and the communities they live in.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

As stated earlier in this paper, it is the duty of elected officials to deliver services in the most fiscally efficient manner possible. The fiscal woes of municipalities are not new. On December 6 1994, Orange County, a prosperous district in California, declared bankruptcy after suffering losses of around \$1.6 billion from a wrong-way bet on interest rates in one of its principal investment pools. The pool was intended to be a conservative but profitable way of managing the county's cash flows, and those of 241 associated local government entities. Instead, it triggered the largest financial failure of a local government in US history (Jameson, 2001).

Things have not improved around the nation. The City of San Diego has had money problems since 2002 (Hall, 2005). One would think that the Orange County experience would have put elected officials on official notice to be very cautious with tax payer money. Not so in San Diego. Private auditors have found that San Diego overstated its net assets by more than \$640 million in fiscal 2002 – a problem that portends greater difficulty for the city's restoration

to sound fiscal health. The city's net assets will be lowered almost 10 percent from their reported total of \$6.8 billion, a miscalculation used in three bond offerings, which opens the city to possible lawsuits and new federal sanctions and fines (Hall, 2005). With the continued budget problems, both locally and nationally, it is quite clear that elected officials and department heads must do everything practical to spend the taxpayer's money wisely. The use of Police Reserve Officers and Volunteer Citizen Patrol are two ways to help in these fiscally tough times.

POLICE AND RESERVE POLICE OFFICERS:

The research questions for this paper were whether the use of volunteer citizen patrol and reserve police officers would reduce the cost of fighting crime. The research also looked into whether use of volunteer citizen patrol and reserve police officers would help full time officers to be more effective in fighting crime. The last two issues researched were whether there was potential for job opportunities being taken away from full time officers and if reserve police officers could be a viable resource for future hiring of full time officers.

The methodology was primary data analysis by use of a questionnaire. 18 questions made up the reserve officer questionnaire; 8 primary questions and 11 secondary questions. Questionnaires were obtained from 5 law enforcement agencies, 2 that served a population of over 500,000 and 3 that served a population of less than 200,000. Only one agency, Carlsbad Police Department was polled regarding volunteer citizen patrol (Questionnaires, 2008).

The San Diego Sheriff's Department and the San Diego Police Department were the 2 large agencies serving a population of over 500,000. Carlsbad, El Cajon, and National City Police Department's were the 3 small agencies, defined as serving a population of less than 200,000. The number of reserve officers serving with agency varied from a high of 81 (San Diego Police) to a low of 4 (Carlsbad Police) (Questionnaires, 2008). All of the agencies required their reserve officers to work a minimum of 2 days a month. Although some law enforcement agencies in the U.S. have a minimum pay schedule for reserve officers, none of the agencies in this research paid their reserve officers. The role of the reserve officers was strictly a volunteer position. All of the agencies in this research paid for the reserve officer's equipment that would be necessary as a job requirement. The average cost of for equipment was approximately \$1,200.00 per reserve officer. The average cost for running the reserve officer's program was \$136,000.00. This would include administrative costs such as full time officers, vehicles, staff help, office supplies, etc. The average pay for a full time police officer in 2008 was \$75,200.00 per year which is approximately \$37.50 per hour. The savings to an agency such as San Diego Police, where there are 81 reserve officers working a minimum of 2 ten hour days a month, would be \$60,750 per month. That is an annual savings of \$729,000.00. (Questionnaires, 2008).

The money saved is not the only benefit to the cities that utilize a reserve officer program. There are also the fringe benefits of a better relationship between the police and the community. Reserve officers come from all walks in life. They hold regular jobs in their communities and interact with citizens in their communities that know them as reserve police officers. Probably the most popular reserve officer was Jack Webb, the actor in the popular TV series *Dragnet* where he played a Los Angeles Police Detective. In real life he was an honorary Los Angeles Police reserve officer and was awarded by LAPD for over 4,000 hours he served in that capacity. Not only did the LAPD use *Dragnet* episodes as training films for a time, they also named a police academy auditorium after Webb ("John Randolph 'Jack' Webb" n.d.).

POLICE AND VOLUNTEER CITIZEN PATROL:

Volunteer Citizen Patrol is another method law enforcement agencies are using to establish a better relationship with the communities they serve. Almost all law enforcement agencies in San Diego County have a Volunteer Citizen Patrol program. The benefits of this program are very similar to the benefits of the Reserve Officer Program. This program has the added benefit of giving seniors in the community the opportunity to give back a service to their community. Many of the agencies that have a volunteer Citizen Patrol Program utilize seniors in the community to staff the program. Most of the seniors are retired with time on their hands. Serving in this capacity gives the seniors a feeling of self worth (Questionnaires, 2008).

