

MODULE 3 – HOW DID WE GET HERE?

LECTURE 13 - THE STUDY

COMMUNITY POLICING AND MURDER CLEARANCE RATES

OK, now we're moving from the 2001 survey that we just talked about, to "**the study.**" I mentioned earlier that other research had shown that COMMUNITY POLICING can help to reduce crime before it happens. However, "the study" conducted an analysis of the data in the 2001 survey to determine whether it helps also to **solve crimes** after they happen.⁹² This was the first study to address this issue using the comprehensive 2001 survey data, and its purpose was – I reiterate – to see if it helps police investigators to **SOLVE crimes after** they have been committed and reported to the police (essentially, after the ACTION and ESCAPE phases, and while the offender was in the FUGITIVE phase). It looked specifically at the Visible Index crimes of murder, robbery and burglary.

Murder is the most serious and most visible of the three crimes. It's the most accurately reported, and it also receives the greatest investigative response. Patrol officers generally play a minimal role in murder investigations, so the investigations are often conducted by detectives who specialize in violent crime investigations. Additionally, special investigative and forensic techniques are often used, and murder clearance rates are the highest among the Index crimes (around 69% in the sample used in the 2001 study). Murder crimes are also the lowest in volume of the three crimes.

Robbery crimes are considered to be less serious and less visible than murders and only about 60% of all robberies are reported to the police (that is, according to the NCVS, **don'cha know**). Normally patrol officers play a larger role in robbery investigations than in murder investigations, and detectives focus primarily on follow-up investigations as necessary. Some robbery cases are screened out, and robbery clearances averaged 36% in the 2001 survey data. Reported robberies have a higher volume than murders (about 30 times more cases nationwide than murders – **blimey!**).

Burglaries are the least serious and least visible of the three crimes. Whereas murder and robbery are classified as violent crimes, burglary is a property crime. Only about half of household burglaries are reported to the police and, as with robberies, patrol officers normally conduct the preliminary investigations. However, because of the limited amount of crime information normally available to and collected by patrol officers, more than half of the reported burglaries are screened out. Of those cases not screened out ("slam dunk" and "where are they" cases, mostly), follow-up investigative responsibility often remains with patrol officers.

Burglaries have the lowest clearance rates (15% in the 2001 survey data) and the highest volume of the three crimes (at least 100 times more than murders – **really blimey!** – and three times more than robberies).

You can see that there are some **considerable differences** between the three crime types and the way the police handle them. The reason they were chosen in the study was to see if the different crime types had any impact on whether or not COMMUNITY POLICING helped to solve them. And wouldn't you know it, that's exactly what was found! Incredible!

The study reported that **COMMUNITY POLICING increased the odds of high murder clearance rates**, but was not associated with the clearance rates of robbery or burglary. This was the big finding. COMMUNITY POLICING helps solve murder cases. **Not too shabby.**

When **decentralized** investigators (those assigned to field units rather than agency headquarters) and **specialist** investigators (those who specialize in certain types of crime – usually violent crime), when they worked in conjunction with COMMUNITY POLICING programs, the odds of high murder and robbery clearance rates increased, but not burglary clearance rates. The clearance rates of generalist investigators (those who work all types of cases) were not affected by COMMUNITY POLICING for any of the three crimes.

COMMUNITY POLICING HELPS TO SOLVE CRIMES

Therefore, COMMUNITY POLICING seems to be most effective in **helping to solve the more serious violent** crimes that receive greater investigative attention and have lower volumes. And decentralized and specialist investigators seem to positively impact clearance rates, but not generalist investigators. Yet most investigators were generalists.

Internal agency investigation **management programs are not associated with COMMUNITY POLICING**, which indicates minimal management attention in this area. So essentially COMMUNITY POLICING is helping to solve crime without any help from management.

Hmm, if clearance rates increase without much management effort, I wonder what would happen to clearance rates **if management actually did try to integrate COMMUNITY POLICING** and investigations. **Just thinking.**

As was mentioned earlier, this study is **based on survey research**. That type of research does have its **problem-os**, as I mentioned with the smiley-faced thingie, and they can affect the analysis of the survey data, so the **findings are not definitive**.

So we need to treat the analysis somewhat gingerly here.

But that doesn't mean we should ignore it. It's the **only research available** regarding the effects of COMMUNITY POLICING on solving crime, and it points in a particular **direction**. It also provides hypotheses (or fodder) that can be tested more specifically in subsequent research.

So, in addition to prior studies showing that police PREVENT or REDUCE crime, what we have here is a study that suggests that **COMMUNITY POLICING may also help police to SOLVE crime**.

Now just think a bit. Bounce that around in your head for a minute. When we obtain crime information from the public covertly, we have **problem-o's**. But when we **work openly** with the public, we seem to both prevent and solve more crime. Any **complaints** or problems with that, PRUDENT TRAVELER?

Same cops, same detectives, same public. Different techniques, different results. How about that – **cool, huh?**

If the study findings are borne out in subsequent research, this **could provide a new direction** for police to develop in the fight against crime.

But the **operative words** here are "if the study findings are borne out in subsequent research." Nobody jumps up and down or totally reorganizes their organization based on one or two studies finding that COMMUNITY POLICING helps solve crime. But if and when multiple studies in varying environments support those initial findings, similar to that which was done with COMMUNITY POLICING, that may be a different story.

But unfortunately, I know of **no plans or activities** suggesting any further study in this area for the foreseeable future.

So let's see, I forgot something. Oh yes, forensics and the classical detective updates – that must be next.