Duties that volunteers perform are:

- Assist with traffic control
- Assist with found property reports
- Assist with searching for lost persons
- Being a presence in the community such as public schools
- All duties of volunteers must be of a safe nature; they do not have police powers

Some of the benefits of having a Volunteer Citizen Patrol include:

- Better rapport between police & community because of citizen involvement
- Safer public schools with presence
- Opportunity for seniors to give back to their community
- Opportunity for seniors to form productive social groups
- Effectiveness of Programs Based on Duties of Reserves and Volunteers
- More reserves & volunteers leaves more time for full time officers
- Both programs offer a resource for personnel under emergency situations when needed
- Both programs help free up more highly trained officers to do tasks that require their expertise

(Questionnaires, 2008)

CONCLUSION

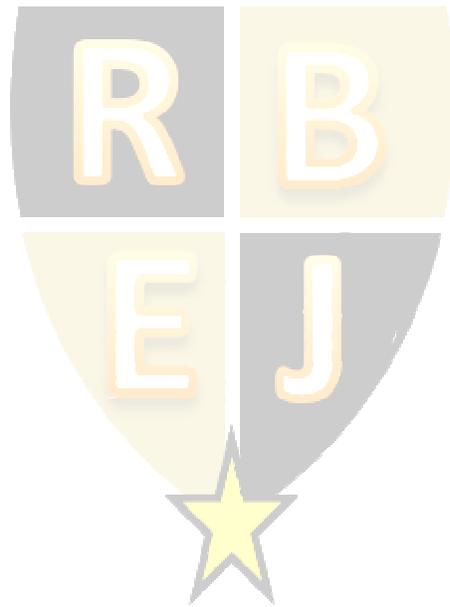
Clearly there is a cost saving benefit for the agencies that have adopted a reserve and senior patrol program. The benefit of having reserve officers and volunteer citizen patrol has a direct result of allowing full time officers more time to effectively fight crime. Is there a potential for job opportunities being taken away? It is debatable whether the reserves and volunteers take job opportunities away. The duties that reserves and volunteers fulfill generally would not take away job opportunities for full time law enforcement. Reserve officers are a very good source for future full time positions within the department they work for, and also other law enforcement agencies.

Law enforcement agencies should be encouraged to continue and expand their reserve force and volunteer citizen patrol programs.

The benefits include:

1. Cost savings to the taxpayers
2. Good rapport established between the police and community
3. Large personnel resource for critical incidents

4. Role of reserve officer can be the first step to full time employment



REFERENCES

- Crutsinger, Martin, (2008, December 1) It's official: U.S. has been in a recession all year, *The Huffington Post*, Retrieved December 10, 2008, from <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/12/01/us-recession-began-one-year-147421.html>
- City of Alameda, *City of Alameda NOT Filing for Bankruptcy*, January 8, 2009, Retrieved January 9, 2008, from http://www.ci.alameda.ca.us/news/0901_bk_rumors_false.html
- Goldstein, Herman (1992) Problem-Oriented Policing, Also adapted from COPPS – Community Oriented Policing and Problem Solving Definition and Principles, a publication of the *California Attorney General's Crime and Violence Prevention Center*. Retrieved December 9, 2008, from <http://www.jus.state.nc.us/NCJA/module-2.pdf>
- Police: Community Policing - Origins And Evolution Of Community Policing. Retrieved December 7, 2008, from <http://law.jrank.org/pages/1649/Police-Community-Policing-Origins-evolution-community-policing.html#ixzz0NSGblvTM>
- Welcome to History UK - the History of England! Retrieved December 5, 2008, from <http://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/England-History/SirRobertPeel.htm>,
- San Diego Police Department, *Community Oriented Policing*. Retrieved December 7, 2008, from <http://www.sandiego.gov/police/about/community.shtml>
- San Diego Police Department, *Problem Oriented Policing*. Retrieved December 10, 2008, from <http://www.sandiego.gov/police/about/problem.shtml>
- Jameson, Rob (2001, June), Case Study, Orange County. Retrieved December 9, 2008, from <http://www.erisk.com/Learning/CaseStudies/OrangeCounty.asp>
- Hall, Matthew T (2005, September 17). More Fiscal Errors, *San Diego Union Tribune*. Retrieved December 7, 2008, from <http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/metro/pension/20050919-9999-1n17account.html>
- Questionnaires, 2008:
San Diego Police Department, San Diego, CA
San Diego County Sheriff's Department, San Diego, CA
Carlsbad Police Department, Carlsbad, CA
El Cajon Police Department, El Cajon, CA
National City Police Department, National City, CA
- John Randolph "Jack" Webb. Retrieved December 10, 2008, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_Webb